



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 104

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Monday, March 6, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Spring Sitting

SPEAKER — Hon. Jeremy Harper, MLA, Mayo-Tatchun
DEPUTY SPEAKER and CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Annie Blake, MLA, Vuntut Gwitchin
DEPUTY CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Emily Tredger, MLA, Whitehorse Centre

CABINET MINISTERS

NAME	CONSTITUENCY	PORTFOLIO
Hon. Ranj Pillai	Porter Creek South	Premier Minister of the Executive Council Office; Economic Development; Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation
Hon. Jeanie McLean	Mountainview	Deputy Premier Minister of Education; Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate
Hon. Nils Clarke	Riverdale North	Minister of Environment; Highways and Public Works
Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee	Riverdale South	Minister of Health and Social Services; Justice
Hon. Richard Mostyn	Whitehorse West	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board
Hon. John Streicker	Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes	Government House Leader Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources; Tourism and Culture; Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation; French Language Services Directorate
Hon. Sandy Silver	Klondike	Minister of Finance; Public Service Commission; Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

Currie Dixon	Leader of the Official Opposition Copperbelt North	Scott Kent	Official Opposition House Leader Copperbelt South
Brad Cathers	Lake Laberge	Patti McLeod	Watson Lake
Yvonne Clarke	Porter Creek Centre	Geraldine Van Bibber	Porter Creek North
Wade Istchenko	Kluane	Stacey Hassard	Pelly-Nisutlin

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

Kate White	Leader of the Third Party Takhini-Kopper King
Emily Tredger	Third Party House Leader Whitehorse Centre
Annie Blake	Vuntut Gwitchin

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**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Monday, March 6, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The following motion was not placed on today's Notice Paper as the motion is not in order: Motion No. 584, notice of which was given by the Member for Klondike.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could we please welcome Joe Humphries from the Yukon Wild Sheep Foundation, who is here today for our tribute to the Bravo Award winners.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I have the pleasure of welcoming, from Highways and Public Works, four engineers who are here for the tribute to National Engineering Month. We have Catherine Harwood, who is a civil engineer and the Deputy Minister of Highways and Public Works, and Sean McLeish, who is an electrical engineer and the assistant deputy minister at the Information and Communication Technology branch. We have Mohammed Idrees, a civil engineer and manager of the design and construction at the Transportation division. We also have Natalie Blecha, who is a civil engineer and engineer-in-training at the Transportation division.

Thank you for coming today.

Applause

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Bravo and Golden Bravo award winners

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I rise today to pay tribute to the winners of this year's Bravo and Golden Bravo awards.

Presented by the Yukon Convention Bureau in partnership with the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce and the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre, this annual event recognizes the best of Yukon's meetings and events hosts. Conventions, conferences, and other forms of meetings are strong economic drivers and contribute to year-round tourism visitation, contributing many millions annually and leading to a range of benefits for the tourism industry and the Yukon at large.

This year's awards were all about ovines, with both awards handed out for the exemplary job that the Yukon did in attracting and hosting the tremendously successful 2022 Wild

Sheep Foundation Thinhorn Sheep Summit conference, bringing together biologists, conservation officers, First Nation knowledge-keepers, farmers, outfitters, hunters, and trappers from across North America. The thinhorn sheep conference was, by all accounts, a fantastic forum of information-sharing and relationship-building.

For their role in bringing this outstanding conference to the Yukon and organizing its logistics and agenda, the Golden Bravo Award went to the Yukon Wild Sheep Foundation. The awards were given out this past Thursday, and many of us from the Assembly were there as the awards were given out. It was nice for the Premier and me to have a conversation with the foundation members afterwards, talking about the work done with farmers here in the Yukon to bring in the protections to make sure that we keep our wild sheep and goats safe.

As the host venue for the conference, Whitehorse's Best Western Gold Rush Inn, was awarded the Bravo Award for going above and beyond and, in so doing, raising the bar of standards within the Yukon meetings and event history.

I was honoured to represent the Yukon government at last Thursday's award ceremony, and the hard work and dedication that these honourees displayed for their field of expertise and as advocates for the Yukon's natural beauty, rich culture, and the facilities and experiences we offer is evident. These efforts are, in turn, helping to establish the territory as an ideal meeting location year-round.

I would like the members of this House to join me in congratulating the Yukon Wild Sheep Foundation and the Best Western Gold Rush Inn for their well-deserved win. I would also like to recognize the Yukon Convention Bureau, the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, and Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre for their great work in promoting the Yukon as a premier destination for meetings and events.

Congratulations again to the winners, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize the 2022 Bravo Award winners. The Yukon Convention Bureau presents two annual awards that are given in recognition of Yukoners who host meetings, conventions, or events in Yukon and bringing people to our beautiful territory.

The Yukon has time and again proven to be a sought-after destination. All of the mentioned events draw thousands of people who want to see what Yukon is all about and what we have to offer. Some participants have been known to add extra days to their business travel to experience more of the Yukon. Many return with their families to visit when they can devote more time to explore and sightsee, and for some, it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see our part of the north.

The Bravo Award recipients we tribute today were both recognized for their contribution in hosting the Thinhorn Sheep Summit, which took place in Whitehorse between May 2 and 6 last year. Stakeholders from a number of US states and across Canada came to discuss the importance of management, enhancement, and conservation of thinhorn sheep. Biologists, outfitters, First Nation game wardens and conservation officers,

resident hunters, trappers, and other interested parties attended many discussions and presentations during the event.

The 2022 Golden Bravo Award went to the Yukon Wild Sheep Foundation for being incredible hosts. This foundation was established in 2015 to promote and facilitate science-based management of Yukon's wild sheep population.

The 2022 Bravo Award went to the Best Western Gold Rush Inn for their venue and work to ensure that the Thinhorn Sheep Summit was a success.

So, thank you to the Convention Bureau, and keep up the great work of encouraging businesses to host events in the Yukon. Congratulations to the winners. Well done.

Applause

Ms. White: I stand on behalf of the Yukon NDP caucus to add our voices to the chorus of congratulations to the winners of the 2022 Bravo Awards. This year's awards went to two separate organizations with a common goal — that of hosting a successful, multi-jurisdictional conference in 2022. This conference brought together state, provincial, and territorial biologists, game wardens and conservation officers, First Nations, outfitters, resident hunters, and trappers to share and discuss information around thinhorn sheep with a focus of ensuring that wild thinhorn sheep populations remain healthy and on the landscape throughout North America.

So, congratulations to the Yukon Wild Sheep Foundation for the 2022 Golden Bravo Award for their efforts and success in bringing and hosting the Thinhorn Sheep Summit III conference to Whitehorse.

Congratulations to the team at the Best Western Gold Rush Inn for their efforts and contributions as the host hotel and conference centre that made bringing the Thinhorn Sheep Summit III to Whitehorse not only possible, but so successful. And, of course, a big thank you to the Yukon Convention Bureau and its knowledgeable staff for all that they do in promoting Yukon as an extraordinary meeting destination, supporting those folks whose big ideas bring so much value to our territory. So, congratulations and thank you to all.

Applause

In recognition of National Engineering Month

Hon. Mr. Clarke: On behalf of the Government of Yukon and on behalf of the Yukon New Democratic Party, I rise today to pay tribute to engineers. March is National Engineering Month. In the Yukon, our engineers have many different specializations but they all have one thing in common: they are committed to making things work. Engineers are the ones who make sure that ideas on paper will function safely in the real world. The Yukon benefits everyday from their expertise. Engineers help design buildings that shape our towns. They build and maintain bridges. They specialize in, among other things, computer science. They work in agriculture and utilities, including green energy to create a more sustainable future.

While we are incredibly lucky to have so many great engineers in our territory, the fact is that we need more. Across Canada, engineering jobs are consistently among the most in

demand. To this end, it is essential that we all do our part and help engage and encourage young people to consider becoming an engineer. Within Highways and Public Works, for example, we have many engineers-in-training. They work in different areas of the department, including the Transportation division, capital projects, and the Sustainable Infrastructure branch. Across our department, recent engineering grads mentor under a professional engineer. These young graduates make a great contribution to our projects and to our jobsites. They bring fresh ideas that can change our perspective on potential problems.

I also want to take this opportunity to recognize the role played by Engineers Yukon. This organization regulates and governs the profession in the Yukon and helps to maintain our high standards of excellence. With International Women's Day on March 8, I would like to praise Engineers Yukon for their work with the other provincial and territorial engineering regulators to increase representation of women within the engineering field through the 30 by 30 initiative. They also have great resources online to encourage young people who might be considering this career. Once a student has graduated from an engineering school, they can apply to Engineers Yukon. Their engineers-in-training program is here to support engineers going through the professional licensing process. Our public service benefits greatly by having this type of mentorship in the Yukon.

Much of the work of engineers is behind the scenes. Sometimes we do not notice or even think about the engineering that goes into something because it works so well and so seamlessly.

To all the professional engineers or engineers-in-training out there, I want to extend my sincere appreciation for your creativity, expertise, and dedication. To the young people who may be considering this career path, I urge you to pursue your passions and to become a part of this field. Lastly, to Engineers Yukon, thank you for the support that you provide to our community of engineers.

Applause

Mr. Hassard: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize March as National Engineering Month here in Canada. Presented by Engineers Canada, this year National Engineering Month is guided by the theme "There's a place for you in engineering". This theme celebrates the diversity of thought, opportunities, and people that make up the engineering profession and welcomes engineering students, engineers-in-training, and early career engineers to have conversations about their profession and key role in society.

We celebrate engineers, their work, and their importance here in the territory and across the country. The Yukon is home to a vast range of engineers with a diversity of expertise and experience, some of which include civil, mechanical, electrical, environmental, and chemical engineers — all different fields, but all with the same goal: to identify and solve problems.

We don't have to look far to see the impacts that engineers have in the Yukon. Whether it's our roads, subdivisions, electrical equipment, vehicles, engines, and much, much more,

we have engineers to thank. These important careers continue to be major contributors to our economy and to life within each of our communities.

With International Women's Day coming up on Wednesday, during the National Engineering Month, I, too, would like to acknowledge Engineers Yukon working with Engineers Canada on their 30 by 30 campaign to increase the representation of women within the engineering field. This campaign is a commitment to raise the percentage of newly licensed engineers who are women to 30 percent by the year 2030.

I would like to, once again, thank all of those involved here in the Yukon and across Canada for their continued work to advance engineering.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Jamie Davignon and Stantec engineering for winning the 2021 Engineering Excellence Award, which was announced just last week.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Mr. Dixon: I have for tabling a letter from the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses addressed to the Yukon Premier, dated February 8, 2023.

Ms. White: I have for tabling a study from the University of British Columbia, entitled "Perinatal outcomes of midwife-led care, stratified by medical risk: a retrospective cohort study from British Columbia (2008–2018)". This study outlines the positive outcomes of births led by midwives over 10 years.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?
Are there any petitions?

PETITIONS

Petition No. 16

Ms. White: I have for tabling a petition with 530 signatures that reads as follows:

To the Yukon Legislative Assembly

This petition of the undersigned shows:

Hemodialysis is a treatment that replaces the work of your own kidneys to clear wastes and extra fluid from your blood. This is done using a special filter called a dialyzer or artificial kidney. Your blood travels through plastic tubing to the dialyzer, where it is cleaned and then returned to you. This machine is required to stay alive.

Hemodialysis is not offered at any hospitals in the Yukon; while at-home hemodialysis sometimes is an option... at-home dialysis requires months of training and is not often a viable option for patients. In addition, if the power goes out part way through a treatment the patient is in trouble.

Patients are having to travel back and forth to Vancouver on a weekly basis to receive dialysis. This is costly to taxpayers

and the patient, but more than anything takes the individual away from family and friends. In addition, travelling on a weekly basis is a tiring ordeal when you are already suffering. In 2019 a hemodialysis patient returned home to die as he was tired of being away from family and friends.

Therefore, the undersigned urge the Yukon Legislative Assembly to provide hemodialysis to Yukoners in the Yukon.

Speaker: Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 27: *Community Services Statute Law Amendment Act (2023)* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I move that Bill No. 27, entitled *Community Services Statute Law Amendment Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Community Services that Bill No. 27, entitled *Community Services Statute Law Amendment Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 27 agreed to

Bill No. 25: *Act to amend the National Aboriginal Day Act (2023)* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I move that Bill No. 25, entitled *Act to amend the National Aboriginal Day Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Community Services that Bill No. 25, entitled *Act to amend the National Aboriginal Day Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 25 agreed to

Speaker: Are there any further bills to be introduced?
Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House supports the creation of a Yukon health authority and the positive transformation of Yukon's health care and social services system, as described in the *Putting People First* report.

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

THAT this House applauds Yukon University and Yukon Women in Trades and Technology for their work to offer a free welding program for women and non-binary people interested in welding or related trades as a career option.

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

THAT this House congratulates the municipalities throughout Yukon on the implementation of the Better Buildings program, which not only makes energy retrofits more accessible and adds value to Yukon homes and buildings, but is an important step in fighting climate change, reducing emissions, and making life more affordable for Yukoners.

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

THAT this House congratulates the Yukon Conservation Data Centre and the Yukon Research Centre at Yukon University on the successful delivery of the 2023 Yukon Biodiversity Forum and for their work to:

- (1) foster partnerships and networking, including coordinated contribution to national and local initiatives relative to the Canadian biodiversity strategy;
- (2) deliver public education on biodiversity issues;
- (3) provide coordination among field researchers promoting long-term data on key species; and
- (4) integrate local traditional knowledge into ongoing field data gathering processes.

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

THAT the House hold a Special Sitting in Dawson City, Yukon, on Tuesday, June 13, 2023, in the original chambers of the Legislature, to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the establishment of the Yukon Territory; and

THAT the Speaker set the time at which the House shall meet on June 13, 2023, and give notice to all members.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to make all prescription contraceptives, including oral contraceptives, known as “the pill”, copper and hormonal IUDs, subdermal implants, contraceptive injections, vaginal rings, and emergency contraceptives, known as the “morning-after pill”, free to all Yukon residents.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with ATCO Electric Yukon to ensure that the cost of upgrading electrical infrastructure to switch to renewable energy in personal residences is not a financial barrier to homeowners.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with the City of Whitehorse to develop a recycling collection service in Whitehorse.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Supportive housing in Watson Lake

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I rise today to acknowledge the important work that is being done in Watson Lake to broaden services offered along with the housing continuum. By working with the Town of Watson Lake and the Liard First Nation, we helped identify the need for greater supportive housing. More specifically, the need is for more support to help people maintain their housing and foster self-sufficiency. In recognition of this need for support, a request for proposals is now open until March 23 on the government’s Bids and Tenders website to build a 10-unit Housing First project in Watson Lake.

In 2019, the Yukon Liberal government opened the territory’s first-ever Housing First residence in Whitehorse. Connective and Council of Yukon First Nations assumed operations of this facility in 2021.

Housing First is a person-centred approach to ending homelessness that provides fundable individuals with immediate access to housing without preconditions. Our government believes wholeheartedly in this philosophy and that ensures support and a community connection to our most vulnerable.

With construction expected to start this spring, the Watson Lake Housing First project has an estimated \$9-million budget and is scheduled to be completed in May 2024. Approximately half of the budget for this project is being funded through the northern carve-out as part of the federal government’s National Housing Co-Investment fund. The program in Watson Lake will be delivered using the Housing First principles, with the Department of Health and Social Services overseeing the provision of on-site support services on a 24/7 basis. This will be done in the same way as the Whitehorse Housing First residence that is currently operating.

Our government remains committed to ending and preventing homelessness in the Yukon and working closely with our partners. We know this is something that cannot be done by one group or in isolation. The Watson Lake project has only progressed to this stage thanks to the hard work of many housing partners: the Town of Watson Lake was instrumental in providing support for the development; the insight of Liard First Nation was key to identifying the need for the Housing First approach; Kobayashi and Zedda Architects was awarded the design of the complex in 2021 that sees us now in a position to issue the request for a proposals; Watson Lake community residents participated in the Housing First open house in the spring of 2022 and were integral to help inform the project through the sharing of community values and top-of-mind topics; the Department of Health and Social Services, which offers ongoing support, is a partner for bringing Housing First online; and finally, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or CMHC, which continues to invest in affordable housing for those who need it the most through the National Housing Co-Investment fund.

The combined efforts of all these individuals and organizations will ultimately lead to the construction of a much-needed community resource. We look forward to

working with the business community on construction of this project as it will play an important role in the community of Watson Lake. Again, our government is also looking forward to a continued relationship with the Town of Watson Lake, Liard First Nation, Department of Health and Social Services, and passionate community individuals. As we continue to foster these kinds of collaborative relationships, we will see more of the changes required to address the housing challenges across the territory.

Thank you.

Ms. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to respond to this ministerial statement regarding housing in Watson Lake.

I think we can all agree that all types of housing are needed in communities across the territory. However, from what I gather from my constituents, this project seems a bit off the mark. In consulting with some of my constituents, they view a Housing First development on this property as a missed opportunity. While they were supportive of Yukon Housing buying this property and cleaning it up, they assumed it would be a broader housing project. I've heard from constituents that they feel this location would have been a better choice to address the key weakness identified in the 2015 *Strategic Plan for the Economic Revitalization of the Watson Lake Economy* — namely, rental housing for employees who are desperately needed for businesses. This property is in the heart of the downtown economic zone. However, it's not the only housing need in my community.

I understand from constituents involved that the Watson Lake housing needs assessment identified many shortfalls in housing in Watson Lake. The government has failed to consult with the broader community to prioritize which projects to do first and failed to consult on the best locations for each type.

I would also note that the government still has not supplied me, as the MLA, with a copy of the needs assessment. If the minister could commit to doing that in his response, I would appreciate it.

The statement says that the project will cost \$9 million and provide 10 units. That, Mr. Speaker, works out to \$900,000 per unit. That seems to me and many others to be a fairly excessive per-unit cost.

Does the Premier think that \$900,000 per unit for a 10-unit complex is justified? As we all know, inflation is driving up the cost of everything. Is there a cost where the Premier will say, "That is too much and the tender for this project won't be awarded"?

Also, the timeline says that the project will be completed by May 2024. The Premier has previously failed to deliver on housing completion dates, so can we hold him to this one?

The Premier indicated that Health and Social Services would fund the programming, as with the Whitehorse Housing First project. Does this mean that the building will be managed by the Yukon government and NGO or some other organization?

The community has identified that more housing is needed in Watson Lake; however, many residents feel that this project is not going to address the most pressing needs.

Ms. Tredger: In the NDP team's travels to Watson Lake, we have heard repeatedly about the need for more housing. We have heard about the people who are homeless and the people who are precariously housed. This investment in housing in Watson Lake is sorely needed and we are very happy to see it going forward. This is a great project. Congratulations to all the partners and to the Yukon government for moving it forward.

One of the most exciting parts of this project is the Housing First designation, which I understand we differ on, but I think we are very excited about it. According to the Homeless Hub — and I quote: "The basic underlying principle of Housing First is that people are better able to move forward with their lives if they are first housed." Housing is provided first and then supports are provided, or, as the minister just defined it, Housing First provides vulnerable individuals with immediate access to housing without preconditions. This is a principle that we actually would really like to see applied across Yukon Housing units, because there are vulnerable people who will not necessarily live in Housing First units, but in all of the Yukon Housing units.

When we look at the new tenant allocation policy that Yukon Housing has recently adopted, it requires some — only some — tenants to have support plans in place before they will be given a housing unit. That is not consistent with Housing First. Housing First means housing comes first, not support plans come first and then you get housing if you have a support plan.

One of the concerns is that only some of the tenants are required to have support plans and, in particular, it is people who identify as part of a priority group, such as women fleeing violence and people who are identified by NGO partners on the by-name list. They have this additional requirement of a support plan. If you self-identify as a priority group, you don't actually get easier access to housing; you get additional barriers.

That doesn't make a lot of sense to me, and I am not alone because key housing organizations such as the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition and Safe at Home have also pointed out problems with this policy. It is discriminatory. It will do the opposite of what it is intended to do for priority groups. Instead of housing these people faster, it just adds more barriers.

On top of the requirement for a support plan, so-called priority groups also only have access to 25 percent of available units and people from the by-name list have access to another 25 percent. That means that anyone who accesses housing through an NGO or chooses to identify as a part of a priority group is automatically ruled out of half of the Yukon Housing units. This is the opposite of what a priority group is supposed to be.

So, again, we are very supportive of this project. We are happy to see it going forward. Congratulations to the partners and the Yukon government on making this happen, but we hope

that the spirit behind these Housing First projects can be embodied in all of Yukon Housing's tenant allocations.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Again, our government is prioritizing access to safe, affordable housing by bringing housing online that is relevant to community needs. We have a duty to serve those Yukoners with urgent housing needs across the territory. These needs affect not only those who are unhoused, but the entire community that must come together to support them. Yukoners care about their fellow Yukoners, and this is what makes our territory such an incredible place to call home.

Community housing is more than just providing housing to those in need; it is about fostering social integration and networks of support. It is about building high-quality housing and amenities in good locations that are available to all Yukoners. That is also why it has been so important to have the Town of Watson Lake and the Liard First Nation at the table, and we need everyone coming together for creative, community-minded solutions, and that is how we promote and refine more positive, inclusive connections.

Our government is centred on taking action to make the Yukon a place that everyone can call home, and that is what we have been doing since 2016 and what we will continue to do.

I will do my best just to touch on some of the questions from the Member for Watson Lake. The first point was that this is really off the mark. I was there for the consultation period in the spring of 2022. The Member for Watson Lake was there. We attended the same open house together. I actually invited the member to do an announcement with me the following morning. I wish, at some point, that it was shared to me that we had missed the mark, during those discussions or during that consultation. There was an opportunity for the whole community to come out to the event. It was over a number of hours. I thought that it was quite well attended. I think something that was very nice to see was that Mayor Irvin was there, as well as Chief Charlie. They were both there. They were working through some other policy challenges at the time, but they both came together, as well as the MLA and me.

I thought it was a really good discussion. During that, there were some very common-sense approaches brought to us by local subject matter experts who are contractors. It helped us to understand the project better. It was at that grassroots level where public servants and politicians — when we're meeting with community members, you have to have your ears open. You listen to what they are saying. They made suggestions and those suggestions were taken into consideration. I appreciate the way the Yukon Housing Corporation has approached that.

I think there always needs to be rental housing. I am willing to share any of the information that we have on the housing initiatives fund with the Member for Watson Lake. That can be distributed in the community. I don't think we have seen a huge uptake from Watson Lake yet as we have in other communities, but that is a great way for us to de-risk projects where people want to build rentals. I want to see the private sector build rentals. That's where I want to see it. I want to see the private sector building that rental, and I want us to de-risk it.

\$900,000 a unit was flagged as maybe a cost that is too high. We are just looking at the market indicators. I see what we are doing when we go out to tender on our duplexes — Carmacks, Dawson City, Watson Lake. I see the numbers that are coming back. I agree; these are large numbers. I wish that we could ensure that we could build units at a rate that is less than that. Maybe it will come in less than that, but I know what the numbers were last year on some of our duplexes and some of our other buildings that were getting worked on, such as Jeckell.

With that being said, thank you for the support from the Member of the Third Party. Yes, in closing, we are looking at the potential of an NGO looking after the operations of this. I will do my best to stay on line for the spring of 2024, and I look forward to talking about lots in Watson Lake, which —

Speaker: Order.

This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Land development

Ms. Clarke: The Yukon continues to face a shortage of residential lots for the development of housing.

In March of 2021, the Yukon Liberals promised to develop and release 1,000 lots over the course of their mandate. Two years have passed and we are now about midway through their mandate.

Can the government tell us how many residential lots they have released in this mandate so far?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: What we are talking about this afternoon is the lot development that this government has undertaken — record lot development, actually, over the course of our mandate so far. I was just talking to the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes this morning, actually, about lot development. We were reflecting on how, in the last four years of the Yukon Party's time in office, they spent roughly \$24 million in over four years, and in this budget that we just tabled, in one single year, we are spending almost \$26 million on lot development. That is a difference in approach. We are working very, very hard to get lots out the door so that the people of the territory have houses to live in. This has been ignored and sort of neglected for a very long time. We are working very hard to get on top of that demand, and we are going to continue to invest in our people and we are going to continue to invest in lot development in the territory.

I look forward to further questions.

Ms. Clarke: My question was simple: How many lots has the Liberal government released since the 2021 election?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: When complete, in four to six years, Whistle Bend will comprise \$300 million of investment and provide a full-service, sustainable community of more than 2,000 lots to accommodate our growing population. The commitment was made in 2021 to build 1,000 lots in the territory by the end of our mandate. We are on track to get that done. That is the goal and we are going to continue to strive to get those 1,000 lots in production.

This year, in addition to phased development in Whistle Bend, the Land Development branch is advancing multiple landscaping projects, the new lift station, and necessary storm water infrastructure in many Yukon communities.

Our Liberal government has built strong, collaborative relationships with municipalities, private land owners, developers, and First Nation partners across the territory to speed up the development of lots and homes in the territory. Our government is working hard to increase the supply of lots in Yukon communities for housing, as well as business and economic development opportunities.

Fixing the territory's housing shortage is not something that one government organization can accomplish alone. We need to work in partnership to increase housing options. This government is doing that on a daily basis.

Ms. Clarke: I did not hear an answer, so I'm going to ask again. My question was very simple: How many lots has the Liberal government released since the 2021 election?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am a bit disappointed that the member opposite doesn't like the answers I am providing. The member opposite can go back to the Blues and see how many lots we have developed. I have answered this question several times in the past. This is another repeat. It's like it should be September and rerun season. These are questions that we have answered on the floor of the House last year.

I haven't heard a new question this afternoon, but I will say that the Yukon Party boasted about population growth for more than a decade but failed to take action to plan for the inevitable increase in demand for housing. The Yukon Party's record on housing is embarrassing. I said this on Thursday, I have said it before, and I am going to say it again.

If I was on that side of the House, I would be embarrassed to bring this point forward, given my party's previous actions. The Yukon Party sat on millions of dollars and refused to invest in affordable housing. We are still paying the price for the Yukon Party's inaction on housing. We are trying to dig ourselves out of this hole. We are going to continue to work diligently and hard to make sure that Yukoners have the housing that they deserve, to make up for the shortfall that accumulated over years of Yukon Party neglect.

Question re: Land development

Ms. McLeod: In December 2022, Department of Finance officials told the Public Accounts Committee that the government underspent on residential land development in both Whitehorse and the communities in the 2021-22 budget year.

Here is exactly what the officials from Finance said — and I quote: "Residential land development was underbudget both in Whitehorse and the communities; \$15.7 million lapsed in total, \$8.5 million just in Whistle Bend."

Can the Minister of Community Services explain why his department has been underspending on land development?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: As I said in my previous answer this afternoon, if we want to talk about underspending on lot development in the territory, you only have to look at the years leading up to 2016 to see the effects and what that looked like. The Yukon Party spent a total, in four years, of less than we are

spending every year on lot development. When we came to office, Mr. Speaker, people said that we couldn't get the amount of money spent out the door. My colleague, the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes, did the unexpected and actually developed lots faster and with more efficiency than anybody had seen on record, and I have continued that process. We are getting Whistle Bend lots out the door. We are developing lots in Watson Lake. We are developing lots and housing in Dawson City. We are working on this file every single day to make sure that Yukoners have the housing they deserve.

Ms. McLeod: In the budget that was tabled last week, the government has revealed that it lapsed almost \$3.5 million in rural land development last year.

Can the minister explain the approximately \$3.5 million lapsed in rural residential development last year?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: There is so much to unpack in that question. It seems like such a simple question on the surface, but it really isn't.

If the members opposite want to talk about lapses, they can go back through their historic notes and look at the capital budgets they tabled amounting to some of the largest announced in Yukon history — \$300 million. How much did they get out the door? \$170 million. They lapsed hundreds of millions of dollars from their capital budgets every single year. This government is spending. As my colleague, the Minister of Highways and Public Works, said recently, we are going to get more than \$500 million in capital spending out the door this year.

We are making historic investments in housing and lot development across the territory. This year's budget includes \$26 million for land development across the territory. We continue to advance Whistle Bend, together with the City of Whitehorse, as well as development projects across the territory with our municipal partners.

According to the Yukon Bureau of Statistics, investment in building construction in the Yukon for December 2022 increased 20.8 percent compared to December 2021, in contrast to a national increase of 6.2 over that same time frame. We are doing the work necessary for Yukoners.

Ms. McLeod: There seems to be a pattern with this government of underspending on rural residential land development. Can the minister tell us whether or not he thinks the government has invested a sufficient amount of money in rural residential land development this year, and what steps is he taking to ensure that more of that money isn't lapsed?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I have a couple of points that I would also like to add on that conversation with communities and ensuring that we have the right approach when it comes to rural land development. I think it's important to note that on Saturday morning, the Minister of Community Services, the Minister of Highways and Public Works, and I spent time with the Association of Yukon Communities, having a conversation on just this point.

Really it was about ensuring that the dollars being spent and allocated toward our communities are done in an appropriate way, but also looking at more of a strategic

approach and understanding the unique needs of each and every community. In some communities, we have the ability to work with First Nation governments that will have funds allocated from the federal government for horizontal services, and in some cases, we have to figure out how to de-risk the private sector on their ability to do this work.

We have shown our innovation and ingenuity. We have moved forward further than anybody has on working with the City of Whitehorse on the tank farm, and the planning for the master plan is underway on that. Again, we're waiting for the geotechnical report to conclude, but we will be able to move 5th and Rogers, which has been something that everybody in the House has talked about at some point, but it's really about who gets it done.

Again, I think that we have an opportunity here to continue to be innovative, to work with First Nation governments as well on land development, and we stand proudly on the work we're doing and the innovation that we are bringing to the table.

Question re: Birth control

Ms. Tredger: Over two years ago, the then-Premier tasked the Minister of Health and Social Services with subsidizing birth control and fertility treatment. When it comes to fertility and surrogacy, many Yukoners are looking forward to the tax rebate won by the Yukon NDP. But when it comes to birth control, the government's work is far behind.

Thousands of Yukoners rely on prescription contraceptives for birth control and many other medical reasons, and thousands of those same Yukoners are still paying out of their own pockets for it. Maybe no progress has been made because the government has given up on affordable birth control altogether.

In the most recent mandate letter from the new Premier, subsidizing birth control has been completely removed. There is also no mention of affordable contraceptives anywhere in this government's budget. Has this government abandoned its commitment to affordable birth control?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Unfortunately, once again, the member opposite does not have accurate information. Our government continues to fund various sexual and reproductive health initiatives. Birth control is covered for many — for all recipients of social assistance through income support services. Additionally, birth control is covered through the children's drug and optical program, which is available to lower income families with children under the age of 18. Work is underway to distribute period products in public washrooms in government buildings throughout the territory for free.

The members opposite may know that the Council of Yukon First Nations, with the support of federal funding of \$100,000 through a transfer payment agreement from the Government of Yukon, has also provided period products to several non-governmental organizations in Whitehorse as well as to equip all Yukon schools with period products. We continue to be dedicated to the services of fertility, contraceptive and otherwise, to support Yukoners throughout the territory.

Ms. Tredger: I'm not sure which information the minister thinks is inaccurate. We know about the programs she listed, but these subsidies only cover contraceptives for a small fraction of people. It's 2023; the bare minimum is not good enough anymore. For thousands of other Yukoners, the cost of contraceptives, even when they have the best private insurance coverage, can still be up to hundreds of dollars a month. This is unacceptable and it goes against this government's own commitment to reproductive justice.

Why is the minister denying thousands of Yukoners equal, affordable access to prescription contraceptives?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: A few days ago, British Columbia announced that it will become the first jurisdiction to provide free prescription coverage for contraceptives — the first in Canada. Coverage for birth control is currently available to youth enrolled in the children's drug and optical program, which is, as I've noted, available to certain families with children at the age of 18 or younger. Birth control is covered for social assistance recipients by income support services. Some funding is also provided directly to Yukoners through the Yukon Sexual Health Clinic to support clients to receive birth control through the care that is provided there. This is an important issue for Yukoners. Our ongoing work with respect to gender-affirming care and providing the services that are available through that program to those seeking such medical care is, in fact, the only of its kind in the country. That has been a priority for us going forward and we will continue to serve Yukoners in that way.

Ms. Tredger: I'm actually delighted to hear the minister bring up BC because there is an example of the bold action that could really make life more affordable for Yukoners. So, last week, as mentioned, they announced that prescription contraceptives would be free. That's right — completely free to all BC residents. That covers all contraceptives including the pill, copper and hormonal IUDs, subdermal implants, contraceptive injections, and even emergency oral contraceptives, known as the "morning-after pill". That decision is economic and reproductive justice in action.

The Yukon can also take bold action like this. If the government cares as much about reproductive health as they say they do, will the minister make all prescription contraceptives free for all Yukon residents?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate hearing about this priority from the New Democratic Party for the first time on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. What I can also note is that it is not likely that they are going to hear such a commitment from me today on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. These kinds of programs require careful consideration and careful study. They require engagement with the Yukon public and a determination as to whether or not this shall become a priority for Yukoners.

I can indicate that many Yukoners do receive free contraceptives through the programs that I've noted — through the children's drug and optical program, through income support services, and also through the Yukon Sexual Health Clinic to support certain clients who receive birth control in that process.

I want to note that BC has become the very first jurisdiction to consider such care coverage in the provinces and territories across the country. Yukon has done its own forging ahead with respect to services that are available to Yukoners, based on information and engagement that we have had with Yukoners over the years and on our commitment to gender-affirming care.

Question re: Midwifery in Yukon

Ms. White: Earlier this year, Yukoners learned that the government's midwifery program was shutting down just six months after opening. For expecting Yukon parents and midwives, this shutdown was devastating. Midwifery is about choice as to where and how the baby is delivered. Births led by midwives are proven to have better outcomes than with doctors, even for high-risk pregnancies, because the midwife is able to give more time during pregnancy to prevent and address many of these risks. But in the two years since the Liberals took over midwifery, the program was only open for six months and midwives were only leading births for three of those months. Yet again, birthing Yukoners are left with no support.

Can the minister explain why this government's midwifery program failed?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I certainly don't agree that the program has failed. It is adjusting, of course, with respect to the current local, national, and global crisis with respect to health care human resources issues. We continue to work with local and national partners to address those shortages. They are global; they are national; and they are local, and Yukon is feeling the crunch. Those concerns are currently impacting the Yukon midwifery program.

To ensure that the program is fully integrated into our health care system, we must work to offer high quality and safe care for all Yukoners who wish to avail themselves of that service and that kind of care.

A robust, quality-improvement process has been the priority for the Yukon midwifery program throughout its development and is doing so on an ongoing basis. The program and the work-flow processes were developed and continue to be reviewed with the input of local and national experts, including registered midwives, nurses, physicians, and Yukon First Nations.

Ms. White: Even though the minister doesn't see the program's closure as a failure, many others do. This shutdown wasn't a surprise to anyone. From the start, this government set the midwifery program up to fail. When the Liberals put midwifery regulations in place, advocates warned that they were going to fail. Under these regulations, this government expected midwives to practise outside of the Yukon for a year, and then work in the Yukon earning \$40,000 less than they could earn Outside. The Liberals promised that they would review the wages they offered midwives, but it has been a year. Midwives are leaving and the program is closed.

When will the minister finally offer competitive wages to Yukon midwives?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I don't agree with the member opposite. The program has been temporarily suspended. It

hasn't failed and it hasn't ended. I think that Yukoners deserve accurate information.

The midwifery program, throughout its development and ongoing, was developed and reviewed with respect to the input of local and national experts. This was not something that was conjured up without the input of individuals who are experts in the field, including registered midwives, nurses, physicians, and Yukon First Nations. We are committed to ensuring that the Yukon midwifery program reflects the best standards of care and reflects the unique realities of the Yukon context. The Department of Health and Social Services and the Public Service Commission are working together to explore the options to bring remuneration rates for registered midwives working in the Yukon in line with other parts of Canada. We recognize the competitiveness and the compensation rates for registered midwives across the country and their impacts on our ability to successfully recruit and retain midwives.

Ms. White: So, for folks looking for the support of a midwife right now, this temporary closure is indeed a failure.

We have heard from Yukon midwives who are forced to work without the clear protocols. When they asked this government for support, the response was, "We're working on it." For months, the government was working on it. Meanwhile, other practitioners, like nurses and doctors, had no clear directions from the department on how to work with midwives.

The government announced a program that clearly wasn't ready at all, and then it collapsed, leaving midwives and expectant parents as collateral damage of this government's "let's announce first and figure out later" approach.

Can the minister explain why this government required midwives to work in such a precarious position with so little government support?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Again, I do not agree with the facts being put forward here with respect to the preamble to this question. Our midwifery program was developed with respect to the input and guidance of local, national experts, including registered midwives, nurses, physicians, and Yukon First Nations. It was not designed to be difficult. It was designed with the input of the members of the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the authorities for midwives to work well in the community.

As a result of the staffing shortages, the Yukon midwifery program has temporarily transferred its clients to Solstice Maternity, so the allegation that individuals have been left without any care is simply incorrect.

Recruitment for additional midwives and other mitigation strategies are, in fact, underway. The 2023-24 budget includes \$1.35 million for the Yukon midwifery program.

The Yukon midwifery clinic in Whitehorse officially opened its doors in July 2022. Its first midwifery-led birth occurred on November 6, 2022. Between November 6, 2022, and January 20, 2023, a total of 12 midwifery-led births were supported.

Question re: Land development

Mr. Istchenko: Last April, I asked the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources to consider making changes to

reduce the cost of rural residential land. I suggested reviewing the government's decision to charge Yukoners for appraised value of rural residential land instead of the cost of development.

On April 21, 2022, the minister said that he would go back to the department and explore that option.

Can the minister tell us if any changes have been made to the rural residential land policy or regulation that will make rural land more affordable for Yukoners?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I thank the member opposite for the question. We did have some correspondence back and forth. I did talk to the department specifically about, at all times, trying to keep the costs as low as possible for rural land. I will check in again with the department. I am trying to recall my last correspondence with the member opposite, but I will ask the department specifically about where this sits right now. I have had one more recent letter, I think, from someone, and I have been asked to sit down and meet with him — to talk with those Yukoners about similar concerns.

I think that we are working across the territory on land development, whether it is in municipalities or our communities outside of Whitehorse, whether they are incorporated or not, and we work at all times to keep costs as low as possible within the rules we have before us by statute.

Mr. Istchenko: We continue to hear from Yukoners, especially those in rural Yukon, that the cost of acquiring land is unaffordable and that the government should be taking more action to reduce the cost of rural land. One option that I think the government should consider is using the power set out in the *Lands Act* to set the cost of land by regulation.

Will the minister use his power under the *Lands Act* to set the cost of rural land to the cost of development, rather than the current policy of selling rural land for the appraised value?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: For everyone here in the House today and for Yukoners who are listening in, we have been working — the member opposite has raised concerns and we have been working those concerns through. It is true that the cost of land has gone up. That is correct. I am not going to change policies or talk about changing regulations on the fly because the department is working on this. There is an ongoing dialogue with Yukoners about it.

What I will commit to today is to make sure to keep the members opposite informed about how that work is proceeding.

Mr. Istchenko: I will remind the minister that this is an issue I brought up last year.

Currently, pricing for the land is laid out in the lands regulation. Several Yukoners have pointed out to us that the pricing for rural residential land is set in a different way than other types of land. Both residential and country residential lots are priced in a different way, which allows the government to charge less than the market value. What I have heard from Yukoners is that the government should treat rural residential land in a similar way — that would allow government to charge less than the market value.

So, will the minister consider changing section 49 of the lands regulations to allow the government to charge less than market value for rural residential lands?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I think that what is being pointed out here is that the system we have before us is the one that has been in place for many, many years. Will we consider other things? Always. But we haven't made changes to the system around how lots are priced. I want to be careful today to say that the issue has been raised with us. The department has been looking at it. I have continued to try to have a direct conversation with Yukoners about what the situation looks like, and we are happy to try to find ways to develop access to land for Yukoners and land use planning and lot development —

Speaker: Order, please.

The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 208: *First Appropriation Act 2023-24* — Second Reading — *adjourned debate*

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 208, standing in the name of the Hon. Sandy Silver; adjourned debate, Mr. Cathers.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise here today as the Official Opposition Finance critic to speak to the Liberal government's 2023-24 budget. My colleagues and I will be saving many of our questions and comments for department debate, but I would like to start by talking about something that we agree with in the budget. We are pleased to see the government finally commit to developing a health human resources strategy. The Yukon Party has championed the need for a new health human resources strategy for years, and we are pleased that the government has finally recognized the need for one.

But, Mr. Speaker, there are serious problems with this budget and this government's plans, including a continued failure by the Liberal government to meet the needs of Yukoners in key areas. This government also continues to plunge the territory deeper into net debt. We were hoping that, with the change in the Premier, we might see some vision and action on areas that his predecessor neglected.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, what we see is more of the same. Spending grows across government while some key needs of Yukoners continue to be neglected.

A few major areas that the Liberals are neglecting include: Yukoners' health care needs; the opioid and toxic drug crisis that has caused the loss of our fellow citizens at the worst rate per capita in the country; an increase in organized crime and the illegal drug trade while RCMP resources have not grown sufficiently to meet them; growth of energy demand outpacing supply while the government fans the flames to increase demand and rents more portable diesels at a cost of tens of millions of dollars; lack of access to firewood; major failures in our education system; and, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the list goes on.

Thousands of Yukoners do not have a family doctor, and the wait-list for a doctor continues to grow. Under the Liberals,

the territory slipped to the worst doctor-to-patient ratio in the entire country. Whitehorse General Hospital was forced to cancel surgeries last summer and again this year due to staff shortages. That problem is very closely related to the Liberal government's continued chronic underfunding of Yukon hospitals, which began in 2017.

The chair and CEO of the Yukon Hospital Corporation told us about their needs when they appeared in this House last fall. On November 22, we heard from them that the hospital O&M needs for the year were this — and I quote: "... annual O&M budget for the fiscal 2022-23 is \$103.5 million. It is expected that is a core increase of approximately 3.3 percent, as well as additional funding for other — I will call them 'one-time expenses' — and that does not include any additional funding for pandemic-related impacts."

The CEO then said this about the latter item — and I quote: "That is something that we are working with government on. We don't know what has been committed yet for pandemic funding. In the last two years, though, I can say that it has been fairly significant — in the range of probably almost \$6 million of additional funding in each of the last two years..."

The hospital witnesses told us that the O&M budget was \$103.5 million, with pandemic-related costs on top of that amount. The chair also told us that their budget hadn't factored in inflation. In the second supplementary budget for this fiscal year, the revised total of O&M funding for Yukon hospital services for the 2022-23 fiscal year is only \$88.9 million.

That doesn't cover the \$103.5 million that the hospital witnesses told us was their O&M budget before pandemic expenses and inflation were factored in. That leaves our hospital short over \$14.5 million for the current 2022-23 fiscal year. That is a pretty big shortfall in funding for our hospitals. Unfortunately, this year's budget, introduced under the new Premier, also contains less than \$100 million in O&M funding, which again does not meet their needs.

Additionally, we hear from doctors that this Liberal government is months behind in paying some of the money they are owed, with thousands of claims outstanding for more than 90 days, despite a government commitment to deal with claims in 30 days. Doctors tell us that delayed payments are making it hard to attract new doctors to move to the Yukon and for them to get locum coverage. No one wants to wait months to be paid. Part of being competitive in attracting health care professionals to move to the Yukon includes paying them on time.

Of course, this Minister of Health and Social Services also promised nurses bonuses and is now facing grievances over her failure to deliver. We have seen as well, under this government, nursing vacancies — by the minister's own admission — in rural communities reaching as high as 40 percent.

During the time that this Liberal government has been in office, the territory's revenues have grown every year, largely due to annual increases in the territorial funding formula. Despite that, they have spent money faster than it was coming in. Despite inheriting the best financial situation of any new government in Yukon history, the Liberals have taken our territory's finances from in the black to in the hole. This year, the territorial funding formula is increasing by \$78 million over

what it was last year. That is an increase of over \$1,700 per person in the territory. Yet, despite that, the Liberals plan to blow through that and plunge the territory deeper into net debt, with this budget projecting \$374.8 million in net debt.

I would like to briefly refer to what Keith Halliday said in a recent column in the *Yukon News*, entitled "Yukonomist: Legacy of debt". For the reference of Hansard and others, this is from a column that he wrote dated January 22, 2023, in the *Yukon News*. It speaks to the legacy of the former Premier, but, as we know, it speaks to the legacy of this entire Liberal government. I will, of course, remove references from the article to the Premier's name, which, of course, would not be parliamentary in this Assembly. The article notes that there has been some debate around town on the former Premier's legacy.

I will go on to quote from the article: "But one aspect of it is undebatable: debt."

Then it lists the name of the former Premier — "... took office in December 2016. When the fiscal year ended a few months later, the Yukon government's net financial assets were \$93 million. By the last supplemental budget he laid down in October 2022, that had turned into a liability of \$214 million, a swing of \$307 million or about \$7,000 per Yukoner (these figures exclude the big government-owned corporations such as the hospital and Yukon Energy).

"He consistently borrowed throughout his tenure. Mainstream economists recommend so-called countercyclical fiscal policy, borrowing in bad times and repaying in good times to smooth out the ups and downs of the economy." Then, again, it includes the name of the former Premier. It says he "ran more of a 'pedal to the metal' fiscal policy. He did borrow during the pandemic to stimulate the economy. He also borrowed in good times, stimulating the economy when we already had labour and housing shortages."

I would encourage Yukoners to read that article. It also does make mention of the fact that the government, through its own actions, has added to labour and housing shortages. I do have to point out that when one looks at the growth of government by the hundreds of employees that the former Premier has acknowledged adding, in terms of new positions, it is clear that the number one cause of the housing shortage is the Yukon Liberal government.

I want to move on to talk about a few positive things in the budget. I am pleased to see the continuation of successful programs we started, like the well program and the microgeneration program. We were also pleased to see the NDP and Liberals borrow heavily from the Yukon Party's policy in their new commitments to enhance recruitment and retention of health care professionals. I would note that one of their specific commitments sounds a lot like the medical education bursary that we implemented under a new name. Of course, that program has continued since we started it in 2006.

I also want to talk about a federal issue that is very important to Yukoners and that my colleagues and I have heard from many, many Yukoners about, and that is the federal firearms legislation, Bill C-21. As I noted, my colleagues and I have heard from many of our constituents and other Yukoners who are opposed to it.

While we are pleased that the Premier has come out in opposition to the amendments to Bill C-21, we still have yet to see a clear position from this government on the original bill, which is itself problematic, and, as you will recall, Mr. Speaker, the Liberals voted against a motion that was passed by all the other members of the Assembly in October opposing the use of police resources to enforce the so-called “gun buy-back program”. So, in the lead-up to the recent First Ministers’ meeting, we issued a press release in which we urged the Premier to deliver a clear message to the Prime Minister on two issues that are very important to Yukoners: health care funding and the rights of lawful firearms owners.

We noted at the time that, while Yukoners were relieved to see the Trudeau Liberal government back down on amendments to Bill C-21 that would ban thousands of lawfully acquired hunting rifles and shotguns, it is important for the Premier to tell the Prime Minister that the original text of Bill C-21 is also unacceptable. At the time, we issued a call, which, of course, we reiterate today: “We call on the Premier to defend the rights and needs of Yukoners by telling Prime Minister Trudeau we need more funding for health care, and that every dollar the federal Liberal government proposes to spend on confiscating lawfully acquired firearms would be far better spent on increasing health care funding across Canada.”

So, my question would be for the Premier: Did the Premier do that? Did he take that message to the Prime Minister, and if not, what did he say to him about the issue of Bill C-21? Will he join us, on behalf of Yukoners, in opposing the original text of Bill C-21 and sending that message strongly to the federal government as well as sending a message on behalf of firearms owners that those who have acquired property lawfully and have done nothing wrong should not have that property forcibly confiscated? So, the question is where the Premier stands and what he said on this issue.

Finally, on Friday at the Chamber of Commerce luncheon, the Premier made a number of commitments that are not reflected in the budget speech, and I’m curious if he will elaborate on those commitments here in the House so that all members can hear them. I look forward to addressing many other issues in Question Period and in debate, but in the interest of moving forward with debate, I will wrap up my remarks there.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am pleased to rise this afternoon to respond to Bill No. 208, also known as the *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

I am proud to have served Yukoners as the Minister of Highways and Public Works and the Minister of Environment since May 2021. It is one of the greatest honours and responsibilities of my life. Within this budget, there are many programs and projects that I am excited to speak about. Mr. Speaker, I will begin today by presenting the Highways and Public Works’ budget for 2023-24.

The Department of Highways and Public Works is dedicated to ensuring that our transportation network and government infrastructure are there for Yukoners, whether that is getting to work safely, flying between communities, going to

school, or staying connected digitally. We strive to do this through a wide range of programs and services that have a lasting impact on our territory and its communities, all the while working toward a sustainable future. Our work ensures that anyone travelling through our territory in all seasons does so safely.

Our department is also responsible for the buildings and communication infrastructure that the public service needs to service Yukoners. Across the Yukon, we do our utmost to maintain existing infrastructure so that it continues to be there for Yukoners now and into the future. We are also investing in infrastructure projects that will benefit the territory and contribute to a prosperous future. At its core, the department’s role is to maintain and improve our transportation network and to support government services through building maintenance, information technology, government procurement, and our fleet vehicle program.

At Highways and Public Works, we strive to do work that builds our communities, grows our economy, and ensures a clean, green, and sustainable future. These projects range from ensuring safe and effective transportation systems like roads, bridges, and airports to implementing new technologies that make government services more accessible and efficient.

Highways and Public Works is a large, multi-faceted department. Highways and Public Works has been entrusted with the maintenance, improvement, and innovation of many important aspects of the daily lives of Yukoners. I want to take this opportunity to provide a short summary.

At the Procurement Support Centre, we assist all government departments with procurement and facilitate the procurement of goods and services in a fair, timely, and transparent manner. Our Fleet Vehicle Agency provides vehicles for government use. This includes vehicles for conservation officers, natural resources officers, wildland fire personnel, community nurses, and social workers, to name a few. I would like to share that the Fleet Vehicle Agency is leading by example in the critical transition to a greener economy by adding zero-emission vehicles to the fleet and promoting sustainable vehicle options. In the fleet, there are currently three battery-powered electric passenger cars and 12 plug-in hybrid SUVs. Further, two fully electric cargo vans are planned to be delivered in late 2023. Battery electric vehicles, plug-in electric vehicles, and hybrid vehicles are the future of ground transportation, and I am pleased that we are taking steps now to electrify our fleet. Our government must be at the leading edge of this transportation transition.

Corporate Services’ support for all Yukon government departments does not end there, however. Staff within the Supply Services branch monitor government assets and make sure that our government incorporates and practises the principles of reduce, reuse, and recycle. The team at acquisition services and planning works closely with all departments to facilitate the purchase of goods and services. The mail and courier services team ensures confidential, rapid and reliable delivery services between communities, departments, and facilities within the Government of Yukon. As well, our travel services unit provides services to all Yukon government

departments and agencies, including airline reservations, hotel, car, and rail bookings, and transportation logistics. They also assist with medical air travel for Yukon residents.

These services and the people behind them help all Yukon government departments work more efficiently. We have implemented and continue to improve many processes and policies that are increasing economic opportunities for communities, Yukon First Nations, and all businesses, all while ensuring value for dollar for Yukoners.

The new technologies developed and implemented by our Information and Communications Technology branch, or ICT, make government services more efficient and accessible to Yukoners. ICT works with other departments to provide online services, such as Yukon 511 road condition reports, camping permits, and business entity purchases. An important aspect of ICT is innovation and finding better ways to deliver these services. For example, we just launched a new online log-in service called "MyYukon", which will make accessing a wide range of government services easier and much more secure.

We know that many Yukoners value living, working, playing, and raising families in our communities greatly, and we will continue to offer people the tools to securely access their desktop and connect with other employees when working remotely. This service is critical to enable this.

Highways and Public Works contracts to have new buildings, such as schools and health centres, constructed to support the future needs of a growing Yukon. We are working on several projects that will lower public buildings' greenhouse gas emissions, helping us move closer to a cleaner future. I am happy to say that some of these projects have already been completed.

The replacement of the skylight at the law centre to improve the building's thermal performance and is estimated to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 23 tonnes per year. In addition, our government successfully completed another nine building retrofits in 2022, resulting in an estimated annual reduction of 101 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions.

We are responsible for maintaining just under 5,000 kilometres of road. This includes plowing, grading, surfacing, painting, brushing — the list goes on. Our crews inspect and maintain 136 bridges, 260 large culverts, and over 6,000 smaller drainage culverts. This represents a significant challenge as permafrost degrades, thaws, and can ultimately collapse in areas across our vast road network.

We also support the aviation industry through our network of airports, aerodromes and airstrips. The Department of Highways and Public Works also assists the entire government with their leases, contracts, risk-management assessments, and insurance.

Our capital planning office leads the development of the government's five-year capital plan. They work closely with the Department of Finance and all other Yukon government departments to create this plan. The five-year capital plan honours our government's commitment to communicate capital spending intentions to Yukoners, municipalities, the private sector, and First Nation governments.

Each year when we release the five-year capital plan, businesses and contractors are provided with an updated timeline for projects. This provides greater certainty and promotes a strategic approach to the forecasting and timing of procurement.

As we work through the five-year capital planning process, I do question how the former Yukon Party government operated in the absence of such planning. How could they possibly plan and execute large-scale projects without it? However, I also wonder how contractors and bidders of years ago felt when the five-year capital plan was not provided. How could a business reasonably plan its operations properly going forward?

Advancing reconciliation with Yukon First Nations is a focus of the department, both in long-term projects and department-wide policies, such as the Yukon First Nation procurement policy, and other important initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that a stable Internet connection is integral to our daily lives here in the Yukon. Live Link Internet with redundancy is necessary for a strong economy, quality health care, and dependable air travel. This year, we have allocated \$24.4 million toward continued construction on the Dempster fibre line. Approximately two-thirds of the total project costs are recoverable from the federal government. Work on the line started in the summer of 2021 and is scheduled to be completed in 2024. This new line will connect the Yukon to the existing Mackenzie Valley Fibre Link, creating a 4,000-kilometre continuous network loop. Approximately half of the installation has been completed, including under three major rivers: the Mackenzie, the Peel, and the Arctic Red. The Dempster fibre line will provide a much-needed backup line in the event of service disruptions.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to speak about our transportation network. High demands are placed on our highways, bridges, airports, and ferries, often in, as Yukoners know, extremely remote areas and in very challenging conditions. To meet our needs, we must maintain, inspect, and ultimately replace the infrastructure that keeps us connected. We plan to brush over 1,000 kilometres of highway, repair and replace barriers at 10 sites, and paint lines on 800 kilometres of highway.

We have established an optimized brushing schedule to be able to maintain an efficient system of brushing throughout the Yukon. Under the prior Yukon Party government, brushing really did appear to have been done haphazardly, on an ad hoc basis.

We are also investing in keeping vital transportation links safe and open for business. To that end, the government has dedicated \$8.5 million to continue the upgrades to the Alaska Highway through Whitehorse. This will include improvements to the Robert Service Way and Hamilton Boulevard intersection.

Our government is committed to projects that increase public safety and reduce the risks of collision along the Alaska Highway. We are also continuing to work to rehabilitate and reconstruct various portions of the north Klondike Highway.

This year we have allocated \$15.3 million to continue work on this important project. The north Klondike Highway is a vital link for industry and a well-travelled route for Yukoners and tourists alike. These upgrades will increase safety, improve driving conditions, and better connect Yukon's resources to market. Of the projected total project cost of \$267 million, 75 percent is recoverable from the Government of Canada. Eventually this project will reconstruct 209 kilometres of the north Klondike Highway from Carmacks to the Dempster Highway intersection just before Dawson.

Along the north Klondike, we are also building more efficient drainage systems to accommodate climate change impacts. These upgrades will eventually allow us to remove seasonal weight restrictions for heavy trucks on the north Klondike Highway, making it more efficient and cost effective to transport goods. We know that this is an issue for businesses in communities and we are working to eventually increase shipping load capacity while always maintaining the safety of our roads. This project will support 800 jobs over the construction period.

A key component of road travel in the Yukon is our bridges. Our government has been working to inspect, maintain, and upgrade the territory's bridges to ensure safety and increase economic benefits for Yukoners. In addition to replacing bridges, which I will speak about shortly, our government has committed \$2.5 million for bridge inspections, management, and safety systems. This year, work will continue on replacing the Nisutlin Bay bridge. Highways and Public Works has committed \$44.4 million in the 2023-24 budget to the Nisutlin Bay bridge project. This bridge is an integral part of the Alaska Highway's transportation infrastructure and is a landmark for Teslin. The new bridge will be able to accommodate more traffic while also improving access for pedestrians and cyclists. Approximately 57 percent of the total cost to construct the bridge is recoverable from the federal government. This project will provide a significant positive outcome for the territory, the Teslin Tlingit Council, local businesses, and the community of Teslin.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank and praise the Naa Sháade Háni Eric Morris, Mayor Gord Curran, and their respective councils for their ongoing collaboration on getting the largest infrastructure project in Yukon history underway.

While our officials do meet regularly, I have also met several times with them and the general contractor, and I look forward to visiting the community again in early May.

Moving from our roadways to our skies, we are continuing to invest in a significant suite of upgrades to the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport. I toured the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport a couple of weeks ago and was very impressed with what I saw. We have great, dedicated professionals operating this critical facility. I know that they were pushed into action when there were security concerns expressed about incursions into Canadian airspace, and specifically Yukon airspace. I know that the staff at the airport had to be extremely nimble. I commend them for their work during that period when quite a number of Canadian Forces

personnel descended upon the airport to assist with the beginnings of a search.

The reconstruction of the apron panels and upgrades to the parallel runway are substantially complete. This year, we are planning work on the main runway and to finish several projects that are near completion. We are investing \$25 million this year to make these critical infrastructure upgrades; 75 percent of the capital for these projects is recoverable through the national trade corridors fund. This work will ensure that the airport can support current and future increases in jet service levels. It will also build the airport's capacity to support forecasted increases in the tourism and resource development industries, and I do understand that the parallel runway will be fully operational in the near future.

Moving outside of Whitehorse, we have allocated \$1 million toward airfield lighting upgrades and pavement rehabilitation at the Watson Lake aerodrome. This aerodrome is the backup for the Whitehorse International Airport, and it is an important base for wildland fire.

I would now like to speak about the Property Management division, which plans, constructs, and operates and maintains the government's facilities. This division operates and maintains over 550 government-owned buildings worth over \$1.6 billion. Property Management also provides building and grounds maintenance, cleaning, and security services. This year, we have allocated \$9.5 million toward building maintenance. This funding will facilitate repairs and maintenance to ensure that buildings meet client needs and help us to achieve the goals laid out in *Our Clean Future*.

Our government is proud to support Yukoners in this way and we have budgeted \$39 million to design and construct new facilities and buildings. This includes \$11.95 million to complete the new health and wellness centre and tenplex housing unit in Old Crow that will be completed in late 2023. This project will replace Old Crow's aging health centre, increase the number of affordable housing units, and create jobs for the community.

Under the building development program, we have budgeted \$8.3 million for building retrofits, 75 percent of which is recoverable from the federal government. Our government does not leave money on the table. These retrofits will reduce energy loss and help us meet our commitments under *Our Clean Future*.

Finally, we are also advancing the green infrastructure program with an investment of \$9 million for program supports, energy retrofits, and renewable energy projects, with the goal of installing low-carbon energy systems to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Our department continues to deliver our commitments to Yukoners. We are taking action on climate change and making sure that our vital transportation links are open, accessible, and safe. We are ensuring that our aviation infrastructure can support the air travel industry and our economy for years to come by improving our territory's airports. We are investing in the roads we drive on, helping Yukoners safely get where they need to go. We are prioritizing energy efficiency by upgrading our current facilities and building new assets, and we are

keeping Yukoners connected in the digital world, ensuring Internet redundancy so that businesses and life can continue without periodic disruptions. These strategic investments are helping us to ensure that this territory stays connected and keeps moving forward toward a bright and sustainable future.

I have spoken of the great work and the projects that are occurring at Highways and Public Works. Now I will pivot a little bit and stand before this Assembly as the Minister of Environment.

The Yukon, of course, is home to vast landscapes, beautiful waterways, and vibrant wildlife. I'm proud to say that the Yukon is a jurisdiction that is leading the country on climate change initiatives, protecting biodiversity, and managing natural resources in a responsible way.

The 2023-24 main estimates for the Department of Environment capital and operation and maintenance budgets are approximately \$61.4 million. This is a 15.6-percent increase from the prior 2022-23 estimate but it is almost entirely recoverable. The operation and maintenance budget is approximately \$57.4 million. This is an increase of over \$9.5 million from the 2022-23 estimate. The capital estimate is just over \$4 million, an increase of \$47,000 from the 2022-23 estimate. In 2023, we expect to collect just under \$14 million in recoveries and revenue. This includes about \$11.5 million in recoveries from the Government of Canada. For the fiscal year 2023-24, we have capital recoveries anticipated at \$638,000.

Through our partnership with the Government of Canada and our continued advocacy at a national level for northern and Yukon priorities, we have been able to gain funding to advance our initiatives with little or no impacts on the Yukon's fiscal framework. In fact, this year's budget for the Department of Environment is just over 22-percent recoverable as opposed to last year's budget, which was just over 9 percent.

I would like now to talk about how some of the funds are being spent and how it will improve the lives of Yukoners while creating a more sustainable territory. One of the biggest challenges that we face is climate change. Climate change is having unique impacts in the north. It is affecting our water, our land, our air, and the places we call home. Last September, our government released the first Yukon-wide climate risk assessment and resilience assessment report. Over the coming years, our territory will continue to work with Yukon First Nations and community partners to address these priority areas, mitigate climate change impacts, and strengthen the resilience of Yukon communities.

In 2020, the Yukon government released *Our Clean Future*, a 10-year strategy to help us reach our goal by reducing Yukon's emissions — first by 30 percent, but ultimately modified to 45 percent below 2010 levels by 2030 — and guide our territory's continued response to climate change through four key goals: (1) reducing the Yukon's greenhouse gas emissions; (2) ensuring that Yukoners have access to reliable, affordable, and renewable energy; (3) adapting to the impacts of climate change; and (4) building a greener economy.

Mr. Speaker, over the next 10 years, the Government of Yukon will invest over \$500 million to support *Our Clean Future* initiatives. Key actions completed in 2022 include:

developing and publishing the report *Assessing Climate Change: Risk And Resilience in the Yukon*; launching the Better Buildings program; and advancing actions that will enable emissions reductions and resilience in transportation — for example, by supporting emission reductions in mining, increasing the number of fast-charging stations for electric vehicles, and supporting municipalities and First Nations to make investments in active transportation infrastructure — as well as convening the Yukon Climate Leadership Council and receiving their recommendations. We are analyzing their recommendations with them to incorporate into future *Our Clean Future* actions.

We cannot meet our ambitious climate goals alone. The Yukon Climate Leadership Council is helping to guide our continued response to the climate change emergency that our government declared in 2019. I thank the council for their passion, dedication, and willingness to support the Yukon in meeting our climate goals.

I would also like to thank my colleague, the Member for Whitehorse Centre, for the fruitful discussions and shared vision and goals as we work toward reaching our ambitious climate goals.

Our changing environment and increase in severe weather events have resulted in flooding in recent years. We know that this flooding is due to climate change, permafrost thaw, increased precipitation, and increased snow pack. One of the key actions under *Our Clean Future* is to develop publicly available flood maps for flood-prone communities to identify hazards and to help mitigate impacts, infrastructure, and public safety.

This year's main estimates include \$400,000 to continue this critical work with 75 percent of that sum being recoverable.

Through *Our Clean Future*, we are also taking action to reduce our territory's waste and its impact on the environment. One of the ways we are doing this is to attempt to create a sustainable recycling program. We know that Yukoners want to do their part in diverting waste. In fact, across all Yukon in 2020, Yukoners diverted 26 percent of their waste, and the number is higher in Whitehorse. However, the onus of waste diversion shouldn't just fall on the shoulders of Yukoners, but also on the producers and the companies that are creating it.

In the coming years, the Yukon government will implement extended producer responsibility, a proven method that transfers the cost of recycling from local processors and governments to the producers or importers of products, thus incentivizing producers to provide innovative solutions in developing products that create less waste through their life cycle. All provinces in Canada are at some point in the extended producer responsibility implementation. The Yukon would — or hopefully will — be the first jurisdiction north of 60 in Canada to be part of the extended producer responsibility model.

Our Clean Future commits the Yukon to extended producer responsibility by 2025 as part of an effort to increase waste diversion to 40 percent by 2030. The budget for extended producer responsibility includes more than \$160,000 to begin the process of implementation. The Department of

Environment just finished wrapping up public engagement on extended producer responsibility. The feedback that we gained will help us implement this responsibly and, hopefully, in a timely manner.

In that regard, I am acutely aware of the concerns expressed by the business community, and I'm working closely with the chambers of commerce, including a recent in-person meeting with a significant number of private sector stakeholders. I thank the business community for their patience and understanding, and certainly look forward to continuing to engage with Yukon businesses as we move through this process. For the record, I would just thank them for their input so far.

Climate change is not only having impacts on our communities, homes, and way of life, but also on biodiversity. The decisions we make now as a country, as a territory and as individuals will be critical to that. At the end of last year, I had the opportunity to travel to Montréal to attend the United Nations Biodiversity Conference, COP15. COP15 brought governments together from around the world. I think it was close to 180 countries that agreed to the *Kunming-Montréal Global Diversity Framework*. The framework includes four global goals and 23 global targets to be achieved by 2030, with an attempt to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and to put nature on a path to recovery by 2050.

I was extremely proud to be able to sign on behalf of the Yukon on a global stage, alongside the federal Minister of Environment, Steven Guilbeault, the bilateral *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*. This agreement is the first of its kind in the country that will support Indigenous leadership and conservation, increase protection of sensitive habitats, help recover species at risk, and to protect and conserve land and water in the Yukon. It will provide our territory with \$20.6 million over the next three years, of which more than \$6.6 million are included in this year's main estimates.

Under this new agreement, the Yukon will contribute to Canada's goals of conserving 25 percent of lands and water in the country by 2025 and working toward conserving 30 percent by 2030.

I am proud to say that the Yukon is a leader in Canada in planning for the future and ensuring that our lands, waters, and resources are managed responsibly. Yukoners should be proud of this. In fact, the Yukon has already protected just over 19 percent of the territory. The bilateral *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* will be foundational to continuing our work to sustainably manage our territory's biodiversity.

A big piece of protecting and conserving our lands and waters is responsible land use planning and decision-making on how we grow and expand our communities. In 2018, the federal government launched the Canada Target 1 Challenge that supports provincial, territorial and First Nation-led conservation projects. This year, the main estimates include \$1.4 million of Target 1 Challenge funding that will go toward supporting four Yukon First Nation governments, the Yukon Land Use Planning Council, and the Department of Environment's land use planning and conservation work. Target 1 Challenge funding is in addition to the funding

received through the bilateral *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* and is also 100-percent recoverable.

Mr. Speaker, as Yukoners, we immensely value our natural spaces. Yukoners are getting ready to enjoy another great Yukon summer. Whether that be paddling the Yukon River to Dawson City, spending a weekend camping at Dezadeash Lake, or a multi-day trek to the remote Talus Lake Campground in the Tombstone Territorial Park, Yukon has some amazing experiences to offer.

In 2020, our government released the *Yukon Parks Strategy*. That is a long-term direction for the Yukon's territorial parks system from 2020-2030. This year's main estimates include approximately \$1.1 million to implement the strategy. The Government of Yukon maintains 42 campgrounds with over 1,000 campsites, 12 recreation sites, and eight territorial parks. Last year, we did raise the price of camping fees for the first time in 20 years.

In 2022, camping fees generated approximately \$930,000 in revenue and are used to help offset the cost of providing and maintaining camping facilities, service, and providing free firewood, which we all know that Yukoners and visitors alike to the Yukon Territory love and appreciate.

Mr. Speaker, even with the increases, the Yukon continues to have some of the lowest camping fees in the country and still represents an amazing value proposition. This will include adding more than 20 campsites in three territorial campgrounds — at Congdon Creek, Wolf Creek, and Ethel Lake — this year. In addition, we are in the process of completing conceptual designs for expansions and recreational activities at other campgrounds. Although we already have an online reservation system in place for backcountry campgrounds in Tombstone Territorial Park, we are working to pilot an online reservation system for other frontcountry and backcountry campgrounds, which is expected to start in 2024. This will be the third year in a row that we have offered an extended camping season, which is projected to start on May 4 of this year. Our online reservation system for the Tombstone backcountry sites is already open for the 2023 season. From what I have been advised, Tombstone is almost fully booked for this season, so it is certainly a must-see — an absolutely stunning destination in the Yukon.

Yukoners love being on the water and we have some rather exceptional opportunities to be on the water in the territory. Our government is investing in installing and upgrading boat launches across the territory. Between 2021 and 2025, we will have invested \$3.2 million in new or upgraded boat launches at 20-plus campgrounds and recreation sites. In fact, this year's main estimates include \$850,000 for the replacement of docks and boat launches at 11 locations.

The Department of Environment also ensures that contaminated sites are cleaned up and that we reduce their impact on our surroundings. This year, the main estimates include \$4.2 million to clean up contaminated sites. One of these sites is the Wellgreen abandoned mine site, which dates back to the early 1970s. This year, we have budgeted \$500,000 to complete the design and planning work needed to begin the remediation of the Wellgreen site, which we anticipate will start

in 2024. We will also continue remediation work at various other sites throughout the Yukon. This important work continues to benefit all Yukoners and the environment. Together, Mr. Speaker, we are not only cleaning up inherited contamination, but we can make sure that we leave future generations with reduced environmental liabilities.

It is our responsibility as a government to make investments in our environment now, which will pay off for Yukoners in the future. At the end of last year, our government released a policy for the stewardship of Yukon's wetlands. The policy sets out guidelines for improving our knowledge of wetlands, minimizing our impacts, and developing tools to better protect these environments. Included in the main estimates is \$455,000 this year and next to implement this policy. Over the coming months, we will continue to work with other departments and agencies, First Nation regulatory bodies, external partners, and those with land use planning interests to discuss specific aspects of the policy's implementation.

Thank you for the opportunity to highlight some of the aspects of the Department of Environment's budget. This budget supports the important work that so many Yukoners rely on.

I would like to conclude my remarks on the budgets of my two departments by thanking the public service. Thank you to all the hard-working Environment staff who are committed to ensuring that our land, air, wildlife, habitats, water, and climate continue to thrive and support our Yukon way of life. As well, thank you to all the Highways and Public Works staff who work to keep us safe, operational, and efficient in so many ways. Your work is pivotal in the functioning of the territory.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on Bill No. 208, *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I rise today to talk about our government's latest budget, which is designed to meet the needs of Yukoners today while setting the territory up for a prosperous tomorrow. That said, I must admit that, over the last past few weeks, I have found myself in a reflective mood. One year ago, in this Chamber, I stood here and talked about the, quite frankly, heroic efforts of Yukoners in the face of adversity — something that, unfortunately, given the events that we have witnessed as a society over the past two years or so, has become common. As a territory we stood together and met challenges we could never have imagined. Through sacrifice, love, and community, we weathered the tragedies and changes that came with a global pandemic. We came together both at the government level and individually in successive summers to plan, sandbag, and protect our neighbours amid record flooding and wildfires. We stood together as one nation in support of a sovereign Ukraine as it faced an illegal and tyrannical invasion, welcoming refugees, and supporting the Ukrainian diaspora already here as they cope with unimaginable loss and upheaval at home.

I remarked last year that every time we Yukoners think that we may be inert to change, we see more of it, and when we think about it, change has, in recent times, been often associated with some kind of negative response, whether it's the new

normal in the wake of COVID, difficulty finding items we once found easily in the stores or in the community, or difficulty travelling where once it was easy. But today as I stand and look around, I see a different kind of change.

There is a vitality and life in the Yukon Legislative Assembly — one that extends beyond the change we have seen in our own team with our new Premier. On Thursday, I saw this Chamber filled with people who supported our government and who support our democracy. That was wonderful to see, and not something that we should take for granted in these times. The Yukon and, by extension, Yukoners themselves have emerged from the spectre of the past two years with hope. They expect good news, and nobody has earned that more than them.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is filled with good news — the kind that I am excited to share with my constituents, the kind that brings real material positive change for all ages from our communities to here in Whitehorse. I am grateful to the constituents of Whitehorse West who have supported me through the events of the past seven years with incredible grace, dignity, humour, and courage.

On the floor of the Legislature, I have often noted Whitehorse West as a microcosm of the territory, a distillation of the Yukon as a whole, and so it provides a window into our amazing people wherever they may live. I thank all of them from the bottom of my heart.

In the hours and hours that our Cabinet team spent with our talented civil servants designing and revising this budget, it was always done with Yukoners in mind — balancing the pressing needs, hopes, and desires of a thinly spread community of people in one of the most challenging and beautiful geographic regions in our country. We looked at our citizens' health needs. We looked at our housing needs. We looked at how to improve the way we educate our children. We looked at our territory's languages and cultures. We spoke about our business sector and what it needs to continue thriving in one of the continent's hottest economies. We looked at our power grid and how we can expand green energy projects throughout the territory. We looked at our changing climate — the fires and floods that have become a regular feature of our springs and summers. We looked at our roads, bridges, and airports — the territorial arteries that connect our families, friends, and neighbours within the territory, and from that territory to the world.

There is more than \$480 million committed to capital projects throughout the Yukon, and this is not a record capital spend. In fact, there is a slight reduction from last year. This is not, in any way, a bad thing. This is a responsible step down from our pump-priming COVID budgets and recognizes the significant capital work that is now going on in municipalities, First Nations, and the private sector in the territory. It also reflects rampant global inflation in the face of an inconsistent supply chain, the war in Europe, and our own efforts to tamp down the flue when it comes to sharply rising prices.

The timing of the budget is important to consider. It's not often spoken about. We started our budget discussions last fall, laying out priorities in our approach, working closely with our civil servants, as I said earlier. At the time, we did not have a confidence and supply agreement with our partners across the

floor. So, by necessity, most of the budget was set out without our partner's involvement. The confidence and supply agreement was struck on the last day of January, close to midnight in the budget process. As such, it is, by and large, a Liberal government budget — one that demonstrates the willingness to do our customary heavy lifting. It is a testament to the team in Finance that, despite these time constraints, the budget does indeed reflect the collaborative nature of our minority legislature.

In the last election, Yukoners asked us to work together in this House. The New Democratic caucus has taken that message seriously and should be commended for their solid work on behalf of their constituents. The Yukon Party never got the message. The Opposition leader never picked up the phone when the Premier called. That is on them and reflects their arrogance and the go-it-alone approach they held while in office with First Nations, unions, not-for-profit societies, and other Yukoners who sought to speak to the Yukon Party Cabinet. They didn't pick up the phone then; they didn't pick up the phone for us. Little has changed.

Our government has struck a different note, Mr. Speaker. Yukoners voted for us to form government. Yukoners also told us to work together with our colleagues for the betterment of our territory as a whole. We take that electoral mandate seriously, and we rolled up our sleeves and got to work.

When I was in media, I looked at the spend to determine where the priorities lay, and — I apologize at the moment — this is going to be a numbers part of my presentation this afternoon. The mind-numbing litany of millions spent here and there is a necessary evil of budget talk. I will endeavour to strip out as much hard math as possible to make it as meaningful and quick as possible.

In this budget, health care is our key priority and makes up more than \$520 million of the document. This budget builds on accomplishments already delivered, such as the most comprehensive public dental plan of any jurisdiction in Canada. We are spending millions to recruit doctors and nurses. We are investing in the foundation of patient care — data management, an issue ignored for decades — so all our health care providers have access to the most up-to-date information when they are dealing with their patients. We are investing millions in the hospital to deal with mental wellness, and we are also investing in mental health supports for youth.

We are spending more than \$400 million on the arteries that bind us together — our roads, bridges, airports, and other infrastructure through Highways and Public Works.

We are spending more than \$275 million educating our children. Education is the only department that has seen an increase in the year-over-year forecasted spending, reflecting its role as a key priority for this government. That money is building schools, investing in early learning and childcare programs, and helping to recruit and retain rural education professionals.

Housing is another key priority for our government. We spoke about it this afternoon. We are spending almost \$26 million on lot development, another \$22 million on

housing projects in Dawson and Watson Lake, almost \$9 million on affordable and community housing, \$8 million on loans to help with home development and ownership, almost \$4 million on supports for renters in the territory, and \$1.6 million for supportive housing for seniors.

I find these numbers particularly interesting because I hear a lot from the Yukon Party and members of the previous government on lot development, yet they managed to spend less than \$26 million over the course of four years addressing that issue. We take this matter much more seriously. We choose to walk the walk on housing, not ignore the problem and lean on it for political points. I will take our record on housing over the Yukon Party's any day.

The budget also confronts new realities. I am proud to say that it features a reserve of about \$50 million to fund what has unfortunately become an annual fight to protect property and livelihoods from flood and wildfires. This gives us the financial resources to fight natural disasters in real time. The cost of these events from year to year is unknown, but it is important to have such reserves in place so that we can support Yukoners during these unpredictable but more common natural events.

I was recently in Fort McMurray, speaking to residents there about the fire that destroyed the town roughly six years ago. The memories are still fresh. I learned first-hand the trauma that lingers from such an event and the importance of preparedness. Yukoners should prepare for emergencies and stock a supply of food, water, and emergency supplies to tide them over in case of any natural disaster. They should take stock of their most important possessions and irreplaceable mementoes and make sure they are at hand in case of an emergency. If they are travelling the Yukon's roads and trails this summer, they should carry a kit to get them through a tough time if they find themselves stranded by a landslide, flood, fire, or other unpredictable calamity. Spoiler alert — I will have more to say on this subject in the coming weeks, but I will leave it there for now.

On the budget, we spent many, many hours this fall and winter building and refining a budget that reflects the needs, hopes, and dreams of Yukoners. The focus is clear — improving the territory's health care, education, and housing is our focus. Now the budget is out. Sharing that good news is always enjoyable, but you have to back it up and that is another reason I am excited for what is to come. Long gone is the "kick the can down the road" approach willfully adopted by previous governments where budget speeches were notable primarily for empty promises. We are one of the fastest growing regions of the country, so I feel obligated to provide context and catch-up to all new Yukoners who can't understand how different things are today from the way they were.

In late 2016, we inherited a recession. The Conference Board of Canada predicted that real GDP would drop by 7.7 percent — 7.7 percent, Mr. Speaker. It was supposed to drop again in 2018; it didn't. The conference board said that there would be a lull in capital projects, and we heard the criticism from the opposition leader in those early days that we should not invest in Yukon's infrastructure, that we could not afford it, and that we should leave federal investment —

25-cent dollars on the table, untouched. Well, we took a different approach. According to the conference board, the Yukon mining sector was struggling. We have mines now.

Under the Yukon Party, housing development — like many things — was sorely neglected. The procurement system was broken — stifling development and undermining confidence in government capital projects. The government would announce a \$300-million capital budget and only deliver \$170 million of it. There was no five-year capital plan. Contracts got out the door too late to make the construction season, and according to the conference board, our population remained static until 2030 when we would come close to hitting 40,000 people. Well, Mr. Speaker, under our government, our population is already more than 43,000 people — that is more people, eight years earlier than predicted.

The territory today is far different — the trajectory is far different from what it was — stronger and better than what we saw under the Yukon Party. I recall a Yukon where major projects consisted of honeyed words and a photo opportunity with a shovel in hand before, for example, a school that had not yet been through an environmental assessment, or before a recreation centre had even been brought to Cabinet. There was no funding and no intention of providing any. It was just a photo opportunity on the side of the road, designed to gull voters. Well, those days are past now. Our government delivers.

With our Liberal partners in Ottawa, we have made historic investments in infrastructure in all Yukon communities. We led the country in GDP growth. We routinely posted the lowest unemployment rate in the country. We are one of the fastest growing jurisdictions in the country. We have one of Canada's strongest economies.

This weekend, I will join my colleagues at the opening of the new Carmacks recreation centre and a shining example of the positive change we are bringing to the territory. Carmacks, like many communities in our territory, has been ravaged by loss and tragedy. My heart goes out to them; I grieve with them. Once you visit the communities, you realize quickly that the communities from Haines Junction to Mayo and all in between are small but mighty. They are incredibly resilient, given what they have faced, and I have a constantly growing admiration for each of them. But they need more than our shared grief and admiration; they need investment in healthy living, a gathering place that meets their needs as they continue to grow, and spaces for young people and families to celebrate their vibrant local culture together. That's what our government is doing and will continue to do for our communities.

On Friday, the John Chabot Hockey Camp will kick off the weekend's festivities in Carmacks, and while I know young hockey players will particularly be buzzing with excitement, I also know the village and surrounding area shares that anticipation, not only for this weekend, but for the future that this recreation centre will help shape for Carmacks. Recreation is important to Yukoners in every community. We built a pool in Pelly Crossing; we're building a long-awaited recreation centre in Dawson City; we're building a new gymnastics facility in Whitehorse, and fixing up the golf course here in Whitehorse, and there are plenty of other examples.

As many are aware, we recently passed on the Canada Games. This was a very difficult decision for our government, but one we took with Yukoners and the needs of our communities at the absolute forefront. It's one thing to deliver the games and marvel at the athletic feats, join the crowd, and celebrate together, but a Canada Games is fleeting. It's the infrastructure — the legacy projects — that change lives for the better for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, Whitehorse is growing. It needs those legacy projects to meet both the city's needs and its extraordinary potential, but it does not need timelines and outside influence that directs it to a quick solution centred on a two-week event or band-aids being put on vital community spaces.

I'm committed to finding ways to deliver more than the Games — committed to finding ways to deliver on recreational projects in a manner that is focused holistically on the realities faced by the city and our communities, on their timelines and their unique needs. The work and investment in this process must be about more than an opportunity to shake hands, get a photo opportunity, and attend a party. It must be about getting it right for Whitehorse and our municipalities, and that will remain my sole motivation with regard to how we move forward on this topic.

While I am enthusiastic about our society's emergence from the throes of the pandemic over the last year, I am, of course, deeply sensitive to this simple fact: COVID and the new vigilance required to prepare for a future in which our health care system must be ready to face exceptional challenges and burdens has not ended. Earlier, I referenced that the new normal is now with us. While we may be somewhat numb to those words now, they remain a reality. That new normal has exposed gaps that we need to address in our society in how we work, travel, and do everyday things. That is why our government is committed to putting people first and improving our medical system in a way that dramatically improves life for all Yukoners on that health front. This is a transformative moment in the territory. It is deeply important to my colleagues on this side of the House. We look forward to seeing it in action.

We have also extended our nation-leading paid sick leave program, which was pulled together in record time by Economic Development officials, while we continue to work with our partners, including the business community, to find a sustainable plan that suits our territory's unique needs when it comes to sick leave. It is a program that not only ensures that Yukoners can afford to stay home when sick and look after their health and the health of their families without penalty, but will seek to avoid placing an undue burden on the amazing small business community that contributes so invaluable to the Yukon's economy and our culture as a whole.

When I talk about investing in health care, education, and land development, one of the biggest keys to this is delivering change that Yukoners can see, feel, and experience. This means more lots in Whistle Bend, more lots in Watson Lake, and more lots in Dawson and Mayo. It means new schools in Whistle Bend, Burwash Landing, and a replacement of Whitehorse Elementary to the tune of nearly \$30 million. It means the creation of a mental wellness unit in Whitehorse and the

building of health and wellness centres in communities like Old Crow. It means a large investment in both the stimulation of housing development, combined with a growing economy, driven by important government investments in infrastructure, recreation, community groups, and our citizens individually. This budget is affordable, this budget is inclusive, and this budget was designed by Yukoners for Yukoners to meet the needs of Yukoners today while setting up the territory for a prosperous tomorrow.

Hon. Ms. McLean: It is my pleasure and honour to rise today to speak on behalf of the constituents of Mountainview and alongside my Liberal colleagues in support of Bill No. 208, *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*, recently tabled by the Minister of Finance.

Whether you are ancient to this land being a First Nation from Yukon or whether you are born and raised or whether you are a settler here in the Yukon, one of the things that I know for sure is that we all have a deep love for the place where we live and we call home: the Yukon. In 2023, the Yukon continues to demonstrate a robust position nationally with population and economic growth among the strongest in the country. Budget 2023-24 shows how we are providing relief for recent high inflation, strengthening our health care system by implementing the *Putting People First*, investing in education and early learning and childcare, and building up the Yukon resiliency to climate change through commitments made in the *Our Clean Future* strategy. We're also making investments to improve Yukoners' mental health and address the substance use health emergency by building relationships between Government of Yukon and all other governments. We will help improve Yukoners' lives and create a more equitable future where all residents benefit from our thriving economy regardless of how we call Yukon home. Again, we all have that common thread, and this budget really speaks, I think, to the heart of that and a place that we can all call home.

This budget will support the First Nation School Board along with significant resources toward education services and programs for all Yukon students. We will see advancements in the sexualized assault response unit, the LGBTQ2S+ action plan, and Yukon's MMIWG2S+ strategy, helping Yukoners to feel safe and more included. This budget also continues to support the nation-leading early learning and childcare programming through our universal childcare model, which is making life more affordable for many Yukoners. I know that all Yukoners will be able to see themselves in this budget that we have brought forward, and that's how we know that we are on the right track.

In terms of my portfolio, it has been an honour to take on the portfolio of Education. It has not been an easy journey, but it is one that I know will be rewarding and will leave a lasting new foundation for education in our territory.

Over the past year, the Department of Education has remained focused on the important work of recovering from the pandemic, responding to the Auditor General of Canada's review of kindergarten to grade 12 education in the Yukon, and implementing the recommendations from the 2021 review of

inclusive and special education and the safer schools action plan.

Together with our partners in education, we are reimagining the Yukon school system. We cannot undertake this transformational work without our First Nation and education partners and their trust. Creating a better future for educators and for students and families is at the heart of all of our work.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who is on the journey with us. Thank you, of course, to our Yukon First Nation partners, other partners in education, teachers, administrators and other school staff, early learning childcare educators and program operators, students and families, and staff working in central administration. I thank you for all of your hard and dedicated work. I know that when we sit together and work together, we are always putting children at the centre. That is always our starting point.

We are working with our partners and stakeholders to reimagine education and create school environments that are safe and inclusive, and build on students' strengths. We are working to ensure that every child feels connected and supported to thrive.

Our government is committed to doing this hard work and right work to create a new system together. I am so appreciative of all of our partners who come to the table to help move this shared vision closer to reality. Your thoughts and your feedback and collaboration are key to our shared success in improving our educational system for current learners and future learners.

This budget will allow us to move forward with a number of educational priorities, including continuing to support the success of the newly established First Nation School Board, progressing our audit response and work to reimagine inclusive and special education, continuing to improve access, quality and affordability of early learning and childcare programs, recruiting and retaining high-quality education professionals, and modernizing our educational facilities through new builds and upgrades.

A couple of weeks ago — and we have spoken about this early in the Sitting — about *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* — and this incredible milestone that we have reached in the Yukon, celebrating 50 years of this transformative document that was presented to Pierre Elliott Trudeau to start the land claims process. Probably two-thirds of that document was really about education, and I am so pleased with the advancements that we have made in a short period of time in government. I heard over and over the reflection on the steps that we have taken as a government to breathe life into the agreements and to really embrace reconciliation. That is one of the reasons why I am so proud of the work that I have been able to do — picking up from the former Minister of Education — to advance the First Nation School Board. It was spoken about many, many times throughout the time that we had together over a week-long celebration. The Government of Yukon, the Chiefs Committee on Education, and Yukon First Nation Education Directorate share the common goal of providing high-quality and culturally appropriate education based on an Indigenous world view for all Yukon students.

The First Nation School Board currently governs eight schools across the Yukon. This was an historic step for Yukon First Nations and their citizens and all Yukoners. Three more schools, I am proud to say, recently voted to join the board for the 2023-24 school year. This includes the schools in Pelly Crossing, Carcross, and the Kluane Lake area, which will include Destruction Bay and Burwash Landing — again, another historic moment. I have recently confirmed those three schools to join the school board, and they will start their work toward that transition and it will happen officially at the beginning of this school year — 2023-24.

The First Nation School Board is enabling Yukon First Nations to reclaim greater responsibility for the administration and management of education programs for students in their communities. We are investing in the success of the First Nation School Board and will support them to implement their vision for education in their schools. This reflects the First Nation School Board's unique needs as an Indigenous school authority. It also acknowledges the leadership role that the First Nation School Board will play in developing and delivering Indigenous language and cultural curriculum and educational programs. We are committed to ensuring that all Yukon school authorities have the resources they need to deliver high-quality and culturally appropriate education. This work will ultimately benefit all Yukon learners and will improve outcomes for Indigenous and rural students in all Yukon schools. One of the notable aspects of this new milestone that we've reached is that eight of the 14 rural schools will now be under the First Nation School Board. That is a huge shift — again, a transformational time in education.

The 2019 report of the Auditor General of Canada on K to 12 education, the 2021 review of inclusive and special education, and the Child Advocate review of attendance all highlighted that we can do better and we have to rethink how we are supporting diverse learners. While we have made significant strides in some areas, we know that we still have much work to do to reach the vision of a renewed, safe, and inclusive education system that better supports all students to succeed. This remains a key focus of the department as we move into the 2023-24 year.

One of the initiatives I would like to highlight in this work is the Ready-to-Learn Schools. We launched this program in the fall of 2022 at several Yukon schools. Ready-to-Learn Schools is a program that supports schools in effecting positive social change and well-being for all students and staff. The program is grounded in the understanding that children can only be ready to learn when they feel safe and calm. This model trains teachers and staff to be developmentally responsive, to recognize that a child's chronological age may not match their emotional, cognitive, or social age.

Most importantly, it helps educators understand how trauma and toxic stress impacts brain development, functioning, and learning.

We look forward to continuing to support the rollout of this program for students and staff. We take the mental wellness of students seriously, particularly as we move forward from the

pandemic, and we are continually assessing the needs of students.

The Department of Education is developing a comprehensive mental health and wellness approach. This is an important part of the overall work we are doing to reimagine inclusive and special education. We will align with the Yukon's mental health strategy and be guided by the recommendations from the youth calls for action from the 2022 youth summit, which brings forward important perspectives from youth on supports that work for them. We look forward to continuing to move this critical work forward.

Just shifting a bit to early learning and child care, we continue to work with Yukon First Nations and other partners to enhance early learning and child care programming in the Yukon. This child care model is making life more affordable for Yukoners, which includes some of the highest wages in Canada for early learning educators, funding for quality enhancements, including cultural and inclusive supports, insurance benefits funding for day homes and centres, bursaries for students in early childhood development studies, and, of course, families who use participating licensed child care programs will save up to \$700 per child per month. That can be for a full-time or a part-time placement.

We are working toward a future where all families have access to high-quality early learning and child care that is affordable, accessible, and inclusive.

This year, we are investing heavily in professional learning and development opportunities. This includes innovative and flexible training options for early learning educators to become fully qualified while continuing to work.

We are working with partners on several exciting initiatives, including partnering with the Yukon University to offer the professional diploma pathways program for early learning childhood educators, funding Yukon University to provide enhanced course offerings in rural Yukon communities, partnering with the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate and the early years program to offer the Understanding Early Years course. I am really proud of that partnership that happened, and I am happy to continue to support that initiative.

In addition to these partnerships, we are also providing education bursaries for post-secondary study as well as enhanced bursary options for educators to access other learning and development opportunities. All of these initiatives are supporting the growth and expansion of high-quality early learning and child care in the Yukon.

I will shift a little bit to capital — modernizing our educational facilities. Whistle Bend Elementary School is a really important project that we are continuing to work toward. We are building the first new Whitehorse elementary school in 20 years in Whistle Bend. We will provide students with a modern learning environment and support a thriving, growing community. The Whistle Bend is a key investment with construction scheduled to be completed during this 2023-24 school year. I would like to acknowledge the members of the newly established Whistle Bend Elementary School Council. I had an opportunity to do a walk-through through Whistle Bend

school last week and it is shaping up to be a very beautiful facility that will accommodate the needs of Yukoners for generations to come.

Just going back to the school council — I had an opportunity a couple of times to interact with this new school council. They will have an important role guiding aspects of the school build and will assume regular school council duties, such as hiring a principal, once the school is closer to completion — very exciting times.

Kêts'ádañ Kù Burwash school project — this, again, is another exciting investment that we are making in the future of Yukoners as part of our commitment to reconciliation and long-term capital planning for Yukon schools. We are pleased to be working in partnership with the Kluane First Nation on Kêts'ádañ Kù. Moving the current Kluane school from Destruction Bay to Burwash Landing has been a long-standing request of Kluane First Nation. Government of Yukon and Kluane First Nation continue to uphold the memorandum of understanding which outlines a shared commitment to plan and construct a new school in Burwash Landing, to be known as Kêts'ádañ Kù, which means “house of learning”.

I had a chance to listen to one of the presentations at the *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* celebration, and to listen to the long history of this from folks who have been directly involved for their lifetime was really moving for me and made me, again, deeply proud of the work our government has done to not only make a commitment but to actually follow through, and do it in a meaningful way that brings significant pride to the community. It's one of the most important things that I think we will do when we talk about reconciliation. I am so proud that we're moving forward on this project. It certainly is a project that my uncle John Edzerza held very close during his time in government and one that he was committed to. So, I'm very proud to be fulfilling that commitment that he made at one time as a part of now oppositional government. They were not able to get it done, and I'm really proud that our government is moving this project forward in a meaningful way. So, I rarely get up and talk about this project without mentioning my uncle John Edzerza, a former MLA, a former minister from this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I will transition now into my role as Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity Directorate and the work being done to keep Yukoners safe. This upcoming fiscal year will mark another significant year for the directorate, which is both leading the partnerships on several major initiatives, including advancing the work of the sexual assault response team, the *LGBTQ2S+ Action Plan*, and *Yukon's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Strategy*. All of these initiatives, as well as the directorate's ongoing policy work, support equity for women and gender-diverse individuals with the ultimate goal of one day having a territory where all Yukoners enjoy equal status, personal safety, and access to opportunities.

The work underway at the directorate right now is truly exciting — full of potential to effect real change. We are seeing similar exciting movement at the federal level. In particular, the Women and Gender Equity Directorate has recently welcomed

Ottawa's commitment to provide funding to provinces and territories that will support efforts to implement the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* with bilateral negotiations to take place early in the fiscal year. The federal appointment of a special representative will work toward establishing a national Indigenous and human rights ombudsperson. This is an incredibly important move for families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit-plus people. This is a position that will hold long accountability for the work that we are all doing to address this national tragedy in our country.

The federal all-party committee on the status of women report on addressing violence against Indigenous women and girls in the context of resource development. Again, it's another really important report, and everyone should at least read the summary to get a better and deeper understanding of the impacts of resource extraction and large infrastructure projects in communities.

The directorate's work is focused on three main areas. First, the directorate staff research and analyze issues related to gender equity. This work includes researching and advising on key policy issues and developing legislation. It also includes leading the integration of gender-inclusive and diversity analysis within the work of all Yukon government departments. Second, the branch provides strategic leadership to other departments and partner organizations on major equity-related initiatives. This work includes such initiatives as the sexualized assault response team, also known as SART, the LGBTQ2S+ action plan, and Yukon's MMIWG2S+ strategy. Finally, the branch advances equity in the territory through its funding of equality-seeking community organizations.

With equity in mind, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on the importance of using inclusive language and affirm diverse gender identities. In 2021, we released the LGBTQ2S+ action plan and we continue to use the title to refer to this document. Language continues to evolve and we are now using 2SLGBTQIA+. This stands for two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, intersex, and asexual-plus to inclusively describe communities and organizations in the Yukon. This is a national shift and one that I'm currently working to get used to using. At some point, we may make that shift with the LGBTQ2S+ inclusion action plan to that new acronym.

Work with NGOs — we're incredibly grateful for Yukon's non-profit equality-seeking organizations. These organizations play a critical role in supporting women and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities in the Yukon. Their advocacy also helps ensure our territory remains on the path to equality for all Yukoners. Their programming is essential. It is also focused on serving diverse populations. It includes advocacy programs, hot meals, skill building, training, on-the-land healing camps, cultural supports, and providing safe spaces for communities to gather. Such organizations are vital in supporting community-driven health and well-being. This fiscal year, equality-seeking organizations will be supported through the Women and Gender Equity Directorate in operational and project funding. This includes ongoing operation funding for non-Indigenous

women's organizations: the Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, the Yukon Status of Women Council, Yukon Women in Trades and Technology, and Les EssentiElles. It also includes the Indigenous women's equality fund for operational and capacity development funding for three Indigenous women's organizations: the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society, the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle, and the Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council. In this upcoming fiscal year, we will continue to support Queer Yukon for operational funding as well as their gender gear program.

As we continue to recover from the pandemic impacts, we recognize the increased demands for service and the clear request from NGOs for sustainable and appropriate long-term funding. We are committed to continuing this work with community partners and the Government of Canada as we negotiate the bilateral funding agreement for the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*. Again, it's really important work. It's very welcome, brand new money that has never been seen in Canada before with a common strategy to end gender-based violence across Canada.

As I mentioned at the outset, a key area of the work of the directorate team is strategic leadership on major initiatives with other Yukon government departments as well as non-governmental partner organizations. These relationships are critical in helping move forward key initiatives and partnerships with NGOs.

GIDA — gender inclusive diversity analysis — is a really important part of our work. The directorate is continuing to lead the integration of GIDA into government's decision-making processes. Integrating GIDA is a shared mandate letter commitment led by the Women and Gender Equity Directorate with the support of the Executive Council Office and the Public Service Commission. The GIDA action plan launched in 2022 outlines clear actions, outcomes, and indicators to guide this work over the next two years. Three of the 10 action items in the plan for 2022-23 were completed and six are still underway.

In the upcoming fiscal year, the directorate will play a key role in ensuring progress of GIDA — that it continues and is integrated throughout Government of Yukon.

For 2023-24, this can include facilitating tailored training for interdepartmental committees and key units, integrating GIDA into other government training such as the arts and craft and public policy and evaluation 101, creating guidelines and best practices on the government's collection of gender data, integrating formal accountability mechanisms for GIDA in government decision-making processes, and collaborating with major projects in the Yukon to integrate GIDA into the YESA process. I will talk about it in a moment around some of the priority areas that we released from the Yukon advisory committee on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and how that plays a role.

In addition, in 2023-2024, directorate staff, in partnership with the Yukon Bureau of Statistics, will continue to update and improve the new indicators of Yukon gender equity webpage and associate data, which will be on yukon.ca.

The directorate and the bureau and e-services launched this content on yukon.ca in early 2023 after moving it from its

previous stand-alone website. The content now on yukon.ca includes several themes with data broken down by age, education, indigeneity, ethnicity, faith, gender, language, and migration status. The data is an important tool for many researchers and non-government organizations. It is also critical in supporting the integration of GIDA in our own work. I know that members, particularly from the Third Party, have asked about this data in the past and I am really happy that we have some very tangible outcomes to talk about and to share with Yukoners.

As we are committed to the vision of a Yukon as a place where everyone feels safe, welcome, valued, and celebrated — including 2SLGBTQIA+ communities — in addition to funding that we are providing Queer Yukon, directorate staff are continuing to lead work on the implementation of the government-wide *LGBTQ2S+ Inclusion Action Plan*. As many of you know, the Government of Yukon released the five-year action plan in 2021. This plan is focused on making government programs and services more inclusive and accessible by the LGBTQ2S+ community. The plan includes over 100 actions, representing programs and services in several key departments across government. Since its 2021 release, we have made progress in several areas. This work has not been without its challenges. Despite some of the hurdles over the last few years, we are continuing the path forward for 2SLGBTQIA+ equity in programs and services.

This summer, we will be returning to the community, as promised, to conduct targeted stakeholder feedback. This feedback will allow us to check in on any shifting priorities. The stakeholder feedback on the action plan is an important aspect of the commitment to "Nothing about us without us".

Some highlights of the inclusion work underway or completed include: insured health care coverage for gender-affirming care; an agreement with Queer Yukon to help fund a health care navigator position; funding for the Pride Centre; a variety of new or updated training for Yukon government staff; new designed standards for gender-inclusive washrooms; and a new internal care group for Yukon government employees who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+ advocates. The directorate is excited to keep building on the momentum in partnership with our community.

We are working toward significant movement on Yukon's missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit-plus strategy. This strategy is the Yukon's path forward to creating safe and healthy communities in the territory, where women, girls, and two-spirit Yukoners are valued, respected, and treated equitably with dignity and justice.

As you may know, I am one of the three co-chairs on the Yukon advisory committee to do this important work, alongside Chief Doris Bill, an elder and moderator. Together, in December 2022, we released an action plan to move the strategy's 12 most pressing action items forward. We are now reviewing the priority action items document released in December 2022 to determine related work underway, remaining gaps, and where the government can play a role. It is the priority of the Yukon advisory committee to complete the remainder of the implementation plan. A technical meeting of

partners and contributors in 2023 is being planned, and the directorate will also play a role in organizing the strategy's second accountability forum, which will take place later in 2023 and is included in this budget.

I will continue to work with my co-chairs in partnership with First Nation governments, Indigenous women's organizations, the RCMP, communities, and, most importantly, the families and survivors, as we continue to move to full implementation of the strategy. This fiscal year, key initiatives for supporting the Yukon's missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit-plus strategy include: updating the record, which is a key action item of Yukon's strategy; the Yukon MMWG2S+ strategy forum, including working with NGOs to coordinate involvement of family members in this forum; and ongoing discussions with partners and contributors on the strategy; and we will remain committed, of course, to moving forward on the critical initiatives in the spirit of decolonization, truth and reconciliation.

Last, but certainly not least, I really wanted to just touch on the sexualized assault response team. This is very important work, and it is transformative. It has taken time to really get it right. We are working to expand the SART into the communities. The statistics really are grim. Yukon has one of the highest rates of sexualized violence in the country. Another grim truth — the vast majority of assaults are not reported to the police.

The Government of Yukon launched the SART program in 2020 to offer victims of sexualized assault wraparound emotional, medical and legal support. SART is based on the core principles of victim's choice, dignity and respect, preventing system re-traumatization, cultural safety, and access to equity and inclusion. Implementation of the program continues to gain momentum. Since its launch, the directorate has worked closely with the Department of Justice and Health and Social Services, as well as partner organizations, such as the RCMP and the Yukon Hospital Corporation, to increase coordination of existing services while also building public awareness of new services for victims of sexualized assault.

Recently, the Whitehorse SART agencies approved the first SART protocol for the Yukon, and work is now underway to expand SART to the communities.

The Department of Justice is leading this work, with support from the directorate and the Department of Health and Social Services. It is anticipated that the engagements will take place in the spring and summer of 2023 to ensure that the expansion happens in a way that responds best to the priorities of our communities. Engagement will happen with First Nation governments, women's organizations, service providers, as well as victims.

Our staff remain committed to working closely with all partners to ensure, again, that we get this right.

As we look forward to the year ahead, we know we must strike a balance between making actionable progress and taking the time needed to build trusting relationships. We must continue to do things differently if we want to see different results.

This budget will support this important work and will help to make life more affordable for Yukoners, help them feel safe, and have a Yukon that we can truly all call home. I think that it's really important that we continue to be inclusive.

I want to take a couple of moments just to thank my family, my friends, and my community for supporting me — to the elders, who continue to support me and to hold me up when I need that extra support — and, of course, to all my colleagues, I'm really so honoured to work with this team of people and now under the leadership of our new Premier. I'm happy to continue to serve Yukoners.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: It's a pleasure to rise today to talk about the 2023-24 budget. I would like to begin by just talking a little bit about some of the anniversaries that we're celebrating and follow on what my colleague was talking about just moments ago. I notice today that the Premier put forward a motion that I'm looking forward to debating here in this House — that we may have a Special Sitting of this Assembly for acknowledging the 125th anniversary of the Yukon being a territory.

I think that the biggest anniversary this year — that's a super-big anniversary, but the one I think is even bigger is the 50th anniversary of *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow*. It's incredibly important for the journey of the Yukon and the path that we're on and how it has shaped our future trajectory. I'm very proud, as a Yukoner, about that moment in time when we began a path of reconciliation and self-determination. I think it's incredibly important for Yukon First Nations and for all of us — all Yukoners.

I will just mention one other anniversary that happened just a couple of weeks ago. It was 25 years to the day that I met my wife and my mother-in-law at the same time at a play. So, it was fun to get them both flowers and make them a card saying "Happy 25th".

There is one more anniversary that I'll mention. I didn't realize that it was an anniversary, but I was lucky enough to be in Carcross, in my riding — the beautiful Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes — for the 10th anniversary of the African Music Festival, and they played the night before here in town up at Mount McIntyre. I think the Premier and others were at that festival and it was sold out. It was incredible, and then I was lucky enough to see it in the beautiful Haa Shagóon Hídi, the Carcross Learning Centre.

I'll just say a few things about my riding before I get in to talk about more specifics about the budget. There is always a lot going on. I'm sure that, in all of our ridings, it has been really wonderful to see the Yukon come back into itself following the past few years. That ranges from little things like the Tagish pancake breakfasts up to events where — in a couple of weeks, my wife and I will be the snow-carving judges at the Marsh Lake winter carnival and we are totally looking forward to that.

I wanted to give a shout-out to the local advisory councils. There is one in Ibex, but there are four in my riding, ranging from Marsh Lake, Mount Lorne, Carcross, and Tagish, and those folks — those local advisory councillors — who put their names forward, which comes under the *Municipal Act*, but they

deal with such a range of issues within their communities and it's always tough when you are dealing with local issues, as any municipal politician will tell you.

I just want to give a shout-out to the local advisory councillors for all the work they do, and a shout-out to their families as well, because it takes a lot to be in front of people when you are dealing with dogs or water or garbage. Those are always tough issues. So, there is a range of responsibilities that each of us as MLAs do here to represent our ridings.

I have, as well, several responsibilities in the role of minister, and I just wanted to make some comments about those with respect to our budget. First, the French Language Services Directorate — I will give a thanks to the Premier who just issued our mandate letters, and I will, of course, work through those.

For the French Language Services Directorate, it's talking about the importance of health. I have heard that from the francophone community — and so, working with the Minister of Health and Social Services to continue to realize the Constellation Health Centre and support it.

We are working on a new strategic framework. This is now my third strategic framework that I am working on with the French Language Services Directorate. I am thankful that it is not back to the very first one, because they got me to come in and do part of an improv in French. I was nervous doing improv generally, but imagine doing it in French was really kind of tricky for me. I am happy to be working on another strategic framework, and I am happy to be supporting economic development in the work around immigration — in particular, francophone immigration.

Un grand merci à l'équipe de la DSF. Vous êtes merveilleux.

Just a big thank you to the team at the French Language Services Directorate. I think they are just a great group of folks.

I am going to sort of blend my role with Energy, Mines and Resources, as well as the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation, because, when you are talking about energy, it is such a sweeping issue, it cuts across quite a bit, but I will begin with Energy, Mines and Resources with some of the other portfolios.

First of all, with respect to agriculture, just this weekend, I signed off on the new sustainable Canadian agricultural partnership, which is the federal funding program that supports our agriculture here in the territory. There were several MLAs at the agriculture banquet put on by the Yukon Agricultural Association. Agriculture is just doing super well here in the territory. It has changed so dramatically over the past five or so years. Our meat production is four times in the last several years. It is really changing, and I would like to give a shout-out to Yukoners who have been supporting our local producers. When you go to the stores and see the products, I am just really proud, as a Yukoner — and I am sure many Yukoners are — to see our local products there and love to support them.

I will just make a comment about forestry. As you may know, there were challenges over the past couple of winters around fuelwood. I am happy to report that, in 2022, we had increased our production here in the territory — and I think that

was in part due to the incentives that we have put in place and all the work that the Forest Management branch has done — tremendous work. We had increased production here in the territory by over 2,000 cords. That is over 2020-21 levels, and we are up to the highest production that we have seen since we have been in government, so that is important and good news. What I have been saying to the branch is: "Keep going. There is lots of work to do — work with First Nations, work with communities, and work with the producers. Let's keep going with that."

Let me turn now to mining. Right as we speak here today, the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada has their big meetings in Toronto. The deputy minister and much of the minerals team is in Toronto right now for that meeting. Of course, we're sitting so it is hard for me to go as minister. We had a great Roundup down in Vancouver, and we had a really wonderful 50th Geoscience Forum hosted by the Yukon Chamber of Mines late last fall.

Mining has a lot going on in it. I wanted to talk a little bit about some of those things that are going on with mining right now, and then I am going to just refer to a quote from the Yukon Chamber of Mines. We are undergoing successor legislation. I want to let Yukoners know that right now we're out there engaging on our new mineral legislation. As some of this legislation is over a century old, it really needs to be updated. It never thought about, for example, self-government and our final agreements. Under the devolution transfer agreement, we committed that we would jointly develop this legislation with First Nations. I want to give a shout-out to the steering committee, which has been doing really great work, and right now we are going out there to engage with Yukoners: individual Yukoners and communities. I happened to go to the opening public session. I saw the Leader of the NDP there, and I saw a really great cross-section of Yukoners at that one. I went down to Carcross the next evening for the first community visit. There was a handful of people out, but they were really engaged. Of course, when you rewrite legislation from the ground up, there is a lot in there to talk about.

We also have land use planning going on. We have heard from Yukoners on the Dawson land use plan. We just did some really good scenario planning around the recommendations from the commission. We will be sitting down shortly with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in to go over where we think we should land as governments. The Premier was at Roundup and we had several meetings with First Nations while we were there. I think that in every one of our conversations with those First Nations, we talked about moving on land use planning in the remaining areas. That is also in my mandate letter. There is a lot going on.

When you think about mining, we also know from the federal critical minerals strategy that there are important minerals that we will need as we make the transition off of fossil fuels, so mining is critical for Canada and for the Yukon, and it's critically important that we get it right.

Let me just turn to this quote. This is from a newsletter that the Yukon Chamber of Mines put out. It's a really good opinion piece. I hope that everyone gets a chance to read it, but I am just going to quote a couple of paragraphs from it — and I

quote: “A major challenge facing society today is climate change and our transition to a green economy. Yukon’s mining industry is among the most energy efficient in Canada and the world. Modern mines are dedicated to driving forward innovation to reduce GHG emissions through the adaptation of new technologies and building efficiencies into operations.

“Miners, businesses that service and supply mines, and environmental practitioners are excited to see the industry evolve so quickly and become part of an innovative contributor to Yukon’s and Canada’s economy and well-being. We are all people who live in the Yukon and are committed to being leaders in environmental stewardship while providing a good economic base for the Yukon.”

The whole piece that they are talking about is around this notion of making sure that our communities are doing well, making sure that our mines are treating the environment well and are done as sustainably as possible, and respecting the governments of the Yukon, which is, of course, about working with not only us as a territorial government and the federal government, but also First Nation governments and municipalities.

So, mining has a brand new face to it, and I have seen this transition even in the two short years that I have been in this role. I commend the industry for moving in this direction. It’s not easy work, but they know that it is the right path to take, they believe that it is the right future for mining, and I am supporting them as they go through that transition.

Let me move a bit to energy. I heard the Member for Lake Laberge talk about energy, and I’m going to reference a little bit about where I hear the Yukon Party sitting. We’re in different places. As political parties, we have a different vision of where the Yukon is, where it should go, and how we can get there together. I think it’s a fundamental difference between us and the Yukon Party; it’s not the only one, but it’s a very stark one in my mind.

I heard the Member for Lake Laberge talk about how we’re not keeping up with supplying energy. So, you know, I often go and look at Yukon Energy’s website to try to see how we’re doing with renewables, and if we don’t have those renewables, whether we have enough capacity to make sure that we’re dealing with the growth. Remember, the growth here in the Yukon is that we have seen huge amounts of growth — I mean, new Yukoners moving here or Yukoners being born, but the territory has grown. We have had the highest GDP growth in the country, so there is a lot of economic activity going on, and we have low unemployment for many years now, and it’s currently the lowest in Canada.

So, what are we doing with energy right now? Well, I looked, and we’re still at 93 percent renewable. So, over the past year, we have 93 percent of the energy that we provided — including dealing with all of that growth, including three active mines all connected to the grid, including shifting energy in home heating and building heating, including beginning the shift of transportation across to renewables — all of that increased load or demand on the system, and still we are at 93 percent renewables. How did we get that?

Now, in this Assembly, we have talked often about the Atlin hydro project and the criticism has been, well, what are you doing if that doesn’t happen?

Well, let me just list off a few of the things that are going on. We have wind happening. We are working on wind in Kluane and we are working on wind on Haeckel Hill. When I say “we”, I should say that many of these projects are led by First Nations or their development corporations, or even sometimes individual Yukoners, but we are providing support subsidies for those projects and technical support. We have geothermal work happening. Again, I know of some up around Carmacks, some here in Whitehorse, and some around Burwash. So, there is activity on geothermal. We have battery storage due this year, and we have a lot of solar. We have solar happening in Old Crow, in Beaver Creek, in some of our highway camps; we have solar happening in some mining exploration camps. One of the places where we have solar is called the “microgeneration program”. That program was to try to reach seven megawatts of solar by 2030, but we have already surpassed that goal. Here in 2023, we are at seven and a half megawatts.

Another program that we have is around biomass. We have 10 commercial systems that have gone in recently. We have five First Nation-owned systems going in their nations. Another program that we are developing is demand-side management, which is just long term, which really means about trying to reduce your demand. Rather than having to increase the energy supply, you decrease the need for energy.

That can be things like timers for your hot water tanks so that they come on at night or first thing in the morning or in the early evening when demand gets high. I talked with the developer of that program at Yukon Energy, and they are targeting seven megawatts. So, we have all this growth in energy, in renewables, in order to match all the work that we have got in our broad vision under *Our Clean Future*. We are doing building retrofits — that’s commercial buildings, residential buildings. Seven of our municipalities have started or completed major upgrades. We have 10 First Nation governments implementing major upgrades. Again, this helps more energy-efficient buildings, which reduces that need.

What’s the Yukon Party’s vision? They have argued against Atlin as a renewable project. They have argued for a diesel plant and/or a liquefied natural gas plant, an LNG plant. They voted against our clean energy act, which sets targets for greenhouse gas reductions. Then, this past fall in the Legislative Assembly, the Yukon Party said that they are pro oil and gas. In fact, what they said is that they are certainly pro oil and gas. It is just a completely different vision.

To build a diesel plant, of course, is not cheap. Of course, it depends on the size of the plant, but if we took away all the rented diesels that we have — our plan is to replace with renewables over time, but if, instead, we build a plant, you are in the \$100-million-plus range. Then you have to decide how big to build the plant. If you build it too big, you have spent a lot of money and you didn’t need that. If you build it too small, you still have a capacity shortfall. Even if you think you have perfectly sized it, when you get to trying to build the next

renewable plant or renewable piece of energy, you will sort of say to yourself, “Well — but I already spent the money on the diesel plant.” Now, how is this doing under this budget and when we talk about the issue of inflation?

I heard that, last year, in 2022, that oil and gas companies’ profits had tripled. If you go to the pumps, you see the challenge. The price at the pumps — it’s just very expensive for gas and for diesel. So, the Yukon Party’s idea is that we should go backward and entrench that dependency on oil and gas. Right as we’re saying, “Oh, we have to deal with inflation”, the idea from the Yukon Party is, “Hey, let’s invest in oil and gas.” Our belief is that, no, we should be investing in renewables. We think that is smarter environmentally, smarter economically, smarter for our communities.

All of these things are just a really big difference between us as parties, and I think that Yukoners should know that difference and should understand it.

I sat down recently with the Whitehorse City Council because when there was a blackout, the blackout started with a breaker of Yukon Energy’s that got reset right away, but then there were other breakers for ATCO Electric Yukon, and they had challenges because it was so cold out. So, it took quite awhile to reset those breakers.

I had a long conversation with Whitehorse City Council about whether there was enough energy on the system to support them, and the answer was yes, there was enough energy. But when that blackout happened — and I read a news release by the Yukon Party at that time where they were suggesting that this was the problem — that we didn’t have enough energy. No, that’s not correct. There was a problem where it’s cold. There was a problem where we need to make sure that we’re working with our Emergency Measures Organization folks to make sure that there are warming centres. Actually, they weren’t getting it up and running. It was the city’s EMO that would respond in that instance, and the utilities reached out to them. They got everything lined up and were about to open up the warming centre when the energy came back on.

We had an after-action review and the city and the utilities worked through how they could improve that system to make sure that information was flowing as well as possible. I think that is great. The issue that I heard, though, in that Yukon Party press release was as if it was our recommendation to move toward more home heat, that using electricity was the problem. Well, okay. There are a few things to explain here. The first one is that, when you have a blackout, every heating system except for wood heat or a backup generator, all of the heating is going to go. If you have an oil furnace or you heat with propane, you still use electricity somewhere. So, all of them go.

The next thing to note is that what we are really talking about is making sure that our homes are more energy efficient, and that is a good thing. Why is that a good thing? Well, again, because, when you invest in insulation — whether that is through the Better Buildings program or in all of our new builds — that insulation means that you are less dependent on fossil fuels, period, or even on heat, period, because you are able to keep your home warm longer. That is really what has driven the

industry because, once the insulation gets better in our homes, then the simplest form of heating is electric baseboards. But, generally speaking, that is a good transition as we move off oil and gas.

Let me talk, as well, about where we go beyond our 10-year renewable strategy. I have been in conversation with Yukon Energy and they think: “Oh, yeah, it is always good to keep renewing the 10-year renewable strategy.” We have also reopened the conversation on a grid connect. The Premier asked me to start doing that more broadly, and I know that he spoke at the chamber luncheon last Friday about this issue. We talked about it at Roundup.

It’s one of those things. As we develop as a territory and as there is a lot of load demand, we are going to have to make sure that we have access to quite a range of renewable energy. That is why we think that grid connect is a good conversation. Plus, the situation with British Columbia has improved in the last several years. They have been doing more infrastructure development in northern BC which lends to us connecting with them.

I am looking forward to having that conversation with First Nations because we think that it would be good to have a conversation about a shared piece of infrastructure where there is an equity stake there. I already started the conversation with my federal counterparts late in 2022 and we just think it is very important. It is important with the growth of the Yukon that we can see. It is important for the prospects for mining that we see, and, as the Premier has pointed out, it’s also important for Arctic security. The world events remind us that we need to keep our focus, as well, on the far north.

These are all important issues. Our vision is that we will build on top of our renewable strategy. I am sure that we will get into Question Period or debate during this session. I look forward to hearing how the Yukon Party believes that they will address climate change, given that they’re coming out in favour of oil and gas. That is an interesting perspective indeed.

My last portfolio that I want to touch on is a new portfolio for me, so I’m just getting up to speed on it and I will do my very best on it, and that is Tourism and Culture. I have had several events where I have gone and talked — I mentioned the Bravo Awards today. Last Thursday, I mentioned the Yukon Heritage Awards which were held up at the Yukon Archives. But I have also been to the opening of the Available Light Film Festival, which was a great festival. I hope that Yukoners had the chance to check that out. It was nice to see the Yukon Quest starting again down at the Shipyards Park. It is always great, fun energy down there. I got to emcee the grad challenge at Rendezvous, which was quite fun. I remember a couple of years ago, in the axe-throwing competition, it was like a two-headed axe and there was no cage around. Now there’s at least a bit of a cage. Next year, by the way, will be the 60th anniversary of Rendezvous north of 60 here in the Yukon, so that’s a big deal.

The first event that I attended was the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada’s meeting. I was there with the Deputy Premier. They held their national meeting here in the Yukon. It was really great to see folks from across the country come and talk about how well situated the Yukon is.

I have been sitting down with many of the organizations around arts and cultural and tourism. I haven't met with everyone I would like to yet, but I have met with the Yukon First Nations Culture and Tourism Association. I have met with the Yukon Arts Centre, the Yukon Tourism Advisory Board, the Yukon Historical and Museums Association, and the Yukon Heritage Resources Board. I have met with the Convention Bureau, of course — and also the Tourism Industry Association of Yukon, who, by the way, I think are hosting the Tourism Industry Association of Canada for meetings here in the Yukon next week.

One of the things that the industry has said to me is that it used to be that tourism was viewed in the Yukon as being a summer-only thing. Then it started being a summer-winter thing. Now, what I am hearing from the industry is that there are no more shoulder seasons and that it's going always now.

I think that we are poised very well. When I have talked with industry, they have said that the things that the Premier did when he was in the role were very important to make sure that the industry did well through COVID. They referred to the Yukon's programs as the best recovery and relief program in the world. That's what they told me. They talked about how, without some of the programs, they would have closed their doors. Our pre-COVID — our biggest year was 2019. The Deputy Premier at that time came out with a tourism development strategy. What operators are telling me is that they think we are going to have a good year this year. They know that we are up from last year, of course, but they are hopeful that we are heading back into that ground that we were in pre-pandemic.

I have been given several pieces that are here in this budget and in my mandate letters — working, for example, with the Convention Bureau on getting a convention centre proposal out, working on destination development, and working on our cultural centres and our museums policy.

I am just excited to loop it back, Mr. Speaker, and to get back to where I started my discussion around the budget. This is a big year of anniversaries for the Yukon — whether that is the 50th anniversary of *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* or the 125th anniversary of us as a territory. It is a time when I think that we are going to shine as a territory and I think that we have a great story to tell. When Canadians discover the Yukon, I think they always come away charmed by our spell.

So, I am looking forward to working hard on this industry and looking forward to rebuilding the industry post-COVID, and it is a privilege to be in the role.

Lastly, like my colleague, the Member for Mountainview, I would just like to thank my wife for putting up with all of the work. I am sure that everyone in this Assembly would like to thank their significant other, because it always takes a lot to do this job for Yukoners. I thank her for her kindness and support. It is an honour to get to represent Yukoners here and to try to shape the territory.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Our colleagues across the way don't seem to be terribly interested in taking the opportunity to talk

to Yukoners about this year's budget, or about how it represents initiatives and services that are important to them as Yukoners, but I'll certainly take that opportunity and look forward to it.

Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to rise — as Yukon's Attorney General, Minister of Justice, Minister of Health and Social Services — to speak to Bill No. 208, introduced here last week by the Minister of Finance. I would like to acknowledge that I am speaking today from the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, and as a member elected to represent Riverdale South. I'm truly appreciative of the opportunity to address the Legislative Assembly today and all Yukoners.

Everyone has taken a different approach, but unlike my most recent colleague, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, I'm going to speak sort of specifically to the departments for which I'm responsible. But before I do that, I would like to acknowledge that, as we celebrate the freedoms that we have here in Yukon and in Canada as evidenced by this very debate and the open opportunity to do so, the people of Ukraine are still, more than a year later, fighting for those same freedoms in the face of completely unjustified aggression. We must continue to support them however we can and unite against the actions of Russia, and we have seen our federal government do the same. Our hearts truly break for the people of Ukraine and for all of Europe at this very uncertain time and as it continues. Some of us have very close ties to the Ukrainian community, and I urge that everyone look after themselves, their families, and their friends.

Mr. Speaker, all communities matter, and I'm so proud that our government has not only made this a priority but has worked extensively with each and every community — to meet with them, to listen to their priorities, and to respond. This budget is about growing vibrant and sustainable communities, and supporting Yukoners absolutely everywhere.

I will speak a little bit later about some of the COVID-19 initiatives that have been removed from this budget, but although we may be a little more distanced from COVID now, we are not completely done with it. Although we wish it to be the case, I daresay it is not completely done with us, either.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the two departments that I have the honour to represent and, as I see it, to work for. The Department of Health and Social Services has two deputy ministers to reflect the enormity of the work on their shoulders, which is to transform Yukon's health and social services system and to build a system that includes a health authority to better serve Yukoners and all of their needs. Yukoners are served amazingly well by Deputy Minister Ed van Randen and Acting Deputy Minister Tiffany Boyd. I am also so pleased to recognize the leadership of Mark Radke, appointed as Deputy Minister of Justice last week. Under the extraordinary leadership of these deputy ministers, the dedicated department officials fully understand how their work serves Yukoners, often when they are in the most stressful times of their lives, as evidenced by the work done by the departments of Justice and of Health and Social Services. It often does not see people at their best.

I would like to thank those deputy ministers and their teams for developing a budget that improves the health and well-being of Yukoners and addresses their priorities. Each day, our dedicated staff go above and beyond for Yukoners. We owe our gratitude to all of our front-line health and social services care providers and service-oriented staff. From Continuing Care to Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services, to Family and Children's Services, to our nurses and care providers, to our social workers, our lawyers, our researchers, our drafters, our custodial teams, policy and communications people, finance folks, human resources, and IT specialists — just to name a few — we thank you and everything you do every day for Yukoners.

As we continue to meet the challenges and opportunities ahead of us, I would like to also express our gratitude for all our health and social system partners and justice partners for all of the work that they do to support Yukoners.

It's not a coincidence that the former Premier and now the new Premier has asked me to take on Justice and Health and Social Services and put these two portfolios together. There are many areas of overlap: COVID-19, legislative drafting, substance use health emergency, the sexualized assault response team, the supervised housing and reintegration programs, just to name a few. Our one-government approach, of course, means that we all work together at all times to remove barriers and to coordinate programming. No place is that more evident than when we look at our budget. My colleagues have spoken eloquently on how we do this, and I will talk just a bit on how Justice and Health and Social Services have worked to do the same.

I'll take a moment to speak to the innovation and the hard work that takes place at the Department of Justice. There are a number of new initiatives underway at the Department of Justice that will support action taken under, and according to, the substance use health emergency. In our 2023-24 budget, there are reflections of those priorities. The RCMP will engage new members, which increases their capacity to expand to drug trafficking enforcement. We are working with the federal government to expand First Nation policing support through the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program. We have feedback from First Nation communities on policing, and it has been recognized — and our government supports — culturally responsive policing. I will speak more about the RCMP in a few moments.

Over the course of the past year, I have had the pleasure of overseeing strong, collaborative working relationships between the Department of Justice and other departments, other First Nation governments, independent agencies, law enforcement agencies, and our Yukon communities. Together, we are working to make the justice system more efficient, more effective, and accessible for all Yukoners. The estimates outlined in the 2023-24 budget consist of total capital investments of \$4,276,000 and operation and maintenance expenditures of \$91.6 million.

Today, I will highlight just a few of the budget items that are being used to improve services and support individuals in contact with the justice system, to increase support for victims

of crime, and to bring high-quality policing services to Yukoners. I will provide some detail about the following areas: our community safety officer program, the integrated restorative justice unit, the legal aid services and clinics, Gladue report writing program, supervised community housing for justice-involved men and women, the sexualized assault response team, the federal victims fund, the *Territorial Police Service Agreement*, and community safety planning program.

Community safety initiatives, such as the community safety officer programs developed by the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, the Selkirk First Nation and other Yukon First Nation governments, have been successful in improving citizens' feelings of safety in their respective communities.

Our government, and many others across Canada, recognize the value and the impact of community safety officer programs and how they have been keeping communities safe. As I have said on more than one occasion to federal Minister Mendicino and federal Minister Lametti, this is the way of the future. We have allocated an increase of \$228,000 to this program for the 2023-24 fiscal year, and this budget increases the already funded community safety officer programs by \$228,000 for a total of \$1,028,000 for both Selkirk First Nation and the Kwanlin Dün First Nation community safety officer programs, and for one additional program that is being identified.

We have increased funding for the integrated restorative justice unit by \$567,000 in this budget.

In 2020, our government approved the creation of an integrated restorative justice unit to improve restorative justice service delivery, increase engagement with First Nation governments, and better support community-designed and community-led restorative justice initiatives. The integrated restorative justice unit allows our government to support existing restorative justice services and practices as we continue to work in partnership with Yukon First Nation governments through the Yukon Forum and other working groups. This program will continue to improve restorative justice service delivery and to increase engagement with First Nation governments and to support community-designed and community-led restorative justice initiatives.

This is a piece of work, along with the community safety planning, that the now-Minister of Education and I have worked on together for many years — prior to even being elected here to this Legislative Assembly. It is a proud moment for both of us to see the progress of this work, but, most importantly, it serves Yukoners. It is an initiative that is being sought after by other Canadian jurisdictions. We are being asked to provide information and the basis upon which this program has been designed and will be evaluated.

This restorative justice unit combines existing youth justice and adult justice services to provide program delivery across the Yukon. Our goal of creating the integrated restorative justice unit is to increase the use of restorative justice services throughout the territory and to provide a holistic, integrated approach to clients accessing these services. It must serve both accused persons and victims. This project has been extended now into March 2025.

The Government of Yukon understands the critical importance of legal aid services provided by the Yukon Legal Services Society to Yukoners and remains committed to ensuring that the society has sufficient resources to discharge its mandate. Our department is committed to ensuring that all Yukon citizens are able to access legal information and advice. In its 2022 budget, the Government of Canada announced an additional \$60 million to fund, in 2023-24, to support the delivery of criminal legal aid services, specifically to the most vulnerable such as Indigenous peoples, individuals from Black or racialized communities and those suffering from mental health issues, who tend to be overrepresented in the criminal courts.

It is a long time coming, Mr. Speaker, for those of us who have worked throughout many years in the justice system to see this kind of initiative finally recognizing inefficiencies and inequities in the system. In response to this, the Yukon Legal Services Society intends to establish a new legal aid clinic, which will provide enhanced services to Indigenous, vulnerable, and disadvantaged people. As such, I am pleased to highlight an increase of \$580,000 to provide funding to the society to assist with the development of a new legal aid clinic. The total budget for legal aid for 2023-24 is \$3.2 million.

I am also pleased to highlight an additional \$175,000 in funding to support the Gladue report writing program. This funding is 100-percent recoverable from the Government of Canada. This program, administered by the Council of Yukon First Nations, supports the preparation of Gladue reports, including training of new writers, a program evaluation, and program administration.

Supervised housing is a critical component of the criminal justice system and contributes to a safer, healthier Yukon.

Connective has been operating the supervised housing and reintegration program, known by the acronym of SHARP, for men who are justice-involved, for several years now. This funding will continue to support Connective with their operations in providing this important service. The 2023-24 budget has an increase of \$258,000 for SHARP. Secondly, there is an increase of \$357,000 for fiscal year 2023-24 that has been allocated for a supervised housing pilot program for justice-involved women. This newly launched service provided through Connective is the first of its kind in northern Canada. We are committed to ensuring safe, reliable housing, resources, and programming for justice-involved men and women in the territory.

Men's services in various forms have been available for well over 30 years, but women have not been so served. On February 22 of this year, the Government of Yukon officially announced a supervised housing program for women to be located in what is known as the Takhini Haven building at 25 University Drive near the grounds of the Whitehorse Correctional Centre. A transfer payment agreement has been signed with Connective to provide the supervised women's housing program. The program will provide an alternative to custody and will support women to access services through the Yukon's treatment courts. It is a long time coming.

The sexualized assault response team has been aptly described by my colleague, the Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity, but it is worth reinforcing here that the program, which is also known as SART, was officially launched back in March 2020. A few other things were happening back in March 2020, but SART had its launch at that time. It's a multi-agency coordinated response across three main components: victim support, legal or criminal justice services, and medical services. I know that criticism has come from the Yukon Party members opposite that this budget and this government have no new ideas. Well, I beg to differ. It is critical that we develop such alternatives as the sexualized assault response team or the services for justice-involved women, and that we build those services into our culture and society and then support them financially into the future.

This is not about brand new ideas. It's about depending on the services and Yukoners being able to depend on the services that have been brought to them by this government and that will, and should, exist well into the future.

Our government is committed to expanding the services of SART to Yukon communities beyond Whitehorse. In order to expand those services in a way that responds to the communities' needs and priorities, we are planning an engagement for this spring and summer with our First Nation government partners, Indigenous women's organizations, service providers, and previous victims of sexualized violence. An increase of \$125,000 has been allocated to support the contracts for engagement and to engage with First Nation and community service providers, and secondly, to engage with victims of sexualized violence in a trauma-informed manner.

Our Victim Services branch receives at least \$500,000 per year through the funding agreement with Justice Canada's Victims fund provincial and territorial stream for the enhancement of victim services in the Yukon — again, something that the now-Minister of Education and I worked on for many years — enhancing services for victims of crime.

Our government provides additional funding in this budget of \$249,000. The funding supports five primary activities, all related to the victims of crime emergency fund, to the independent legal advice program, to rural service enhancements where we can provide additional victim service workers in some communities, to child and youth victim services, and to the promotion of victims' rights under the Government of Canada providing some funding for personnel and training. This funding also supports the independent legal advice program, which allows the Yukon to hire additional lawyers to a roster and to begin the evaluation to provide additional training.

Through the *Territorial Police Service Agreement*, we have a cost-sharing agreement with the Government of Canada to provide services for the Yukon RCMP. This agreement states that the Government of Yukon will cover 70 percent of the cost while the Government of Canada covers the remaining 30 percent. In this budget, there is an increase of \$3.5 million to the RCMP. I expect to have to repeat that several times, but nonetheless, I am happy to introduce this figure today.

Specifically, this increase includes \$874,000 in one-time costs, including the replacement of Yukon RCMP's aircraft engine, the payout of excess leave liabilities, and some one-time costs related to RCMP's force-wide arms, armour and equipment modernization initiative. There is more than \$122,000 in term costs, including a multi-year boat replacement plan, other equipment needed by the officers, and increases to the operation and maintenance portion of the RCMP's infrastructure program. There is \$2.521 million in ongoing costs, including lab costs, block training requirements, ongoing IT and equipment cost increases, budget erosion related to inflationary measures, negotiated pay raise impacts, and 7.5 new full-time positions for our police service here in the territory.

Under the federal initiative to take action against gun and gang violence, the gun and gang violence action fund was a five-year contribution agreement ending this year between the governments of Canada and the Yukon. We are continuing conversations with the Government of Canada on the extension of this action fund. Funding will also support the ongoing maintenance and renovation of existing RCMP infrastructure. The line item of \$3.1 million for the ongoing maintenance, renovation, and replacement of RCMP-owned policing infrastructure in the territory is an annual contribution by the Government of Yukon.

The Government of Yukon continues to prioritize support for safer and stronger communities across the territory and has approved funding to support First Nations in their safety planning projects. The community safety planning program has an overall budget of \$2.8 million with varying amounts in the Community Justice and Public Safety division's budget each year until fiscal year 2029-30. Phase 1 of the community safety planning program has recently been launched, which provides up to \$200,000 to each Yukon First Nation government or community for safety planning or to implement priorities identified in the planning process to support safety in communities. We encourage interested Yukon First Nations to contact the Department of Justice with any questions about applying for this funding, and we certainly have outreach to those partners. Phase 2 of the program will explore opportunities to expand community safety planning funding, perhaps to municipalities, and we expect to be discussing this program with municipalities in the year to come.

The Department of Justice has dedicated funding for a new morgue and coroner's office build. The existing morgue is presently located in a repurposed space that once served as a geological storage warehouse. While that is often important, it is completely unacceptable. The existing site is aging and does not contain a proper place or space and does not provide a culturally appropriate or dignified viewing environment for friends and family of a deceased person.

It is one of the first concerns that came to my attention back in 2017, and I have been dedicated to improving this situation for our coroners, their staff, and the public. A location has been identified and I am pleased to say that there is \$300,000 in this budget to begin groundwork, planning, and design. The cost for construction will follow. Our government is committed to

provide Yukoners and the coroner with proper facilities for people who are at their most vulnerable and enveloped in grief.

The Department of Justice has collaborated with the Council of Yukon First Nations and the judiciary for the addition of new art in the law centre in the law courts building here in Whitehorse, and the use of eagle feathers in Yukon courts. An increase of \$56,000 has been allocated to engage with client groups to continue to improve Department of Justice facilities to be more inclusive of building users and less colonial or institutional in appearance and presence. This may include art or ceremony or improving signs, making it easier to navigate services, and be more inclusive and welcoming to facility users. This, of course, will be in communities.

The Department of Justice is pursuing thoughtful changes to facilities so that the buildings are more welcoming, more inclusive, and reflect Indigenous clients' needs and their culture. This budget also includes \$250,000 to obtain software and hardware related to surveillance camera upgrades, and \$195,000 to replace all personal alarm transmitters and several computers in relation to the Whitehorse Correctional Centre.

That is a lot of information about justice initiatives, programs, and services, and it is only just scratching the surface.

I will turn now to highlight some of the opportunities in this budget for Health and Social Services. We are building a brighter future for the territory by investing in a sustainable, people-centred health and social services system that improves outcomes for all Yukoners. I heard the Leader of the Official Opposition say that there is nothing new or exciting in this budget yet again. Again, I completely disagree. We are transforming Yukon's health care system into a national leader in people-centred service as we continue to implement *Putting People First* recommendations and continue to improve Yukon's health care system.

Our government has taken significant steps to make service delivery more accessible and more efficient and responsive to the needs of Yukoners. Our government is committed to modernizing Yukon's health and social services delivery to better meet the needs of all Yukoners. We are increasing access to medical services in the territory while reducing wait times and the need for out-of-territory medical travel. But, if you do need to travel for medical treatment, our government is supporting you with increased medical travel subsidies and places for you to get treatment.

We have listened to Yukoners and what they have told us on the doorsteps, through public engagement, through our partnerships working with First Nation governments, municipalities, community groups, and Yukoners directly.

This budget, like every budget that we have tabled, reflects our approach and attitude that our government is fair, efficient, and accountable. It ensures that priorities that exist in every corner of this great territory are addressed. It ensures that service to our constituents — and by that, I mean all Yukoners — is fair, efficient, and accountable.

The 2023-24 operation and maintenance budget for the Department of Health and Social Services is \$512.3 million. This represents a 1.32-percent increase over the 2022-23 main

estimates. This budget reflects our commitment to addressing the health human resources challenges being experienced across the world, improving access to health care services, and adapting to today's COVID-19 environment.

As we approach the three-year anniversary of the World Health Organization declaring the world pandemic, we must recognize that Yukoners have come a long way since the arrival of COVID-19 in the territory, and, for the first time since the start of the pandemic, there is no COVID-19 O&M budget included in the Department of Health and Social Services. As we shift away from the acute stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are adjusting how we respond to ensure that public health needs of Yukoners are met. We must take what we have learned from this pandemic and envelope it into our services. As part of this process, we are adjusting our full-time equivalent count to remove the temporary FTEs introduced in response to COVID-19, while also permanently integrating some of these critical front-line positions, so as to remain responsive to public health challenges moving forward.

In the 2023-24 budget, the Department of Health and Social Services has made a decrease of 144.9 FTEs, which is informed by the transfer of 37 FTEs with 405 Alexander to Connective and to the removal of 82.8 FTEs related to COVID-19 as well as some other time-limited removals that were introduced back in 2022-23.

There is an increase of 41 FTEs this fiscal year. The majority of these positions are related to our health human resource strategy and the permanent integration of some front-line service positions introduced in response to COVID-19. Additionally, as the work to align the health services in the territory, a total of 87.3 FTEs for emergency medical services are being transferred from Community Services to Health and Social Services.

The increase of \$6.6 million in operations and maintenance funding is for several initiatives across the department. In January of 2023, we launched the Yukon dental program and to date, we have enrolled approximately 400 Yukoners. We expect more. This fiscal year, there is an increase of \$3.62 million for the Yukon dental program. The launch of this dental program reflects our ongoing commitment to implementing the recommendations of the *Putting People First* report and to honouring our commitments from 2021 confidence and supply agreement.

The Yukon dental program is not the only step we are taking to make life more affordable. There is an increase of \$1.5 million to provide social assistance recipients with an additional \$100 per month as we conduct a more comprehensive review of social assistance.

Since 2015-16, the Yukon hospital services corporation O&M budget has increased by over 48 percent, and we are pleased to continue working with the hospital to meet its core funding needs and to introduce new programs and services. We applaud the hard work of everyone at Yukon hospitals as they endeavour to connect Yukoners with timely, culturally safe, and excellent care.

This year, we have provided an additional \$4.6 million for the Yukon hospital services operation and maintenance budget.

In addition, we are working closely with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to address our shared priorities and meet funding needs as we are exploring new ways to support Yukoners, which includes a \$12.2-million capital budget to fund the mental wellness unit and the building of that unit at the Whitehorse General Hospital.

We also recognize that for many Yukoners, their health care journey begins in their homes and their home communities, and there is funding in this budget to support the bridge at home program.

Like all jurisdictions in Canada, the Yukon has experienced the effects of a local, national, and global shortage of health care providers. It is a top priority of the federal minister's agenda. It is the top item on, I daresay, every minister of health's agenda across the country. In fact, I met with them this morning and it was a top priority on that agenda. Despite the fact that the Member for Lake Laberge thinks that we were not paying attention, this is critically important to Yukoners and critically important to this government. Health human resources is one of the greatest challenges facing our health care system today. It will not be resolved in the short term, but every new health professional who joins our team matters.

Our government has budgeted \$2 million to enhance the recruitment and retention of health care professionals across the territory. There is a further \$2.53 million budgeted for the nurses retention and recruitment incentives. This work is consistent as we enter into a new agreement as well with the Yukon Medical Association. As part of this work, there is an increase of \$1.97 million for the Yukon Medical Association to work at addressing the global shortage of health care providers.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to turn to how our territory has been overwhelmed by loss due to substance use and suicide for far too long now. I share my deep condolences, as I do for all my colleagues, to all Yukoners impacted by these tragic deaths, often way too close to home. The loss of each friend, member of a family, or loved one means that many more Yukoners will struggle with trauma, experience medical health crises, and carry the pain that persists as a result. These preventable losses devastate communities and families. Tragically, some here have had to cope with multiple losses, making the healing journey that much longer and more painful. So, for the past few years, there have been devastatingly high numbers and that is completely unacceptable. Substance use related deaths impact every part of our community and this crisis truly touches every corner of our territory. We are acutely aware that we are facing the most critical health issue in Canadian history.

As everyone knows, on January 20, 2022, our government, with the support of many leaders across the Yukon Territory, declared a substance use health emergency. We chose the name very carefully. It is a health emergency, but it must include the concept of the use of illicit drugs, opioids, alcohol, and terrible tragedies that can result, including drug deaths due to overdose and suicide. We need to work together to address substance use and make our communities safer and healthier places to be. Our government has taken the most progressive steps toward substance use harm reduction in the history of the Yukon

Territory. We have taken significant action to address substance use in our territory and it is clear that we need to do more. We have committed millions of dollars to support our government's continued response to the substance use health emergency. By coming together as a territory, we are working to find solutions that will help ensure that every Yukoner can access the support that they need when they need it and benefit from our recovering economy.

Through this declaration, we want to ensure that Yukoners feel supported as we move toward a stigma-free community and remove the stigma associated with drug use and addictions. We want Yukoners and communities to be aware of the resources that are offered and work to expand those services. We have reached out to First Nation governments, partner agencies, and Yukon citizens to seek collective input on how we can work together on the actions and responsibilities that will be taken under the emergency declaration.

We declared this emergency to send a clear message to every Yukoner, whether it be directly affecting them or not, to every member of this Legislative Assembly, to every member of every family, to every member of every government and community, that substance use, overdoses and suicides, and the underlying issues that lead to those outcomes is a crisis that will take all of us to address. We also wanted to send a clear message that we intend to bolster substance use and mental wellness services, strengthen community level responses across the territory, and support Yukoners who use substances or experience mental health challenges to safely find a path to healing.

Our government successfully hosted two mental wellness summits in 2022 where presenters learned about participants and presenters and learned about and discussed topics such as prevention, treatment, support services, and after-care while also sharing a variety of harm-reduction models and solutions.

Our work with respect to the substance use health emergency absolutely must continue. We have made a number of progressive changes to the safe consumption site and to the services that are available across the territory. We look forward to releasing a new opioid action plan in the very near future.

There are a number of inflationary measures included in this budget that are administered through the Department of Health and Social Services of which I am proud. I note that others will be able to speak to them.

I would like to reiterate my gratitude to all members of the departments of Health and Social Services and Justice for their ongoing commitment to serving Yukoners. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank my colleagues in this House who are an extraordinary group of people. They work hard every single day to serve Yukoners. My family and friends do the same every day to support me, and I cannot thank them enough. Everyone who has done this job knows of the demands on your time and how your family must necessarily take a back seat to the demands of Yukoners, and rightly so.

Thank you to the hundreds of people who have reached out to me with words of support and encouragement as I do this job. Thank you to the people of Riverdale South. It is an honour for me to be elected a second time to represent you and bring

forward your concerns and serve Yukoners in the way that I have described here today.

Ms. White: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity today to rise to speak to the budget in front of us. It's interesting, because we have heard from our colleague across the way that the opposition had nothing to say, but I think there is plenty to say; we might just choose to do it in different ways.

It was fascinating for me during Question Period to know that there was so much repeating from the past. The Minister of Community Services likes to talk about what the Yukon Party did, but I would like to point out that he has been in government longer than when I was in opposition to the Yukon Party. So, it's something to remember when we talk about the past.

Think about some of the things that we have learned over time and lessons that have come here and how we each grow in the ways that we do, because this job, as we've heard, is all-encompassing, it's tiring, it's rewarding, it's beautiful, it's hard, it's frustrating, and it's all of those things wrapped into one.

I think back to the very first time I spoke in this House in 2011 after getting elected, and I worked in Corrections. Before I was elected, I was a life skills coach in Corrections, and I worked in a specialized women's unit. You might be familiar with the building. It looks like it has wings. It's on the Corrections land on the way up to the Yukon Arts Centre. It's on the right-hand side. I said, in my very first response budget speech — I guess my response at that point — was how important it was that there be transitional housing for women leaving Corrections. When I worked there, I realized that, as women got closer to their release date, they got more and more stressed out and more anxious about what they were going to do when they left. If they didn't have secure housing to go to, then they were going to go back to what got them to Corrections in the first place.

I said that to a Yukon Party government and I said that the Liberals after the 2016 election, and I am relieved to know that I walked back into that very same space that I left as a life-skills coach to know that it's going to be women's transitional housing.

One of the concerns I have is that it was empty. The Takhini Haven Group Home left years ago, and this place, which has six bedrooms and will house six people, was empty for years. I was concerned about that. We asked questions about it before, but I am relieved to know that it is finally happening, because that is important. To orient people, it's around the corner from my house.

So, interestingly enough, in June 2022, the Minister of Education made an announcement that there was going to be the relocation of the École Whitehorse Elementary School from downtown to Takhini — interestingly enough, across from the correctional facility, from the new women's transition facility, on the grounds that are currently being used by Softball Yukon. You can imagine that this actually caused lots of concern at the time, because there was this big announcement made, and the really interesting thing is that there has been a resounding silence since. We have heard that there is going to be consultation. Sometimes we have heard that there has been

consultation, but I can tell you that there has been no consultation in my neighbourhood. My neighbours haven't been asked what they think or how they feel about it. Based on Softball Yukon's responses, there hasn't been consultation there.

We do know, however, that downtown residents have come out in droves to say that there needs to be an elementary school in downtown Whitehorse. I think about my friend whose young son is currently at École Whitehorse Elementary, and she said it so beautifully. She said that downtown has so much of these really important social support services, with the shelter and with Housing First, group homes and other things, and those are all really important, but if you don't have the balance of children laughing, if you don't have that joy to counteract all the hard things, then all you are going to have downtown are hard things.

Downtown residents have been super clear that they want an elementary school in downtown Whitehorse. In the NDP, we agree. We absolutely agree. We talk about the importance of communities and we talk about the importance of education within those communities so much so that there is a new elementary school going up in Whistle Bend. We think that is great, but why would we take a school out of an existing community, because downtown continues to grow. There are families in downtown Whitehorse; there absolutely are.

The announcement was made in June 2022 about the relocation of the school, and my colleague, the Member for Whitehorse Centre, and I, we were waiting for more information. We get asked regularly about what is happening. Not a lot is being shared. I can look at the five-year capital plan, but no real money starts to flow there until three or so years from now. We are curious and interested to know what will happen there. There were big statements, but not a lot of follow-up at this point, but we are looking forward to it.

I think it's one of those things. When I look at my neighbourhood, Normandy Manor is also around the corner from where I live with its 84 units of supportive housing for seniors. Interestingly, it is a for-profit business and it was hugely subsidized by government money. Initially, Yukon government — Yukon Housing Corporation — said that they were going to take 10 units of the 84. That's good, but now we have added an additional 16, so it's 26 units, which is good because seniors need housing, but it is a for-profit business. We have the Vimy Heritage Housing Society that has been working on this for a very long time. It's a similar plan, similar vision, and not for profit — not built. You know, I am glad that in the confidence and supply agreement that I signed with the Premier that there is a commitment to funding there. I am glad. It has taken a long time to get there. I remember when they first approached those of us who were in the Chamber at that point. It was more than 10 years ago for sure.

Then I think about things like climate action, and I think about how important it is that we make decisions. Collectively, here in the House, we heard from the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources with some really good points. Today, you would have heard from me when I tabled the motion saying that I want the Yukon government to work with ATCO Electric to make

sure that people are not being faced with these infrastructure costs for infrastructure owned by a company as they try to move toward the renewables that we have tried to indicate. As an example, Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that, in 2016, I put in an air-source heat pump.

I'm what's referred to as an "early adopter", which meant that I paid \$3,000 to have a utility pole put in my parking spot, and then I upgraded my electricity to my house to have 200-amp service and I had to change a whole bunch of things. Then I got to buy the heat pump and get that installed, and, all said, I was probably \$32,000 into it. I don't regret it at all; I don't regret it at all. The fantastic folks at the Energy Solutions Centre had a lot of stories at that point about how they were good, but there weren't the factual numbers. So, I had a meter put on my heat pump so they could collect the information. I like to think that part of my information collection is what helped us get to the point where we have recognized how important these systems are. But I live in a neighbourhood where we have above-ground wires, and my neighbour recently wrote to me saying that the barrier of having to put in a new pole to hold the wires is just going to be that one thing past that stops her from changing from her fossil-fuel furnace to an electric furnace, and her fossil-fuel furnace needs to be replaced; that's the thing. It needs to be replaced. This isn't a luxury.

I think about the folks who live up in Hillcrest who wanted to go on the Yukon Conservation Society's pilot program for electric thermal storage units, and they were told that they would need to put in a \$55,000 transformer on the power pole. So, I think that this is really showing us — you know, when I put in the pole in my own yard, I had told ATCO at the time when we were talking about it — I was like, look, I'm tying myself to you for the rest of the history of this home. I am now beholden to electricity until the end of time. You would think that the house has already been there since the 1950s and it's probably going to be there for a while longer, and I will be attached to the electricity the entire time. But I didn't win that argument and I paid for a pole to be installed.

These are barriers to people being able to make those choices. We are encouraging people to look at their impact on the climate and how we can all make those decisions, and there are ways that, I think, we need to work outside of this Chamber. So, my hope is as Yukon government will work with ATCO Electric Yukon to address some of those concerns, to find solutions, because I know we can. I absolutely know we can.

We think about some of the reality — and I appreciate that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources talks about baseboards as a great alternative. I just envision toasters in every room in the house just being turned on and how it's an electric draw on the system. My hope is that we don't install more toasters to heat homes and that we do look to things like air-source heat pumps and things that are more efficient.

I think about the changes that we have seen and things that I would like to see. You know, I appreciate the words from the Minister of Education, but I recently wrote to the Minister of Education, based on a story that was shared with me by a young woman who has now graduated from high school. She

highlighted her concerns that there are no policies within Yukon Education on what happens if there is student-on-student sexualized violence. There are lots of policies. There are lots of policies within Education, but nothing addressed that specific thing. The reason she said that nothing addressed that specific issue is because she lived through it. She lived through it. She reached out to me — years after she graduated because that is how much time it took to get to the point where she could talk about it — and she asked me to move it forward. I got a response today and I have to say that it wasn't great, because I really do believe that the Department of Education has the opportunity to work with women's organizations, the sexualized assault response team, and Victim Services to come up with a policy that ensures that students are safe from each other in school, if that is what needs to be.

Then, I think about the SOGI policy — the sexual orientation and gender identity policy — and I think how weird it is that the Department of Education has told schools that they have to develop their own SOGI policies and that there isn't one core policy that says that this is the bare minimum and you can go above this, but you can't go below this. I think that, in this Chamber, we have seen the examples of schools that will do the bare minimum. The reason why I think that the Department of Education should be working on a SOGI policy for the Department of Education is to make sure that every school has a standard that is set — that we can't go below that standard.

Then I have conversations with educators as they are trying to pick their way through this — how do they do it? Who should they speak to? Where should they look? How do they know if they are doing it right? Are they making mistakes? They don't want to make mistakes, and so they look back and say: "Why isn't the Department of Education — why isn't one being developed there? Why can't we add to it? Why can't we customize it?" But still, right now schools are being left with that on their own.

Speaker: Order, please.

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

Debate on Bill No. 208 accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.