



# Yukon Legislative Assembly

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Number 105

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35<sup>th</sup> Legislature

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## HANSARD

Tuesday, March 7, 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
<b>Hon. Ranj Pillai</b>	Porter Creek South	Premier Minister of the Executive Council Office; Economic Development; Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation
<b>Hon. Jeanie McLean</b>	Mountainview	Deputy Premier Minister of Education; Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate
<b>Hon. Nils Clarke</b>	Riverdale North	Minister of Environment; Highways and Public Works
<b>Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee</b>	Riverdale South	Minister of Health and Social Services; Justice
<b>Hon. Richard Mostyn</b>	Whitehorse West	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board
<b>Hon. John Streicker</b>	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
<b>Hon. Sandy Silver</b>	Klondike	Minister of Finance; Public Service Commission; Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission

### OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

#### Yukon Party

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

### THIRD PARTY

#### New Democratic Party

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

### LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Dan Cable
Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

**Yukon Legislative Assembly  
Whitehorse, Yukon  
Tuesday, March 7, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

*Prayers*

## DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

## INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** I would like the House to help me welcome this afternoon Aisha Montgomery and Simon Lapointe, who are the parents of Constance Lapointe and Matthias Purdon, president of Cross Country Yukon.

*Applause*

**Speaker:** Are there any tributes?

## TRIBUTES

### In recognition of Nutrition Month

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Every year in March, Dietitians of Canada, students, and other key stakeholders come together to celebrate Nutrition Month. It has been over 40 years since we started recognizing Nutrition Month, which is a time when dietitians from all over the country join together to raise awareness of the importance of food in our lives and in our communities.

The theme for 2023 is “Unlock the Potential of Food: Find a Dietitian”. This theme speaks to the importance of nutrition and dietitians and how they can help to inspire and support people to take advantage of the benefits of food.

Nutrition is a critical part of health and living our best lives. Good nutrition is related to improved infant, child, and adult health, stronger immune systems, and contributes to positive mental health. Good nutrition contributes to healthy pregnancies and childbirth, to lower risk of disease, and ultimately to longevity.

Dietitians understand the science of nutrition and the unique needs of each person based on their health, preferences, culture, food traditions, and personal situations.

Dietitians and health care professionals are well-positioned within our food and health care systems to influence and encourage healthy nutrition and guide us to all eat better. They are key members of a multidisciplinary team in long-term care homes, in hospitals, and in the community. They have a deep understanding and the ability to share the science of nutrition while also ensuring that food traditions and cultures are respected. Dietitians recognize that food is important for everyone and the meaning of food and eating well may look different from one person to the next.

Food builds community, and it is so much more than sustenance. Eating well is about sharing experiences, enjoying

food, the transfer of knowledge, connection, and listening to your body. Sharing delicious food that feeds our bodies also feeds our souls and mental health.

I invite all Yukoners to think about the role that nutrition plays in our daily lives and to embrace it. We should all share our cultural traditions so that they can be passed on to younger generations and spread the joy of food. Taking time to explore how food plays a key role in keeping our bodies healthy and our communities strong is important to every Yukoner; Nutrition Month works well to remind us all.

*Applause*

**Ms. Clarke:** I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize March as national Nutrition Month. This month, we celebrate the importance of making healthy food choices and developing good nutritional habits. The concept of healthy eating is not easily defined; it really looks different for everyone. The cost of food, allergies, and preferences can be prohibitive to many people. Cultural practice, traditions, and nutritional needs vary across regions, climates, and communities. Dietitians help individuals navigate food choices and work across the country toward the common goal of promoting healthy eating.

Coming from a tropical country like the Philippines to the Yukon, I had to learn how to eat again. You see, where I come from, people eat vegetables and fish, as they are abundant. Frozen food at the grocery store is much more expensive. Here in the Yukon, it is the reverse. It took me many years to learn how to eat healthily in a different way, but there are many things you can do as a family to help form good eating habits.

Eating meals together as a family, limiting or avoiding unhealthy snacks or treats, and reading food labels are all good steps to take. Planning meals ahead of time can save time, money, and help to ensure that we have ingredients on hand that are more nutritionally valuable.

We are fortunate in the Yukon to have a number of local growers and producers throughout the territory who provide us with fresh vegetables, milk products, meats, fish, poultry, and more. The cost of groceries is rising, and families often struggle to make mindful choices on a daily basis. I would also like to encourage Yukoners to be mindful of this and to consider supporting your local food bank throughout the year. You can contact them to see what foods they may be in need of in order to provide clients with well-balanced and healthy options.

Thank you to dietitians and other health professionals who dedicate their lives and careers to help Yukoners make healthy choices. Remember that forming healthy eating habits starts at home, and healthy kids make a healthy community.

*Applause*

**Ms. Tredger:** I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to Nutrition Month. This year for Nutrition Month, I want to focus on the systems that determine what food choices are available to people. We are at a time when more and more Yukoners are experiencing food insecurity. That means healthy, affordable, nutritious food is beyond their reach. We are lucky to have strong communities of volunteers, local

governments, and NGOs that are working hard to provide nutritious food through food banks, school lunch and breakfast programs, prenatal programs, and soup kitchens.

I want to take the time today to thank all the people working to make sure that everyone has access to food. Promoting good nutrition means fighting against poverty. It means making sure that people have fair wages and a social safety net that can truly catch them. It means safe transportation so that people can get to the grocery store. It means affordable housing so that people have a place to store and cook food. Thank you to everyone doing the work to make that possible.

We know that nutrition is especially important for children, so I want to celebrate all of the families who are working hard to provide food for their children. Whatever types of food you provide for your family, we think you're doing a great job.

*Applause*

### **In recognition of Yukon representation in cross-country ski championships**

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** I ask everyone in the Legislature this afternoon to imagine for a moment the rasp of skis on freshly groomed trails. I ask that because that is the sound of success — another Yukon success. Today, I rise to pay tribute to our Yukon cross-country skiers who represented Canada at the FIS Nordic Junior World Ski and the U23 Cross-Country World Ski Championships. From January 27 to February 5 in Whistler, BC, Constance Lapointe, Sonjaa Schmidt, and Sasha Masson reached a career landmark by competing across our country in several international events, including the individual sprint, mass start classic, individual free technique, and the mixed relay.

Qualifying for any world championship is an incredible and rare achievement. At this event, 24 individuals raced for Canada. Three of those individuals were Yukoners, a remarkable 1:8 ratio for a territory with a population similar to Campbell River, BC.

Mr. Speaker, this territory has a thriving cross-country ski scene. Since 1980, an astonishing 12 inductees to the Yukon Hall of Fame were there because of their contributions to this sport. For decades, the Yukon has produced top-tier cross-country skiers like Martha Benjamin and Dahria Beatty.

These three young people, the next generation of Yukon skiers, joined those ranks. I know that when they wear that Canadian flag, they carry their territory name proudly in their hearts and on their sleeves. We thank them for representing us so well and extend our appreciation to the coaches, families, and volunteers involved in building this successful cross-country ski culture that makes their achievement possible and contributes to the well-being of all Yukoners.

We hoped that these athletes could be with us today, but their busy schedules make that difficult. Constance has just finished competing at the Canada Winter Games, Sonjaa is a student at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology in Calgary, and Sasha is racing on the European ski circuit. This week, all three will be travelling to Thunder Bay for the national championships. Along with their dreams of a good

result, they go with our hopes for a successful, fulfilling competition.

*Applause*

**Ms. White:** I stand on behalf of both opposition caucuses to celebrate the achievements of three incredible Yukon cross-country skiers. Congratulations to Sonjaa Schmidt, Sasha Masson, who races as part of Team Canada for the Nordic U23 World Cross-Country Ski Championships, and congratulations to Constance Lapointe, who raced on Team Canada for the Nordic Junior World Ski Championships. These three are following in the well-laid tracks of other Yukon cross-country skiers who have competed nationally, internationally, and all the way to the Olympic stage.

We would have loved to have had these remarkable athletes in the gallery today, but, Mr. Speaker, this team is busy. Some are currently in a bus en route from the Canada Games to the nationals in Thunder Bay, while others will be meeting them by plane. So, good luck to all of the athletes and coaches. We are so proud of you.

*Applause*

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

### **TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS**

**Ms. McLeod:** I have for tabling a news release from the Association of Yukon Communities.

**Speaker:** Are there any reports of committees? Petitions.

### **PETITIONS**

#### **Petition No. 16 — not received**

**Clerk:** Mr. Speaker and honourable members of the Assembly: I have had the honour to review a petition, being Petition No. 16 of the First Session of the 35<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly, as presented by the Leader of the Third Party on March 6, 2023.

The petition presented by the Leader of the Third Party does not meet the requirements as to form of the Standing Orders of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

**Speaker:** I must therefore rule that the petition cannot be received.

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

### **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

#### **Bill No. 26: *Act to amend the Municipal Act (2023)* — Introduction and First Reading**

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** I move that Bill No. 26, entitled *Act to amend the Municipal Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Minister of Community Services that Bill No. 26, entitled *Act to amend the Municipal Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

*Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 26 agreed to*

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

## NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Canada to respect the rights of firearms owners who lawfully acquired their property by taking the following actions:

- (1) withdrawing Bill C-21, *An Act to amend certain Acts and to make certain consequential amendments (firearms)*; and
- (2) repealing its May 1, 2020 regulation that reclassified rifles and other unrestricted firearms as prohibited weapons.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to use the 2023-24 capital budget to support the development of communications infrastructure in rural Yukon by beginning work with the private sector to expand cellular phone coverage to people without service in rural areas and improve coverage in weak service areas, including Grizzly Valley, Deep Creek, Fossil Point, Fox Lake, Ibex Valley, Takhini River Road, Silver City, and Junction 37.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to take immediate action to reduce the wait-list for class 4 drivers' licences by:

- (1) recognizing class 4 licences that are issued in other Canadian jurisdictions;
- (2) increasing the number of qualified examiners; and
- (3) finding a solution to the backlog of medical exams for those without a family doctor.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to ensure that the pool in Beaver Creek is opened in 2023.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to ensure that prenatal nutrition programs are fully funded to meet increasing healthy food costs.

**Speaker:** Is there a statement by a minister?

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Home ownership loans program

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I rise today to talk about how we are supporting Yukoners who want to own or build a home of their own. Navigating a long-term financial future that includes entry into the housing market is challenging for many today. This is not our grandparents' market and not even the same market of

five to 10 years ago. The rules and the interest rates have changed. It's tougher today than it used to be to rent, purchase, and build homes. We have heard many personal stories from a range of Yukoners, young and old, on the path to find a forever home.

The vacancy rate in the Yukon-wide rental market is 1.9 percent. In Whitehorse, it is 1.7 percent. Again, a healthy vacancy rate would be around three percent.

For many, home ownership remains a rite of passage, a huge milestone to mark personal achievement and security. The most recent quarterly real estate report lists the average detached home price at \$639,700. At that cost, a Yukoner would need to save nearly \$31,985 for a five-percent down payment. That is a not a sum to take lightly.

Other Yukoners might consider building their own homes from the ground up. This would help, again, increase the housing supply; however, without significant, upfront cash, it can be challenging to access financing from traditional lenders. Whether we are talking about access to rental housing or home ownership, our government understands that Yukoners face a number of stressors across the board in the face of the impacts of global inflation.

Our government is taking action and will continue to ensure that all Yukoners have a place to call home. We are expanding the home ownership loans program. It will be available in the next fiscal year throughout the territory, including here in Whitehorse. This was previously called the "rural home ownership loans program". The home ownership loans program provides loans to Yukoners so they can purchase and build homes. The program expansion follows a detailed engagement with numerous stakeholders, including the banking community.

We know that the limited housing supply can drive up the cost of housing for everyone. Now those who wish to help increase the housing supply by building their own homes in Whitehorse may also find some help through this program. Addressing the needs of the housing continuum continues to require creative solutions and cooperation across all housing partners, including individual Yukoners.

Expanding the home ownership loans program is just one of the ways we are taking action to make the Yukon a place everyone can call home.

**Ms. Clarke:** I am happy to hear that the Premier is announcing this today to address the decision made by the former Liberal housing minister to cancel the first-time home buyer program, the first-time mortgage loan program, and the down payment assistance program.

I know that many Yukoners will be pleased to hear that the home ownership loans program — formerly the rural home loans ownership program — will expand to include Whitehorse.

This is something that the Official Opposition has advocated for over the past while as we look for solutions to the Yukon's housing crisis; however, I hope the Premier can clarify a few items in his response.

We understand from applicants that the barrier is not eligibility but the amount of dollars in a program. When Yukoners apply to a program, they have been told that the scheduled intakes are already maxed out. Has the budget been increased to address denied applications? How many Yukoners will this new territory-wide program serve? Will there be a cap on the number of Yukoners who can access the program? Will the expanded program operate the same as the old program? How will Yukoners access the program? What will the application and delivery timelines be like, and at what stage of the home-buying process can Yukoners access this program? Do they need to put up the entire down payment up front and then be reimbursed, or will the program provide the money during the purchase process? Will there be one pool of money for Whitehorse and rural Yukon combined, or will that be split up into separate city and rural funds?

I think we can all agree that any program to help get Yukoners into a home in a cost-effective, self-supporting manner is welcome. I look forward to the Premier's answers to the important questions that I have outlined today.

**Ms. White:** So, to me and the Yukon NDP, the expansion of the eligibility of the Yukon Housing Corporation home ownership loans programs to include Whitehorse residents is really the story of two friends. I first met Mike Dixon while knocking on his door in the Takhini trailer court in 2011. Mike was a retired nurse who loved the Yukon deeply. We talked, we debated, and we disagreed and agreed on a great number of topics over the years. He was never shy to send me e-mails or leave me phone messages.

So, he sent me a letter in June 2021 talking about the plight of his friend David, who had recently won a land lottery building lot in Whistle Bend. He spoke about the barriers he faced while attempting to get a home building loan from his bank and the sheer amount of seed money required to secure a loan, despite having been preapproved for a much higher mortgage, because a loan to build a house doesn't have the same criteria and is much harder to get compared to a loan to buy a house.

In April 2020, the eligibility rules to access the Yukon Housing home ownership loan program changed to exclude Whitehorse residents. This change meant that his friend, who wanted to build a modest home in Whistle Bend, was unable to access the Yukon Housing program, and so began the Yukon NDP attempts to ensure that Whitehorse residents had the same access as their neighbours outside of city limits that they had before the program criteria changed.

We wrote letters; we asked questions; we talked about the issue during budget debate. Mike and David never stopped believing that reinstating this program would help Yukoners living in Whitehorse.

When the Premier and I signed a new confidence and supply agreement, this very issue was addressed in the "Housing" section, point 4(e), and it reads: "expand the eligibility of the Yukon Housing Corporation Home Building Loan Program to Whitehorse residents."

Mr. Speaker, I'm sad to share that Mike never got to know that the issue he cared so much about was finally resolved, as he passed away on November 4 of last year. So today, I want to thank both Mike and David for their tenacity and their care for others, and when I think about this program going forward, I will think about these two men and the friendship they shared and how that friendship led to this important change that will affect Yukoners. Our condolences to Mike's family and friends, because he was truly a special guy.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Again, Mr. Speaker, buying or building a home is typically the single biggest financial endeavour of a person's lifetime. It is a serious and often emotionally moving journey. Home ownership is an investment in your family and your future, and our government, again, remains committed to supporting home ownership options for Yukoners.

The Yukon Housing Corporation did restructure — which has been identified by both opposition parties — its loan program in 2020, and that was to better support low-income households and target the evidence-based needs of rural communities.

I spent many hours speaking with rural Yukoners, and they identified the challenges that they had accessing debt instruments to build houses. It was very difficult in some communities to get comparables of other homes of similar scope that they wanted to build, and therefore the banking sector was hard to deal with for those individuals.

The program in 2020, as well, was undersubscribed, and it wasn't being used to its full extent because interest rates were extremely low and individuals in Whitehorse were accessing, in many cases, some traditional lenders within the banking sector again. The Yukon Financial Advisory Panel's report in 2017, through the recommendations, identified the fact that we shouldn't have government programs duplicating work that the private sector can do. That was red tape. So, we adjusted that program to meet the needs where they were most greatly needed, and that was in rural Yukon.

We heard feedback, as well, when we went out to speak to Yukoners on reinstating this program, and again, we thank Yukoners who have provided their thoughts.

In today's current climate, our government remains focused on making life more affordable for Yukoners, including a Whitehorse loan stream that makes construction mortgages more accessible for eligible households as well.

Concerning federal programs that still exist which I want Yukoners to be made aware of, Yukoners can take advantage of some helpful programs like the Canada-Yukon housing benefit and the federal first-time homeowner incentive. I think that those are things that folks could look toward.

Concerning the questions from the Official Opposition, there are many questions there. I think the best thing that we can do is to table those questions and then we can respond appropriately and fully in casework back to the member. There are a number of pieces of information that we can definitely supply to clarify some areas of interest.

When it comes to the questions from the Third Party, I appreciate what you have shared with us. I want to recognize that the comments that were made in the advocacy that was done by the Third Party are accurate. It was brought up by a number of members last year. I want Yukoners to be aware that we monitor the programs in front of us and we adapt when needed. In 2020, there was a different need than there is in 2023.

The work that we have done to change these are based on our conversations with David — the gentleman who was brought up again. So, we have listened to Yukoners directly and we have listened to opposition parties. We hope that collectively here we are getting a win and putting a program back in place that will help Yukoners, both rural and in Whitehorse.

**Speaker:** This then brings us to Question Period.

## QUESTION PERIOD

### Question re: Physician recruitment and retention

**Mr. Cathers:** In Thursday's budget speech, the Minister of Finance made some pretty bold assertions about the Yukon Medical Association and their views on the new agreement with the Yukon government. The budget speech claimed that the YMA is confident that the new agreement will make Yukon one of the most competitive places to practise medicine in Canada; however, the day after the speech, the YMA wrote a letter to all three political parties to rebut the budget speech and clarify their position.

They stated in their letter that the new agreement has the potential to make the Yukon a competitive jurisdiction to practise medicine, but — and I quote: "... potential can only be realized if the new agreement is accessible. To this day, many parts of the new agreement, including administrative details of the Attachment and Attraction fund, remain inaccessible to Yukon doctors."

What is the Minister of Health and Social Services doing to rectify the problems with the new agreement with the YMA?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I am very pleased to be able to speak about the importance of physicians and the Yukon Medical Association in our services that are provided to Yukoners every day. The 2023-24 budget has \$2.2 million to support physician benefit programs, the majority of which are administered by the Yukon Medical Association.

I am not sure of the date stamp on the letter that the member opposite is referring to, but you will perhaps note that the executive director and the president of the Yukon Medical Association were present during the budget speech. I had an excellent conversation with them afterwards. I can indicate that we continue to meet regularly to iron out the details of the agreement that was signed last year.

I have many more specifics, if necessary, but Yukoners need to know that the Department Health and Social Services and the Yukon Medical Association, as well as all professional organizations that provide health services here in the territory, meet regularly. We are working together in partnership to make sure that services are provided to Yukoners.

**Mr. Cathers:** The minister seemed unaware of it, but the letter from the Yukon Medical Association was addressed to all political parties and was sent the day after the budget speech by them. It makes it clear that the Yukon Medical Association didn't agree with the minister and saw the need to clarify their position.

They have serious concerns about uncertainty in the new agreement. Here's what they said in their letter — and I quote: "At a time when burnout amongst physicians is increasing across the country, uncertain access to large parts of the new agreement is only adding fuel to the burnout fire. The YMA is deeply concerned about the wellness and sustainability of Yukon's physician workforce when they are burdened with additional stress caused by uncertainty."

The Finance minister was quick to claim that all was well with the new agreement, but the YMA and individual doctors paint a very different picture.

What is the Yukon government doing to fix the problem that they created in the agreement with the YMA?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** The new three-year agreement with the Yukon Medical Association covers the period from April 2022 to March 2025. The highlights of the new memorandum of understanding include a new attachment and attraction program that will work to increase Yukoners' access to primary and specialty care while supporting physicians' operating costs. The details of the operation of the attachment and attraction program are one of the items that we are currently discussing with the Yukon Medical Association.

The creation of an equity, diversity, and inclusion learning program and a commitment to help end systemic racism and discrimination in the health care system through learning and behaviour change is a part of that agreement, as well as the commitment to work with Yukon First Nations, health system partners, and other service providers to support collaboration, maternity, and early years care.

The details of the practical rollout of these programs are currently being discussed between Department of Health and Social Services officials and the Yukon Medical Association. I will attend a meeting in the very near future, as well, with the Yukon Medical Association to continue our partnership.

**Mr. Cathers:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there is again a large disparity between what the minister and her colleague claim and what is actually happening on the front lines of the health care system. The YMA wrote — and I quote: "... uncertain access to large parts of the new agreement is only adding fuel to the burnout fire."

We have heard from doctors who are owed tens of thousands of dollars for beyond 90 days. Promises about improving recruitment and retention of doctors won't materialize if government doesn't pay them for the services they provide in a timely manner. Last week in response to a question about this, the minister claimed that this is no longer an issue. The minister even said — and I quote: "We must maintain a process by which they are paid very quickly."

Does the minister actually think that the system has been fixed and that doctors are currently, as she asserted, being paid

quickly, or will she now admit that the problem is not fixed and commit to a timeline for fixing it?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I don't actually speak about anything in the Legislative Assembly that I don't actually think. So, yes, I actually think that we are working on the relationship with the Yukon Medical Association. They are dedicated to our health care system being improved, that they are dedicated to working with us as a partner, as well as other partners in the system, including the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the nursing associations. We are working to ensure that physicians are properly paid and that the agreement that we have signed with them is executed in a way that is beneficial to Yukoners. I look forward to our continued discussions and the opportunity to provide health care services to Yukoners in the transformative way suggested by *Putting People First*. Our dedication to that — and I know the dedication by the Yukon Medical Association and individual doctors here in the territory — will support those moves.

#### **Question re: Nurse recruitment and retention**

**Mr. Dixon:** Last fall, the Minister of Health and Social Services was shamed into action when the union representing nurses had to issue a press release rebutting what the minister had said in the Legislature about the status of negotiations between the Liberal government and nurses. In that press release, they pointed out that the minister seemed to be misinformed and that she was demonstrating political opportunism with her comments in the Legislature. Following that, the minister announced a new package of bonuses.

Can the minister tell us if the bonus package that was announced in December has worked to address the critical shortage of nurses in the territory? Can the minister tell us what the current vacancy rate is for community nursing?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I am sure I misheard some of what the Leader of the Yukon Party noted in the preamble, but nonetheless, what we are talking about here is nursing services here in the territory. We have worked very closely with nurses and the opportunity for the services that they provide to Yukoners to be enhanced. The Yukon government is taking steps to continue to recruit and retain nursing staff to ensure that Yukoners have access to quality essential health care services across the territory.

I certainly want to take this opportunity to thank our front-line nurses and all of the nurses who work in our health care system for the service that they provide not only in the last three years, but that they provide on a daily basis to care for Yukoners when they are often in very stressful and concerning situations. Nurses are the front line. Nurses are the people who help Yukoners get through these very stressful times.

We recognize that the health care system has provided circumstances in which there is burnout. That is a real and pressing issue in Yukon communities. We support Yukon nurses who have sacrificed much of their personal lives and time to their jobs. I look forward to continuing to talk about the nursing profession.

**Mr. Dixon:** Since the announcement in December of the nursing bonus package, there have been several issues and

problems that have emerged. One of the most concerning was that bonuses that were promised did not flow immediately and that there were several nurses who did not receive the bonuses because they were on maternity leave.

Last week, the minister said this about the situation — and I quote: “It is, quite frankly, a situation with respect to the collective agreement — to which the union agrees that there are certain categories by which bonuses, as we design them, cannot necessarily be paid to individuals who are also on leave...”

Can the minister tell us if she stands by this comment about the collective agreement preventing the flow of bonuses to nurses on maternity leave? What is she doing to fix the problem?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Over the next two years, retention and recruitment bonuses will be provided to registered nurses, nurse practitioners, and licensed practical nurses who are in a position requiring a nursing designation and performing nursing duties for the Government of Yukon as of December 1, 2022, when the announcement was made.

This new bonus package serves to address a wide gap that we face, along with other Canadian jurisdictions, and will help us with the ongoing recruitment and retention challenges that we face, so we are creating tools to effectively attract and retain staff to serve in our communities.

We understand that some of our nursing staff have raised questions about the administration of these allowances. This has been brought to the attention of the Department of Health and Social Services, which is working closely with the Public Service Commission to respond to these concerns as quickly as possible.

The administration of these bonuses is consistent with our delivery of other compensable allowances outlined in the collective agreement.

**Mr. Dixon:** One interpretation of how this has been handled by the Liberal government was offered by the union representing some nurses a few weeks ago when they declared that the nurse bonus program was a fiasco. In fact, not only is it not achieving its stated goals, it may also provoke a challenge with the Human Rights Commission. According to the YEU, there will be numerous grievances filed.

Can the minister tell us how many grievances have been filed in regard to the minister's handling of these issues?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** What I want to say about the importance of Yukon nurses here in the territory is that the recruitment and retention bonuses are in fact having a positive impact on the nursing staff here in the territory. We are working to recruit nurse practitioners. We have additional nurses who have signed on to work in communities, including some rather difficult positions to attract nurses to. We are continuing with recruitment through the Department of Health and Social Services.

What I can say — and I am pretty sure that the member opposite knows — is that, if there are any grievances with respect to how a matter has been handled, that grievance is not filed with the Department of Health and Social Services but with the employer through the Public Service Commission.



Over the next two years, the retention and recruitment bonuses will be provided to Yukon nurses. The vast majority of Yukon nurses have, in fact, received those bonuses. As we indicated in that statement back in December 2022, we are experiencing some vacancies, and the retention and recruitment bonuses, we hope, will be a positive effect.

**Question re: Food security**

**Ms. White:** It's not news to anyone that food costs have skyrocketed since the pandemic, leaving many Yukoners struggling to make ends meet. Last fall, we asked how many Yukoners were currently receiving food hampers and, while the minister explained to us that it's preferred that non-profits and volunteers fill the gaps left by his government, he wasn't able to answer our question. The good news is that he promised to find out.

So, Mr. Speaker, now that it has been a couple of months, can the minister tell this House how many Yukoners are relying on food hampers from non-governmental organizations to feed themselves and their families?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** First of all, I want to identify the fact that, during our budget deliberations that we'll be having over the next couple of weeks, we'll be able to identify the supports that we're putting in place when it comes to our supports for Yukoners — when it comes to understanding the needs of the most vulnerable individuals here in the Yukon. You will see that some of the programs that we look to enhance focus on some of our seniors and being able to support them in a more appropriate financial way, understanding that we're still in a difficult time when it comes to inflation. We also are in a position where individuals who are receiving program funds through Health and Social Services are also in a position where we will be able to provide them with more. The Minister of Education will also have an opportunity to stand in the House and again defend the Education budget and provide some insight into supports that we're putting in for food in schools.

We are always taking into consideration the cost pressures that we have seen over the last number of years. What we have tried to do with this budget is make sure that our most vulnerable folks — and really, the individuals the Leader of the Third Party has talked about — have the supports they need. I look forward to questions 2 and 3 as we talk about supports and inflationary measures that we have put in place to support Yukoners.

**Ms. White:** What I was really looking for was the number of Yukoners who are facing food insecurity. The number accessing food banks is in the thousands, and in some communities, more than 25 percent of the population accesses monthly food hampers.

So, when the Food Bank Society of the Yukon was first founded in 2009, their mandate was to be a temporary stop-gap, going so far as to plan to close their doors again within 10 years. It's now 2023, and the food bank delivers more food to Yukoners than ever before. The food bank was never meant to be a permanent solution, nor do they have the resources and infrastructure to be. On top of that, they were never meant to

deliver food outside of Whitehorse, yet now they are supplying most of the Yukon.

What concrete work is this government currently doing to reduce the Yukon's reliance on non-profit food hamper programs?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Our government and the Department of Health and Social Services is committed to closing the gap for low-income Yukoners and promoting nutrition across the territory. We certainly recognize that some Yukoners face financial challenges, particularly in this year with inflationary concerns, and they face challenges to meet their core needs, like food and shelter, and this is not acceptable. Our government collaborates with many organizations that deliver food aid to Yukoners, and I want to take the opportunity to thank all of our partners for their crucial work to address food security. I know that the member opposite does work with the Whitehorse Food Bank. I certainly have volunteered there in the past — sat on the board. Members of my family are dedicated volunteers to the work of the Whitehorse Food Bank and the important work and food that it supplies, as well as a community that it supplies for many, many Yukoners.

Our opportunities here — the Social Services division delivers social assistance to Yukon seniors income supplement to eligible Yukoners to assist with meeting basic needs like food.

In response to the growing inflationary pressures, we committed \$100,000 to the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition late last year to support the Yukon food network.

**Ms. White:** I appreciate hearing that commitment from the minister, so here is another idea to help address this gap: Access to local food is a huge part of food security. It means that communities are not completely dependant on trucks coming from thousands of kilometres away. The challenges of northern farming mean that the price of local food is often beyond the means of many Yukoners. In other jurisdictions, vulnerable people receive weekly coupons for the local markets so that they can support local food producers and access freshly grown produce. In the summer, there are regular farmers markets in Dawson, Whitehorse, and Haines Junction, to name just a few. This would be a great opportunity for the government to support local food producers and to help low-income Yukoners get healthy food on their tables. Will the minister develop a program that supports vulnerable Yukoners in accessing locally grown food, such as I have just shared?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** First of all, with respect to locally grown food, I rose yesterday in the Assembly and talked about how well our farmers are doing here in the Yukon.

They are doing tremendous work, and I appreciate the suggestion from the member opposite. What I will note for Yukoners is that the Premier just gave me a mandate letter, and in that mandate letter, he asked me to work with Highways and Public Works — but I will also work with Health and Social Services around how we can make sure that there are more opportunities for local producers here in the Yukon. I thank the member opposite for the suggestion, and I will set up a meeting

with Social Services to talk through what possibilities there may be on this front.

Again, thanks very much to our farmers for all the great work that they are doing producing local food here for Yukoners.

**Question re: Land development**

**Ms. Clarke:** Yesterday, I asked the Minister of Community Services a simple question about a promise that the Liberals made in the last election. I asked how many residential lots had been developed and released since the last election. The minister refused to answer in the Legislature, but he did provide an answer to the media. Since he was willing to cite some numbers in the media, I would like to give him another chance to share those numbers with the Legislature.

Since the 2021 election, how many residential lots has the Yukon government developed and released?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** What we are talking about this afternoon is the Liberal government's historic investments in lot development and housing since we were first elected in 2016. The budget in 2023-24 has \$26 million in its budget for land development in Yukon, with an additional \$22.4 million for housing projects in Dawson City, Teslin, and Watson Lake.

The five-year capital plan — which is another innovation that this government brought into the Yukon — shows how we are working in partnership with municipalities and First Nation governments to address the continued demand for building lots. Here in Whitehorse, my department is leading in supporting feasibility and planning work for the sites identified in the City of Whitehorse's community plan.

We are not going to end our work building housing lots for Yukoners, Mr. Speaker. We have done as much as we possibly can to make sure that Yukoners have the housing that they deserve and that they need. This stands in stark contrast to the members opposite who are asking these questions who basically left the field and put the Yukon in an untenable situation where they did not have enough housing for the citizens in the face of the economic growth that we have seen. We are working very hard to overcome that lapse on the part of the Yukon Party, and we are going to continue to do that to make sure that the people in this territory have houses.

**Ms. Clarke:** In order for Yukoners to know whether or not the Liberal government is meeting their commitment to develop 1,000 lots in this mandate, they need to know how many lots the government has released; yet, for some reason, the minister continues to refuse to provide a clear answer.

Why won't the minister answer this very simple question: How many lots have been developed and released since the last election?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** You know, the time in this Legislative Assembly is so precious and, honestly, I don't understand the question. We just ascertained two seconds ago that the opposition actually heard the answer on the radio this morning. So, here we are again wasting House time, which is precious to the members opposite — they make this known all the time — answering questions that are frankly redundant.

Our Liberal government has built strong, collaborative relationships with municipalities, private landowners, 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 or organization can accomplish alone; we need to work in partnership to increase housing options. The minister responsible for housing and I, and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources — indeed, all of the members of this caucus, including the Minister of Highways and Public Works — are working together to make sure that we have the infrastructure to support the housing needs of the territory. We are going to continue that hard work as long as we can.

**Question re: Alaska Highway corridor upgrades**

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Over the past year, I've been hearing growing concerns from constituents about plans to connect Birch Street to Azure Road on the west side of the Alaska Highway in my riding. Recently, the Yukon government has indicated to the City of Whitehorse and affected residents that the project is moving ahead regardless.

Later this week, the mayor and council are hosting a town hall meeting to discuss the proposed extension. I would like to remind the minister that the Yukon government promised to hold an information meeting about this project as well.

Will the minister commit to having Yukon government officials in attendance at the town hall later this week? Will he ensure that the Yukon government also hosts their own meeting on this project?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I am not quite sure which department the member opposite is asking for this information from — whether it is for me, who deals with land management, or whether it is for Highways and Public Works — but I can say that we always work closely with the City of Whitehorse.

I know that my colleague, the Minister of Community Services, meets often with the city. I have met with the city several times. I am happy, as always, to meet with the City of Whitehorse.

But just checking in with the member opposite — if she can clarify which department she is interested in having speak to it.

**Question re: Land development**

**Ms. McLeod:** Yesterday, the Association of Yukon Communities expressed their concern about the Liberal government's decision to cut the budget for rural residential land development in this year's budget.

Here's what they said — and I quote: "We are disappointed and concerned that at a time when Yukon communities are facing shortages of land and housing that the Government of Yukon would cut the budget for rural residential land by more than half..."

So, recognizing the concerns raised by Yukon municipalities, will the Yukon government consider an

amendment to the budget to increase the amount of funding for rural land development?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** I appreciate the question from the Member for Watson Lake this afternoon. As a matter of fact, the Premier, the Minister of Highways and Public Works, and I actually met with the Association of Yukon Communities on Saturday morning. We had a conversation that lasted at least an hour — perhaps 90 minutes. Do you know how many questions we got on rural land development? One, actually, from the town of Mayo, which actually asked us about trying to get lot prices down in that community, and the Premier addressed that concern.

The rest of the questions actually were about extending the municipal election terms. They were very, very pleased that we had done that. They wanted to know if we were undertaking a community tour this year. We said that of course we are going to do that. As a matter of fact, they were quite complimentary to the government.

It came as a bit of a shock when the president of the Association of Yukon Communities brought up the land issue yesterday. I wish he had given me a call. We often talk on the phone, but he didn't call me in this regard, and it coincided with the Leader of the Official Opposition's questions on the matter. I was curious about that, but nevertheless, we do take rural lot development very seriously. We are working to get more lots out in the territory. Since this government was elected in 2016, we have built 71 new rural lots. We have outlined how many more rural lots we are going to build, and we will have more to say on that in the near future.

**Ms. McLeod:** In December last year, the AYC wrote to the Yukon Legislature and raised concerns about the lack of land and housing opportunities in rural Yukon. In that letter, dated December 14, they called on the Yukon government to develop a rural land development strategy to facilitate increased supply of market and non-market housing in communities outside of Whitehorse.

So, can the minister tell us if the Department of Community Services is working on the development of a rural land development strategy, as recommended by AYC?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** As I said in my previous answer, Mr. Speaker, we are working very closely with AYC. We have a robust communication protocol. We are talking all the time is really what it amounts to. I am always available. The president of AYC certainly has my number, and on these issues, I certainly will take his calls, as I have in the past and will continue to do that.

We have, as I said — the total rural lot completions that we have here. In rural communities, we had 13 lots built in 2016, 10 in 2017, 43 in 2018, and five in 2021. In 2022 and 2023, we have an estimate up to 30, and we have more coming. There is lots of rural lot development happening. We understand — as we have spoken when we have gone around on our community tours — that this is certainly an issue for rural mayors. I am happy to address this — as are the minister responsible for housing and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources — as we work in a concerted effort to make sure that people in the territory have homes to live in.

**Ms. McLeod:** In their response to the budget, the AYC also raised some questions about the new \$50-million community emergencies fund. So, can the Minister of Community Services tell us when Yukon municipalities will be able to apply for this new fund? What parameters will apply to the fund, and can municipalities use these funds for emergency mitigation work, such as berms, dikes, and flood preparations?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a bit of a new question, but we will respect the fact that it is on the theme of AYC — Association of Yukon Communities.

Concerning rural land development — and the question that was identified by the Member for Watson Lake was: Is there work being done on a strategy for rural land development?

There was a meeting that was held between Yukon Housing Corporation and the executive director of AYC in December. In that conversation, the priorities of the AYC were identified. I echoed our commitment on Saturday morning in our meeting with both the Minister of Highways and Public Works and the Minister of Community Services. We talked about the fact that all communities are not the same and an overarching strategy is a good idea, but we also have to take into consideration the uniqueness of each community, especially when you have land development being undertaken by both First Nation development corporations or governments and municipalities.

So, I think it was a positive conversation concerning the contingency fund. The conversation seems a bit muddled down by the Member for Watson Lake, but it was very clear when we spoke about the contingency, and that was the fact that there are consistent mitigation efforts that are being undertaken by Community Services, such as FireSmart and some of the earlier work being done on looking at flood mitigation. That fund is for emergency efforts, and we put it in place based on the trends of expenditures, and we think it's a smart thing to do —

**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 MOTIONS

#### Motion No. 585

**Clerk:** Motion No. 585, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT, for the duration of the 2023 Spring Sitting:

(1) the Clerk shall keep a daily list of paired members, in which any member of the Government and any member of an opposition party may have their names entered together by noon on that date to indicate that they will not take part in any recorded division in the Legislative Assembly held on that date; and

(2) following each such division held, the names of any members entered on the list of paired members for that date shall be printed in Hansard and the Votes and Proceedings.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Just for these motions, we have had them in all of our recent Sittings. I'm not intending to debate them. Unless there is debate coming from across the floor, I will just seek to go to question and have a vote.

*Motion No. 585 agreed to*

#### **Motion No. 586**

**Clerk:** Motion No. 586, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT, for the duration of the 2023 Spring Sitting, any Member of the Legislative Assembly who is unable to attend sittings of the House in person due to COVID-19 symptoms, illness, or protocols may participate in the sittings of the House by video conference, notwithstanding Standing Order 8 or any other Standing Order, and by video conference shall:

(1) be recognized to speak in debate, notwithstanding Standing Order 17;

(2) be permitted to vote, notwithstanding Standing Order 25;

(3) be permitted to participate in counts in Committee of the Whole, notwithstanding Standing Order 44 and Standing Order 44.1;

(4) contribute to constituting quorum in the Legislative Assembly under Standing Order 3 and the *Yukon Act*; and

(5) be considered to have attended the sitting of the Legislative Assembly, with no deduction of indemnity required under subsection 39(5) of the *Legislative Assembly Act*.

*Motion No. 586 agreed to*

#### **Motion No. 587**

**Clerk:** Motion No. 587, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT, for the duration of the 2023 Spring Sitting, if the Legislative Assembly stands adjourned for an indefinite period of time, the Government House Leader and at least one of the other House Leaders together may request that the Legislative Assembly meet virtually by video conference, with all the Members of the Legislative Assembly being able to participate remotely, notwithstanding any current Standing Orders regarding members' physical presence in the Chamber.

*Motion No. 587 agreed to*

#### **Motion No. 588**

**Clerk:** Motion No. 588, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT Standing Order 76 of the Standing Orders of the Yukon Legislative Assembly be amended for the duration of the 2023 Spring Sitting by deleting all instances of the words "Government Bill" and substituting in their place the words "appropriation bill".

**Mr. Kent:** We did have a discussion at House Leaders' about this motion and other ones. We are quite hopeful that these will go to SCREP and have the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges consider especially this one. This is the third Sitting, I believe, where we have introduced this motion on government bills versus government money bills. I am hoping that SCREP can come forward with a report and some changes to the Standing Orders so that we don't have to bring this motion forward again.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Mr. Speaker, at House Leaders', as the Official Opposition House Leader noted, this was raised. I did raise it with my colleague, the chair of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges. I also happen to be on that standing committee. I looked back at the last instance when we met and we had recommended it as a motion. I am happy for us to review that as a standing committee and look forward to what the committee brings forward.

*Motion No. 588 agreed to*

**Speaker:** Government bills.

### **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. Mr. Silver; adjourned debate, Ms. White.

**Ms. White:** It is a pleasure to rise to finish my statements from yesterday. I think, to everyone's relief, I will tell you that I will not go over the first 18 or so minutes of the things I said yesterday, although I will note that I did talk about Vimy Heritage Housing Society having not been previously funded. I believe that the Premier took a little bit of that to heart, so I look forward to him coming back and telling me how I was wrong and how the for-profit is built and the not-for-profit isn't. Anyway, I look forward to that clarification.

One of the things we heard a lot about yesterday — it was actually one of the questions in the scrum — had to do with the Yukon Party's assertion that there was underspending in terms of development and the government's response. I actually want to bring a different lens to this. I think the truth of the matter is that we have reached a point in the territory where we are reaching capacity of our current labour workforce and the abilities that contractors and others have to hire qualified people to be able to do that work. I think this is a real opportunity, and it should come as no surprise to anyone that, as a tradesperson, I believe this is when we should be investing in trades and trades education.

For example, there is nowhere to learn to be an operator here, so if you wanted to operate a piece of heavy equipment, you might be lucky enough to get picked up by a company that

would do that training with you. You might have to go Outside, for example, to Alberta to do that training, but being qualified to drive a piece of heavy equipment is an important job.

It's interesting to note that Highways and Public Works covers thousands of kilometres of Yukon highways in heavy equipment, but when we have asked previously about how many apprentices work for the Yukon government, the number is embarrassingly low. That is a trade. You work, you learn from others, and you develop those skills. There's an opportunity for the Yukon government to step into that void and be part of that training process, to be part of the solutions.

I think there is the ability, right now, to work with the Yukon University and rural campuses. For example, the Yukon University ran a great program up in Old Crow for water delivery. As we all know — we have talked about it lots in this House — Old Crow has struggled with water delivery. Part of that is having qualified, trained people to be able to assist with that work. I think there is a real opportunity to look across the territory for different ways to build that capacity.

The concern — when we just talk about the money and whether or not it is being spent or being budgeted — is whether or not there is actually the capacity to do that work. I think there is a real opportunity to build up the Yukon workforce by speaking with contractors and tradespeople and finding out where the gaps exist in our current labour market and working to fill those. I think that there is an opportunity. It's an opportunity for people in rural communities to get that training through the local Yukon University campuses. There is the opportunity, as we heard yesterday from the Minister of Education — the Yukon University and the women exploring trades and technology program have put a free welding course on at the university. That is fantastic. That is a great opportunity, so I think that there is an opportunity to build up the capacity. So, instead of us talking about what is underspent in the capital budget, we can talk about how there was the capacity within the Yukon to fully embrace what that earmarked spending was — that the companies are ready to take on that work — and I think that this is a real opportunity.

Another thing where there is a difference of opinion between me and the government has to do around the affordability measures that have been taken. I feel so lucky that people come into our offices and they want to share their experiences and their stories. I met this fantastic senior who lives off-grid between Whitehorse and Teslin. He lives off grid, which means that he is not connected to ATCO. He harvests his own firewood and he has a generator backup. So, every affordability measure that was announced — he doesn't qualify. I appreciate that the minister —

**Some Hon. Member:** (Inaudible)

**Ms. White:** He had his turn; it's my turn now.

The truth of the matter is that, if you don't meet the requirements for some of those affordability measures that were announced — let's say that you are in a house and it's a roommate situation. Let's say that it is a family of seven who lives in one house — so maybe \$50 off your utility bill is great, but you have seven people taking showers. I imagine that with a house full of seven, you might actually do it on a rotational

basis — every two days, every three days — because the cost to heat your hot water would be astronomical.

I think that there is a different way to look at affordability and how we tackle that and how we make sure that people are supported. So, I think about this fantastic human who came and shared with me his story and his concerns for his neighbours — the families of four, multiple — all those things. He talked about how you live pretty simply. I heard the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources off-mic talking about senior benefits, but in some cases, the affordability measures that have been announced by this government just don't go far enough. They just don't answer those questions. You know, they don't look at the reality in some cases where people are at and things are at. I think that if we talk about that — we can look to the recent example of the senior couple in Watson Lake who were told that their combined assets are too much for them to go on the housing wait-list.

I appreciate what the Yukon Housing Corporation is trying to do, but I am also concerned that what they are saying is that any senior couple who lives in rural Yukon, who will need to sell their homes and their assets and to rent, will be forced to move into the City of Whitehorse.

Because if we think that the City of Whitehorse has a very small margin of rental properties, looking outside of Whitehorse would give us a whole new understanding of what less than that one-percent vacancy rate is.

So, my concern is that, in trying to address the comments of the Auditor General's office, we're looking at the same lens for every community and that is not the case. In the City of Whitehorse, there are absolutely places to rent, but I would suggest that Watson Lake has a different vacancy rate. Ross River would have a different vacancy rate than even Watson Lake. Every community has those different barriers and those different challenges, and I think that's when sometimes we have to do it on a case-by-case basis.

I think the last thing that I want to touch on today is the substance use emergency or the opioid crisis. The reason I want to talk about that right now is I want the members of the government team to know that, in the media scrum I had, I said that no government could fix this problem on their own — no government. No government alone, no amount of money could fix this alone. I said that if I was in the position and I had put \$100 million toward this, it still wouldn't fix the problem, and that is a hard reality. That's a brutal reality, because I don't doubt for a second in my mind that every person in this Chamber — we're all just trying to support the people in our communities who are struggling. The hard reality is that not a single one of us can fix the problem, because if we could, we would have fixed it by now. I don't doubt that for a second. I don't doubt for a second that if we could fix the problem, if we could stop our family members from dying and our friends from dying, we would have fixed that problem by now.

So, there is the part of me where I always remain hopeful and optimistic. There is the commitment to working with First Nations and rural communities. The new confidence and supply agreement actually has support going to First Nation governments to develop those on-the-land programs, which, of

course, would benefit everyone. So, when we look at a budget like this, there are always going to be good things and there will be shortcomings. We're all going to have a difference on opinion, and I guess, in the Chamber, we're all here because of our opinions.

So, there are some things that I am incredibly pleased to see in the budget. The monthly increase to social assistance rates — I signed an agreement on January 31 but said that there would be \$100 additionally per month on social assistance cheques until that review is done, and I am going to put out here again, and I have before, that my expectation is that it goes back to February. My expectation is that it goes back.

I think that it is really important that, when we look — because it is really critically important that social assistance rates and the entire system actually get revamped. It is so interesting — when I have conversations, even, for example, with the individuals at Da Daghay Development Corporation, who have built great community housing, and they highlight how sometimes their concern is that someone on social assistance — the housing allocation isn't enough to cover the rent, but they don't want to take away from the grocery side because they understand that, if they take away from the grocery side, they are just going to put this person into a tailspin. So, we need to take a look at that. We need to take a look at the cost of housing now compared to what it was when these rates were set.

We need to take into account the cost of food. We all recognize that the cost of food is different across the territory. From your community of Pelly Crossing to the co-op in Old Crow to Superstore in Whitehorse, we know that those prices vary wildly, and it is making sure that those are taken into account when we are looking at those new rates. I know that there is the commitment to do a review of social assistance and those rates, and I think that it is really important, but my expectation is that the \$100 top-up goes back to February, because I signed that document on January 31.

The continuation of the dental program is important, but not only that, I hope that every person in this Chamber understands that Yukon was leading in the country when this decision was made and this program rolled out. I hope that when we all retire out of here and we are all doing other things and dental becomes something that is totally viewed as normal — dental access is normalized — we recognize that it came from here. But I do think that there is an opportunity to expand this program. I know folks in the community who have private insurance, but dental is much lower than \$1,300 per month, and I think that there is an opportunity to look at subsidizing that amount to get it up to \$1,300, because I think that it just makes sense. It just makes sense. If a private plan only covers \$700, then it's \$700 that Yukon government won't have to cover, but it makes more sense than not doing it — making sure that we all have access to that same coverage.

I'm looking forward to having the conversation with the minister either of Education or Health and Social Services about what wellness counsellors in schools look like, because when we talk about youth mental health, we know that this is a

crisis, and we know that there is an opportunity to really support people when we are in the school system.

I think that it is really important that there is money in the budget about the investment in recruitment of health care and rural education professionals, because we have heard how our communities are struggling and how health care is struggling.

I am really pleased to see the investment in rural renewable energy projects, because I have to say that what we are having a conversation about now is far different from the conversations I was having around energy in 2012. I am glad we have moved forward and I'm glad we are talking energy in a different way, because I think that there is also an opportunity.

It was interesting hearing the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources talk about maybe having to look toward grid connection. The truth of the matter is that this might be what our solution has to be. It won't be easy, it won't be cheap, and it won't be fast, but that might be the future. That's not a bad thing, because we have all learned at this point in time that the best laid plans don't always result in the outcomes that we expect, and that is okay too.

Today, in looking at the budget and thinking about where we have come from, where we are, and where we hope to go, I see some of the priorities that I have shared with the Premier and the previous Premier reflected in the budget. I think it's important. Of course, there are things I don't understand. I wonder about the money allocated for golf course irrigation and what that means. I wonder if it goes up to the \$2-million point, and I add up things from the budget speech that are for substance use emergency and it says \$1.4 million. I wonder about that prioritization and what that means.

I am concerned that there is an indication that some programs that I think are very important — critical social safety nets — have been cut back. The NDP put out a statement over our concern about the meal program that was closed down that was being run from the Stop In Family Hotel. The reason why we are concerned is that it may have been started because of COVID, but understanding that the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter doesn't serve dinner to people who are not staying over meant that there were people who were dependent on that food program. We all talk about the importance of affordability and where we are at with that.

I look forward to the budget debate. So far, we have had a couple of briefings and they are always helpful, but I do look forward to the questions and answers with the ministers and their officials in the Chamber. Just as a wrap-up, I would say that this is a different place than it was when I was first elected. I think that is a good thing.

I can say that I have learned in my time here, but my values have remained the same. Sometimes, how I thought we were going to get to a goal maybe has changed, but the outcome has always remained the same.

I thank my colleagues for the time today, and I look forward to those debates, because, in some cases, we will have commonalities and we will have agreement, and sometimes we will disagree and that's okay.

I thank everyone for their time today.

**Ms. Tredger:** This is the first budget we have had since the signing of the second confidence and supply agreement, which I think has shaped a lot of this budget and it is really exciting to see. It has provided a lot of policy decisions that also shape this budget. It is actually some of those policy decisions that I am most excited about from the CASA, and I just want to talk about one of those briefly, which is the end to evictions without cause. That is my single standout, favourite thing in the CASA by far. I am so proud of it. It's a little bit of a bittersweet victory in some ways, because I think about all the people for whom it is too late, but those are also the people who made it happen.

I think about a woman I know named Darlene. I met her because she was being evicted. She's a senior. She had lived in her building for, I think, almost 20 years and had done everything right. She had paid her rent every month, had been a model tenant, and she was being evicted with no reason given. She had to put all her stuff in storage and move in with her daughter and give away all her plants because there was no room for them anymore. She said, "I know it's too late for me. Me speaking out is too late. That's not going to help me, but I hope that, by speaking out, I can help the next person so, from now on, people will feel safe in their homes. They will know they can't be evicted from their homes." I am so proud she did it. She is not the only one. There are many people who have spoken about that — many organizations and individuals — and I am so immensely proud. The next time someone calls our office and says, "My landlord just said I am evicted without a reason. That can't be right, can it?" — instead of what we have had to say for the whole time I have been in office, which is, "I am so sorry, but there is nothing we can do" — we are able to say, "No, you are protected. If your landlord hasn't given you a reason, if you have done everything right, you are safe and secure in your home and you have a right to keep renting there." I am so proud that this is the case.

I wanted to give that context to the budget, because I think it is those exciting policy decisions that have come forward that I think about as we then look at how we are going to spend our money as a territory. There are a lot of things I am really excited about in this budget. I want to talk about some of them.

There has been a lot of progress on fighting climate change and implementing *Our Clean Future*, and I think that is fantastic. I think it is vitally necessary. Those are actions we have to take if we are going to survive. I am so happy to see a lot of movement on that. One that comes to mind in the budget specifically is the money for retrofitting buildings, both government buildings and for individuals retrofitting their homes, as well as supporting other entities to retrofit their buildings. I think that this is amazing. I am so happy that's in the budget.

I think that there are some things in here that are really going to support families. The first thing that comes to mind is the money for early childhood educators and early childhood spaces. It is a huge benefit to families that they are paying so much less every month so that it is actually affordable to have their kids in daycare and that their children are being taught by

people who are making a fair wage. I think that is so important and I'm really excited that it's there.

I am really excited to hear that the sick leave program has been extended. I am excited to debate it because I have lots of questions about what exactly it will look like, but as far as I can tell, people will be able to access sick leave when they need it. That is so important. It is so important for families who have kids who come home every week from daycare with a different bug, and it's important for everyone because we all get sick and we all deserve to have time to recover.

I am really excited about the money for implementing the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls strategy. I am really excited about the events that are going to come out of that and the discussions, movement, and actions. I am really happy to see that there.

I am really excited about the Housing First project that we were talking about yesterday in the ministerial statement — the building in Watson Lake. I love the principles of Housing First. I think they are so important and that people deserve housing before anything else. Housing is what helps people be successful in so many other ways. I am really excited that this is being embraced in this building going forward.

I am really excited to see ongoing funding for the supervised consumption site. That came from the first CASA. That, of course, is in my riding. I actually live right across the street from the supervised consumption site. I can look out my bedroom window and see it. I have to say that they are phenomenal neighbours. It makes me so happy to know that there is this place in the community where people can go and where overdoses are reversed and lives are being saved every day. At the same time, they are a phenomenal neighbour and I think that they do such a good job.

I want to talk a little bit about the issues that are on the minds of the constituents in my riding and that I've been hearing about. The number one issue that I hear about in my riding is Whitehorse Elementary School. Of course, last year, the government announced that it was being moved to Takhini — that their new school would be built there — and the fate of Whitehorse Elementary School has been a little bit unclear.

I did some outreach last summer. I did a town hall, talked to a lot of people, and got a lot of e-mails. I heard from many, many people talking about how important this was to them. The quote that always stands out in my mind when I think about this is: "A community without a school is a dying community." I think that is my biggest fear for my riding right now — is that without a school, it will become a dying community.

I think about some of the other concerns that people have downtown, and I think they are really linked to a school. So, people worry about break-ins in businesses; people worry about crime and feeling unsafe. I think that having an elementary school, making it a place where families want to live, is part of making it a healthy, vibrant, safe community. My fear is that if we move things like schools out of downtown, people will follow. Homes will move out of downtown, and downtown will turn into a ghost town that shuts down after 5:00 p.m. when everyone goes home and then become a place where people do feel very unsafe because there is no one around.

That's not the future I want for my riding. That's not the future my constituents want. If we want a vibrant neighbourhood, that means we need it to be a place for everyone, and that includes children, and if we want it to include children, it has to include schools.

I know a lot of people in my riding have been speaking up about this, and the message has been to save this conversation for later when there will be a consultation. You know, everyone understands that Whitehorse Elementary is a very, very old school and it needs to be replaced; I think everyone gets that. But what people are asking for is a commitment that, as these decisions are made and as schools are replaced and rebuilt, there will still be an elementary school downtown.

So, I'm bringing that forward today again, because the Downtown Residents' Association has identified this as their number one priority. There has to be an elementary school downtown.

I'm going to move on from that to talk a little bit about some of my portfolios and some of the things that I am concerned about in the budget.

One of those is the funding for women's organizations in the territory. So, there was a letter sent to the Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate on February 28. It was sent by the majority of the women's organizations in the Yukon, and they talked about what their funding was and what they needed. In particular, I'm thinking about the organizations that are funded through the women's equality fund. So, I'm thinking of Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, Yukon Status of Women Council, Les EssentiElles, and Yukon Women in Trades, because those organizations receive really very little money in core funding. Three of them receive \$49,000 a year. That's less than what it costs to fund one position.

That means that they don't even have a single position that they have core funding for, never mind things like a space, phones, and all the costs of doing business. They don't even have enough money for one single position through their core funding. I have had this conversation before, a couple of times, with the minister in budget debate. She has pointed out that there is project funding available, and I agree; there is. But it is an enormous burden on an organization to constantly be chasing projects and funding and pots of money just to pay your ED, never mind to actually run your space. It is a huge burden and it is not what they should be doing with their time. We have incredibly talented people in these positions working for these organizations, and I want to see them using their time to do the work that we are asking them to do — to provide support to the communities and find ways to move us closer to equality. I don't want their time to be spent writing funding applications.

I was disappointed to see that fund stay the same, and I hope that the minister will consider the letter that she received and really look at whether there is room in the supplementary budget to meet some of these funding requests to make sure that these organizations can keep doing the essential work they are doing.

I also noticed that the funding for Queer Yukon Society has decreased in this budget, and what particularly concerns me

about that is that last year it decreased and then this year it has decreased again, and that is a trend. At this point, we have a trend downwards, and that really worries me. Is it going to decrease again next year? I know that they had upfront costs three years ago when they moved into their space, and it makes sense to me that those costs aren't ongoing, but is this trend going to continue — that they receive less and less funding each year? I hope not, because they are doing really incredible work. They are providing an enormous array of services to the community, and I think that it is very valuable and I hope that we can value it by making space for it in our budget.

I have some questions about environment funding from the Department of Environment, in particular, Mae Bachur animal society, which does the majority of the animal rescue and protection in the Yukon. They are our shelter for Whitehorse. They take animals from communities across the Yukon, and their funding has, I think, increased very slightly, but not anywhere near enough to meet the demands of the work that they are doing. I had the pleasure of touring their facility last year. They do incredible work, but they do it on a shoestring budget. It is not cheap to provide veterinary care for animals, and they just do a remarkable job of making it happen and they deserve the money to make it happen well and without stress.

I was also surprised that I didn't see any new positions for supporting the implementation of the *Animal Protection Act* that we debated last Sitting. They might be in there somewhere; I haven't seen it. I haven't had the Environment briefing yet, but we talked a lot about how important that act was and how important the implementation of that act was and that it would require more bodies on the ground, and I don't see that.

I want to finish by talking a bit about housing and some of the decisions that have been made. I am thinking about the funding for Normandy Manor. I am thinking of the selling off of the Macaulay Lodge lot. I am thinking of the selling off of 5<sup>th</sup> and Rogers. These decisions paint a picture for me — a decision to privatize social housing. Instead of Yukon Housing using those spaces to build social housing that they run and that they use to support vulnerable people, they are handing them off to the private sector. I think that is a mistake. We have a limited amount of public land, and we can't make more of it when we decide we want to build our next Yukon Housing development. So, when I see the government off-loading it like this, I really worry if there is going to be another Yukon Housing development in Whitehorse. Is the government intending to stay in the business of housing vulnerable people? I worry that the answer is no. I worry that they are hoping that the private sector will do that, and I think that is a huge mistake.

A company's ultimate goal is profits, and that is what they are meant to do. That is what they are made to do, and that doesn't mean they can't provide good housing and support people, but it is not their mandate. Their mandate is to make profits. The government's mandate is to provide support to the people who need it most — to the vulnerable populations. I think they can do that best. I think they are the ones who can do it well, and I really worry that we are moving away from that mandate.



I am sure there is lots more to say on that subject. I am sure we will have many more conversations about it, but I want to finish my budget reply with the hope that we don't privatize our government services, that we as a public look after each other, that as a public we provide housing, that as a public and as a government we take care of the people in our society who are the most vulnerable.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I am happy to rise in the Yukon Legislative Assembly today to speak to the 2023-24 budget. This budget captures our government's vision for the territory. It is a vision for the Yukon that is affordable, recognizing the difficult financial times that Yukoners are facing.

Our vision for the Yukon includes investments in our environment, taking seriously the responsibility to care for our world for the generations to come. It is also a vision for the Yukon that places people at the centre of our health and social services systems, investing in those who need it. My vision for the Yukon is a place where anyone who is born here or comes here cannot only succeed but thrive. There are not many places left in the world where that is true. The Yukon, thanks to the work and vision of those who came before us and the work that we are here today to do, can remain a place where everyone is welcome, where everyone can find opportunities, and where everyone can succeed. The Yukon can and should be somewhere that we all have a place to call home. There are a number of stories Yukoners have shared with me in which this is true.

I think about my own history in the territory as an example of this, coming to the Yukon approximately 25 years ago and having an opportunity to be able to create a life that was built on an ability to work hard and look for opportunities. It didn't matter at that time what your last name was, but it was what you were going to bring to the table, what you were going to contribute to your community, what you were going to do to support your fellow Yukoners. My vision — our government's vision — for the territory is one that supports Yukoners to achieve their goals. We are making significant investments across the board in this budget to continue to make this vision a reality.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my neighbours for electing me as MLA for Porter Creek South as I now enter my seventh year in government. I am incredibly honoured to be the representative of this wonderful riding. Over the past seven years, I have served as the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, Minister of Economic Development, Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation, Yukon Energy Corporation, and when I was re-elected in 2021, I was privileged to continue my work as the Minister of Economic Development. I also took on the role of Minister of Tourism and Culture, Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation, Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation, and Minister responsible for the Yukon Lottery Commission. I served as Deputy Premier for the first four and a half years of my term in government. This January, I was sworn in as Yukon's 10<sup>th</sup> Premier — the territory's first

premier to be a person from a minority background and our country's second.

Now, why do I bring this up? Well, I bring this up because part of the decision-making process to put my name forward was based on a conversation by the Yukon River with my son about three weeks before I announced that I would seek this opportunity. It was a conversation mulling over the facts, the pros and cons, and the pressures and opportunities of taking on such a job. What he said to me was that not many people from your background get an opportunity to do this type of work. When you go back inside Canadian history, there is only one person from a minority background in the entire country who has ever had a chance to be a premier, and that was in British Columbia. He said, "It is important that you do this, because other people with diverse backgrounds and minority backgrounds have to understand that these types of opportunities can be achieved and that there is not a ceiling, yet if you work hard and take on these opportunities and have the support of special people and incredible colleagues, you get to do this work."

I mention that today because my colleagues — each and every one of them — supported me, sacrificed some of their work and probably interests. They did that as friends and as colleagues. In turn, we now — for those who may be listening today who come from a diverse background — understand that opportunities like this are possible in this country. It is incredible that there have only been two situations in the history of this country, but for anyone who comes from a minority background, they need to know that these opportunities are here for them. I wanted to share some of those thoughts with you today.

My experience over the past seven years as minister responsible for these portfolios that I outlined has taught me a lot. It has also provided me with a solid, practical education in the ways that government impacts Yukoners across a number of sectors. I have worked hard on behalf of Yukoners, no matter the role I occupy. Whether it be through experience working with Yukon's mining sector or working with hard-working Yukon organizations receiving community development fund grants, I am here to work hard on behalf of Yukoners to continue to make the Yukon the best place in the world to live.

As many Yukoners will also know, before joining government, I worked in the private sector. I will also tip my hat to my colleague across the aisle here, as there are two party leaders in this House who have actually owned small businesses and operated small businesses, and the other being the Leader of the Third Party. These are things that we took into consideration in our work over the month of January.

In 2015, I had the opportunity to become executive director of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations government, and the incredible work of Yukon's First Nation governments is something for which I have profound respect. It is amazing to see the impacts of their hard work and the hard work of those who came before us, such as the delegation responsible for *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* and how it has changed the lives of all Yukoners for the better.

Together, we strive for a fair and just future where First Nation people are equal in Yukon society, economy, and government. This is a goal that continues to inspire me and the work that our government is undertaking every day. As I have heard others say, reconciliation is a path, not a destination. I am committed to walking that path with our government and Yukon First Nations.

This January, I was sworn in as Yukon's 10<sup>th</sup> Premier. My first 50 days at the helm — 53 days now — have been busy, and I am happy to report back to Yukoners on how these 50 days and the last seven years have informed me of our government's priorities.

First, I will state for the record the last 53 days, Mr. Speaker, as a snapshot of some of the work that has been undertaken — structured internal meetings inside the Cabinet and bilateral discussions with other departments, I have undertaken 85 meetings. Meetings external with other outlying groups — there have been 47 meetings, 48 including today. I have attended 22 events where I have either spoken or taken a significant part in. I have concluded 37 media interviews. I have met with all of the premiers in Canada, the Premier of Manitoba twice, the northern premiers in meetings four times, and the Council of the Federation four times.

As well, I have had an opportunity to take part in a retreat with my colleagues and have had eight separate meetings with federal officials while negotiating the final pieces of Canada's health care transfer in Ottawa.

Also, as highlighted, I was proud to attend the grand opening of 47 new, affordable homes for Yukoners at 401 Jeckell Street. I was honoured to be part of the Government of Yukon's long service award ceremony, recognizing some of Yukon's hardest working public servants who work tirelessly and often with little in the way of recognition to draft policy, regulations, and even the budget documents that we are discussing today.

I participated in a number of formal meetings, speaking opportunities, and working with First Nations, including the Council of First Nations, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, and the Carcross/Tagish First Nation. I had multiple meetings with the Ross River Dena Council, a number of community organizations, as well as consuls general from Ireland, Japan, and India.

On January 21, I also had the opportunity to attend the Chinese New Year celebration where a number of long-time, multi-generational Yukoners were in attendance. It was an absolutely beautiful event. As well, another event I attended was the recent solidarity with Ukraine vigil in Whitehorse. I know that everyone in this place agrees — all of us — that we stand united in support of Ukraine and Ukrainians.

I was also honoured to speak at the 10<sup>th</sup> annual African Music Festival, and our government believes strongly in a diverse Yukon, one that welcomes people from all over the world to come work and be proud to call our magnificent territory home.

Also, I would like to highlight that I had an opportunity to attend Yukon Night at the AME Roundup mining conference

in Vancouver. As always, it was extremely well-attended. I think it was another sold-out event.

On my first day on the job, I committed to defending the interests of Yukoners and I spoke publicly against the proposed amendments to Bill C-21 for the negative impacts they would have on law-abiding firearms owners in the territory — especially hunters and trappers.

I will also continue to advocate on behalf of Yukoners for investments in our health care system that will help us implement the *Putting People First* report. This report is the road map to creating a health and social system that better serves the needs of Yukoners. This will involve fundamentally transforming the future of our health care delivery model in the Yukon.

Moving the Yukon forward on clean energy is another area that I have committed to working on, on behalf of Yukoners. In late January, I met with British Columbia Premier David Eby to discuss the future of the Yukon's grid connection to British Columbia. I have attended school council meetings as Premier but also as a parent. I believe that it is important to understand the challenges and realities facing schools and education professionals here in the Yukon today.

I will continue to support and listen to the business community. I was honoured again to speak at the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours event at the beginning of February, as well as the Premier's luncheon with Yukon chambers last week. I spent time in my office last weekend, on Sunday, meeting with business leaders, and again, I can state that when we finished our session last night, I also continued to have those discussions, understanding the pressures and opportunities to work with the business community.

Alongside that, I have met with the Yukon First Nation Chamber of Commerce, the Yukon Chamber of Commerce, and the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce. As well, I met with the Yukon Contractors Association to understand their priorities and concerns. I have also met with the Canadian institute of business and the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

I believe this outreach to business is what made our recent budget so appealing to local businesses, large and small. There were no changes to business taxes. We continue to have the small business tax rate at zero percent. I am proud that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the CFIB, said that they appreciate that our 2023-24 budget delivers stability for small businesses at a time when many are still feeling stressed and uncertain about the future of the economy.

I also want to pause here to highlight some of what the Secretary-Treasurer of the Yukon First Nation Chamber of Commerce said about our budget in a recent interview with CBC. She said, "There's definitely some good news, for sure... There's no question in my mind whatsoever that the Premier knows that there is a housing crisis and I think that there is a lot of work he's putting into affordable housing." They also added — and this is something I am very proud to hear: "50 years ago, when the chiefs went to Ottawa to present *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow*, it was to try to pass a better path

for ... the territory as a whole, and I do believe that this budget is a step in that direction.”

Back to my previous point, since taking the office of Premier, I have travelled to Ottawa to meet with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to discuss health care funding. The Prime Minister visited the Yukon shortly thereafter, and we continue these discussions on a bilateral level. It was also very touching again to see the son and grandson of Pierre Trudeau meeting with the descendants of those original chiefs who went to Ottawa as part of the *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* delegation.

During his visit, we were able to meet and show him some of the innovation investments that we are proud of here in the Yukon, like NorthLight Innovation. In fact, I have attended 24 meetings in total with municipal, territorial, provincial, and federal partners. This includes the Deputy Prime Minister and federal Finance Minister, Chrystia Freeland, with whom, again, I discussed investing in critical minerals, job creation, and the importance of infrastructure for the north. I look forward to this strong working relationship moving forward.

I also met with the federal Minister of Northern Affairs, Dan Vandal, to continue discussions around critical mineral opportunities here in the Yukon and we discussed potential future projects, like Casino mine and Fireweed Metals corporation's acquisition of the tungsten project on the North Canol. Part of that discussion included supporting First Nations in their ability to interact with the private sector in ensuring that projects are built on a proper foundation of respect.

Supporting the Canadian Rangers and the issue of Arctic security is also something I raised with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence in meetings. I invited the Minister of National Defence, Anita Anand, to visit with Yukon First Nation leaders to discuss Arctic policy and further advance defence infrastructure, and she and I were in close contact in the days following the NORAD activities over our territory.

Yukon also hosted the federal Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Dominic LeBlanc, and federal Minister of Health, Jean-Yves Duclos, to discuss our bilateral health agreement. In this meeting, I underscored the importance of addressing the unique challenges of health care delivery in the Yukon and the importance of northern-specific investments to meet those unique needs.

I'm committed to an open working relationship with leaders in the Yukon and have met with not only the Prime Minister and the federal ministers but our Member of Parliament, our Senator, Whitehorse city councillors, and the Association of Yukon Communities. When I was in Ottawa during those meetings, I also had an opportunity to host a small get-together attended by a number of Whitehorse city councillors, the Mayor of Whitehorse, as well as the president of the Association of Yukon Communities, and both chiefs who represent First Nations here in Whitehorse — Ta'an Kwäch'än Council as well as Kwanlin Dün First Nation. It was an opportunity to bring leaders together while we were there and

to talk about their priorities and also to share the work that we are all up to while in Ottawa that particular week.

These meetings are important ways to keep our lines of communication open and discuss the realities, challenges, and opportunities for Yukoners. These are just some of the things I have been up to for the first 53 days as Premier. Conversations with Yukoners — all of which inform this government's financial and policy decisions — to continue to work to ensure the Yukon is a place we can all call home.

What does that mean concretely? It means taking real steps and investing real dollars into ensuring that life in the Yukon is more affordable, and that starts with addressing the impacts of inflation on Yukon families and businesses. As our Finance minister indicated in the budget speech, we are investing \$10 million of this budget toward inflation relief measures. What this means for Yukoners is an investment of \$5.3 million to extend the inflation rebate on our utility bills. For Yukoners who heat their homes with wood, we have invested \$300,000 in this budget to offset timber harvesting and business costs and boost Yukon's fuelwood supply.

This government continues to invest in our vulnerable population. Yukon seniors will receive, as I talked about in Question Period today, an increase of \$800,000 to their income supplement. We continue to increase our investments in seniors through organizations like the Signpost Seniors association in Watson Lake and through investments in supportive housing like the \$1.6 million allocated to Normandy Living. We believe in taking care of those who came before us: our parents and our grandparents.

This government also believes in investing in the leaders of tomorrow. This budget contains an investment of \$280 million in education. This means supporting our students, whether through a \$500,000 investment in the food in schools program, \$27.3 million for new schools and upgrades to existing schools, or the \$1 million we are investing for the recruitment and retention of rural education professionals. Investing in our youth is an investment in the Yukon.

As Premier responsible for the Executive Council Office, I am proud that this budget also contains funding to support youth programs and services that promote wellness and allow youth to reach their full potential. This investment comes through in the form of funding to the Youth Directorate and the youth program funding.

As many Yukoners know, sport is another essential way we support and are investing in the well-being of our youth. We believe that healthy choices and healthy lifestyles can be encouraged through investments in the area of recreation and sport. That is why this budget contains over \$6 million in investments for sports and recreation in the Yukon. Yukoners will see this investment through programs supported and funded through Sport Yukon and the community recreation and active living funds.

This budget not only supports and celebrates the success of Yukoners but also takes real steps to address some of the difficulties that Yukoners are facing. I have already spoke about the inflation relief measures that this budget contains. We are also tackling the challenge of housing.

This budget contains significant investments in increasing Yukon's available housing stock from the ground up. We are investing \$25.9 million in land development. This budget also contains an \$8.2-million investment in programs to assist Yukoners with land and housing development, as well as with home ownership. This budget contains investments in housing projects across the Yukon with \$22.4 million for housing projects in Dawson City, Watson Lake, and Teslin. We are investing an additional \$8.7 million in funding to build affordable housing and supporting the development of community housing and \$3.9 million in subsidies and supports for renters across the territory. The availability and affordability of housing in the Yukon is something that we are addressing.

I would like to take a moment as well today to address some of the investments that we are making to support our work on mental health for Yukoners. This is an area that touches all Yukoners' lives. We are investing in infrastructure for mental wellness, with \$10 million to \$15 million for the creation of the mental wellness unit at the Whitehorse General Hospital. We are also investing another \$1 million for additional mental health supports for youth. Investing in mental wellness helps Yukoners today and tomorrow, but we all know that Yukoners are still facing the consequences of an unprecedented substance use health emergency. This budget continues investments in responding to that emergency. This budget contains \$25.7 million for mental wellness and substance use services.

I will take the opportunity now to just address something from the Leader of the Third Party. Most Yukoners know that we have funding agreements with the federal government for particular areas of investment. Sometimes it is for roads and bridges, sometimes it is for horizontal services for municipalities, and sometimes it is for recreation. I just want to politely clarify that, when we invest in trails for biking or we invest in an irrigation system that has been talked about for a golf course or we invest in a new arena in a community, that has usually been earmarked from infrastructure money.

I think that with respect to the people who are working in health and social services and for the NGOs we work with, to minimize the investment and work of those individuals and compare it to the infrastructure at a golf course, I think, is a bit of — politely saying — a broad brush. Again, I just want to touch on the fact that we have \$25.7 million for mental wellness and substance use services. Many of us in the Yukon have been touched at personal levels by people we have lost because of the substance use crisis. We take this work extremely seriously, and we believe that this is a priority.

If you go back to the mandate letters that I have provided to my colleagues, you will see that I have specifically outlined in those mandate letters the fact that we have to, as a government, work with sensitivity and empathy and understand the Yukoners from all walks of life who are going through extremely difficult times.

With the work we are doing with this budget, we will support land-based healing, support the new Car 867, support an opioid overdose prevention team, make naloxone available

across the Yukon, and fund several NGO partners, including Blood Ties Four Directions.

This budget also includes \$660,000 for additional mental wellness and substance use services to continue supporting some of Yukon's most vulnerable people. It commits \$250,000 to address the substance use crisis among youth. It also commits \$279,000 to ensure a safe supply of opioids for those on the front lines of the crisis. As well, it invests \$217,000 to the RCMP for substance use emergency response.

When I look at this \$1.94 billion budget in totality, I see one that invests in building a resilient Yukon through responsible spending. We will stimulate the economy and continue the strong growth that we see in our territory. I am proud of the fact, again, that our GDP is experiencing strong growth and that we continue to have the lowest unemployment rate in Canada.

When I look at this budget, I see our vision where every Yukoner can thrive. We are building a Yukon where everyone has a place to call home, and I want to thank the Minister of Finance and all the hard-working people in the Finance department for this budget.

I would like to thank those from the opposition who have spoken primarily, I guess, to critique our budget, but I still have great respect for members of the opposition — for both opposition parties. Although some of the comments come more as attacks on our budget, I think that there have been some ideas and comments that were made. I think that, while I have an opportunity to be in this role, I would like us to be in a position where we have more debate on concepts. I know that both the Third Party and the Official Opposition in the 2020-21 budget had a number of ideas that I had an opportunity to look at and hear about that were, I think, some good ideas for Yukoners. So, I hope that maybe from time to time here in the Assembly, we can debate on a Wednesday not just political "I gotcha" motions, but concepts and ideas. I remember the Official Opposition had a few different items around housing and ensuring that Yukoners who grew up here and were coming back from their university education would have priority in being able to access different housing solutions, and I would like to be able to come back into the House on Wednesday and debate a motion maybe on something like that — where we could get a more fulsome idea. I think that those are really good ideas that can come from the other side of the House and that we can hopefully action those items once we have a better sense of what they are.

I say this in a respectful manner — I know that there has been a dialogue around: Is there a vision here? Are there ideas here? Look, I think there are lots of ideas from all sides of the House. I know that we have been able to bring our ideas into very succinct plans — *Putting People First, Our Clean Future*, and our MMIWG strategy, which is really about bringing dignity back to people who have gone through some of the most difficult times. I think about where we are on our renewable energy work. I think about where we are on cultural creators and our gig economy and part of the work that was led by Tourism and Culture. I think about the tourism strategy; I think about our innovation strategy that is about to come out; I think

about our immigration strategy that is about to come out and all of that work that really lays out a vision for our government but also an opportunity to have a sense of where the Yukon can go.

We'll see what happens in our Wednesday dialogue and our discussions and also potential ideas that will be spurred out through our Committee debates as we go through our budget.

I would like to thank my colleagues for their support and their patience with me over the last number of weeks and their ability to give me a chance to take on this role. It's not an easy transition, I am sure, for them from time to time. They have been extremely kind — and the same with the public servants and the Cabinet team as well as those in the Executive Council Office whom I now get to work with.

Specifically, before closing, I just want to thank a couple of department officials. I want to thank the team at Economic Development. Today, there has been some dialogue about the Skagway port. The work that has been done by the members of Economic Development — the deputy minister, the assistant deputy minister, and the director, as well as policy team members — I will leave them as silent heroes — is an example of the best possible work, in my mind, that public servants can do. They undertook a very difficult task over the last number of years to identify a future solution that would not only meet the needs of the Yukon as we see it now but into the future. There was a challenge coming down the road for us. It has been known for decades that there would be a conclusion of a lease in Skagway, and our team, over the last week, have been able to go down, do a tremendous amount of work, do it across international lines, and look at very technical work. A vote was just concluded by the Skagway municipal government, and it approved a draft plan that could secure tidewater for Yukon private sector companies for 35 years with a potential extension of 15 more — for 50 years, or half a century. It was supported and passed.

Also during that time, those officials supported me to meet with the US Ambassador to Canada as well as federal ministers to come up with different financing solutions that we could be entertaining so that when money has to flow in 2024, we will be in a position to have support from Canada on this work that's really not just about the Yukon private sector, but it's really about all of Canada. It's about critical minerals; it's about the future of the economy of Yukon, Canada and where this country is going to go and our solutions and contributions to strategies around climate change.

As well, the housing team that has worked very diligently to finish projects and to move people in on a number of projects to conclude on the housing side — I want to thank them as well.

The team at Executive Council Office where I have asked for some different thoughts on looking at things — one of them is the idea of an advisory group when it comes to Arctic security where it can be populated with subject matter experts such as academics and others who can help inform us as well as inform Yukoners on some of the key things that we should keep in mind as things across the world, from a geopolitical standpoint, start to evolve. So, we will be happy to come back and report on that work as well.

With that, I will cede the floor, and again, thank you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly for the work they do on behalf of Yukoners.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Thank you for the opportunity to rise again to speak to the 2023-24 budget. I am pleased to speak about these important investments to you today and through you to all Yukoners on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. I would like to begin by thanking all of the remarkable public servants who have been involved in the strong work of bringing this budget together. I am pleased to continue for another budget season as Yukon's Minister of Finance. Part of what makes this role so enjoyable and satisfying are the many impressive folks who do work in all departments, but in the Department of Finance specifically. I say this every year, but they are incredibly professional individuals and they care deeply about the Yukon. We are far, far better off because of the wealth of knowledge and wisdom that they bring to the table to support all of our elected officials.

Thank you to the outgoing deputy minister, Scott Thompson, and also to my new deputy minister, Jessica Schultz, and all of the tremendous professionals who work on the Finance team. Your hard work has not only been noticed, but also, you should be very, very proud. I know I am very proud of the accomplishments.

The 2023-24 fiscal and economic outlook that I presented last week updated the expectations of the Yukon's finances and economy since the release of the interim 2022-23 update in October 2022. The 2023-24 surplus is forecasted at \$48.2 million, with a projected year-end net debt of \$374.8 million, primarily due to our investments in infrastructure across the territory. A surplus in the fiscal framework provides the ability to make in-year investments in order to address unexpected events without risking going into deficit.

Operation and maintenance expenditures are expected to increase by \$35 million, or 2.2 percent, from the 2022-23 main estimates. The increase in spending is related to tackling affordability issues, strengthening the Yukon's health care system, and addressing the Yukon's substance use emergency. O&M spending is focused on reducing Yukon's greenhouse gas emissions as part of the *Our Clean Future* strategy.

We have also included a \$50-million contingency in the financial framework to respond to anticipated additional expenditures during the year without impacting our financial position.

Capital spending will continue our commitment of investing in Yukon's infrastructure for the benefit of Yukoners now and also well into the future. The capital budget includes funding for affordable housing, land development, energy-focused projects as part of the *Our Clean Future* strategy, and also transportation infrastructure.

The economic outlook remains positive, with a strong labour market leading to job growth and low unemployment. The Yukon led the country in real GDP growth in both 2020 and 2021, with 2021's increase of 10 percent the strongest in over a decade. The current forecast has the pace of real GDP growth returning to more normal levels, with growth estimated at 3.1 percent in 2022. Increased mineral production and the continued recovery of the tourism sector are key contributing factors to real GDP growth forecasts of 5.4 percent in 2023 and 3.7 percent in 2024. Continued recovery of the tourism sector and strong mineral production supports a positive outlook, with average growth of 3.7 percent growing through 2025 to 2027.

A strong demand for labour and increased economy activity spurred growth in the labour force and also employment — both reaching record highs in 2022. While up from recent lows, an unemployment rate projected in the neighbourhood of five percent remains relatively low and should continue to be one of the lowest in Canada.

The inflation rate in Whitehorse averaged 6.8 percent in 2022, identical with the national inflation rate — the highest annual increase since records began in 1982. Inflation remains higher than anticipated, but is expected to moderate with the stabilization of energy prices, improvements to global supply chains, and an increase in interest rates that are beginning to absorb excess demand in the Canadian economy.

Measures taken by the Government of Yukon, such as payments to Yukoners on social assistance and Yukon seniors income supplement recipients and a monthly credit on household power bills, were welcome news to all Yukoners but especially to those struggling to make ends meet.

While remaining relatively strong, there are signs that the local housing market may start to cool, as it has in other parts of Canada. This budget includes investments in new and expanded health services, as outlined in *Putting People First*, which was our government's comprehensive review of the Yukon's health and services programs. These include responding to the substance use emergency and funding to strengthen the Yukon's health care system. It also demonstrates this government's commitment to making strategic investments in Yukon's infrastructure while supporting the territory's green economy with significant investment in delivering on commitments outlined in *Our Clean Future*, which our Yukon Liberal government developed in partnership with Yukon First Nations, transboundary Indigenous groups, and Yukon municipalities over the course of three years.

Many of the budget items reflect priorities outlined in our Liberal government's 2021 mandate, and while a lot has changed since then, one thing has not: the importance of these commitments in meeting the needs of Yukoners today and setting up the Yukon for a prosperous tomorrow.

While I take immense pride in this budget as the Minister of Finance, I also take a lot of pride in the position that I have held since 2011, which is the MLA for Klondike for my hometown of Dawson City. Since my announcement last fall about my future as an elected official here in the Yukon, I have been so pleased to be able to spend a lot more time in my

community — inviting myself over for dinner to a whole bunch of different houses.

As the MLA for Klondike, it has been an honour to see strong investments in my community, from the modular addition to Robert Service School — that was completed on budget, I will add — in the 2022-23 year that has provided, since January, four new classrooms to support students at the school that I used to teach at, to a new duplex scheduled to begin construction in 2023-24, as well as recent investments in a lagoon, a reservoir, water and waste-water upgrades downtown, half a billion dollars' investment to the north Klondike road construction, and the investment in Dawson's upcoming recreation centre. It's heartening to see my community continue to be invested in by this government.

Gone are the days of Dawson City being forgotten or taken for granted by the government in power. That was Dawson's reality under the former Yukon Party government. I love seeing my community growing and thriving further, bolstered by the support of the territorial government. My deepest thanks and gratitude to local leaders in my riding, both at the municipal and First Nation levels, for working with the territorial government to ensure that our community can utilize all opportunities for growth that present themselves.

Mr. Speaker, thank you also to my colleagues who rose in the House, either yesterday or this afternoon, to speak to this budget. I was pleased to hear my Liberal colleagues stand and speak to the investments of this budget in their respective departments, as well as in their home communities and constituencies. That engagement made me proud — proud of the team that I used to lead and that I'm honoured to still be a part of.

I would also like to thank the Member for Lake Laberge for rising to speak to this year's budget and for his engagement and comments. I wish I could say the same about more colleagues across the way in the Yukon Party, but the Member for Lake Laberge was the only Yukon Party MLA to share his thoughts on the budget in the second reading. I will choose to interpret that silence maybe as a support and endorsement for our 2023-24 budget, but I guess we'll have to wait to see that.

My thanks, as well, to our colleagues in the New Democratic Party for their comments in second reading, their support of budgets in the past couple of years, and their support for this one.

I also extend my thanks to the Leader of the Third Party for the work that she and I achieved together in the first half of the mandate as we worked together to achieve great things for Yukoners, and I wish her well as she engages in similar hard work with the new Premier.

Mr. Speaker, despite the Member for Lake Laberge's statements around fiscal responsibility in this budget and fiscal responsibility of our team, I can share that this government, under new and old leadership, is getting positive reactions and reactions that they do deserve.

It is a government that retained its double A stable credit rating from Standard & Poor's this year as a result of a strong history of fiscal management in producing solid and stable financial results for the territory. The Yukon government also

received the second highest grade of all provinces and territories in the latest C.D. Howe Institute's assessment on financial transparency of budget materials and financial statements. These national organizations realize that responsible borrowing is part of strong fiscal management of a government. It helps with the preservation of capital, the liquidity management as well, and also returns on investment. These organizations also realize that most of the actual borrowing on our books is from the former Yukon Party government.

I would also note that responsible borrowing should not be confused with net debt. Net debt is the measure of a government's ability to pay off all its liabilities if they were due immediately. That does not mean that the government needs to necessarily borrow these funds. The majority of the net debt is for long-term liabilities and will not materialize all at once — for example, severance entitlements. We continue to actively monitor, of course, and review our financial position as it relates to the management of government operations. We continue to learn every year, as well. This allows us to plan ahead and ensure sustainable and effective capital spending to meet the territory's infrastructure needs.

We have chosen to use our financial assets to invest in the future of Yukon, to spend on roads, bridges, schools, and health facilities, to grow our economy, and to provide vital public services. These investments in infrastructure and services improve the lives of all Yukoners living in our territory.

So, despite the members' concerns, the Yukon Liberal government continues to invest in making lives more affordable for Yukoners and we continue to do it very responsibly.

Mr. Speaker, I have seen a number of budgets over my decade-plus as an MLA. As Minister of Finance and as an opposition MLA, I have seen many locally here in the Yukon, but I have also had eyes across the country in territories and provinces as well as federal budgets. I have seen what makes a flashy budget. I have seen budgets that leave you very skeptical, but what I have learned is that you need a budget that balances strong, sustainable investment plans with fiscal responsibility. That is this kind of budget.

It has measures that make lives more affordable for Yukoners. It invests in transportation infrastructure, in land development, in housing, in education, in health care, as well as in community and First Nation infrastructure. It continues to deliver on our commitments outlined in *Putting People First* and *Our Clean Future* while all along practising the fiscal restraints that this Yukon Liberal government's budgets are known for.

**Speaker:** Are you prepared for the question?

**Some Hon. Member:** Division.

### Division

**Speaker:** Division has been called.

### Bells

**Speaker:** Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Agree.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Agree.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Agree.

**Mr. Dixon:** Disagree.

**Mr. Kent:** Disagree.

**Ms. Clarke:** Disagree.

**Mr. Cathers:** Disagree.

**Ms. McLeod:** Disagree.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Disagree.

**Mr. Hassard:** Disagree.

**Mr. Istchenko:** Disagree.

**Ms. White:** Agree.

**Ms. Tredger:** Agree.

**Clerk:** Mr. Speaker, the results are nine yea, eight nay.

**Speaker:** The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

*Motion for second reading of Bill No. 208 agreed to*

### Bill No. 209: *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2023-24* — Second Reading

**Clerk:** Second reading, Bill No. 209, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver.

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 209, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2023-24*, be now read a second time.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 209, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2023-24*, be now read a second time.

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** I rise today to speak in support of Bill No. 209, otherwise known as the *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2023-24*. If passed, this bill will provide spending authority for the first two months of the fiscal year. As with previous years, this funding will ensure that this government has the necessary appropriations to fund the programs and services that Yukoners expect and rely upon, as members debate the main estimates in this Assembly. The 2023-24 interim supply bill will grant spending authority to departments for the months of April and May while this process is underway.

The total value of the *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2023-24* is approximately \$450.2 million. This includes \$353.6 million in operation and maintenance spending and there is \$96.6 million in capital spending.

Mr. Speaker, the main estimates for 2023-24 show a government continuing to invest in the health and well-being of Yukoners while supporting individuals, families, and the needs of communities across the territory to help make lives more affordable for Yukoners. It also shows continued progress on key priorities for this government, including the advancement of our commitments outlined in *Putting People First* and *Our Clean Future*.

Our investments and continued response to the substance use emergency and funding to strengthen the Yukon's health

care system will benefit the health of Yukoners in our territory, while affordability measures will tackle affordability issues and mitigate how inflation is impacting Yukoners.

This interim supply bill supports governments as we begin this work and it provides critical operation funding in order to allow departments to meet their financial obligation at the start of the fiscal year. The bill ensures that government services continue and that the employees, Yukon businesses, and government contractors continue to get paid until the 2023-24 main estimates become law.

The majority of the funding includes one-sixth of the forecasted budget, as well as large payments that are due early in the fiscal year for items such as comprehensive municipal grants, the Yukon Hospital Corporation continued agreements, Yukon University continued agreements, social assistance payments, and funding for universal childcare expenses.

Yukon's comprehensive municipal grants are paid out on April 1 of each year. The bill will ensure that organizations, corporations, and other levels of government have the money that they need to fund their operations. It also includes the first instalments necessary for the operation of Yukon's schools.

While some of the numbers reflect more than one-sixth of the government's budget, I will explain in further detail how these figures are determined during Committee of the Whole.

We expect the *First Appropriation Act 2023-24* to receive assent by the end of the session, which will provide spending authority for the full year.

**Mr. Cathers:** Mr. Speaker, as always with government spending, since it's a confidence matter, we will not be voting in favour of that because we do not have confidence in the government. We do recognize, of course, that some of the areas that are being funded within the budget are reasonable. We continue to believe, though, that this Liberal government is out of touch with the needs of Yukoners and continues to fail Yukoners in a number of major areas.

I would note as well that we are concerned with the interim supply budget itself and by the continued growth of government spending.

As I noted in speaking to the budget at second reading, we have seen this government on a spending spree that, as noted by local columnist Keith Halliday in his column entitled "Yukonomist: Legacy of debt", he referred to the legacy of this Liberal government and noted that — and I quote: "... one aspect of it is undebatable: debt." Again, when we see that this government that came into office with net financial assets in the bank has turned that into a spending spree that sees them this year projecting being in net debt in excess of \$374 million, that, of course, is something that we do not support.

I will give you a few examples before touching on a few other items. While we do agree with spending in areas that are necessary, this government, through its time in office, has been wasteful in a number of areas and has spent millions upon millions of dollars on things that were a low priority for Yukoners, if they even were on the list at all. That includes, last summer, spending \$2.7 million on the parking lot that didn't need repaving, and that, of course, is the parking lot of the YTG

building here — although I am sure that ministers are happy that they don't need to walk through a puddle anymore to get into their vehicle when it's raining — and spending over \$1 million on digital signs over the Alaska Highway that are widely disliked by many Yukoners and, as one of my colleagues pointed out off-mic, the signs often do not work.

I note as well that after government increased staffing to deal with the COVID pandemic, there were a significant number of positions added to government that they assured us were time-limited related to COVID. Just looking at the Department of Health and Social Services alone, there were over 100 positions that, we were repeatedly assured, were time-limited related to the public health response. Now this government, just as one example in their continued addition of full-time-equivalent employees to government across departments that has happened throughout their time in office, of those 100-plus positions in Health and Social Services that the government repeatedly assured Yukon taxpayers were time-limited, we see in this budget, reflected as well in the interim supply, that they are keeping over a quarter of those positions and turning them — reprofiling them — into permanent positions under what they are calling "health system rationalization". But in fact, despite their repeated assurances over the years, we see that 100-plus positions, just in health alone, that they told us were temporary — over a quarter of them are permanent.

Tracking back to a while ago, at the time, as the Premier will recall, the then-Premier, who is now the Minister of Finance, had acknowledged that the government had added 568 full-time-equivalent positions over their time in office — well, that number has grown, and, Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the total number of positions added to the Yukon government by this Liberal government is larger than any one of the communities that you represent in your riding of Mayo-Tatchun. Most of those positions are in Whitehorse, and that is why this Liberal government is the single greatest contributor to the housing crisis — through their hiring spree.

With the growth in population comes additional needs in a long list of areas. I will mention, as well, that in the area of the Yukon Hospital Corporation — as I mentioned in speaking to the budget — we see, very concerningly, the hospital, again — as part of this Liberal government chronically underfunding the Yukon Hospital Corporation, which they began in 2017 and have continued every year, except for one where the funding was actually reasonable that fiscal year —

We see that, in the fall, when the chair and CEO of the Yukon Hospital Corporation appeared in this Legislative Assembly, I asked them about their needs for the fiscal year. On November 22, as reflected in Hansard, what we heard from the hospital witnesses about the O&M needs for the year were this — and I quote: "YG's 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." I won't repeat everything that I read before, but I will note again that if we look at the second supplementary budget



for the fiscal year that we are finishing right now — the same year that hospital witnesses told us that they needed \$103.5 million for O&M prior to factoring in inflation and pandemic impacts — the revised total of O&M funding for Yukon hospital services for the 2022-23 fiscal year is only \$88.9 million according to the second supplementary estimates.

Of course, the relevance that this has to the interim supply, in my view, is the fact that government, according to what we learned from the hospital witnesses, did not cover the \$103.5 million in hospital needs prior to factoring in pandemic and inflationary costs in the fiscal year that concludes at the end of March.

That leaves them with a deficit for this fiscal year. Now, the question is: Is the government, in the interim supply, doing as they did in a previous fiscal year of finally, after it passes on April 1, retroactively giving the hospital some of the money that they actually needed for the year that they are wrapping up to meet their core needs? Because if you crunch the numbers — if you do the math on that \$103.5 million that the hospital witnesses who sat right there and told us what they needed for 2022-23 and what is in the government's budget — that leaves a \$14.5-million hole in the hospital's budget prior to factoring in inflation costs. And inflation costs, Mr. Speaker, in a budget of that size, are equivalent, at a 6.9-percent increase to CPI — that is effectively the same as having a \$7-million loss of buying power in that budget. So, is the government doing anything to fix their mistake in the interim supply bill?

We talked, as well, both in speaking to the mains and in Question Period, about the doctor payment delays. The Yukon Territory, under this Liberal government, slipped to the worst doctor-to-patient ratio in the entire country, Mr. Speaker, and it's in a report that the minister herself has liked to cite. It shows it very clearly. The Yukon slipped to the worst doctor-to-patient ratio in the entire country. Now, the minister can deny it all she wishes to, but the Canadian Institute for Health Information report is there for anyone to read.

There are thousands of Yukoners who are on the wait-list for a family doctor, and this government has continued to be incredibly slow to take action. We have heard from physicians that doctor payment delays are creating a serious issue for physicians who are here and are sending the message to those who might consider moving here that the Yukon is slow in paying its bills for the necessary health services they provide. So, my question is: Are they doing anything about it in the interim supply bill?

We heard, as well, that, while the Minister of Finance rose in the Legislative Assembly and assured us everything was rosy when it comes to the relationship with the Yukon Medical Association, we saw the Yukon Medical Association issue a letter the following day, which I believe, Mr. Speaker, to the best of my knowledge, is the first time in all of my time as an MLA that the Yukon Medical Association has responded to a budget speech rebutting it and clarifying their position with a letter, especially one sent so quickly.

Contrary to what the government said, the Yukon Medical Association expressed concern about the memorandum of understanding signed with the government. While noting that it

has the potential to make the Yukon a competitive place to practise, they said — and I quote: "... potential can only be realized if the new agreement is accessible. To this day, many parts of the new agreement, including administrative details of the Attachment and Attraction fund, remain inaccessible to Yukon doctors." They also went on to say: "At a time when burnout amongst physicians is increasing across the country, uncertain access to large parts of the new agreement is only adding fuel to the burnout fire. The YMA is deeply concerned about the wellness and sustainability of Yukon's physician workforce when they are burdened with additional stress caused by uncertainty." What is the source of the uncertainty? This Liberal government.

So, the question is: Are they addressing that issue and the outstanding payment issues for Yukon physicians where the government has not processed thousands of claims, some of which are outstanding for more than 90 days? Are they going to act on this through the interim supply bill?

We have heard the government talk about the mental health crisis. We actually see here in the mandate letters from the new Premier to his ministers — every single mandate letter talks about the mental health crisis. The Yukon does not have many NGOs that it funds for mental health services, but they told one of those NGOs that they were actually going to eliminate the funding for them completely. We are hearing from a number of NGOs that are concerned about their funding. That includes a joint letter written by a number of organizations and women's groups that wrote to the government expressing concern about their fiscal needs. A few other examples include NGOs that have expressed concerns to us about the lack of any increase to their budget to meet inflation or uncertainty about whether they will receive any amounts to meet those needs.

There is also uncertainty regarding renewal. I would note as well that the NGO that I referenced that provides mental health services has been funded by government for over 30 years.

They were told that government was going to eliminate their funding at the end of March. Then, after repeated attempts to meet with the government, in correspondence with ministers as well as ourselves, they were then told that maybe government might consider funding them if they submitted a new proposal. But, Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with a week into March — the funding for this organization that has been funded by government, to my understanding, for over 30 years is ending at the end of March and they have no certainty about it, and that, as the Minister of Health and Social Services certainly knows, is the Second Opinion Society.

I would urge the Premier to look into this, to treat this seriously, and, if government is serious about supporting the mental health needs of Yukoners, to work with all the NGOs that provide mental health services and to ensure that a reasonable arrangement is come up with to ensure that they continue to be able to serve their clients.

I am just trying to see what else I had in my short list of notes here. There is much more that we will talk about later, but, again, as I noted in starting at the top, budgets are about priorities. We have seen a continued pattern by this government

of spending millions upon millions of dollars on matters that are not priorities for Yukoners. We have seen, as well, in the area of firewood subsidies, that the government is spending a significant amount of money on it, but what many of us have heard directly from those in the woodcutting business, including people who have said this to me personally, is that they are not seeing it as being helpful at all. It is administratively complex and, in fact, is creating more government paperwork and burden on those people when the initial problem in the first place is access to supply and the burdensome government paperwork and red tape that is making it hard for Yukon small businesses to go out and cut wood and deliver it to their customers.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on for much longer on this, but that is the short version on why we will not be supporting the interim supply bill, even though we do recognize that some of the things funded by it do require funding certainty as we begin the fiscal year.

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, I have more things to say than I thought I was going to say about the *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2023-24* and, interestingly enough, maybe not in the angle that we thought.

Although I appreciate the comments from my colleague, the Member for Lake Laberge — and I am sure I will hear them repeated multiple times over time — I would like to point out that, in 2012 when I was a member of the Official Opposition and it was his government, the NDP voted in favour of the interim supply bill, as did the former Premier, the Member for Klondike, because an interim supply bill ensures that government carries on. It means that government is able to do the work the government does while supporting people and making sure that programs run and social assistance goes out. You can get your driver's licence and everything you can do isn't held up by the words we use in this Assembly.

So, I went back to 2012, which would have been my first spring budget where we had an opportunity for the interim supply bill, and I checked, because I just wanted to be sure. I am going to quote my lovely friend, Lois Moorcroft: "As I stated in the debate on second reading of this bill, the Official Opposition will support the interim supply bill, which allows money to flow to cover the expenses of the public service." That just makes sense, Mr. Speaker. It just makes sense. So, today, the NDP will be voting in favour of the interim supply bill — not because it is part of our confidence and supply agreement, but because it is the right thing to do. We look forward to getting through this and moving on to other topics today.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the members of the Official Opposition for their comments — the Leader of the Third Party for hers and also what is becoming an echo chamber from the Member for Lake

Laberge when it comes to his approach to being a critic of the financial world. It is always so interesting to hear him mentioning borrowing and debt. If you take a look at the \$216.4 million worth of debt that we have on our books — let's compare dollar for dollar how much of that was borrowed by the Yukon Party compared to the \$20 million-some that was borrowed by us. Basically, most of that — most of it, the lion's share of borrowing that is on the books right now that we are talking about is from the Yukon Party. So, I am flabbergasted when I hear the Member for Lake Laberge come up and say that we have a spending problem. I think we are getting the accolades that they didn't get from the C.D. Howe Institute and others when it comes to how we're actually doing the books now. Again, I'm starting to think that he really doesn't understand the difference between net debt and a deficit or debt that's on the books from our borrowing limits, because he is often confusing those in the Legislative Assembly here.

Also, to the Leader of the Third Party's comment, the conversation here means a lot, not only to the people who are reliant upon the transfers and the money, but also to people who are investing in the Yukon. That's an extremely important point, because it would never stop the Member for Lake Laberge to just speculate on things of huge financial consequences as he did last fall with the territorial formula financing. Basically, I went back and I took a look at Hansard, comments like the Member for Lake Laberge mentioning the TFF — quote: "... potentially being on the chopping block..." Right? And he was going on and saying — quote: "... there is legitimate cause for concern that, as part of budgetary cost-cutting measures, there could be reductions." He doesn't know that. He is speculating and doesn't care past political expedience that those words mean a lot to people who are investing in the Yukon. He doesn't care about the private sector when he makes those comments speculating, because there is a review of TFF. We obviously see that none of that happened. To the contrary, this year's funding through that formula is more than we anticipated. But, again, it doesn't matter to the Member for Lake Laberge; whatever makes sense politically for him, he will do the scattershot and see what sticks.

**Some Hon. Member:** (Inaudible)

#### Point of order

**Speaker:** Member for Lake Laberge, on a point of order.

**Mr. Cathers:** I have been quite tolerant of the Minister of Finance's flight of fancy, but he has been contravening Standing Order 19(i) by using quite a bit of abusive and insulting language, including the most offensive suggesting that I don't know the difference between debt and net debt. I would urge you to have him respect the Standing Orders and perhaps return his comments to something that is relevant to Yukoners.

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

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 19(i) says that if any of us in this House "uses abusive or insulting language, including sexist or violent language, in a context likely to create disorder". None of that was what was being said

by the Member for Klondike; he was merely talking about how the member opposite was discussing the budget on interim supply.

### Speaker's ruling

**Speaker:** There is no violation of Standing Order 19. This is a dispute among members.

Minister of Finance, please continue.

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker; I appreciate that. I am making a point here. Our words matter in the Legislative Assembly. The Member for Lake Laberge went on last fall talking about — and I am going to quote here again. He went on to speculate: "... if the federal government chooses to reduce the territorial funding formula ... if they choose to cut the territorial funding formula as part of a budget-cutting exercise..." — inferring that — "... it may be fair to say that the Finance minister of the day was not anticipating the cut until it occurred." Again, talk about insulting — basically saying that I, as the Minister of Finance, might not be involved in any conversation or might not know whatever conversations are happening on the federal level.

Actually, he has insulted the Department of Finance staff themselves. To think that anybody from the Department of Finance who works tirelessly with their colleagues on the territorial level, the provincial level, and also with the Finance ministers and with the federal minister — to think that they would ever let me sleep if there wasn't a conversation that was necessary, if there wasn't a statement about Yukon and our fair share — it is insulting to them that the member opposite would insinuate in the Fall Sitting that we as a territory or as a government or me as a minister might not be involved in these conversations. Again, just speculating for the sake of speculation. Those words really matter. There are a lot of business people listening in to these debates. There are a lot of people wanting to invest in Yukon listening in to these debates. That speculation doesn't help at all.

Also, the member opposite has brought up this parking lot issue quite a few times now, and again, it's insulting to the Department of Highways and Public Works. Here is why. When we do Management Board, we will get an envelope for certain things from Highways and Public Works. To think that the paving of the actual parking lot that we as ministers decide upon — it's not — we give allocations to envelopes of spending for the department. They will prioritize that spending. We will let the Department of Highways and Public Works know that the Member for Lake Laberge and the Yukon Party don't trust their ability to make important investments in infrastructure, including a parking lot that has not been invested in since the 1970s. Again, I guess it's whatever sticks. Just keep on throwing things and see what sticks.

I will turn quickly to the size of government and growth of government. Based on our stats here, there were 5,250 FTEs across the Yukon government workforce over the 2022 calendar year. This is a decrease of nearly 74 FTEs — a 1.3-percent decrease over the previous calendar year. The decrease in FTEs is mainly due to the government's change in

response to COVID. When you take a look at where we are investing, we are investing in health and education. If you see growth in government, it's mostly in those fields, which is confusing to the members opposite, because we keep on hearing from the Member for Lake Laberge and the Yukon Party: "You're spending too much" but then "You have to spend more." "You're spending too much" but then "You have to spend more." It's very confusing to find which narrative on which day we are actually supposed to be paying attention to here. I know that the members opposite don't like to hear this, but that is exactly what is going on.

The size of the Yukon government has increased in recent years, but not as much as under the Yukon Party government. Again, it's: "Do as we say, but not as we do." It has grown at a consistent rate, actually, for a government of this size, with trends over the last two decades that make sense — like a pandemic. To give credit to the members opposite as well, other things — like growth in government between the 1980s into the early 2015s — you could take a look at what's happening with things like the Faro mine coming in and coming out, affecting our populations. Of course, that is going to affect the size of government. You could take a look at the growth of jobs as a percentage of Yukon's population, which is partly attributed, even back in the day, to the devolution of federal programming. Again, the criticism without any substance is interesting. It's an interesting tack as we sit here and discuss the interim supply bill. So, that's interesting.

Finally — I can't help it — every time the Yukon Party talks about mental health, I have to — I just can't help myself — to go back to when the Yukon Party was in charge of mental health services, especially in rural Yukon — I shudder to think — two mental wellness nurses. Two for all of the rural communities outside of Whitehorse under the Yukon Party government — two. Unbelievable. Unbelievable, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Member:** (Inaudible)

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Now, the Member for Lake Laberge — I sat and listened to him while he did his speech. I would expect that maybe he might give me the same respect, but clearly not. It hurts when he hears these things.

Again, members opposite don't remember that they had two mental health nurses, not in every community, but for every community — unbelievable. So, again, they would criticize us for increasing the size of government when we went into the double digits when it comes to mental health supports in rural Yukon. I will defend those FTEs and that budgeting exercise forever because it's important work. We are extremely vigilant when it comes to the fiscal responsibility of this government. This is a balanced budget. The interim supply is a necessity, as the Leader of the Third Party speaks to. I completely agree with that.

I will take my seat now, and we will move on — hopefully — and make sure that the departments, the corporations, the agencies, and the municipalities who rely on this interim supply bill — thankfully, because of an agreement with us and the NDP and no thanks to the Yukon Party — will get their money.

**Speaker:** Introduction of visitors outside of the usual time provided.

## INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, I am delighted that we are joined by the spitfire that is Grace Pinkerton right now in the gallery. Her father, Erik, works with me, and I'm delighted to have her here. So, welcome, Gracie; it's fantastic to see you.

*Applause*

**Speaker:** Are you prepared for the question?

**Some Hon. Members:** Division.

## Division

**Speaker:** Division has been called.

*Bells*

**Speaker:** Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Agree.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Agree.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Agree.

**Mr. Dixon:** Disagree.

**Mr. Kent:** Disagree.

**Ms. Clarke:** Disagree.

**Mr. Cathers:** Disagree.

**Ms. McLeod:** Disagree.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Disagree.

**Mr. Hassard:** Disagree.

**Mr. Istchenko:** Disagree.

**Ms. White:** Agree.

**Ms. Tredger:** Agree.

**Clerk:** Mr. Speaker, the results are nine yea, eight nay.

**Speaker:** The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

*Motion for second reading of Bill No. 209 agreed to*

## Bill No. 207: *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23* — Second Reading

**Clerk:** Second reading, Bill No. 207, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver.

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*, be now read a second time.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*, be now read a second time.

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this afternoon to begin debate on the *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*. Bill No. 207 is the second supplementary estimates for the fiscal year. The second supplementary estimates let us take a step back and refine our forecasts and the spending requirements we made from our initial budget, as well as in the

first supplementary estimates and the benefits that these have had for Yukoners.

In a time when our economic and environmental landscape continues to evolve, we do our best to make predictions, but as we know, circumstances can change — sometimes drastically. By tabling and debating the supplementary estimates, we can explain where those refinements occur and evaluate whether the funding allocations that we made for the year are meeting our commitments to Yukoners and industry or whether we need to make changes.

The key word here is always “flexibility” — being able to respond to shifts in Yukon’s economy or situations that arise unexpectedly — you know, unexpected results like an evolving inflationary environment or international politics that are beyond our control. That flexibility also needs to respond to opportunities just as much as it is required to respond to challenges, especially at this critical juncture where we, after three years of the COVID-19 pandemic as a public health emergency, are moving toward a Yukon that looks more like it once did. Not all opportunities are related to this aspect of our times, however. Some are built on long-standing relationships, like the ones that we have with First Nation governments. Other opportunities come when we leverage funding programs from the Government of Canada.

You can also see, through the supplementary estimates, where we have made adjustments based upon the hard work or foresight of public servants on long-standing projects, completing work ahead of schedule, or after analysis determining that more work or time is needed to do things right.

Our guiding principle for making the decisions that lead to these supplementary estimates is moderate but responsible increases in spending. From this appropriation bill, you can see a government that had to respond to new challenges facing the territory head on. We have examined where money wasn't spent or where we need to make changes, and we have acted accordingly.

The *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23* proposes an increase of \$29 million in new operation and maintenance spending and no increases in capital spending on a gross basis. The increases in operation and maintenance spending is paired with \$4.3 million in new recoveries for O&M projects and \$10.2 million in new recoveries from capital spending. This results in a total of \$14.5 million in additional recoveries.

The supplementary estimates also include \$26.1 million in additional revenues. The largest source of revenues for the Government of Yukon is from increases in income taxes and mineral royalties — increasing money coming in. These changes to the budget mean that we have an adjusted forecast surplus of \$43.9 million, up from the \$33.04 million in the first supplementary estimates. The year-end net debt is forecast at \$298.5 million, which is likewise up from the \$213.93 million forecasted in the first supplementary estimates. This, of course, is a reflection of continued investment in the Yukon’s infrastructure and tangible capital assets, as well as the implementation of new asset retirement obligations included as part of the updated public sector account standards.

On the whole, these changes demonstrate that our territory is well on the path of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and, while inflationary pressures have had an effect on government projects, we are still working diligently to make sure that our commitments are fulfilled to the benefit of all Yukoners.

Let's break down those budgets. The proposed operation and maintenance budget includes \$29 million in new spending and \$4.3 million in new recoveries, as mentioned. With the end of the state of emergency for the COVID-19 pandemic and the relaxing of many pandemic measures, some of these funds are going directly toward ensuring the success of programs that help kickstart the Yukon's economy and provide services to the Yukon public; however, the economy is still feeling some effects from the height of the pandemic, as well as effects from new and emerging challenges as well. We recognize that supply chain issues and the war in Ukraine have caused inflation to rise all over the world, and the Yukon has not been spared from this phenomenon.

To help with the rise in the cost of living, the Yukon government is providing an extension to the inflation relief rebate on electricity bills that was in place from October through to December. In addition to this three-month extension is one month of funding in March, which falls within the supplementary estimates. This rebate puts money into the pockets of Yukoners to help cope with the high prices.

Many Yukon workers were hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic and needed to learn new skills to re-enter the workforce. That is why we are providing support for the Skills for Success program, which gives workers fundamental skills training and gives people the tools they need to adapt to a changing labour market. The pandemic made for lower ridership in public transit in Whitehorse, so we are addressing shortfalls in operational costs in this area as part of the budget as well.

Now, as I mentioned before, Mr. Speaker, the government has scaled back on pandemic restrictions and is now turning its attention toward Yukon's recovery. Therefore, we have extended funding for the COVID-19 recovery research program. This program funds research from various organizations that fill in needed information on pandemic recovery. We will use the results of this research for evidence-based decision-making as we look toward a future where we address the disruptions from the past three years.

Now, funding from each of these programs is recoverable from the Government of Canada, either in full or in part. Mr. Speaker, many news stories have come out about strains on the health care system following the height of the pandemic. Many health care workers suffer from stress and burnout, and Yukoners can experience long waiting times and staff shortages. We are working hard to address these issues, and these supplementary estimates chart how the government is contributing to the resiliency of health care in the Yukon.

The Department of Health and Social Services will see an increase of \$13.3 million in the supplementary estimates for O&M. Much of the amount will go toward covering costs related to scheduled procedures, physician claims, pharmacare,

and medical travel. Other increases went toward programs like the installation of waste-water surveillance equipment that monitors communicable diseases in First Nation communities and to the Yukon Hospital Corporation toward providing MRI services to shorten the wait-list in Whitehorse.

Another significant change is to the Department of Highways and Public Works, with an added \$3.8 million to the O&M budget. The increase is related to the same pressures that Yukoners face across the territory, namely higher heating fuel and electricity costs. We also had to cover unexpected repairs from washouts along Yukon's highways.

The supplementary estimates include a number of programs for the Department of Justice that fully recoup their costs from the Government of Canada, coming to a total of \$2.7 million. This includes providing money to important institutions, like Yukon Legal Services Society, which provides Yukoners who can't afford a lawyer with legal aid. Also under this umbrella is support for drug treatment courts that provide treatment programs to people who use drugs.

We are also adding to the funding for preparing Gladue reports and training people to write them as well. These reports give specific, culturally sensitive information on Indigenous offenders for consideration by judges. They are designed to reduce the over-representation of Indigenous persons in the criminal justice system.

There are other programs geared toward improving the experiences of Yukoners who come in contact with the system. We have added support to the victims fund agreement, which aims to improve supports for victims of crime. We are also expanding the sexualized assault response team — SART, for short — which provides a way for victims of sexualized assault to access services on their own terms.

We also continue to support Yukon Utilities Board hearings.

As mentioned, funding increases for all of these programs are fully recoverable from the Government of Canada.

Otherwise, the supplementary estimates include further funds for transferring inmates to federal prisons outside of Yukon, to the RCMP for personnel and equipment, and for covering outside legal counsel.

We are also proud to extend the integrated restorative justice pilot project to 2025. This project means to grow and to strengthen restorative justice services in the Yukon.

We believe firmly in proper, meaningful public input on policies and projects that affect Yukoners. With this bill, we are providing support for the Yukon Water Board Secretariat to provide public hearings on applications for water use.

The Government of Yukon is working to make our communities safer. This bill includes more going toward FireSmart projects under the Wildland Fire Management program.

We faced some unexpected costs because of flooding at the Dawson waste-water treatment plant. This supplementary estimate takes that into account, as well as higher expenses for water delivery and funds for solid-waste contracts and certain facilities across the Yukon.

In keeping with government's commitments to address climate change in the *Our Clean Future* strategy, the supplementary estimate shows an added \$4.1 million toward clean energy and climate change programs. These are programs like the low carbon economy fund, which went toward housing retrofit projects in First Nation communities, for the greener homes initiative that provides Yukoners with grants to retrofit their homes or clean energy projects in rural and remote Yukon communities, as well as pitching in on the Kluane First Nation wind project or other projects to bring down transportation emissions.

In addition to programs concentrated on energy, \$269,000 is going to climate change science like adaptation projects, flood mapping, and funding a climate change scientist. We believe in using a firm foundation in science to approach these issues. All of these programs are fully recoverable from Canada.

Another aspect of climate change adaptation is shoring up food security. The Yukon government is contributing to developing food security through the Canadian agricultural partnership agreement, which develops agricultural capacity in the Yukon through various programs as well as other funding agreements with Canada.

With regard to the Yukon's natural resources, we are completing projects like work on forest plots for the national forest inventory that gives detailed information on forests across Canada. This information is used to improve forest management. We are also conducting geophysical surveys to learn the properties of the ground beneath our feet.

As for protecting our land and water, the operation and maintenance budget includes more funds for the Wolverine mine site so that the contractor can finish their work. While the costs are greater than expected, the government wants to make sure that this project is done right so that the area is made safe for future generations.

The Yukon did see a windfall from a larger slice of mining royalties and is therefore passing on the \$980,000 to First Nation governments, in accordance with previous agreements.

Along with the land, the government is also maintaining commitments to managing and protecting Yukon wildlife. We are monitoring wood bison to get a better picture of the population and trends in the Aishihik herd.

As Yukoners are facing inflation, additional costs for fuel and electricity have gone up.

For social housing, we have added over \$1 million to account for higher prices and for repair and maintenance. This amount also covers lease costs, services, and staffing for 10 units at Normandy Living earmarked for seniors. Providing affordable accommodations for seniors is one important piece in addressing housing pressures in the Yukon.

Expenses for maintaining rest stops and outhouses has also gone up, with more rest stops coming under the responsibility of the Yukon government. This money goes toward keeping those sites clean and tidy for the many tourists driving along the scenic routes. Simply put, costs for goods and services have gone up and we have had to adapt.

The government continues to work with commitments on reconciliation. We are contributing to ongoing funding to Yukon First Nation governments for their negotiations, consultation, and engagement and the continued implementation of the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* as well. We are also contributing to the Indigenous courtwork program, which aims to benefit Indigenous peoples who encounter the criminal justice system. The program funds courtworkers who can assist Indigenous clients in navigating this system in a way that's equitable and culturally relevant as well. The Government of Canada provides full recovery of funds that go toward this extremely important program.

The Government of Yukon also believes in promoting Indigenous cultural expression. We have added to the artists and cultural carriers micro-grant in the supplementary estimates. This grant provides up to \$5,000 to Yukon Indigenous artists and cultural carriers to complete creative and cultural projects and activities. This fills a gap for emerging and established artists and cultural carriers and we are very excited to see the impacts from the projects it funds.

I mentioned at the outset that the supplementary estimates are meant to address unforeseen circumstances, and these can extend beyond our borders. In 2022, the Atlantic coast experienced the arrival of Hurricane Fiona, which led to the destruction of countless homes and disrupted many people's lives. We all know that Yukoners have ties to this region. To help with relief efforts, the government did donate \$25,000 to the Red Cross for Fiona relief.

Mr. Speaker, that was a long list of changes to the O&M budget for new and existing initiatives. I acknowledge that there are several increases for this fiscal year; however, there are new recoveries as well.

In this appropriation bill, you will see \$4.3 million in new O&M recoveries. The biggest increases are from the Department of Justice and from the Department of Environment leveraging federal programs that have opened opportunities to improve the lives of Yukoners.

Let's move on to the capital budget. The capital budget has no overall changes on a gross basis in this supplementary estimate, but this is not because there were no shifts to be made. Major projects are still getting the resources that they need to reach completion, but other projects were deferred or delayed. This means that we are able to accommodate new spending while staying within the gross capital budget. The largest increases are on three important capital projects accounting for \$53.4 million all together.

The first is the replacement of the Nisutlin Bay bridge. This increase covers unanticipated higher costs due to an accelerated schedule. We are doing what we can to have a safe, reliable bridge in place as soon as possible at this vital gateway to the Yukon.

We also provided additional funding for building the Carmacks bypass, which is part of the Yukon Resource Gateway program. The new road will allow industrial vehicles to go around the town of Carmacks instead of through it, greatly benefiting residents and improving access to the mining activities as well.

The third project is the construction of the Dempster fibre line, which will open up a second fibre optic link instead of relying on just one, giving Yukoners more reliable access to Internet as well as a necessary redundancy.

The Nisutlin Bay bridge project and the Carmacks bypass will have three-quarters of their funding returned by the Government of Canada through recoveries in 2022-23. All of these projects are of great importance to Yukoners and we are making sure they move ahead.

We do have some smaller increases in capital spending as well. They include the remediation of Ross River School to account for permafrost thaw, licensing technology systems for schools, the last step in project design for upgrades to the morgue, there are renovations for the bilingual Centre de Santé Constellation Health Centre, and implementing the 1Health Yukon health information system. These ongoing projects will have a measurable impact on improving Yukoners' lives.

Mr. Speaker, the largest offsets come from the Yukon Housing Corporation. This is largely the result of revised timelines for various projects and initiatives, as well as lower uptake in application-based programs, but it also accounts for the housing and building cycle. Normandy Living, Cornerstone, and the 47-unit, 4<sup>th</sup> and Jeckell facilities are all ready and taking in clients, and we are now shifting toward building new relationships for potential future projects.

So altogether, we see that gross decreases have entirely offset the increases in capital spending for 2022-23. A large part of the increases have benefited from federal recoveries, and there were some funds that were carried over from previous budgets that were only recovered for the supplementary estimates. We are happy to report that, with these adjustments, we have been able to operate within our gross capital budget and even had a small increase in recoveries.

Before I finish, Mr. Speaker, I would like to address changes in recoveries to the supplementary estimates. As mentioned, we forecasted that revenues will increase by \$26.1 million. The biggest piece of this increase is from an estimated jump in tax revenue. This is because of higher than expected inflation and a strong labour market. With more people working, often for higher wages, we expect Yukoners overall to have bigger individual incomes. The government also benefits from non-recurring adjustments from earlier tax years. Another key piece was greater royalties from quartz mining, showing the strength of the mining industry in the Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, when we zoom out, the supplementary estimates show a responsible increase in spending as the government strives to move ahead on projects and services that Yukoners rely on and need. Our ability to keep capital spending within the limits that we set, as well as taking advantage of federal recoveries for the many projects on the government's plate, shows an agile approach to managing Yukon's finances.

The government is working hard to address current challenges and to bring growth and stability as we move into an era beyond pandemic measures — knocking on wood. We are making decisions with a clear eye toward the future and practical ways to make sure that initiatives with tangible benefits to Yukoners come to pass.

I invite members to treat Committee of the Whole as an opportunity to request the details on any of the areas included in the supplementary estimates.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your time today and for the time of the Legislative Assembly. Mahsi'.

**Mr. Cathers:** Mr. Speaker, as we debate another part of this government's budget, we do have to note again that some of the comments that I made earlier when speaking to the interim supply, as well as the budget, stand equally true with regard to the supplementary estimates for the fiscal year that is being finished. I won't repeat all of them in the interest of the House's time and not being repetitive in Hansard, but I would refer people to read some of my earlier comments about government spending, including spending that was wasteful — and areas such as the needs of our hospitals and paying physicians, where the government has been remiss in not paying for things that are very important to Yukoners. It shows a government that is very much out of touch with Yukoners, is well, well past their best-before date, and is neglecting some core needs of Yukoners while spending money on things that are very low on the priority list of any Yukoners outside of the Cabinet office, if even on those lists, such as the wasteful spending on the parking lot that I highlighted earlier that the Premier took great issue with and tried to blame on officials.

I would note as well — in anticipation of the former Premier, the Finance minister, becoming similarly fussed as he did earlier when responding to me — that contrary to his assertions, as officials should know — but just to be clear about it — when we criticize decisions made by this Finance minister, the new Premier, and this Liberal government, we are criticizing the decisions made by those senior leaders, the ministers in Cabinet who ultimately make the decision regarding large capital projects despite the former Premier trying to claim that the parking lot spending wasn't his decision. It is his attempt to blame it on officials and we know that this is simply not correct.

**Some Hon. Member:** (Inaudible)

**Mr. Cathers:** The Premier is again trying to blame officials off-mic. Again, he can continue to do so if he wishes.

I want to return again to the fact, as I noted, that we see in this fiscal year that is being wrapped up the most glaring item of concern for me as the Official Opposition Finance critic — and, of course, as the critic for Health and Social Services — which is the shortage of funding for the Yukon Hospital Corporation. Now, government can attempt to dismiss it or paint the picture that somehow, as the minister has attempted to do in other areas — just trying to claim that I am wrong or tossing insults across the way — but I would refer any Yukoner who is curious about this to look at what the chair and CEO of the Yukon Hospital Corporation said themselves when they appeared in this Assembly last fall in those seats just to my left, Mr. Speaker, when I asked them about what the O&M needs of the hospital were for the current fiscal year. I will again quote from what the CEO said. I know that I have said this before, but I am repeating it because the needs of our hospitals are important and the tangible effects of this have been shown in

areas including the cancellation of hundreds of elective surgeries for Yukoners earlier this year, and a gap in surgical services both last summer and early this year at the hospital directly relate to the money that is provided to that corporation. When they are short over \$14 million in their operational needs, that has an impact, Mr. Speaker. I apologize for speaking in such a clipped manner, but the point doesn't seem to be getting through to this Finance minister or to the Minister of Health and Social Services, but the impact is very real on Yukoners.

Again, just to quote from what the hospital witnesses said last fall — I am quoting again from November 22: "... annual O&M 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 witnesses then said this about the latter item — and again, 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..."

So, for the fiscal year we are wrapping up, the hospital witnesses told this Legislative Assembly, in their own words, that the O&M budget was \$103.5 million. The chair also told us that the budget hadn't factored in inflation. To understand the impact of inflation on an organization of that size, I would point out that, at 6.9-percent inflation, the impact of that is in excess of \$7 million toward the budget — is ultimately, of course, not a cut applied by government, but it has the same impact because of that lost buying power due to unprecedented inflation compared to recent years. That impact — again, just looking at scope of numbers — of inflation in excess of \$7 million and pandemic-related funding that they have been receiving, totalling roughly \$6 million in the previous fiscal year, adds up to \$13 million on top of the \$14.5-million funding shortage that I already spoke to.

So, again quoting from the hospital witnesses — the witnesses told us that the O&M budget was \$103.5 million, and we see in this second supplementary budget for this fiscal year that the revised total of O&M funding for Yukon hospital services — for that line item — for the 2022-23 fiscal year is a paltry \$88.9 million. That doesn't even come close to covering the \$103.5-million budget that the hospital witnesses told us their O&M budget was before pandemic expenses were factored in.

I will acknowledge that \$6 million in pandemic funding would not be as high this year. It would not be as high as that total, likely. We don't know the amount, because the last time we had opportunity to ask the Hospital Corporation that, they didn't know the amount they had received for that either. But that's showing the scope of impact on the hospital's budget. With the \$14.5 million that they included in their operational budget that the government has yet to provide them, plus the impact of inflation totalling roughly \$7 million, plus the impact of pandemic-associated requirements, which is somewhere

under \$6 million — but we don't know the exact amount — that's a pretty big impact on an organization of that size, and it is one that literally every Yukoner depends on being there for us if we need emergency care.

Also, in the area of doctors, we have seen the impact of the government not paying doctors on time. Doctors have identified this in contacting our office. There are individual physicians who have been waiting for more than 90 days to be paid for some of the health services they provided. That, as we have heard from physicians, creates a huge disincentive to attracting doctors to the territory.

If the government is serious about addressing the family doctor crisis here in the territory and the shortage of family doctors that is affecting thousands of Yukoners — over one-fifth, according to one of the government's estimates — then they need to recognize that paying physicians in a timely manner is vitally important.

The same type of issue, although the details of such were different, has impacted pharmacies where they were carrying hundreds of thousands of dollars that government owed them and had agreed to provide them, but there was a long delay in government actually taking the steps necessary to sort that out. Those decisions by government to not meet their obligations to health care providers have an impact.

I won't even spend more time today on the colossally bungled approach of this government to midwifery where they banned midwives operating in private practice and created a gap in services before they set up their own program and then they failed to manage to even continue to operate that program. They have created, again, a situation in which Yukoners are without those services.

A constituent of mine, among other Yukoners, has been writing to the Minister of Health and Social Services pleading for her help and pleading for answers and has been waiting for months to receive even the decency of a reply. I recognize that in the one particular case — I will, of course, not mention any details so as to not compromise her privacy — the minister finally got around to responding, but my constituent was very deeply dissatisfied with the minister's response.

In the area of mental health as well, I do have to point out that, for a government that talks about prioritizing mental health, in this year's budget, we see that one of the areas where funding is lapsing is for the mental health unit at Whitehorse General Hospital.

As I noted, this government, which cut funding and shut down an NGO that had been providing mental health services to Yukoners for over 50 years — Many Rivers Counselling and Support Services — this is the government — the Finance minister who was the Premier when they chose to shut down that NGO, which used to receive over \$2 million a year in government funding — contrary to the illusion in the Member for Klondike's mind, it used to provide mental health services in rural communities.

The Member for Klondike likes to claim that, under the previous Yukon Party government, the only mental health services available in rural communities were two nurses. Well, that is factually incorrect. Many Rivers Counselling and



Support Services also provided mental health services in rural Yukon communities. They did so for over half a century, right until the Liberal government shut them down — a proud legacy.

Now, while government has replaced some of those services with funding for the Canadian Mental Health Association, that association and the Second Opinion Society combined receive less than half of what Many Rivers Counselling and Support Services used to receive from government before the Liberals shut them down. Now, as I mentioned earlier, we have heard that the Second Opinion Society has been told that they may not have any funding after the end of March, after being funded by government for over 30 years. So, this Liberal government seems to have a problem with NGOs that provide mental health services since it has shut down the funding for one and threatened the funding of another.

We see a number of lapses in these areas. The government has lapsed money in a significant number of areas, including on land development. After talking a good line — and we have all seen the Minister of Community Services whipping out those yellow sheets that he seems to like, which contain no useful information, and bragging about how much money the government has budgeted for land development. If you budget the money and don't spend it, it doesn't result in new lots, and that is what we are seeing in this supplementary budget.

I hear a fire truck passing outside, and I would just remind the Minister of Community Services of the issue that I wrote to him about regarding the Hootalinqua fire hall's pumper not being able to operate under lights and sirens. I am not expecting an answer here today. I would just flag to him the importance of that issue, which the sirens going by reminded me of.

I want to turn to areas that speak to the government's choices. We see the firewood subsidy program, with the government being the cause of the firewood shortage in the first place and the cause of problems and lack of access — including permit conditions where the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources will recall me pointing out to him in this Assembly the problem that they were shutting down the largest fuelwood-cutting company in the territory on a permit they had on April 1 due to forest fire risk when, in fact, there was two feet of snow on the ground and it was, I believe, minus 27 at the time in the area. The minister wouldn't even agree with me that it didn't make sense to shut a company down through their permit conditions when that company could have been operating for months more without any wildfire risk. So, we see a government-created problem and, instead of solving the actual problem, they chose to whip out subsidies. What we have heard from operators is that, in fact, those subsidies are not useful and they create additional paperwork that some find quite frustrating.

Additionally, as I mentioned, the Minister of Finance tried to suggest that we complain when they are spending money and then want them to spend more, but that's not the case. Budgets are about priorities. Government-spending decisions are about priorities. We disagree with the spending of the government that we feel is wasteful or does not reflect the priorities and the needs of Yukoners, and we will continue to do so. In the area

of the parking lot, again, where we saw \$2.7 million, in my view, largely wasted on repaving a parking lot where the pavement was largely intact and it didn't really need repaving in a year, I point out — the current fiscal year that we are wrapping up — that the government actually eliminated funding for the rural road upgrade program.

I have constituents affected by that, and I know that one of my colleagues had constituents affected by that. Applications that they put in, in some cases — in the case of one constituent who copied me on correspondence to government, that person put in an application two years in a row. For two years in a row, the government didn't fund the program. They weren't told that their application was approved or denied. They were simply in a situation — and I feel sorry, actually, for the officials who were left dealing with this situation — where they didn't have a mandate from government to spend money to address these needs. I'm sure it must have been frustrating for them as well not to be able to fund roads that legitimately needed upgrading.

So, no money for the rural road upgrade program in the current fiscal year — Takhini River Road is a road in my riding that is very much in need of a major upgrade. It was never actually designed as a road. It was plowed in as a cat trail and eventually government started maintaining it and putting gravel on it and doing work as time went on. But it doesn't have proper ditches, it doesn't have a proper roadbed, and the surface of it basically falls apart, Acting Speaker, when there is significant rain or snowfall or heavy traffic on it. This is an issue. The current Minister of Highways and Public Works will recall that literally the first question we asked him was about Takhini River Road. But in the budget for the fiscal year that we're wrapping up and debating supplementary spending on, there wasn't money for a major upgrade to Takhini River Road. The \$2.7 million to the parking lot would have gone a long way to improve it or to improve health care and provide funding there.

I just want to reference, since the former Premier, the Finance minister, is attempting to dismiss my comments about the parking lot — I point out to him an article by a local economist, Keith Halliday, regarding the parking lot, and I will read his words rather than putting words in his mouth. He shared a similar view to mine that the parking lot should not have been a priority for \$2.7 million.

For reference of Hansard, that article is entitled "Yukonomist: Priority parking!" The date on it is September 11, 2022, and there is a lovely picture of the parking lot in the article.

So, after a bit of an intro, Mr. Halliday writes: "Which invites a thought game. Suppose you were premier. You've have just wrapped up the budget. You've successfully managed to spend the \$1.5 billion the money plane from Ottawa has dropped off, when you think, 'Why not a little something special on top?'"

"You decide to borrow \$2.7 million extra from the bank (a figure I will explain in a minute). The bank, of course, is willing to lend the Yukon government money. They know our children will also get transfer payments and will be able to pay it back.

“But what to spend the money on? Housing? Addiction services? Low-carbon energy? There are so many issues in our community that could use more resources.”

Mr. Halliday then goes on to note some of the choices that he would suggest as potential options for spending that money on, noting that health care is one of them and then, as well, pointing out — and I quote: “Since we’re in the middle of an ongoing opioid crisis, you could hire more addictions counsellors. \$2.7 million would pay for three addictions counsellors for a decade if they cost \$90,000 per year each.”

Mr. Halliday then goes on to note, after some other examples — and I really would encourage the Finance minister to read this column, because he might find it instructive.

Mr. Halliday said — and I quote: “You may have even better ideas. If so, I suggest you send them to the premier.

“He just played a real-life version of this game. The Yukon government borrowed on top of the transfer payment in the latest budget.

“And there was a \$2.7 million project: Parking Lot Upgrades for the parking lot outside the premier’s office at the Smith (Main Administration) Building.

“Somehow this project was not highlighted in budget handouts to media, but government communications officials have posted details on Facebook. They point out the ‘project will improve drainage, as the parking lot collects water after rainfall and snow melt.’”

Well, isn’t that inspiring, Mr. Speaker. I think I will wrap up my comments here.

I could go on at much greater length here in talking about areas where we believe that spending is wasteful or not well-targeted, areas where the government has been slow to act. Ultimately, budgets are about priorities. Again, we feel that this Liberal government is well past its best-before date. It is spending money on things that are not priorities for Yukoners. They are currently governing on a mandate that isn’t theirs. They are largely bereft of vision. To the extent that they have a vision, it largely came from the NDP through the new confidence and supply agreement or they have borrowed some things from our vision, and we are quite happy to see them commit to a health human resource strategy and to commit to doing more to help Yukoners who are going to school to become doctors. We are very happy to hear them take ideas from us, because ultimately, we want to see the budget reflect the needs of Yukoners. Unfortunately, both the main estimates that we have debated, the interim supply, and ultimately this spending for the tail end of the 2022-23 fiscal year, we believe, do not reflect many important needs of Yukoners and do show the government spending money in areas that, simply put, could be better spent somewhere else. The government did not need to go down the road, as I noted before — from a previous article that I quoted of Keith Halliday’s about the government’s decisions to go further into debt. I am not going to read from that article again. I quoted it earlier at second reading, but the comments provide an insightful, non-partisan viewpoint from a Yukon citizen who made some good points in that area.

With that, I will wrap up my remarks. I am sure that the Finance minister will again attempt to spin and deflect and

blame me for everything, but the closing comment that I would make on that is that I would encourage Yukoners to actually read the facts in the budget and from those that I have cited here earlier and recognize as well that, as much as the former Premier may try to put a spin on things, his legacy, as noted by independent Yukoners, is one of debt.

I just recall what I had intended to point out, which is that the Premier, when we talk about the growth of FTEs, likes to claim that the Yukon Party hired too many people and grew too much. Well, then, why do you keep hiring people on top of that? Why do you keep hiring enough people across the board in government to be larger than any town in the riding of Mayo-Tatchun and a number of other small communities?

With that, I will wrap up my remarks.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** That was an interesting use of time in the debate today, talking about a parking lot.

I think that the member opposite summed it up in one thing, saying that budgets are about priorities. We are seeing the priorities of the Yukon Party here. The member opposite’s first question was on TikTok and now he has spent the whole afternoon talking about a parking lot. We saw that he is the only member of the Yukon Party who even said anything during our second reading on the mains.

So, yes, budgets are about priorities. I am starting to question the priorities over on the other side here. It is quite interesting.

I will always push back on the numbers and the interesting way that the opposition — well, one member specifically from the opposition — will randomly pick things that aren’t related or just breeze over things that are also part of the story to make his point. If he repeats it to himself enough, it just becomes fact.

Here are the actual facts, though. During the 2023-24 fiscal year — this is for the Yukon Hospital Corporation — we budgeted \$93.64 million for the Yukon Hospital Corporation’s O&M, as well as \$12.2 million in capital expenditures, for a combined \$105.84 million. Now, between the 2015-16 fiscal year to here, 2023-24, we have increased the Yukon hospital services O&M funding from \$63.2 million, which was more than the Yukon Party, to \$93.64 million. This is an increase of 48.2 percent — a 48.2-percent increase in that time frame and well over the investments that the Official Opposition put into these corporations and services.

The member is cherry-picking stats again, and it just doesn’t add up that way. That’s not how we do financing over here.

**Some Hon. Member:** (Inaudible)

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Again, the member opposite will talk off-mic when I am speaking. I was polite, listening to him as he did his work. I was listening to what he was saying, so hopefully, he could meet me halfway as well and listen.

He mentions one NGO that the opposition worked with. I will mention another NGO that the opposition worked with

when I was a teacher — CATS, Child and Adolescent Therapeutic Services. What an amazing program that was, which the Yukon Party cancelled. I saw kids in my classroom not open up ever again to any program, from any NGO or any government ever, because of the Yukon Party's decision to cancel rural funding for those programs.

The member opposite can cherry-pick if he wants, but when you take a look at the record investments that we are putting into health and social services — again, our record comparatively is putting people at the centre of health care.

The member opposite was the minister when the government was more for acute care. We wait until you are sick and then we are going to help. That's not the model that is being used anymore — thank goodness — in the Yukon.

The Member for Lake Laberge single-handedly cut millions of dollars in social housing — single-handedly. Yes, budgets are about priorities. We would never have done that. Federal funding on top of that — recovery money — holding onto that for years and then doing this horse-and-pony show, getting people to apply for these programs. People spend their blood, sweat, and tears in my community and other communities applying to actually have some housing options, and then the Member for Lake Laberge cancels it. Yes, budgets are about priorities.

Again, talking about one rural roads program for roads in rural communities, not mentioning the half a billion dollars for Gateway, not mentioning the half a billion dollars for the north Klondike road expansion — again, you can't talk about one fund without looking at the full gamut as well. These are going to be great conversations as we move into Committee of the Whole for debates. My ministers are all ready to counteract the misinformation that we heard here today.

I will take my seat at this time to get us to a vote and move on to hopefully get to some of these riveting conversations coming.

**Speaker:** Are you prepared for the question?

**Some Hon. Members:** Division.

## Division

**Speaker:** Division has been called.

### *Bells*

**Speaker:** Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Agree.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Agree.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Agree.

**Mr. Dixon:** Disagree.

**Mr. Kent:** Disagree.

**Ms. Clarke:** Disagree.

**Mr. Cathers:** Disagree.

**Ms. McLeod:** Disagree.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Disagree.

**Mr. Istchenko:** Disagree.

**Ms. White:** Agree.

**Ms. Tredger:** Agree.

**Clerk:** Mr. Speaker, the results are nine yea, seven nay.

**Speaker:** The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

*Motion for second reading of Bill No. 207 agreed to*

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the House do now adjourn.

*Motion agreed to*

**Speaker:** This House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

*The House adjourned at 5:18 p.m.*