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HANSARD

Wednesday, March 8, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Spring Sitting

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

CABINET MINISTERS

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

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

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**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, March 8, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

Speaker's statement in recognition of artwork exhibits in the Chamber

Speaker: Today, I am pleased to announce that new artwork has been installed in the Legislative Assembly. The artwork, in order from the back, south side of the Assembly moving counter-clockwise — I will start with moosehide mukluks made by Karrie Brown in 2018. These are home-tanned moosehide, canvas, lynx fur, beads, traditional Sámi trim, with nylon thread.

A member of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nation, Karrie Brown was born in Whitehorse, Yukon and raised in Otter Falls Cut-off with her grandparents. Her grandparents started her off with thread, needle, and beads around the age of five, and a young Karrie would bead the slipper tops for her grandmother until she learned how to craft complete moccasins and mukluks on her own.

She said, "Learning from my Grandma Audrey, watching her bead and make these beautiful things and knowing that her teaching came from her mother — all that is something that is special that is passed down. Now, the mukluks that I made are considered a piece of artwork. Whereas, when it was my great grandmother sewing, it was more essential and they needed these products on the land and to survive."

For this pair of mukluks, Karrie stated that her intention was to combine as many bright colours as possible. The lynx fur was sourced from the artist's own trapline and a woven band around the top was purchased in Norway from a traditional Sámi sewing supply shop.

Next is an acrylic on canvas piece by Alice Park-Spurr called *Tribes* from 2006. After quitting their full-time jobs in California in 1980, Alice Park-Spurr and her husband moved to a remote location of the Southern Lakes district of the Yukon Territory to begin building a log home in the wilderness. Wanting to express her experiences of the wilderness life, Alice began painting as a hobby, eventually pursuing art as a full-time student, earning both BFA and MFA degrees with high distinctions at the California College of the Arts.

Working primarily in oil and watercolours, Alice takes inspiration from memories and visions of the north, rendered in a poetic, dreamlike manner. Her work reflects the colours, the long and short hours of sunlight, unexpected encounters with wild animals, and the ever-changing weather conditions. The artist's statement for this artwork in particular reads: "It is known that two different types don't get along very well. However, ravens are the exception. They are neutral to each other. They have built a strong community and they are like one big family. They even allow others to share their roost if other

tribes are making a long journey. Sharing with others is one of their practices."

On my left, closest to the gallery, we have *Bricked Self-Portrait* by Luann Baker-Johnson from 2008, made from porcelain, slip, and iron oxide.

Growing up in the Yukon, Luann had the good fortune to be mentored early on by Ted Harrison, her teacher at F.H. Collins Secondary School. He instilled in her that art is synonymous with pleasure and that creativity produces vibrancy in life. Luann strives to incorporate this philosophy into her life through her works.

Following the tragic death of her daughter at the age of 19 from leukemia, Luann enrolled at Alberta University of the Arts to channel grief into something tangibly good and was drawn to ceramics and glass. In her second year at the AUA, Luann envisioned founding a glassblowing studio in her hometown, and from that vision sprang Whitehorse's thriving and beloved Lumel Studios.

Luann describes the process behind *Bricked Self-Portrait* as an exploration and catharsis marking the second anniversary of her daughter's death: "I wanted to consume my mind with busy-ness by making little clay bricks — small bits that absorbed my thoughts and would grow into a towering object of grief. The kiln finished the work, the 1250°C heat collapsed the bottom half onto itself, but miraculously the piece still stood. When I opened the kiln the next day, I was greeted with an image of myself — fractured and broken but still standing."

On my left, closest to me, we have two pieces. The first is by Mark Porter, entitled *Eagle*, from 1997, made from alder and acrylic. A member of the Raven clan of the Teslin Tlingit nation, Mark Porter was a talented carver and painter whose work was held in high regard by many artists and collectors, and he was admired for his talent and generous spirit. Mark learned many of his people's stories from his mother and had an active interest in his culture. He collaborated with Keith Wolfe Smarch, a master carver in the Tlingit tradition, on a variety of projects. Mark's work can be found in such collections as the Indigenous Arts Centre in Ottawa, the Yukon Permanent Art Collection, the Teslin Tlingit Heritage Centre, and the Beringia Centre, as well as numerous private collectors throughout the Yukon and Canada. On April 17, 1999, the life and promising career of this young Tlingit artist was lost tragically in a house fire.

Finally, we have a purse by Lena Moon, who used home-tanned moosehide, seal skin, and seed beads.

Lena Moon is a Tlingit artist who was born and raised by her grandparents who were Tlingit and Southern Tutchone in the Teslin/Johnsons Crossing area. Lena was taught by her grandmother to sew and tan skins. Her grandmother taught her the importance of taking her time and doing things properly. Once Lena learned how to sew better, that's all she wanted to do, making slippers, mukluks, vests, gloves, mitts, fur hats, baby moccasins, and more.

Made from moose hide and seal skin, the purse was added to the Yukon permanent art collection in 2021. The beadwork pattern came from Lena's grandmother. Lena says that with this purse, she envisioned having a beaded panel in the middle, but

when she tried to assemble it, she found that her hands weren't big enough to do it, so she created an entirely new design for it.

I urge members to view the art in the Chambers, and the public can see the art by arranging tours with the Legislative Assembly office on non-sitting days.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleagues to help me in welcoming some guests who are here today for the International Women's Day tribute. We have, from the Human Rights Commission, Birju Dattani, who is the director; we have Molly Swain, the human rights officer; and Simone Kitchen, the operations officer for the Human Rights Commission.

Also, from the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle, we have Natalie Taylor, the executive director, and Colleen Craft, from the board of directors.

Thank you so much for being here today.

Applause

TRIBUTES

In recognition of International Women's Day

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government in recognition of International Women's Day. I want to acknowledge the tireless efforts of generations of women who came before me and whose determination in the quest for women's rights made it possible for me to stand here and address you today. I am honoured to continue their work as Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate. Our country has a dark history of discrimination against women and, in particular, Indigenous women and girls.

The colonial legal system stripped Indigenous women of our traditional matriarchal roles, our social status, and, for a long time, denied Indigenous women and girls fundamental civil and human rights.

In Canada, women of European descent and some women of colour were granted the right to vote in federal elections in 1918. It took over 40 more years for Indigenous women to also be allowed to vote. For decades, under the *Indian Act*, being granted the right to vote came at the cost of giving up our Indigenous status and our rights. This was a part of the process of colonialization rather than an active political liberation. Although now equal before the law, Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people still pay the price for past discrimination and disadvantages.

This year's International Women's Day theme is "#EmbraceEquity" and the Canadian theme is "Every Woman Counts". These themes recognize that women are a diverse group for whom equal opportunities don't always mean equal outcomes. This year's theme calls for a shift from pursuing equality to embracing equity. It's critical to understand the

difference. Equality means giving everyone the same thing, such as the right to vote, but the idea that it will make people equal is built on the assumption that we all start from the same place. We know that this is simply not true.

Women in the Yukon and worldwide face challenges because of their gender but also because of historical and current inequities, such as colonialism and racism. These factors intersect with gender-related disadvantages and create complex systemic barriers. Equal opportunities are not enough to dismantle them. Equity means not giving everyone the same thing. It's about giving people the support that meets their specific needs. It recognizes that we all come from different backgrounds and face unique obstacles. If equality is our goal, then equity is the way to achieve it.

As the Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate, and as a proud Indigenous woman working to end discrimination and build an equitable society for all women and girls, these are all commitments that I carry deeply. International Women's Day is more than a celebration; it's a call to action.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize March 8 as International Women's Day.

On this International Women's Day, I would like to talk a little bit about equity, which is a huge part of the reason we celebrate this day. The words "equity" and "equality" are often used interchangeably, and it is important to understand and acknowledge these terms as separate terms. Equality means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities. Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.

This year's theme seeks to get the world talking about why equal opportunities are no longer enough and can, in fact, be exclusionary rather than inclusive. Equity, then, is a mechanism for addressing an unequal system. Equity acknowledges that not everyone is starting at the same level. There are huge disparities between what resources different facets of the population have access to.

I remember, many years ago, I applied for a job. It was a challenge to access the system, as English was not my first language. Back then, I had a thick accent, and the way I answered interviews was very different from a person who speaks English as a first language. It was very frustrating and challenging because I knew that I could do the job, but I couldn't seem to access the system. Today, I am pleased. I see diverse human resource practitioners who may address gaps in knowledge, and conscious bias training is a good example of how to start addressing equity in the workplace. People start from different places, so true inclusion and belonging require equitable action.

To all the women and men out there, your mission is to celebrate the women who are forging change, elevate women's creativity, build workplaces where everyone can thrive,

improve equality in the tech world, and empower women's choices in health and wellness.

In closing, take a moment to reflect on some of the amazing contributions of all the women in your lives today. Chances are those contributions make up a very big part of your lives and who you are as individuals and community members.

Happy International Women's Day. Salamat po.

Applause

Ms. Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to International Women's Day. I had the real pleasure of attending the Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council circle up at Roddy's Camp by the university today. It was cold; I was worried that it was going to be very cold, but there was a fire and it was pretty warm, actually. There was stew, bannock, and tea and women talking to each other.

That is probably my favourite way to celebrate International Women's Day — by women talking to each other — because I really believe that is the source of change, that is where feminism and action and movement toward equality comes from. It starts with conversations between women. I believe that is where it all starts.

Of course, you can't have conversations between women where there is only one woman in the room. So, I am really grateful today for all the women in this room. We just heard two really powerful speeches, really insightful speeches, and those wouldn't have happened if these women weren't in the room. I really hope that the minister for women and gender equality will table the rest of her speech, because I want to hear it.

I'm really grateful for her; I'm really grateful for the Minister of Health and Social Services; I'm grateful for the Member for Watson Lake, the Member for Porter Creek North, the Member for Porter Creek Centre, the Member for Takhini-Kopper King, the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, because I know we don't always agree. I know we don't, but I think this is a richer and stronger and wiser Assembly because we are all here.

I'm grateful for the clerks and the pages and women all through our governments, all through our private sector, and all through our NGOs for all the work they do and the conversations they have and the change they make because of that.

When we talk about these conversations, I also think about the things that we don't, even among women — that are very hard to talk about, that carry a lot of shame and guilt, and I hope that we can all work to make space in our conversations for those things too, because none of us should carry that alone.

I think about the people who aren't in those conversations, the people who are talked over, silenced, excluded, or just forgotten. I hope that, as we have those conversations, we make space for all women to be part of those conversations, because that, I think, will lead to real change.

Applause

In recognition of the Industry Conference

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I rise to pay tribute to this year's Industry Conference. I was honoured to give the opening remarks at today's event and to see so many familiar faces. At this very moment, Yukoners and people from across the country are gathering in Whitehorse to learn and discuss how we can adapt business practices to meet our evolving business and economic needs. This year's conference theme is "Exploring Possibilities".

We have experienced many global changes in recent years. From supply chain disruptions, inflation, labour shortages, and the impacts of climate change on our infrastructure, the world we are doing business in has experienced a lot of upheaval. We are incredibly fortunate to have a business community in the Yukon that is resilient and that has invested in keeping up with our changing economic landscape.

With challenges come opportunities; with changes come possibilities. The Industry Conference provides a space for our business community to meet, share ideas, and explore possibilities that change brings. At this year's Industry Conference, we are looking at new ways to do business and to grow our economy. We are fortunate to host a roster of impressive speakers from across Canada and our own territory. These speakers will help guide the participants in exploring a variety of new programs, initiatives, and topics that are transforming how we conduct business in the Yukon. The sessions cover topics like workplace psychological health, using procurement to promote sustainability, and hiring Indigenous youth.

I would be remiss, Mr. Speaker, to not mention our partners in planning this conference. The Yukon Chamber of Commerce, the Yukon Contractors Association, and the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce are each responsible for advocating on behalf of their members. They work to ensure that the common interests of the Yukon's industries are represented and that our private sector remains strong. I want to say a special thank you to these organizations for the work that they do on behalf of Yukon's businesses.

Our territory is home to a vibrant business community. While I cannot attribute the success of Yukon businesses to any one thing, I can say with certainty that the ability of our private sector to adapt in the face of change is one of our greatest strengths. I believe that industry and government can collaborate as partners in innovation and welcome change. Together we can work to build a thriving economy that benefits all Yukoners. The insightful ideas and initiatives presented at the 2023 Industry Conference can help us achieve that goal.

Our economy cannot remain stagnant. We must always strive to find new and inventive ways to do business in a changing global economy. I have confidence that our private sector and our government can work together to create a more socially, environmentally, and fiscally responsible landscape for conducting business in our territory.

To everyone who participated in this year's conference and to the organizers who put it on, thank you very much.

Applause

Mr. Hassard: It's a pleasure to rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the ninth annual Yukon Industry Conference. I had the pleasure of attending for a couple of hours this morning, and I would like to thank the Department of Highways and Public Works and all of the partners and organizers for their hard work to bring this important event together. It was certainly great to once again attend this conference in person.

Unfortunately, I was only able to stay for a couple of hours, so I was only able to listen to the first two presenters of the day, but I must say that Mr. Dennis Cuku, an engineer from Edmonton, gave a person plenty to ponder, as I'm sure the minister would agree. And, as per usual, Mr. Kailer Mullet, who I'm sure is listening this afternoon — his presentation on the economy was exceptionally colourful as per normal. It was great to hear him. I certainly hope that the remainder of the event was as good as the first part, for sure. So, I wish all of those who are attending a fruitful event and all the best.

Applause

Ms. White: I stand on behalf of the Yukon NDP to wish the presenters, participants, and organizers of this year's Yukon Industry Conference a stellar time. In a territory where the relationship between government and industry is so vital to both sectors, this event is all about building new and better relationships, exchanging ideas, and so much more. The annual Industry Conference is a great networking opportunity and an altogether educational experience for industry and government alike.

So, again, thank you to the organizers and the participants who will make this conference such a success.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I have for tabling the Watson Lake housing needs assessment in response to questions raised by the Member for Watson Lake.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I have for tabling a letter from the Yukon Medical Association.

Ms. Clarke: I have for tabling a letter dated February 28, 2023 from the Yukon Women's Coalition addressed to the Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate.

Ms. White: I have for tabling today a press release dated January 17, 2023 from two First Nations, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, in regard to the wetlands policy.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees? Are there any petitions to be presented?

PETITIONS

Petition No. 17

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

To the Yukon Legislative Assembly:

This petition of the undersigned shows:

THAT hemodialysis is a treatment that replaces the work of your own kidneys to clear waste and extra fluid from your blood;

THAT hemodialysis is not offered at any hospitals in the Yukon;

THAT patients are having to travel back and forth to Vancouver sometimes on a weekly basis, or have had to relocate to receive hemodialysis;

THAT this is costly to both taxpayers and the individual; and

THAT more than anything takes the individual away from their homes, communities, supports and families;

Therefore, the undersigned ask that the Yukon Legislative Assembly to urge the Yukon Government to work with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to provide Hemodialysis to those who need it in the Yukon.

Speaker: Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 23: *References to the Sovereign Statute Law Amendment Act (2023)* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I move that Bill No. 23, entitled *References to the Sovereign Statute Law Amendment Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 23, entitled *References to the Sovereign Statute Law Amendment Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion agreed to

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

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges all Members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly to take the introduction to gender-inclusive diversity analysis, GIDA, training course that assists in:

(1) identifying how personal and systemic biases can impact different stages of decision-making;

(2) implementing a GIDA lens during decision-making processes in your workplace to enhance the inclusivity of programs, policies, and services; and

(3) evaluating the different impacts of an initiative and considerations to take into account when addressing how people are impacted.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to continue the implementation of gender-inclusive diversity analysis, GIDA, on key initiatives across government by providing training, research, support, and analysis.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to fix its flawed implementation of midwifery by taking actions including the following:

- (1) allow midwives to provide services in private practice and be paid for their services under a negotiated agreement;
- (2) ensure that the pay for midwives employed by the Department of Health and Social Services is competitive with other jurisdictions; and
- (3) revisiting the government's decision to shut down the program completely if there are gaps in the availability of two midwives to be on call.

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

THAT this House commends the Yukon Human Rights Commission on the successful delivery of the Y(OUR) PART conference as part of their work to educate the public and build capacity in collaboration with stakeholders to effectively and responsibly address sexual harassment in Yukon workplaces.

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

THAT this House supports and stands in solidarity with the Canadian national women's soccer team in their continued fight to seek equal pay with their male counterparts, celebrates the interim funding agreement struck just days ago as evidence of the positive change they are creating, and urges the Canadian soccer association to move expediently to conclude a full collective bargaining agreement that mirrors that of the men ahead of this year's women's world cup in New Zealand.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to hold further public consultation with affected property owners about plans to extend Birch Street and Azure Road on the west side of the Alaska Highway and to change the intersection of the Alaska Highway and Wann Road.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to follow the direction of Alberta and Saskatchewan by allowing Yukon trucking companies the ability to continue using paper logs and be exempt from the costly use of electronic logging devices when they are not leaving the Yukon.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to ensure that the swimming pool in Ross River is opened in the summer of 2023.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to support the development of seniors housing in Haines Junction by:

- (1) initiating consultations with the St. Elias Seniors Society, the Village of Haines Junction, and the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations on the construction of phase 2 of seniors housing in Haines Junction;
- (2) including a line item in the 2023-24 budget for this project; and
- (3) completing consultation and design of this seniors housing project in 2023.

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

THAT this House supports equality, diversity, and gender parity within the Yukon government and that while, in 2023, women occupy seven of the 15 deputy minister positions at Yukon government and 22 of the 46 positions at the ADM level, equivalent to a total of 47.5 percent of senior management positions within Yukon government, this House urges the Government of Yukon to continue to apply the gender-inclusive diversity analysis lens to continue this important work.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House supports the Government of Yukon's efforts to ensure that the port of Skagway remains accessible as an export option for the Yukon mining industry.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with the borough of Skagway to ensure that the design for the new ore dock is able to accommodate the delivery of wind turbine components such as blades, nacelles, and towers for delivery to Yukon.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Frances Avenue lot development

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I rise today to recognize the new agreement between the Government of Yukon and Liard First Nation. The Frances Avenue land distribution agreement will see the development of 43 new residential lots on Frances Avenue in Watson Lake.

The agreement is the key step toward addressing the housing needs of Watson Lake while strengthening how the Yukon and the Liard First Nation governments work together equitably. Both the process of reaching this agreement and the impacts that it will have for generations to come demonstrate

the importance of using a reconciliation-based approach to strengthen Yukon communities.

Under the agreement, the Yukon government will make 25 lots available to the public, while Liard First Nation will hold title to 18 lots. The 18 lots being transferred to Liard First Nation are interim protected lands. This means that they have been protected from the development of potential settlement land since the negotiation of the *Umbrella Final Agreement*. Our government will continue to oversee the lots as well as develop a lift station to support the growing neighbourhood.

Not only is this good news for today, this agreement also supports a strong and prosperous tomorrow. The infrastructure for this project will support future development phases, yielding up to 73 additional lots, which will help to continue to meet the needs of the growing community.

The Frances Avenue agreement is the first to be finalized as part of a broader set of negotiations supporting our government's commitment to advancing reconciliation in partnership with Liard First Nation. As negotiations progress, we expect further agreements to be reached that will help improve quality of life within the community.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring that all parties have a meaningful role in the growth and development of Watson Lake. Working with the Liard First Nation and the Town of Watson Lake is a crucial part of that. Together, we are discussing topics such as capacity development, land planning and development, and fish and wildlife management.

In terms of next steps, the development of the Frances Avenue lots will begin this winter, following review by the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board.

Creating a neighbourhood requires significant effort, and I am thankful for everyone — Liard First Nation, the Town of Watson Lake, and Yukon government staff — for their efforts and support.

This agreement marks another step in our government's actions to make the Yukon a place that everyone can call home. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about this agreement and to celebrate our government's strengthened relationship with Liard First Nation.

Ms. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and any day that I get to talk about my community of Watson Lake on the floor of the House is a good day. We look forward to the advancement of this 43-lot development project on Frances Avenue. This project has been in the past couple of capital budgets but, for whatever reason, has not come to fruition. So, I know that Watson Lake will be pleased to hear that this project is coming forward. I know that this has been on the Watson Lake town council's radar for quite some time.

In his statement, the Premier said that the project will have future development up to 73 additional lots, so can the Premier tell the community about this future lot expansion? How will the 73 lots be developed? Where will they be developed, and what is the timeline for this future development of 73 lots?

Speaking of timelines, the Premier said in his statement — and I quote: “In terms of next steps, the development of the

Frances Avenue lots will begin this winter, following review by the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board.” Can the Premier clarify what he means by “this winter”? Does he mean this month or a year from now?

Last night, the Minister of Community Services told the town council that he anticipates that 25 of the 43 lots available to the public will be for sale this fall. Can the Premier confirm this timeline? The lack of building lots has severely hampered the development of Watson Lake, so we are happy to see some forward movement on lot development in the community.

Ms. White: In response to today's ministerial statement, I want to congratulate all those who worked together on the agreement between the Liard First Nation and the Yukon government to bring these much-needed residential lots to Watson Lake. We hope to see more collaborations like this one between the government and other Yukon First Nations in the future to help address the current housing crisis. In a time when even the Yukon Party is talking about the importance of housing, it is imperative that we work collectively with First Nation governments, municipalities, and with each other to address the housing shortage.

So, congratulations to the Liard First Nation and the Town of Watson Lake. We are excited to see what the future brings with these new lots as a starting point.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Our government recognizes the fundamental importance of housing. The need to increase housing across the territory has been a priority for this government since day one.

As Minister Silver stated yesterday, Yukoners deserve to have accurate information —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

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

Mr. Cathers: The Premier should be well aware that it is out of order to refer to a member by name, as he just did.

Speaker: Hon. Premier, on the point of order.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Point taken. I will stand and refer to the minister appropriately.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: On the point of order, I just want to remind members not to refer to members by their names.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As stated by the Finance minister yesterday, Yukoners deserve to have accurate information and here it is: I can assure all Yukoners that our government is making informed, responsible decisions to increase the availability of housing in Yukon communities, including responsible budgeting to ensure access to rural lot development. The proof exists in milestones such as the Frances Avenue agreement, which supports the development of 43 new serviced residential lots in Watson Lake. Again, the infrastructure that our government is putting

in place will support future development, yielding up to 73 additional lots.

I will, at a further time, work with Community Services to bring a timeline of when the work will start so we can clarify my comment today about the starting point. As the Member for Watson Lake should know well, the plans for development and the planning process for the official community plan, as I understand, are led by the municipality — in this sense, the community of Watson Lake. That is a fact and, again, the information that everyone has a right to know.

Another fact is that I believe that the Member for Watson Lake had stated that the community will — I believe, to paraphrase — likely be happy with this. I think the member was on a call last night. My sense was that people were quite ecstatic. You can imagine — this is something that, years and years, probably over a decade — people wanting to see a community come together. Our team here is about bringing both the First Nation and the Yukon government and the municipality together to work on a process that is of the priorities of all governments — but again, making sure that people are working together on these projects versus maybe challenges, which we have heard this week, of pulling people apart.

There was also a comment this week about the strategic plan. There was an ask by the Member for Watson Lake: Have I seen the strategic plan and what was the response to that from 2015? I will table the strategic plan. I have asked the Department of Community Services to get the response. For efficiency purposes, the Member for Watson Lake could have a discussion with the leader of her party, because that is whom the strategic plan went to, and there was a two-year period where the minister probably would have responded. I'm going to look for the response and I will table it, but in the meantime, if maybe the Leader of the Official Opposition wants to speak with his colleague on what the response was to the strategic plan, that may be a more efficient way to pass on the information.

With that being said, I want to commend the Minister of Community Services for this work. I want to commend the former Premier. This is something that we have not seen in the Yukon — this type of work. This is true reconciliation in order. This is action, this is delivering, and again, this is ensuring that all Yukoners have a place to call home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to more projects similar to this in the future.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* implementation

Ms. Clarke: Early last week, eight organizations that make up the Yukon Women's Coalition wrote to the Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate. Their letter was in response to a meeting held with them by the minister and was focused on the implementation of the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*.

In this letter, they explained that in order to participate in a coordinated approach to end gender-based violence, these groups need proper core funding. To quote from the letter: "Core funding for women's sector non-profit organizations is at the heart of achieving the goals of the NAP...". Does the current budget provide the increases in core funding that these groups have requested?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I will start by saying that we recognize and value the absolutely critical contribution made by equality-seeking organizations in the Yukon in supporting women, their children, and 2SLGBTQ2S+ Yukoners. I definitely know that NGOs are struggling with the rising costs and staffing shortages and that further conversations need to happen to discuss sustainable levels of core funding. The letter that was tabled today and was spoken about today by the member opposite was a follow-up from a meeting that I had with equality-seeking organizations in January. I am absolutely committed to continue meeting with women's organizations that are receiving core funding from the Women and Gender Equity Directorate this year to develop a sustainable way forward and to work together on the implementation of Yukon's portion of the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* — again, brand new fund. I will elaborate a little bit more on that, but I really do look forward to sitting down again with the staff and elected officials of these organizations to continue the discussion.

Ms. Clarke: The letter from eight groups that make up the Yukon Women's Coalition have raised serious concerns about the lack of funding they receive. They note that the women's shelters represented in the group are required to operate at a deficit and therefore do not have the funding necessary to operate their essential service 24/7. Here is what they said: "We struggle with squaring Yukon Government's declarations to address and mitigate gender-based violence in our territory while your funding decisions reflect the opposite." These groups are calling on the minister to back up her words and promises with actions and funding.

Will the minister provide the necessary core funding to these groups to achieve the goals set out in the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yukon was very proud to endorse the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* at the 40th annual federal-provincial-territorial meeting of ministers responsible for the status of women in November 2022. We are aware of the need for additional funding and capacity to address the high rates of gender-based violence in the Yukon.

Bilateral negotiations with Canada have now begun to determine details of the funding agreement, including territorial priorities for investment, especially those that align with Yukon's missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls strategy. We look forward to working with our partners and with the Government of Canada in preventing and responding to gender-based violence.

I have made commitments to the women's organizations and equality-seeking groups to continue this discussion. The formal negotiations on Yukon's implementation, as I have stated, have started and will be reflected in, I would think, the

supplementary budget later in the year. Those dollars are not reflected in our current budget that we have tabled this week. As I have stated, those negotiations are continuing and will reflect the needs and priorities of the Yukon.

Ms. Clarke: Core funding wasn't the only thing that the eight women's groups requested; they also requested a formal working relationship with the Yukon government on the rollout of the national action plan funding from the federal government. In particular, they requested an MOU that would demonstrate their inclusion as decision-makers on prioritizing how the funding should roll out.

Has the minister developed such an MOU, and when will it be in place?

Hon. Ms. McLean: As I have stated, today is International Women's Day. We did a tribute today expressing the work that needs to be done in our territory and in our country and, really, worldwide. We recognize and value the critical contribution made by equality-seeking organizations in the Yukon in supporting women and their children and 2SLGBTQIA Yukoners.

There is a critical role for women and 2SLGBTQIA with respect to implementing the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* within the Yukon, and we will work closely with these organizations. The bilateral agreement with Women and Gender Equality Canada is federal-provincial-territorial and will be negotiated between governments. Negotiations have started. I am making a commitment to work with our partners. There are many partners in the territory. We also have partners who we have committed to with the MMIWG2S+ strategy, and I look forward to continuing the work.

Question re: Inclusive and special education

Mr. Kent: On January 4, 2022, the Yukon's Speech Language Pathology & Audiology Association, or YSLPAA, wrote to the chair of the Public Accounts Committee with a variety of concerns. Subsequent to that letter, we asked a number of questions of the minister, which I would like to follow up on today.

The YSLPAA asked the Department of Education to — and I quote: “Conduct a thorough review of literacy and language instruction to address how to close widening performance gaps that continue to be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.”

So, my question for the Minister of Education is: Has this review been undertaken, and if so, can she provide us with an update on where that work is at?

Hon. Ms. McLean: This is certainly an area of focus for our government. In 2019, the audit of Education indicated that we had a lot of work to do in the territory. We have also done a review of inclusive and special education that tell us how to re-think and what we need to do to support students in delivering timely, effective supports for their learning needs. A tremendous amount of work has gone into this. I have talked about this in the last Sitting. I talked about it previously in terms of the work that we are doing on reimagining inclusive and special education, and we have a very in-depth focus. This

initiative is called “RISE”. All of the supports that are being referenced in the questions that the member opposite is asking are a focus of a number of working groups, and all those organizations are working within the working groups to address the needs and supports for our children in schools.

Mr. Kent: Just for the Minister of Education, that question was specific to a review of literacy and language instruction, as recommended by an organization that wrote to the Public Accounts Committee last January.

So, that YSLPAA organization also asked that Education move away from existing literacy programs and “Support the use of evidence-based practices for literacy and language development.”

According to a recent *Yukon News* article, the First Nation School Board is moving away from the literacy program that it inherited from Education in the schools that they are responsible for. The new system, called the Science of Reading, will teach kids to decode new words by sounding them out and is expected to be in place for the 2023-24 school year.

So, will the Department of Education be following suit and changing their literacy programming for the schools they are responsible for?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Literacy skills are a key component of student success, and we are committed to improving literacy proficiency for Yukon students. Addressing student literacy needs is a complex task, and no single approach or resource program is a solution for the many factors that influence student literacy outcomes.

The Department of Education is supportive of using multiple approaches to literacy instruction that include balanced literacy, combined with the Science of Reading, to address students' needs.

We are also committed to using a variety of intervention tools that include Reading Recovery and Wilson to address learning needs. The Department of Education recently launched a literacy strategy working group to develop culturally responsive literacy programming in schools. This working group will make research- and data-informed recommendations for a Yukon culturally responsive literacy strategy. There are a number of partners who are working with us on that strategy. We are providing training and support on new literacy resources to support literacy development.

I will continue to build on this as we go forward.

Mr. Kent: As I mentioned, the YSLPAA has asked that Education move away from the existing literacy programs and support the use of evidence-based practices for literacy and language development. The First Nation School Board is making that move away from the literacy program that it inherited from Education in the schools that they are responsible for, so I just want the minister to clarify for me: Will the Department of Education be following suit and changing their literacy programs for this upcoming school year?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I have already stated that we're working — we have launched a literacy strategy working group. This working group is comprised of various Yukon education stakeholders. The Yukon First Nation Education

Directorate is represented there — Department of Education staff, including educators and administrators — and are actively working to seek other Yukon First Nation members to this group. The group will provide research-based and data-informed recommendations for a Yukon culturally responsive literacy strategy.

As I have stated off the top, literacy skills are a key component to student success, and we're committed to improving literacy proficiency for Yukon students. Also, just to make the note while I am on my feet, schools are following the Yukon K to 12 education recovery plan, which outlines key priorities, including numeracy, literacy, and providing an inclusive environment for learning. We continue to assess student learning and are closely monitoring impacts of the pandemic on learning outcomes.

A lot more to come on this — really proud of the work that's being done in partnership with Yukoners.

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Wetlands protection

Ms. White: The much-awaited wetlands policy was finally released in January, and it leaves a lot to be desired. The hope was that this policy would actually and actively protect wetlands; however, as it stands, a wetland will only be deemed worthy of protection if it is designated of special importance by the minister, but it needs to be nominated first, and that's where it gets complicated. Only other levels of governments, boards, and councils can nominate a wetland, not conservation organizations or concerned Yukoners or even experts.

The Yukon government is counting on other levels of governments to do their work for them while it's preventing experts and individual Yukoners from weighing in. Why has this government put so many barriers in place and made the process of protecting wetlands so difficult?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I was there with my colleague, the Minister of Environment, when we first released this strategy. There are several ways in which protection gets put in place. The Leader of the NDP has outlined one, but there is a whole hierarchy at work around using avoidance, using — it's a sequence that's used in order to improve protection across all of our wetlands.

With respect to special designation, yes, it's true that this is ultimately going to come to governments, but we're happy if the public or NGOs make nominations to us. They will be considered. So, that's the route; that's fine. I have had meetings since that strategy was released with both the Yukon Conservation Society and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Yukon. Our dialogue is ongoing; in fact, we just reached out to them recently to talk about some ongoing research in wetlands. I think that they, Ducks Unlimited, and the Wildlife Conservation Society have responded to be part of that work, alongside industry and governments.

Ms. White: Two of the First Nations with territory containing many wetlands currently under development came out against the policy and asked for a complete rewrite. I tabled that press release today.

They both agree that the policy doesn't efficiently protect wetlands and still allows for broad resource development and land use activities. Experts are also concerned that the designation of a wetland of special importance will not only fail to stop further development but will also not have any effect on current and ongoing development, allowing development to continue on as if nothing has changed.

Will the government listen to First Nation governments and experts and implement a protection-first approach to wetlands?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: After we released the strategy, we did hear the announcement from the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in. Of course, we immediately reached out to them. I should start by noting that the departments of Environment and Energy, Mines and Resources worked in engagement with the public, with industry, with environmental groups, and with First Nations over the past five years. There has been a lot of dialogue. I immediately reached out to the First Nations and said, "If you want more protection, the wrong thing to do would be to withdraw this strategy, because the strategy is a good step in the direction of providing protection." So, I have had that initial dialogue and there is more to come.

I think that there are several ways in which we work to do protection. Another one, for example, is land use planning.

We have seen many ways where we have protection through this strategy. We also know that where we have development happening, we want to make sure to protect that, and that's why we're in conversation with industry as to how to have reclamation that will protect those wetlands.

Ms. White: In the past, the minister has consistently claimed that we don't have enough data or research on wetlands. If we listen to the minister, we don't have enough data to effectively protect the environment, but somehow we do have enough data to sell off our environment to private companies for development and profit, so something just doesn't add up.

When asked to rescind the policy and start listening to people, again, the minister said that we need more research. More research shouldn't be used as a "get out of jail free" card. Wetlands are precious ecosystems that need to be protected, especially if we're told that we need more research to truly understand how important they are for the environment.

Will the minister push pause and work with Yukon First Nations to address their concerns?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: This policy, the wetlands policy, sets out high-level guidance for improving our knowledge of wetlands and minimizing our impacts on wetlands, and it describes a new suite of tools to protect significant wetlands.

Implementation of the policy has started, but completing the 16 identified actions will take time. The policy commits the Yukon government to map wetlands in the Yukon within five years, which will provide very valuable data. We have already begun to fulfill this commitment.

We recognize that we must be responsive to new information as we continue to build our knowledge and to improve our understanding of Yukon's wetlands. This includes

through initiatives such as wetland mapping and inventory, studying carbon storage and release, as well as researching the effects of a changing climate on northern wetlands. We will also continue to support local, national, and international partnerships to increase our knowledge of northern wetlands.

Mr. Speaker, we are of course aware of the concerns expressed by the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun regarding the levels of protection that the policy provides for wetlands. We do look forward to further conversation with both governments to identify and address specific concerns, but we are certainly of the view that this is a very positive step forward in the protection of valuable Yukon wetlands.

Question re: Canada Winter Games bid cancellation

Mr. Dixon: On November 14, 2022, the Liberal Cabinet shocked the sport community, and pretty much the entire territory, when they unilaterally announced that they were pulling the plug on Yukon's bid to host the 2027 Canada Winter Games. What followed that announcement was a bizarre attempt by the minister to point the finger elsewhere. He tried to blame the City of Whitehorse for demanding too much infrastructure, he tried to blame the games council for setting the bar too high, and he tried to blame the federal government for failing to offer enough funding.

But Yukoners know exactly where to lay the blame for the cancellation of Yukon's bid to host these games. Is the Minister of Community Services ready to admit that there is no one else to blame for this fiasco but the Liberal Cabinet?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I'm happy to address this issue on the floor of the House this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, a comprehensive bid to host the Canada Winter Games was jointly submitted by the Government of Yukon and the City of Whitehorse to the Canada Games Council in September 2022. This was a culmination of 18 months of work by the 2027 Canada Winter Games Bid Committee. A bid cannot be created quickly.

In the fall of 2022, together with our partners at the City of Whitehorse, our government made the decision to not proceed with the bid to host the 2027 Canada Winter Games due to the high cost of building the infrastructure that would have been needed to make the games a success. The Government of Canada indicated that it was willing to provide less than three percent of the requested contribution, meaning that no funding would be available to support the necessary work to make the games a success and leave a lasting legacy in Whitehorse.

Based on that, in the wake of that news, the Yukon government, with the City of Whitehorse, made the very difficult decision not to host the games in 2027.

Mr. Dixon: It's interesting to hear the take from the minister that the decision involved the City of Whitehorse, because that's clearly a point of difference between the Mayor of Whitehorse and the minister.

In the fallout from the minister's November 14 announcement, just about every group involved expressed their

disappointment with the handling of this decision by the Liberal Cabinet. The decision may have been made by the Liberal Cabinet, but the ramifications will be felt by many others. Some sports groups have indicated that they will feel the effects of this fiasco for some time and that the Yukon will need to do a lot of work to repair the damage done.

What steps is the Minister of Community Services taking to repair the damage from the reputational black eye that his decision has caused for the Yukon sports community?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I want to note for the House that the former Yukon Party chief of staff voted against the games bid largely due to reservations centred on finances. It is very disappointing, frankly, to see the Yukon Party leader spreading disinformation regarding our government's decision to not move forward with the 2027 Canada Winter Games bid. Our communication surrounding this matter was clear. Despite our government's transparency regarding the decision, the Yukon Party continues to search for darker, more ominous information regarding that decision — information that simply does not exist.

The Official Opposition's positioning on this topic does a disservice to the incredible potential of this territory and does not reflect the hard work and collaboration that went into the process for 18 months leading up to the ultimate decision. Once again, we are just seeing the Yukon Party throwing aspersions and false information in the public narrative, and it really does a disservice to Yukoners.

Question re: Recreation infrastructure

Mr. Hassard: In March 2021, the now Premier and the now MLA for Mayo-Tatchun hosted a press conference to make a promise to the Yukon sport community. Here is how it was reported in the *Whitehorse Star* on March 26, 2021. The now Premier said — and I quote: "... the party is interested in partnering with the private sector to build what it's calling a massive new 'fieldhouse' complex worth anywhere from \$7 million to \$11 million."

Can the Minister of Community Services provide an update on this promise that was made by the now Premier and his colleague, the now MLA for Mayo-Tatchun?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Once again, we are revisiting history. I was actually just in Charlottetown, PEI and went to visit the inflatable fieldhouse that they had developed in Charlottetown, PEI — actually, it's in Summerside. I discussed with people there the criteria for keeping such a facility up, maintaining and heating it, and actually keeping it going through a winter. Now, of course, in PEI, the winters are much milder than they are here in the Yukon, and that really comes down to some of the problems we had in developing this fieldhouse.

Once again, what we are talking about is building proper recreation infrastructure for the people of the territory. I have expressed this to the sporting community, and I will continue to say it here on the floor of the House: We are going to work to create the recreation facilities that will meet the needs of the people of the territory going forward. We are going to do it on our timeline, with our budget, and secure the financing in a

methodical and responsible way so that we can continue to host world-class sporting events in the territory, but we're not going to do it under a boilerplate, one-year application process that meets the needs of outside organizations.

Question re: Rural emergency services

Ms. McLeod: Earlier this week, the Mayor of Dawson raised some serious concerns about gaps in the ambulance coverage in Dawson City. According to the mayor, the local volunteer fire department has been called on to fill in gaps in EMS coverage when paramedics aren't available, and these calls are steadily increasing. Here is what the mayor said to CBC — and I quote: "I think it puts the volunteer firefighters in a difficult spot because, you know, everyone wants to help. People want to assist in ways they can. But again, it's not necessarily something they're trained for or have the equipment."

So, what is the Minister of Community Services doing to address this concern?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I will state right off the top that our Yukon Emergency Medical Services branch does a phenomenal job of serving our territory, covering vast distances with a small team, and I commend the entire service for their good work and their dedication to the well-being of our people and communities. There will be, at times, situations where incident volume exceeds available resources. This is not a challenge unique to the Yukon, and it happens with all emergency services locally, nationally, and internationally. EMS manages these situations through a variety of approaches to reduce patient impact and to prioritize critical care. At times, this may mean that EMS repositions people and ambulances to ensure coverage, ensures coverage from the nearest units, utilizes medevac, among other ways to deliver services. EMS maintains an aggressive recruitment and new staff orientation programs, and it is always looking for volunteers and professionals. Emergency Medical Services recruitment strategies have allowed the services to bolster capacity.

Ms. McLeod: Dawson City isn't the only community that is facing EMS challenges. In Watson Lake, there continue to be gaps in coverage as well. I have heard from community members that there is an increasing reliance on volunteers to provide EMS coverage during times when paid coverage is not available. This is leading to more and more being put on the shoulders of an already small volunteer group. Even worse, we understand there are times when there is no coverage at all.

Can the minister tell us what steps are being taken to ensure that citizens living in Watson Lake have access to EMS when they need it?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Watson Lake Emergency Medical Services responds to approximately 450 calls per year in an expansive and remote service area. We recognize that. I've spoken about this on the floor of the House, I've spoken about this in the community of Watson Lake, and I will repeat it today. This high call volume, along with extended transport times, makes it necessary to support our valued volunteer community of responders with additional paid staff support. To meet operational demands and maintain sustainability, Yukon

Emergency Medical Services introduced a permanent new staffing model at the Watson Lake ambulance station that utilizes a hybrid of employees and volunteer community responders. The staffing model provides funding equivalent to 3.2 full-time positions of additional employee-based coverage and funding to cover standby costs when volunteers are unavailable. These positions provide paid coverage in Watson Lake for more than 10 hours per day, seven days a week.

Ms. McLeod: Beyond Watson Lake and Dawson City, we know that there are growing concerns around the recruitment and retention of EMS volunteers in many Yukon communities.

We have heard that volunteers are giving up their service for several reasons, including burnout, the lingering impacts of the vaccine mandate, administrative hurdles that create red tape, and a lack of proper respect and recognition.

Has the minister considered increasing the honorarium and standby pay and improving support for training?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We are, indeed, in a post-COVID hangover, and we are seeing that with front-line service providers across the territory and around North America — certainly across the Canadian nation.

Yukon Emergency Medical Services recognizes that training and education are essential in supporting the effective delivery of emergency medical services. Using a variety of training methods, Yukon Emergency Medical Services delivers programs aimed to increase recruitment and retention of community responders and to ensure support for community responders throughout the territory. This includes a training centre, a mobile training unit, high-fidelity training mannequins and an online platform, local training nights, certificate courses, and two dedicated clinical educators, in addition to peer support groups and mental-wellness supports, with a focus on the psychological health and safety of our first responders.

Yukon Emergency Medical Services also provides accredited core training and certification for emergency medical services community responders through the Emergency Care and Safety Institute's emergency medical responder program.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Deputy Chair (Ms. Tredger): Order, please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 209, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

Deputy Chair: Order, please.

Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

Bill No. 209: *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2023-24*

Deputy Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 209, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I am very pleased to rise today in Committee of the Whole to speak to Bill No. 209, otherwise known as the *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and I am thrilled to have my deputy minister, Jessica Shultz, here with me today, her first time in the Assembly as the deputy minister. Thank you very much to her and her team for all of the work that has led to us being here today.

If passed, Deputy Chair, the bill will provide spending authority for the first two months of the fiscal year. Members will be familiar with this bill, as it includes funds that ensure that the government has the necessary appropriations to fund the programs and services that Yukoners expect and rely upon, as we debate the main estimates.

As with the previous year, the 2023-24 interim supply bill will grant spending authorities 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 also \$96.6 million in capital spending. This interim supply bill provides critical operational funding in order to allow departments to meet their financial obligations at the start of the fiscal year.

The bill ensures that government services can continue and that employees, Yukon businesses, and the government contractors continue to be paid until the 2023-24 main estimates receive assent. The majority of the funds include one-sixth of the forecasted budgets, as well as large payments due early in the fiscal year for items such as the comprehensive municipal grant, the Yukon Hospital Corporation contribution agreement, the Yukon University contribution agreement, and expenses for universal childcare needed at the start of the fiscal year.

The 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 funding for the Yukon's schools for the first two months of their fiscal year. I would also be pleased to

provide members with an overview of what is included from a numbers perspective.

I mentioned legislative grants. This year's interim supply bill includes: \$39.8 million in that area, the largest of which includes \$22.2 million for the comprehensive municipal grants; \$11 million for grants-in-lieu of property taxes for municipalities; \$932,000 for post-secondary student grants and child subsidy grants; and also \$4.4 million for social assistance payments. There is also \$546,000 for Yukon seniors income supplement payments; and \$492,000 for medical travel subsidies. Beyond these grants, contribution agreements to the Yukon Hospital Corporation and Yukon University make up \$46.8 million and \$7.3 million respectively.

Non-governmental organizations also depend on these payments to continue their operations without interruption. Under Health and Social Services, this bill also includes one-quarter of the grants and contribution agreements with NGOs, worth \$15.3 million. There is also \$9.5 million for one-quarter of the RCMP and 911 contract values included in the interim supply bill. Lastly, there is \$10 million included in the bill as part funding for universal childcare and \$13.5 million to meet agreements, purchases, and contracts in Yukon schools. \$4.6 million is also required at the start of the fiscal year for work on the Whistle Bend school.

Deputy Chair, this is just a snapshot of some of the bigger-ticket items that are included in the interim supply bill and which may fall outside of one-sixth allocation. The remaining amounts are largely operational and fall under a standard two-month distribution of funds.

We expect the *First Appropriation Act 2022-23* to receive assent by the end of the session, which will provide spending authority for the full year.

While I welcome questions related to the interim supply bill, I'm hoping that members can keep questions about the *First Appropriation Act 2022-23* to that debate. Passing this interim supply bill will help ensure that services are still provided to Yukoners while we have the comprehensive and fruitful discussions here in the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Cathers: I would like to also welcome Jessica Schultz here in her role as Deputy Minister of Finance. Deputy Chair, we do have a number of questions related to the government's spending plans; however, we intend to ask those questions during debate on the budget itself, rather than taking a long time on interim supply.

With that, I will turn the floor over to the Third Party, if the Third Party has any additional questions, and I would just ask that, when debate on interim supply clears, I would respectfully request to the Chair that, rather than taking extended breaks, since the same officials would be present, we proceed into the supplementary budget, either without delay or with a very short recess.

With that, I'll turn it back to the Minister of Finance and over to the Leader of the Third Party, if she has any questions.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I appreciate the member opposite giving that room so that we can have a more fulsome conversation in the larger appropriation.

He makes a very good point. This is where the majority of the funding is going to come from, so having the opportunity for all of those departments to be here and to answer those questions on the full picture, as opposed to the two-month window, is probably a better use of our time in the Legislative Assembly.

I appreciate that from the member opposite. From that, I will cede the floor.

Deputy Chair: Is there any further general debate on Bill No. 209, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2023-24*?

Seeing none, we will now proceed to clause 1. The bill's schedules form part of clause 1.

On Clause 1

On Schedule A

Schedule A agreed to

On Schedule B

Schedule B agreed to

Clause 1 agreed to

On Clause 2

Clause 2 agreed to

On Preamble

Preamble agreed to

On Title

Title agreed to

Hon. Mr. Silver: Deputy Chair, I move that you report Bill No. 209, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2023-24*, without amendment.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved the Member for Klondike that the Chair report Bill No. 209, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2023-24*, without amendment.

Motion agreed to

Bill No. 207: *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I am pleased to rise this afternoon to begin Committee of the Whole debate on the *Third Appropriation Act 2022-2023*. I am still joined by my deputy minister, Jessica Schultz. Thank you very much to her and her team for all of their extraordinary work.

Bill No. 207 is the second supplementary estimates for the fiscal year. I am pleased to give an overview of the bill during the second reading, and instead of rehashing the need for this appropriation bill, I will focus in on providing a greater level of detail for the new funding and decreases included as part of this proposal.

Above all else, however, the bill allows us to respond to unexpected changes since we first tabled our main estimates last March. As well, it gives us the ability to respond to new and emerging challenges. With that, I will dive into many of the changes included in the appropriation bill.

The *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23* proposes an increase of \$29 million in new operation and maintenance spending and no increase in capital spending on a gross basis.

The increase in O&M spending is paired with \$4.3 million in new recoveries for operation and maintenance 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 revenue for the Yukon government is from increases in income taxes and mineral royalties — the money coming in. These changes to the budget mean that we have an adjusted forecast surplus of \$43.9 million, up from the \$33 million in the first supplementary estimates.

Year-end net debt is forecasted as \$298.5 million, which is likewise up from the \$214 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 part of our five-year capital plan as well as the implementation of new asset retirement obligations included as part of the update of the public sector accounts standards.

Now, let's break down those changes a bit further, starting with operation and maintenance. The proposed operation and maintenance budgets include, as mentioned, \$29 million in new spending and \$4.3 million in new recoveries. With the end of the state of emergency for the COVID-19 pandemic and the relaxing of many pandemic measurements, some of these funds will go directly toward programs that help kick-start Yukon's economy and provide services to the Yukon public. There are, however, also global and geopolitical influences on these changes, including higher inflation and also the war in Ukraine.

To help with the rise in the cost of living, the Government of Yukon is providing an extension of the inflation relief rebate on electricity bills that was in place from October through December. These supplementary estimates will cover the costs of March. We are also including \$4.4 million in the Yukon Development Corporation's budget to cover this additional extension.

Recognizing the need for Yukoners to learn new skills to re-enter the work force following the pandemic, we have also included \$741,000 under Economic Development's budget as part of the Skills for Success program. The pandemic made for low ridership on public transportation and public transit in the City of Whitehorse, so we are addressing shortfalls for operating costs in that area as part of this budget.

Continuing with COVID-19 recovery-related spending, we have included \$270,000 for the recovery research program. This program funds research from various organizations that fills in needed information for 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. Funding for each of these programs is recoverable from the Government of Canada either in part or in full.

This government also recognizes challenges facing the health care sector. As part of the supplementary estimates, the

Department of Health and Social Services will see an increase of \$13.3 million in operation and maintenance.

This includes: \$9 million for legislated, insured health program increases; \$1.2 million for Yukon Medical Association adjustments; \$2.6 million for additional work on 1Health; \$483,000 for MRI services to shorten wait-list times; and \$1.9 million for waste-water surveillance funding to monitor communicable diseases in First Nation communities.

Another significant change is to the Department of Highways and Public Works, with an added \$3.8 million to the O&M budget. These increases relate to the same pressures that Yukoners faced across the territory — namely, higher fuel costs and electricity costs. Included in this breakdown is \$2.2 million for the electrical and fuel rate increases that I've mentioned and \$1.6 million for emergency road washouts and flooding.

The Department of Justice also includes a significant number of smaller adjustments totalling \$2.7 million, which I will allow the minister responsible for the department to speak to in greater detail, but included in this appropriation is: \$428,000 in RCMP funding increases; \$347,000 for women's and men's transition home needs; \$310,000 for the Yukon Utilities Board hearing budget; \$240,000 for legal aid increases; \$175,000 for Gladue report funding; \$172,000 for Victim Services increases; and \$125,000 as an internal transfer from the Women and Gender Equity Directorate for the sexualized assault response team expansion. The adjustments in this department will also result in a \$1.6-million increase in recoveries.

The Executive Council Office and the Department of Environment will also see increases of \$1.2 million and \$1.1 million respectively. In the former, the increase is primarily the result of increases in First Nation capacity funding for consultation and engagement at \$1.2 million, as well as \$300,000 for Water Board legal and technical review costs for the Department of Environment.

This supplementary estimate includes: \$432,000 in wood bison monitoring; \$381,000 in increases as part of the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement*; \$150,000 for flood hazard mapping and data acquisition recovery; \$99,000 for a climate change scientist; and \$20,000 for the climate change preparedness in the north extension.

All of the increases in the Department of Environment are fully recoverable. One additional noteworthy increase is in the Department of Community Services, where an additional \$1.4 million is required for community operation costs, \$754,000 is needed for transit relief funding to address operational shortfalls through the pandemic, and \$300,000 will go toward First Nation FireSmart projects. These changes result in a \$2.5-million increase in that department's budget.

Lastly, the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, Tourism and Culture, and the Yukon Housing Corporation will each see increases of \$1.7 million, \$506,000, and \$1.2 million respectively. I invite the ministers responsible for each of these areas to outline the changes in their departments when their votes are called for debate, but I will now use the next few minutes to detail some of the changes in the capital budget.

The capital budget has no overall change on a gross basis in this supplementary estimate, but this is not because no adjustments were 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 were able to accommodate the new spending while staying within the gross capital budget.

As I mentioned during the second reading speech, 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 higher costs due to an accelerated schedule. The additional work on this project results in a proposed increase of \$35.8 million as part of the supplementary estimates.

We also provided additional funding for building the Carmacks bypass, which is part of the Yukon Resource Gateway program. Work in this area makes up \$11.8 million in capital expenses. The third project is for the construction of the Dempster fibre line, which will open up a second fibre optic link instead of relying on just one, and so it will give Yukoners more reliable access to the Internet as well as the necessary redundancy. This project includes a proposed increase of \$5.7 million.

The Nisutlin Bay bridge project and the Carmacks bypass will have three-quarters of their funding returned from the Government of Canada through recoveries in 2022-23, resulting in \$35.5 million of new recoveries in these three projects. All of these projects are of great importance to the Yukon and we are making sure that they move ahead.

We do have some smaller increases in capital spending as well. These include: remediation of the Ross River School to account for permafrost thaw at \$2.3 million; licensing technology systems for schools at \$177,000; the last step in project design for upgrades to the morgue at \$185,000; renovations to the bilingual Centre de Santé Constellation Health Centre for \$1.3 million; and implementation of the 1Health Yukon health information system at \$3.5 million. These ongoing projects have a measurable impact on improving Yukoners' lives. As members can see, these increases are offset by decreases in capital.

The most significant offsets can be seen at Yukon Housing Corporation. As I mentioned in second reading, this is largely the result of revised timelines for various projects and initiatives as well as lower uptake in application-based programs. This also accounts for the housing and building cycle as Normandy Living, Cornerstone, and the 47-unit 4th and Jeckell facility are all ready and taking in clients. We are now shifting toward building new relationships for potential future projects.

The following projects will all see a decrease in funding as part of this supplementary estimate. The developer build loan program will see a reduction of \$5 million to account for a revised project schedule. The flood relief program will see a reduction of \$1.5 million owing to lower program intake — that is a good thing, Deputy Chair — meaning that fewer homeowners needed to access emergency funding. The municipal matching construction program will also see a

reduction of \$2.5 million to account for program intake, and the northern carve-out will see a reduction of \$4 million to account for a revised project schedule.

There is also a notable decrease from delays at the Atlin hydro expansion project, totalling \$12.5 million. This delay does not mean that the project is permanently on hold, but comes from a timing issue where we have an opportunity to bring in other funders in the near future.

Altogether, we see that decreases have entirely offset the increases in capital spending for 2022-23. A large part of the increases have benefited from financial recoveries, and there will be some funds that were carried over from previous budgets that were only recovered for the supplementary estimates. This means that the changes will result in a net increase of \$10.5 million in new recoveries.

Before I finish, I just want to address changes in revenue in the supplementary estimates. As I mentioned in the second reading, we forecast that revenues will increase by \$26.1 million. The biggest piece of this increase is from an estimated jump of \$17.5 million in new 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. This will result in \$9.8 million in new revenues.

Deputy Chair, this concludes my summary of the second supplementary estimates for 2022-23. As always, I aim to provide as much detail as possible at a general level but invite members to seek greater detail from ministers during individual department debates. Until then, I look forward to providing further insight, as needed.

Mr. Cathers: I begin with a question for the Premier, and that is what the current debt of the Government of Yukon is. In that, I'm referring to the current amount that's classified as long-term debt, as well as temporary borrowings that exist, such as Yukon Development Corporation's line of credit and Yukon Energy Corporation's line of credit.

Hon. Mr. Silver: So, we have been having a lot of conversations about borrowing debt — net debt — so thank you to the member opposite for the opportunity here to elaborate a bit on these things.

We know, on this side of the Legislature, that responsible borrowing is part of strong fiscal management, and it helps with the preservation of capital, and it helps with liquidity management and also return on investments. The Government of Yukon's current borrowing limit, if we want to start there, is \$800 million and is set by regulations under the *Yukon Act*, which is federal legislation. The total debt used — as calculated using the rules of the Yukon borrowing limits regulation — on March 31, 2022 was \$116 million. This can be found on page 64 of the 2021-22 Public Accounts. The remaining borrow room of nearly \$600 million provides financial flexibility to support a growing economy. Current borrowing has provided investments in public infrastructure, which is beneficial to

Yukoners, notably, critical upgrades to electricity generation, the transmission network to improve reliability, and supports the goals that we have under *Our Clean Future* and the Yukon Energy's 10-year renewable electricity plan.

If we take a look at how the bulk of the current total external debt — of the \$216.4 million, as reported in the 2020-21 Public Accounts — Yukon Development Corporation is at \$173.4 million, the Yukon Hospital Corporation is \$22.6 million, Yukon Housing Corporation is \$1.3 million, and finally, the Yukon University is at \$1 million.

So, that's where we are with borrowing. It's worth mentioning that Standard & Poor's Global issues credit ratings for debt of public and private companies and other public borrowers, such as governments and others. When commercial or public entities go to market for debt offerings, lenders will consider the quality of the proposed debt, of which one indicator is a credit rating. We have a AA credit rating right now in the Yukon through Standard & Poor's Global, which we are very proud of.

I will now move on to net debt. Again, the difference here is that net debt is a measure of the government's ability to pay off its liabilities if they were due immediately. It doesn't mean that the government needs to borrow on these funds. The majority of the net debt is for long-term liabilities that will not materialize all at once — things like severance entitlements, for example. The two main contributors to changes in annual net debt for 2023-24 include something new from the Office of the Auditor General: the adoption of an asset retirement obligation liability, which is a new accounting standard that came into effect in April 2022. Also, another contributor is the continued investment in capital spending, specifically capital assets.

So, the five-year capital plan includes \$2.15 billion in spending over the next five years. This plan features strategic investments in infrastructure that support our growing economy and deliver on government services to Yukoners. Last year, the Government of Yukon approved the territory's largest-ever capital budget at \$547 million, as the government responded to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This spending stimulated the economy and addressed a number of infrastructure needs at the same time.

The territory is now shifting. We are shifting away from the response phase of the pandemic, and we are entering into that recovery phase. Current economic conditions, which include rapidly rising inflation, labour shortages, constrained supply chains — they have all resulted in a reduction in planned capital spending for the 2023-24 fiscal year, as the government seeks to maintain its strong fiscal standing.

We are continuing to actively monitor and review our financial position as it relates to the management of government operations. This is allowing us to plan ahead and ensure that sustainable and effective capital spending continues to meet our infrastructure needs here in the territory. This is us choosing to use our financial assets to invest in the future of the Yukon, spending on roads, bridges, schools, and health facilities to help grow our economy and provide vital public services. These investments in infrastructure and services improve the lives of all Yukoners.

Investments in this particular budget, for example — Whistle Bend school, Dempster fibre, north Klondike Highway, Nisutlin Bay bridge, Erik Nielsen Whitehorse airport runway — are all examples of this level of spending.

As far as consolidated versus non-consolidated, I am going to give the floor back to the member opposite, if he is looking for a breakdown further than what I have provided here with our borrowing, the corporations, and then the net debt.

Mr. Cathers: While I do appreciate the numbers the minister provided, the numbers he provided are found in the Public Accounts. As one of the handful of people in the Yukon who actually read through the Public Accounts, I had seen those numbers. They also are not necessarily current numbers, because they reflect the audited year-end for the last fiscal year, which ended almost 12 months ago.

My question was about current status regarding both debt that's classified as long-term debt, and would be shown as such in the Public Accounts when those are eventually released, as well as what the status of the temporary borrowings of government and government corporations might be.

Again, if the Finance minister could provide that, I would appreciate it. We are looking for what the current number is of debt, not what the number was almost 12 months ago.

Hon. Mr. Silver: As the member opposite will most likely recall from his time in ministerial appointments, those are the most current, up-to-date numbers, and we don't want to get ahead of the Public Accounts and that process, working with the federal government.

We make regular payments to staff, contractors, and hundreds of other vendors to ensure that Yukoners receive the services that they expect from government. We continue to ensure that we have a sustained cash flow to meet the spending needs that are of critical importance to provide essential services to Yukoners. We go through variance reports as we continue to monitor throughout the year, but what I have given the member opposite is a current reflection on the public numbers to date as we continue to work with the federal government to update those numbers for public consumption.

Mr. Cathers: There are a few things in the Minister of Finance's response that I'm concerned with, but one that jumped out is that I was asking about borrowing and long-term debt, and he made reference to sustained cash flow to pay employees and other matters. That seemed an odd response to a question about debt. Is the Finance minister indicating that the government is currently borrowing money to pay employees?

Hon. Mr. Silver: What I'm saying is that the Department of Finance is regularly monitoring cash flow to access its current financial status and basically giving him information that he already knows, as a minister — which is having an up-to-date assessment of all things. Whether it be our vendors, our transfer payments and making sure that they are moving thoroughly — these are the things that we work with as we move through our variance reports and as we work with the Office of the Auditor General. That's what I'm flagging. He asked about more up-to-date numbers, and I'm telling him information that he probably already knows. I know he already knows, because he spent some time here as a minister. So,

again, just talking in general about how we report public numbers and how we continue to monitor in between those Public Accounts.

Mr. Cathers: The Minister of Finance just tried to sidestep my question. As I noted, Deputy Chair, when I was asking about borrowing, to me, it seemed odd for the Finance minister to mention the need for sustained cash flow and monitoring cash flow to pay employees and meet other expenses. That seemed like a strange response, to me, to the question I asked about debt and borrowing.

So, could the Finance minister then clarify: What is the current status? Does the Yukon government have cash in the bank, and if so, what is the most recent number on that? I know the minister has a number more recent than 11 months ago. Or is the minister indicating that they are currently running into overdraft or other short-term borrowing to meet employee expenses and other costs?

Hon. Mr. Silver: We understand the member opposite's propensity to speculate, but again, we're talking about fluctuations year-by-year, month-by-month. As to why giving current numbers is something that his government didn't do — you know, as we go through that process with the Office of the Auditor General — and also a reflection of the questions, not only that the member opposite is asking now, but also the questions that his party asked in previous Sittings here. So, we kind of know where they are going. Basically, I'm just reporting again on the current conversation as best as possible. But, yes, again, we go through fluctuations as we go through a calendar year, as one can imagine. One really great thing to see from the opposition may be support of an interim supply bill, because, again, that allows us to allocate funds as well.

Again, I won't necessarily entertain the member's speculations; I will just give him the information from the Department of Finance.

Mr. Cathers: The Minister of Finance made reference to going through fluctuations in a year and again dodged a fairly simple question that he, for some reason, doesn't seem to want to answer. He can dismiss questions that I have asked now or in the past as speculation, but I will point out that if the minister was more proactively transparent and simply gave us the information up front or a quick-hand response to a question, we wouldn't have to be persistent and ask questions that he then sees as speculation.

The question is simple. The minister made reference to fluctuations in a year. This series of questions all began with me asking about long-term debt and temporary borrowings. In response to that, the Minister of Finance was the one who brought in the question of having a sustained cash flow, monitoring the cash flow, and talking about the fluctuations in it. It seemed, from his initial answer and attitude by his reluctance to give me more details, that the minister may have been saying that the government is running into overdraft or other short-term borrowing to meet expenses, such as payroll.

So, the question is simply whether that is what the minister is indicating: Is the government currently, or has it been, running into overdraft or other short-term borrowings that it pays interest on simply to meet the cash-flow requirements? It

is a simple yes or no question. If they aren't dipping into overdraft and paying interest to meet the ongoing cash expenses of the government, then a simple answer to that will suffice. The minister knows which they are doing. Is there cash in the bank, or are they dipping into overdraft and paying interest to meet cash requirements?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, I am giving the member opposite as much information as the opposition, when they were in government, gave to the public. He knows that there is a process with Public Accounts. He also knows that, when we talk about things like recoveries, for example, and working with the federal government, sometimes you will see more money in a bank and sometimes you will see less, based upon a lot of things. It fluctuates on a daily basis. The reason we bring it up is this is why this information isn't necessarily readily available on a day-to-day basis, because on a day-to-day basis, those numbers can fluctuate.

The member opposite can speculate as much as he wants about a narrative — maybe he just might want to let us know where he is going with his questioning. I answered his question as far as the most current numbers. I gave a little bit more information when it comes to cash flow, for example. We know that the amount changes on a daily basis and on a significant number of variables as well. So, this is just giving a little bit more information. Again, he is making it seem like information he already knows from his time as a minister, now that he is not the minister — that must mean that the sky is falling somehow.

We will continue to monitor, and we will continue to move through our variance reports, and we will continue to be open and transparent with the numbers as we work with the federal government to make sure that we continue to win accolades on a national basis about our transparency, about our openness and our financial processes. If I am not giving some information that maybe the member opposite gave when he was in the ministerial roles, or his team, please let me know, and I will rectify that immediately.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Deputy Chair, to begin with, as the Finance minister should know, I was never the Finance minister and was not the one who might have fielded questions of this type from the Official Opposition Finance critic. Getting into a debate about what someone may have asked and what someone may have refused to answer a decade or more ago is really not a productive use of time.

The Minister of Finance, when he ran as the Liberal leader, promised increased transparency. The question I am asking is about the public's money. The minister suggested by the fact that, when I asked a question about the long-term debt and temporary borrowings — he was the one who brought in the question of cash flow and meeting expenses, such as payroll. That certainly suggests that, unless he gave a very odd answer to the question that had nothing to do with my question — it would lead one to draw the conclusion that the Minister of Finance saw it as directly relevant, and it would seem that this Liberal government is either currently, or may have been in the past, borrowing money on a temporary basis and paying interest just to meet the cash-flow requirements. If that's not the case, then tell us. If it is the case, then we, of course, would question

how much the government has been paying in interest charges and how deeply they are into borrowing money for short-term cash requirements.

It is a very simple question, and as the minister made reference to officials closely monitoring the cash flow, we know that officials are mindful of whether there is cash in the bank and what the status of it is. The picture that we have, which the Premier references in Public Accounts, is almost a year out of date. The government has entered spending decisions since then. The Minister of Finance knows whether they have entered into long-term debt or not. If they haven't entered into any new long-term debt, then tell us that. The Minister of Finance knows whether they are borrowing money right now to meet short-term cash requirements or if there is cash in the bank, so tell us which it is.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Whether the member opposite was the Minister of Finance or not, surely they worked together as ministers and understood how the Management Board process works and all of that. But again, we watched from his government to our government — we both know, and we're doing this weird dance — he is speculating and I'm refusing to participate in his speculations, as I did with the territorial formula funding back in the fall. It is just not a great use of our time here necessarily, but let's just cut to the chase here. Cash reserves — let's talk about that.

The Public Accounts show that we have had cash reserves in the past, and they have diminished over the years, for sure. We also know that, during the pandemic, we made sure that we were spending to make sure that the private sector continued to work and that we kept a good GDP. We also know that there are new pressures that will be coming down the road. There will probably be a situation in the future — as every government comes to maturity and comes to a level of more sophistication — where we do have to consider long-term borrowing, where we will have to consider this long-term borrowing. To know right now, with the short-term borrowing that was in place for the member opposite — and they have probably used and I know that they have used — to make sure that departments can make ends meet, that's one thing, but to say — let's go to the real conversation: Are we worried about a long-term borrowing situation in the Yukon? I would say no, we are not worried about it. I think it's important to have a priority on maintaining specific spending on critical capital infrastructure, knowing full well that taking a look at our GDP ratios compared to our net debt or looking at the different types of debt anchors that every other jurisdiction uses, we're in an incredibly good place when it comes to our long-term financing. However, we also went through a situation different from the Yukon Party where we actually did spend the federal money that was coming in. Provinces would love to have 75-cent dollars coming in.

Also, because they didn't spend when they were in government, we did have to spend to catch up and keep up. We can take a look back at some of the Office of the Auditor General reports on the lack of infrastructure spending that the Yukon Party did. There are a lot of things coming together, including the fact that we all know — I was in opposition and made reference to the reduction in cash reserves, and the

member opposite has talked about cash reserves. If he is asking me if I'm worried about long-term borrowing, I am not worried about it. I do believe, though, that we have to develop strategies, because again, going from where we were with the Yukon Party and how they applied — or didn't apply — federal funding, where we were in the pandemic, where we are on inflation, there are pressures. I will give him that; there are pressures, but we are probably in a situation where, if something major was to happen — God forbid — on an environmental-catastrophe basis where we had to do some relief or even on a good thing where, if we were going to come together with a strategy with First Nation governments, the federal government, and ourselves on a major infrastructure investment in *Our Clean Future* or even in *Putting People First* or some of these pressures we are seeing, would we entertain long-term borrowing? Absolutely.

We, as a department, would be looking at strategies to service that, absolutely. But again, my only hesitance with the member opposite is his propensity for speculating, and anything we say in here, he then holds it against us. So, we are definitely in a situation where we've seen over the last 10 years or more — I'm not really sure, but for a long time — those cash reserves going down; that's for sure. And we are now in a situation where the federal government provides borrowing room, and we have lots of borrowing room right now, but if a major project came down the road, then we would be concerned about the borrowing room on that, because over here, with the Yukon Liberal Party, we believe that we need to take the opportunities when they hit us.

Now, I'm going to couple that, if we're going to go into speculation land, which is the member opposite's favourite place to be — I don't know if there is a lot more massive ICIP — Investing in Canada Infrastructure projects — money coming down the pipe right now, when we're seeing a federal government talking about austerity-like measures or the Governor of the Bank of Canada and others talking about recessions. I don't see an opportunity that would — I shouldn't even say it that way, but I'm hopeful that we'll see equal amounts of infrastructure spending from the federal government, but probably not likely in the next couple of years.

So, as far as me worrying about having to match up our money with federal money or — we should prepare for those, and I will let the member opposite know that's something that we can talk more about, as we develop strategies for that situation, but right now, there is authority for departments if, from a daily basis or monthly basis, they find themselves in situations that they could borrow. There is kind of an antiquated way, if we look at the legislation that we still have in right now. We might want to look at longer term borrowing solutions, if we had something like a massive influx of cash from the federal government that we would have to match fundings on. I hope that's enough for the member opposite, but again, I'm just refusing to do much more speculating past that.

Mr. Cathers: I do appreciate that the minister provided some information, but unfortunately, there are parts that he is refusing to answer and without good reason, Deputy Chair. Unless the government feels that they have something that they

want to hide, I'm simply asking about the public's money and the public's business. It's the Premier — pardon me, years of habit of referring to the Member for Klondike as “the Premier” — the Minister of Finance now.

The Minister of Finance suggested that there was something unreasonable about me taking words that he or his colleagues have said in Hansard and reminding him of them years later or in a future session. Well, that is a big part of what it is the job of the opposition to do. In fact, as the minister will recall, it is something that all parties have done. In fact, part of the reason why we have transcripts in the Legislative Assembly is so what all members say is put down and people can judge them on what they said in the past and whether they delivered.

The question about whether the government and departments are borrowing money to meet cash-flow needs is an important one. The minister indirectly indicated that departments do have the authority to borrow money to meet cash-flow requirements, but this is a development in the Yukon that has not always been there historically, contrary to what the minister is suggesting. It is a question that the public has a right to know. If government is out of cash in the bank and borrowing money short term to meet cash-flow requirements, including to meet its payroll requirements, the public has a right to know when they are doing that, how much money they are having to borrow, and what the interest charges are on that.

Ultimately, if the Minister of Finance and his colleagues believe that those decisions were reasonable, necessary, and justified, then they can justify and explain them. But it is public money. If government is out of cash in the bank, running into overdraft, and paying interest on that or effectively achieving the same thing through short-term borrowings, the question of just how deeply they are into short-term borrowings is one that I believe not only members of this Assembly but Yukoners have a right to know. And the amount of interest payments that they have paid, for example, in the current fiscal year or previous years is something that government should be disclosing to people, not hiding it within any line items of departments or making it difficult for people to see in the Public Accounts.

Just to simplify it here, the Minister of Finance keeps pointing to the Public Accounts and suggesting that we just refer to them, but those are almost a year out of date. When we are looking for answers that Yukoners can understand and judge the government on, there are very few people in this territory of roughly 44,000 Yukoners who are going to page through the Public Accounts and understand them. What I'm asking for is the key pieces of information in simple enough terms that most people can understand them, and that relates to the question of: How often is government borrowing money to meet cash-flow requirements for departments? How deeply are they going into short-term borrowings, and how high is the interest that they are currently paying on such borrowings, as well as the total interest charges in a year? Paying interest becomes more and more relevant to government the higher the Bank of Canada prime rate gets, and we're just asking what government is doing with public money.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, the member opposite started by saying: Is there something to hide? No, there is nothing to hide. I'm answering his question. There is nothing to hide. We are offering the exact same information that his government did when he was in — and rightfully so. We're not saying that the Yukon Party was keeping numbers from the public by adhering to the laws of the land federally and locally when it comes to reporting and accounting these monies. All of these trends that the member opposite is looking for are in the Public Accounts.

I will push back and say that I don't think most Yukoners wouldn't be able to understand the Public Accounts. I don't think that's true, and I also don't think that the member opposite is in some select group of the only people who are reading these; I think that's completely nonsense. I think people who invest in the Yukon pay close attention to these numbers, and there is a reason why we report out in a fiscally responsible manner — in a timeline manner — when we're taking a look at a yearly fiscal review.

I mean, for example, March 31, 2022, non-consolidated cash was at \$72.8 million. So, there you go; there is money in the bank. The member opposite keeps on speculating. He's talking about interest. What's really interesting about interest is the Yukon Party's borrowing style in the past. You know, we're still paying off interest from debts that were accrued under the leadership of the members opposite, with no money of that principal being taken off. That's how the members opposite used their debt, and we still have that on the books. Not one dollar of principal has been taken off that. The member opposite knows a lot about those things.

Back to non-consolidated cash — that \$72.8 million. Like all figures and indicators, we monitor these changes throughout the year. If I then said — let's say that — this is not true — but let's say that I said the day after that reported number of \$72.8 million — let's say it went down to \$50 million — and then we reported that to the member opposite. I can only imagine what the member opposite would do with that information, as opposed to: No, let's take a look at trends on a yearly basis, based upon fiscal acuity that we have been getting accolades on. We're open and transparent in the way that we budget. The member opposite is pretending that we are somehow hiding things, when really, we are doing more accountability than the member opposite ever did when his party was in the Legislative Assembly in government. We have gone from the Ds that they used to get with the C.D. Howe Institute up to As, and again, the member opposite won't let this go. I mentioned cash — publicly accessible numbers of cash of \$72.8 million — and I am not going to allow him to speculate wildly by giving him daily reporting, when that is not what the Office of the Auditor General is even asking for. We could go around this mulberry bush all day long — no problem. I don't mind sitting here being called “the Premier” all day as well — it's quite refreshing.

Like many other figures, cash-flow fluctuations, with payments made to vendors and staff, fluctuations that we receive in payments from fees from the federal government through transfers and through recovery payments — you know, working with the federal government to make sure that we get

our recoveries back on a timely basis — yes, there is always strain — there is always going to be a strain when it comes to cash management. The member opposite would know that from his time in government as well. I am sure that he does know that, but again, for him to say: I want daily updates on those dollar values, and if you don't give them, then I am going to go out to social media and tell everybody that there is a problem — go ahead; do your worst, but again, we are going to continue to give the reporting that we are required to. We are going to continue to monitor long-term, year-by-year accountability of trends like cash flow. It is no secret that, of course, the cash-flow trend has been going down. That is obvious. That is in the pages of the Public Accounts, and we are obligated, as Finance minister and my team, to make sure that we develop borrowing strategies for rainy days, and we will continue to do that, absolutely.

This process is no different from how we publish the annual surplus and deficit. Does he want me to then also tell him, okay, what is the actual surplus and deficit the day after the budget? What is it going to be in the variance report? What is it going to be the next day? I am not going to give him those numbers.

Mr. Cathers: So much for sunny ways.

The Minister of Finance, in refusing to provide me the information and trying to take personal shots across the floor — which, knock yourself out, Minister of Finance — I would just note that this is not ultimately about who is asking the questions. The question is whether the public has a right to this information. The Minister of Finance is effectively saying to this Assembly that, while he reluctantly acknowledges that the public has a right to this information, they only get to ask for this information four times in an entire term of this Liberal government, and asking at any other time will be met with stonewalling, rejection, and a refusal to answer the question.

After I asked what was the current status of long-term debt and temporary borrowings, the Minister of Finance then jumped to the conclusion in his next response, where he was attempting to dismiss my question, to claim that I was asking for an update on a daily basis. There is a very large difference between asking for an update more than once a year and asking for it 365 times in a year. I am simply saying that, since the Public Accounts for the last fiscal year reflect a point in time that is almost 12 months ago, I am asking for the current status.

If the Minister of Finance, for example, does not have an update on this that is more current than two weeks ago, three weeks ago, or four weeks ago, I would take the information about the date it was current, and if it seemed reasonable, I would certainly accept that he might not have received an update on the cash balance today or the current status of government indebtedness to meet cash-flow requirements to pay for the needs of departments, including payroll.

It is something that is notable, if the Liberal government is in a situation regularly where, to meet what he referred to as “fluctuations in a year”, they are regularly allowing departments to borrow or requiring departments to borrow money just to meet payroll. The question, then, is about how deeply they are going into these temporary borrowings and

what the current rate of interest is on these temporary borrowings, as well as the amount of interest in a year.

It's a question; it's the public's money.

Hon. Mr. Silver: This is fascinating. You know, giving the same amount of information as the Yukon Party gave, as far as regular reporting — not enough for the member opposite. In answering that in the way that I answered, now the member opposite is speculating on things that I didn't say. Again, I have answered his question and I have answered his question.

Mr. Cathers: Well, the Finance minister can spin it all he wishes, but to suggest that the only information provided by previous Yukon Party Finance ministers was a copy of the Public Accounts is simply not factually correct. Questions were asked — that varied depending on who the Official Opposition Finance critic and the Third Party Finance critic were of the day — of the Finance minister of the day, and answers were given. Those individual ministers of Finance can and should be judged by the public on whether the answers they provided to those questions were appropriate and reasonable.

The former Finance minister seems to keep trying to rewind the clock —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Mr. Cathers: Sorry, Deputy Chair; I am getting ahead of myself — the current Finance minister, not the former Finance minister yet, but we are looking forward to that day.

Questions were asked by Finance critics; the Finance minister of the day provided information. Whether that was transparent or not is a question any Member of the Legislative Assembly and all Yukoners can judge. What the Finance minister is suggesting is that information about the borrowings of the government and the interest charges they are paying should only be seen by the public at the end of October every year, months out of date, and that for the Official Opposition Finance critic to rise and ask a question about a more current fiscal picture is somehow, according to the Minister of Finance, profoundly unreasonable.

Well, unfortunately, if he's going to do this sidestep all day, as he indicated off-mic that he intends to, then we are left concluding that, if the Minister of Finance is adamantly refusing — as he is — to provide a more current financial picture of how much debt government has, both in long-term borrowings and short-term borrowings, it seems like there is information there that they don't want the public to know. If they were proud of the current situation, you would think that they would be more than happy to present current information.

It is simply not believable to suggest that the Minister of Finance doesn't know whether, between March 31 of last year and now, the government has entered into any long-term debt. He has to know that information. So, it's a simple question: Will he tell the public whether the government has entered into long-term debt since the end of the last fiscal year or tell the public they don't have a right to that information?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, it's quite interesting to hear the debate here in the Assembly today, accusing me of personal attacks and then personally attacking me by saying that I'm not going to be the Finance minister pretty soon. That's all good. I'll take that on the chin — no problem.

I'm very proud of my tenure as a Minister of Finance, actually. I'm very proud of the accolades that we have been getting nationally, compared to the abysmal reports — second-last in Canada — in reporting in the past with the Yukon Party. We have increased our openness and our transparency, but the member opposite would have you believe that, by not providing something that he's looking for — and I'm really not sure — if he would just get at what he's looking for — but again, we have accounting processes that we're adhering to. We have annual trends that go through the scrutiny — and I tell you, it's scrutiny, and it's worthwhile, because our Department of Finance — the scrutiny of the Office of the Auditor General — for him to say that me not giving any numbers before Public Accounts comes out — like, there's the crux of the conversation right there. He's saying — which I don't think any government in Canada does, by the way — if he could point me to a government with financing that would say, like, on a monthly basis, without talking to the Office of the Auditor General about any of these very complicated pulleys and levers, you know, of payments and transfer and surpluses outside the regular recording, and then, because we're not answering that question — because we're saying that's not how it works, basically — then that therefore means that we're hiding something? The concept is baffling, and I think the member opposite knows that, as well, that's how finance is done. There are an awful lot of — as I said — pressures from a variance perspective monthly. You can imagine, with the school years, there are going to be times where schools have to manage inside their appropriations, and it's tougher than other times.

You can also imagine that, with the amount of capital building that we have done, we do need to come up with a longer term borrowing strategy. I would urge the member opposite to take a look at our legislation as far as what we can borrow and what we can't borrow, because we have limits. There are limits in place right now and there is also the Public Accounts. If we were engaged in a long-term borrowing scheme against the public that no one knows about — I mean, this would be very hard to do. We are answering the member opposite's questions, but he is asking us for information that governments don't provide on a regular basis — or on as regular a basis as he wants it — and now he is saying that must mean that the sky is falling.

Deputy Chair, you were in the Chair for this debate with the territorial financing formula. The member opposite made it seem like the sky was falling back then again and making us feel like — you know: You're not being accountable, you're not doing your job, and you're not pushing enough. Then the transfer comes over our estimated — over — but we don't hear him coming to the Legislative Assembly and saying, "You know what? I'm sorry that I made it seem like the Yukon was in a dire financial position in the fall." No, he continues; he's doubling down on it.

If the member opposite wants to continue to ask the question for the rest of the day — fair enough. The use of the time in the Legislative Assembly is interesting. He said it himself yesterday.

We are much more accountable, much more transparent than the Yukon Party ever was when it comes to financing. This exercise is interesting. It's an interesting use of the member opposite's time. I have answered the question as far as our most up-to-date numbers, and I asked him to reflect on the Public Accounts. Yes, the last one was a while ago, but at the same time, they are every year. There are trends in those, and if the member opposite is taking a look at the same trends that we are looking at — and I have already said this to him a few times — then yes, we need to consider long-term borrowing. I have said that; I have said that a few times now.

The member opposite is speculating that we have been doing long-term borrowing — I don't know — for years now, I guess. Is that what he's saying? I don't know what he is saying. It is an interesting exercise to try to get into the brain of the member opposite when it comes to his speculating and his paranoia, but we do have a situation where, looking at the long-term trend of cash — cash, not debt necessarily and not net debt necessarily, which the member opposite likes to confuse people with. We do need to consider, as we look at turning the page from pandemic to post-pandemic recovery, as we take a turn, as we see interest rates hopefully being stabilized, as we take a look at federal funding, as we take a look at the current situation, we will have to entertain long-term borrowing. I think that the most important thing here — the thing that bewilders me the most — is that the members opposite had no problem borrowing money — no problem borrowing money — but they don't want us to borrow any money.

So, that's the interesting piece here. On the books — take a look at the Public Accounts. Take a look at the \$200 million-plus of debt that the members opposite rang up — and is now sitting here saying that we need to do better on our borrowing, on our debt, and we need to be more transparent — all these questions. It's fascinating to me; it really, really is.

Mr. Cathers: The Minister of Finance conveniently ignores the additional debt that the Liberals added on, and with that, he seems to suggest that he thinks that borrowing money for the Mayo B project, which was the largest single project in the last 20 years adding renewable energy on the grid, was a bad thing. Now, yes, the Yukon Party government did borrow money for that project. The Finance minister is welcome to criticize that decision if he wishes, and I would argue that, in fact, every government should be scrutinized and criticized, as appropriate, for any decision to borrow money that stays on the books for a long period of time.

But, Deputy Chair, I don't want to spend a lot of time rehashing the past with the Minister of Finance, but he has attempted to suggest several times here this Sitting that my questions regarding the certainty of the territorial funding formula and what indications they had received from the federal government about future years were somehow saying that the sky was falling. I was asking questions to the Minister of Finance about the certainty of that agreement and what indications they had from the federal government about the dollar value of it in future years. Prior to a point where there had been a government announcement that provides certainty about that, of course the Official Opposition is going to

consider asking questions about whether they have certainty on that or, when the federal government is talking about austerity — as they were at the time — whether there was any risk that there could be a reduction in the TFF. Now, I am pleased to see that this year there was an increase in the territorial funding formula amount over the previous year of some \$78 million — which the Minister of Finance is, despite that increase in funding, apparently borrowing money to meet payroll. Again, fundamentally, this is not about whether the Minister of Finance doesn't like me or doesn't like the questions we ask; this is about whether the Yukon public has a right to the information that I am asking about. I believe that they do.

The Minister of Finance would have you believe that it's perfectly reasonable for government and consistent with all past governments for government to say, "We're going to tell you about our borrowings four times a year when the Public Accounts come out, and don't even think of asking a question about it in between, because we are not going to tell you, and we are going to try to paint the question as being unreasonable."

The Minister of Finance knows very well whether the government has entered into any new, long-term debt since the end of the last fiscal year. If the answer is no, then tell us. If the answer is yes, then tell us how much and what it's for.

To be clear, again, I am not saying, "Tell the Opposition Finance critic"; I'm saying to let the public know what you are doing with their money. Did you borrow money and enter into long-term debt since the end of the last fiscal year — yes or no? If you did borrow money, what was it for, and what was the dollar amount?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, I completely disagree with the member opposite as far as how open and accountable we are. We will continue down the same process that the members opposite have done when it comes to the accounting of debt and borrowing. The Public Accounts is the best place to go for those updates on an annual basis. We have been over why it is that governments aren't reporting on that on a more regular basis for the member opposite — the Herculean effort that it is to do the reporting as is. The last Public Accounts — a couple of months ago in the fall — represent the comprehensive and complicated deficit surpluses, borrowing, capital assets. They are all there, and I would urge people in the public who are listening to continue to look at those long-term trends, because that is how it's done. That's how the financial administration, the administration manuals, the rules — we are completely in compliance, doing a better job than the members opposite did when it comes to that accountability.

To answer the member opposite's question, of course, I was a critic at the time. I was in opposition for five years. I have done a lot of criticizing of the government like he does. I think it's healthy to criticize, and I have never said that the members opposite shouldn't have borrowed the money they did, but I find it interesting that the members opposite were fine with their borrowing, but they're not fine with our borrowing. The members opposite were fine with increasing the borrowing limits but weren't okay with us borrowing those limits. I would also encourage people to take a look at our debt anchors and take a look at our GDP to our net debt.

The member opposite is well within his rights as the critic for Finance to bring these things up. I have answered his questions. He is asking for more information that I can't provide him, and that's fine, but those Public Accounts provide all of this information that the member opposite is looking for.

Mr. Cathers: Well, this would be funny if it wasn't a serious matter of public accountability and the Minister of Finance's refusal to be accountable. He just got up and said that the Yukon Party borrowed money but is not fine with "our borrowing". But this is the point. I am asking the minister — and he is repeatedly refusing to tell me whether, since the end of the last fiscal year, they have borrowed money. Have they entered into any long-term debt and, if so, what was it for and what was the amount? The Minister of Finance knows the answer to the question. Every member of Cabinet, I assume, knows the answer to the question. Did they borrow any new money that is factored as long-term debt? What was the dollar amount and what was it for? Anything of that type, I would assume, went through the Management Board approval process, so the Minister of Finance certainly should know this: Did they enter into any long-term debt, and if so, what was it for?

I would say this to the Minister of Finance: Don't look at me when you are choosing to answer the question or refuse to answer again; look at the public gallery.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, as far as long-term debt, no. The member opposite is asking different questions at different times and saying that I'm not answering. That's a different question than he asked earlier. If we invested heavily right now in borrowing on something like Mayo B, then we would be talking about that in the Legislative Assembly right now. The member opposite is speculating. He is absolutely speculating, and again, it's so interesting.

Have we entered into significant long-term — no. But that's not the question he asked earlier, and he knows that. So, if we were in a situation right now as a government where we were investing in a long-term debt situation, where we had to work with the federal government or First Nation governments on maybe — wouldn't it be great if one of their next generation hydro projects actually came to fruition? Well, it didn't because they didn't consult with the First Nations.

But imagine if that actually came up, and right now there was a massive interest in a First Nation — then we would be talking about that right now in the budget that's in front of us, but we're not, and the member opposite is speculating still. It's baffling.

Mr. Cathers: Well, amazingly, the Minister of Finance eventually got around to providing me with an answer. He told me that they haven't entered into long-term debt. Was that so hard, Deputy Chair? Unfortunately, trying to get the answer from him was like pulling teeth. Yes, the minister suggested I asked a different question. I also asked about short-term borrowings, which he still hasn't answered.

The Finance minister is clearly very upset by this request for public accountability, but again, it's just a case of asking for information about what the government is doing or isn't doing with taxpayers' money. It's unfortunate that the Finance

minister is choosing to take it personally or insist on not providing the information instead of just offering up the information that he finally did say about my question about long-term debt.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Mr. Cathers: Now it sounds like he may be wishing to revise his answer, but it did sound like he rose before and indicated that they hadn't entered into new long-term debt since the end of the last fiscal year. So, if he wants to correct his previous statement, then please do so.

Hon. Mr. Silver: No, I'm just not letting him get away with saying one question one time and then asking a different question another time and going, "Oh, finally, I got an answer to my question." The member opposite knows that he's sliding between different concepts, like he does with "net debt" and with "deficit" and "debt". It's classic with this guy. It really is.

Again, our financial accounting compared to theirs — let's bring up the interim fiscal updates as well. We do that on a regular basis every fall. The members opposite wouldn't. They absolutely wouldn't. They talk about accountability now. If it was good for them, they might show a fiscal update. Maybe they don't — maybe because they want to hide something. I don't know; I'm not going to speculate on that, but the member opposite is purely speculating — he really is — and if he asks one question about: Is the department, on a daily basis, borrowing money here and there?, then he asks another question: Did you do some long-term borrowing?, those are two different questions; those are two different questions. I will say again that, in both of those, we are more transparent than the member opposite's team ever was when they were here. If there was long-term borrowing in the budget that we're debating here, then we would see that in the pages of — and he knows that. I can tell by the smile on his face right now; he knows that.

So, again, we will continue to advance the Department of Finance in a way that wins accolades nationally. Again, the amount of work that we have done from the Financial Advisory Panel forward to make sure that this government finally has that openness and transparency that other governments do — that was really important to our team. The member opposite is known for wildly speculating, regardless of what that means as far as stakeholders looking in and listening in and people wanting to invest, especially now. Where the rest of Canada is looking recession-wise, we hope to continue to be resilient of recessions. To speculate wildly that we are somehow not being more transparent than the Yukon Party ever was — it's an insult. It is basically just antiquated politics that we have come to hear as a hallmark from the Member for Lake Laberge.

So, again, we are answering his questions, but it's hard to answer the questions when they change midstream and then the member opposite makes a statement like: "Oh, you've finally answered my question." That is what I am getting upset about here because it is not the question that he asked. He is smiling across the way. Again, this is just regular debate for this guy, I guess, but different questions asked and questions answered. We are not going to help the member opposite wildly speculate by giving numbers on a regular, updated basis outside of the parameters of working with the federal government. We are just

not going to do that. That is not helpful to long-term trends, for one, because mentioning how things fluctuate on a month-to-month basis — the member opposite's teams were known for the March madness spending back in their day. Imagine asking questions pre and post a month like March to the members opposite; they would have freaked out.

The bottom line is that, if you do a yearly accounting and if we add on to that with the Public Accounts and then add on to that the interim updates, we are more accountable than the Yukon Party ever was.

Deputy Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: We will take a 15-minute recess.

Recess

Deputy Chair: Order, please.

Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Is there any further general debate?

Mr. Cathers: I would like to just thank officials for their work here this afternoon and would note that, in the interest of moving on to other departments, including the Department of Tourism and Culture, which is up next, I believe that my colleague, the critic for Tourism and Culture, is looking forward to asking questions there. I think that we can likely clear general debate on the supplementary estimates here now and move into departments.

Deputy Chair: Is there any further general debate on Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*?

Seeing none, we will proceed to clause 1.

On Clause 1

Deputy Chair: The bill's schedules form part of clause 1. One of the schedules is Schedule A containing the departmental votes.

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, in Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Do members wish to take a recess of five minutes to allow officials to take their places?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Committee of the Whole will now recess for five minutes.

Recess

Deputy Chair: Order, please.

Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, in Bill No. 207. Is there any general debate?

Department of Tourism and Culture

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thank you, Deputy Chair. It is an honour to get to rise for the first time in the role as Minister of

Tourism and Culture. Of course, I made some comments during my budget speech, but it is quite the group.

Today I am joined by Deputy Minister Justin Ferbey and by our director of Corporate Services, Kate Olynyk. As always, I am sure that all of us, as members of this Assembly, welcome them here to assist.

I will say just a few brief words about the supplementary budget and the changes that we have before us, but I want to start by saying that, in the role that I have been given, I have had the opportunity to meet with the folks over at Tourism and Culture and they are really a great group of people. I am very impressed with the work that they have been doing, and as I have been getting out and talking with industry, I am hearing that back, so I just wanted to start by paying a big compliment to those folks who do the work to help with our cultural and arts and tourism industries, and I think that we are all the better for it as Yukoners.

The few things within the supplementary budget that I will just highlight for us — they are not big numbers, but they are all pretty significant changes. The first one is that there was some work done to increase funding for our culture and museums — the 19 museums and First Nation cultural centres. So, that was an increase of a little over \$200,000. We are also doing some review work right now to consider how we should look at that on a go-forward basis. We are in dialogue with the Yukon Historical and Museums Association and all the constituent folks about that.

There was just under \$200,000 for a scenic drive rest stop that needed some maintenance work that we hadn't anticipated earlier in the year. There was just under \$100,000 for an Indigenous artists and cultural carriers, a microgrant funding program in which we are getting money back from the Canada Council for the Arts. Some of that is going toward a time-limited outreach officer and some toward funding for the microgrants themselves.

We have deferred some dollars through our capital budget, and it's around the permanent art collection storage. There is also some signage that we have been working to get. I have had several meetings about that. It's not that those projects aren't happening; it's just that they are not happening within this fiscal year.

I will stop it there and look forward to questions from the members opposite.

Ms. Van Bibber: I would like to thank the Deputy Minister of Tourism and the staff member for attending and also the staff who gave us the briefing the other morning. It was very well done.

I have a couple of questions. The first, of course, was about the \$218,000 that was going to be transferred to 19 museums and cultural centres. From what I just heard the minister say, they are still looking at how that's going to be allocated. Will each of the 19 receive funds, and when does he expect this allocation to be determined?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The allocation has already happened, so I might have led astray in my opening remarks. There was work done to look at how inflation has been happening. There was a review, and the dollars were all

allocated for this year's budget. Right now, we are doing a review to understand how we should look on a go-forward basis. That is the ongoing piece.

I'm sure I have it somewhere — there's a breakdown by centre, but I think that was all worked out ahead of my introduction into this role. Yes, the money has been allocated, and what we're looking at is a long-term plan.

Ms. Van Bibber: If we could have a list of that allocation, that would be wonderful.

Now, on the \$190,000 — the remainder of that funding was for scenic drive rest stop program site maintenance. Can the minister expand on exactly what maintenance was needed and what it covered?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, with respect to the museums, because we're doing that work with them right now in the review of process on a go-forward basis, how about we check in with them? I'm just not sure whether they have sensitivities about the information or not. So, I'll just ask the department, as they meet to do that look, that we check in with them about sharing the breakdown, and then, if they're good with that, I'll make sure to give it as a legislative return or something like that. I'll share it with the members opposite.

With respect to the scenic drive upgrades, it was really about getting the outhouse clean; it was about making sure that the site was cleaned up — generally, garbage, et cetera — and there was some signage that was done around the site as well.

Ms. Van Bibber: There is an increase of \$98,000 for culture and arts and the creation of an Indigenous artists and cultural carriers microgrant funding program, and it also states that it's 100-percent recoverable from Canada. I found the term "Indigenous artists and cultural carriers" very interesting. Can the minister explain to me what a cultural carrier is?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: So, the term comes from the federal program, and the way I understand the term is that cultural carriers are folks whose role within First Nations, or Inuit or Métis — not here, but First Nations here — communities supports the preservation, retention, maintenance, and knowledge production and transfer of specific Indigenous world views, cultural practices, and traditions through art and creative practice. So, it can include elders or knowledge-keepers, traditional knowledge folks, language holders, individuals who are actively engaged in learning and mentorship recognized by their communities as cultural representatives.

Ms. Van Bibber: The microgrant funding program is up and running, I'm assuming. Is it fully subscribed, and have you had any feedback on the program?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Apologies, Deputy Chair; if I could just ask the Member for Porter Creek North to just repeat the question for me, please.

Ms. Van Bibber: Not a problem. The microgrant funding program, I am assuming, is fully up and running. Has it been fully subscribed, and have you received any feedback on this program?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: It was more than a couple of dozen. It was oversubscribed. We had more than a couple of dozen applications. We granted a dozen of them. That is the

bulk of the fund. On our other express microgrant program, we had about 100 applicants to receive — where 23 were granted. So, yes, these programs are well-subscribed.

Ms. Van Bibber: The other part of the question was: Was there any feedback from any of these recipients?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thanks; I forgot to answer that question. It's early days, but so far, the indications we have are that it is being well-received. We don't have a lot of detailed feedback as of yet. I think that we will get that over time, but so far, so good is what the department is relaying to me.

Ms. Van Bibber: I thank the minister. Part of the \$98,000 — \$48,000 of that amount is going to one new time-limited Indigenous outreach officer position. First, can the minister explain what this position is? I do understand "one", I do understand "new", and I do understand "Indigenous", but what is "time-limited"?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: This is a partnership, as we noted earlier on, with the Canada Council for the Arts. This is a two-year program, so "time-limited" just means that it is for the life of this program.

In her earlier question, the Member for Porter Creek North asked about how well it's being received. I am sure that the Canada Council for the Arts also wants to hear how well the program is doing across the country. We will see what happens over time, but the initiation of the program is as a two-year rollout.

Ms. Van Bibber: Moving on to the capital side, \$300,000 has been deferred to a future year for the cultural services permanent art collection storage. Can the minister tell us what future year, and what caused the project delay?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: There are some issues that we need to address at the Arts Centre. I will work with my colleague, the Minister of Highways and Public Works. I did flag to him. When I met with the Arts Centre team, they discussed a few issues that we are dealing with; one in particular is to make sure that there are good levels of fire suppression. We need to deal with that issue first, so it is difficult for me to give a timeline on the shelving side of this piece. We are working on the issues that are in front of us first. As soon as I get those out of the way, then we will be able to move on to the next piece. I can hopefully update colleagues at some point, but we just have to do that other work first.

Ms. Van Bibber: Under "historic sites", there is a Yukon sign modernization problem. Again, there are delays. Can the minister fill us in on the deferred \$200,000 on signage?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: On this project, the department has briefed me up on the planning work that is underway. It's to replace all of our "Welcome to the Yukon" signs, and some of those, you know, aspects — as we get closer, we'll be having more direct conversations with the communities — Watson Lake, including Dawson — you know, all of our border points, including at the airport. So, it's partway along, and we're hopeful that it's in the coming fiscal year — so, in 2023-24. It's one of those projects that I think the team is excited about.

Ms. Van Bibber: Can the minister further explain the type of signage that will be used? Is it a whole new thing that

Yukoners will be able to view before it's rolled out, or is it just going to show up one day and cause some angst?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: So, there was a committee struck around the signs with industry to try to work with them on the signage, and I have said that there will be some work within each community as we get close, because there will be aspects of it that reflect the community. I am not anticipating that we are going out for broad public consultation. I also kind of don't want — I want to hold on — I don't want to describe them yet, because we are not quite there. I am hopeful that it will be of interest for Yukoners, of course, but I don't want to — the process is partway through, so I don't want to steal the thunder of the process itself.

Ms. Van Bibber: The two questions just kind from the supplementary, but still in Tourism — the tourism cooperative marketing fund — I'm curious to know if that has been fully subscribed, how many applicants applied, and how much is in the current budget for this fund.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: This current year fund is \$700,000. It is fully subscribed. The department is telling me that it is always oversubscribed, and we have \$700,000 earmarked in the budget that is before us in the mains.

Ms. Van Bibber: I am sure many have seen the animated commercials on the Yukon. I have heard from some that a few businesses are being showcased in these commercials. We wonder who made the decision on which businesses to highlight. Can the minister also explain how the content was chosen and who has the ultimate signing authority on these ads?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The process, as I understand it, is that there is a competitive process for marketing firms to become part of a standing offer agreement with the department, and whoever is chosen has to have — there is a local component for the firm, so usually it's a partnership. There is a marketing firm out of Vancouver called Cossette, which is, I think, the lead, but they work in partnership with Aasman here, which is a local marketing firm.

They create the ads. I think they try to select things that showcase the iconic Yukon. I don't think it's about trying to pick one company or thing over others, but it is to try to give the flavour of the Yukon. I believe that those ads would then go within the department. I would have to figure out where that is exactly, but there would be someone who signs off on the content and says, "Okay, go ahead." But the design of the ads is coming from the firm that was selected through a competitive process.

Ms. Van Bibber: I would hope that it's the DM or the minister who signs off on what represents our territory and not just somebody from an agency.

The timeline for new ads, I'm sure, will be coming up within the next year. When will these be produced and released, or what is the time frame for the current ads? Also, will there be a change of agency of record?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The contract award or the agency of record that I spoke about earlier — 2022-23 is their second year. Next year is their third year, so it's a three-year contract. Then it would go out again into that process.

We have a whole marketing branch within Tourism and Culture. They are the people who I would consider to be the professionals around marketing. We don't expect that all marketing comes up to the deputy minister level for signoff, but it does, under the marketing branch, go up to the Director of Tourism, I'm being told. So, that's typically the level at which those things are dealt with, but I will describe those folks as communications and marketing professionals, so that's the sign-off level.

This coming fiscal year will be the last year for this agency of record, and then we will enter into another process — I would anticipate a similar process, because we are going to want advertising and marketing, but it would be back to the process of a competitive process under our standing offer agreements.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you, Deputy Chair, and thank you to the Minister and the DM and staff member for answering my questions today.

Deputy Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, in Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*?

Seeing none, we will go to line-by-line debate of Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, in Bill No. 207.

Mr. Kent: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, cleared or carried

Deputy Chair: The Member for Copperbelt North has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$506,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures underexpenditure in the amount of \$500,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$6,000 agreed to Department of Tourism and Culture agreed to

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 10 minutes.

Recess

Deputy Chair: Order, please.

Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Is there any general debate?

Department of Highways and Public Works

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I would like to take this opportunity to welcome to the Assembly the Deputy Minister of Highways and Public Works, Catherine Harwood, to my right, and her executive assistant, Alyson Miller, to my left, here to assist with Committee of the Whole debate and questions.

Deputy Chair, this request highlights the Department of Highways and Public Works' continued commitment and dedication to supporting Yukoners by investing in and maintaining our infrastructure. This past fiscal year, we experienced a number of natural disasters — floods, fire, road washouts, and landslides, to name a few. For every unexpected event, the Department of Highways and Public Works rose to the occasion and helped get Yukoners moving again. Staff at Highways and Public Works provided cleanup, traffic control, safety assessments, repairs, and public communications during these unexpected events.

It is part of my department's mandate to provide these services and to respond to these events. However, it was hard to deny that the frequency of disruptive natural events is, in fact, increasing, and there is a cost. In addition to these pressures, supply chain delays, global inflation, and labour market challenges over the past year have all led to rising costs for regular maintenance activities like plowing roads and also for our capital projects. Despite the challenges we faced in the department, we kept Yukoners moving and continued to move projects forward.

Through the 2022-23 fiscal year, Highways and Public Works prioritized projects that advanced safe and efficient travel across our transportation network. We supported local industries, put a strong focus on sustainable infrastructure investments, and responded to emergencies, and we enabled our aviation community to continue the ongoing delivery of essential supplies and medevac services.

I will address, first of all, operation and maintenance estimates. Due to the challenges of this past year, Highways and Public Works is expecting an increase of just under \$3.8 million to the 2022-23 operation and maintenance estimates. This request in O&M funding translates to a 2.4-percent budget increase during the year; however, I would like to highlight that, despite our requested increase to the 2022-23 operation and maintenance budget, we are in fact spending less than in the fiscal year 2021-2022.

As I mentioned earlier, our environment is changing, and that has meant an increase in unexpected natural disasters. Our department has had to mitigate several emergency washout repairs on stretches of road, like the sluffing from the non-permanent permafrost that occurred on the Klondike Highway close to Dawson City in the fall of last year. Of course, there

was the very substantial snowfalls and much, much more frequent avalanches which occurred from Carcross south to the BC-Alaska border. These emergency repairs and clearing have resulted in approximately \$1.6 million of unexpected costs. I certainly thank the tireless crews of Highways and Public Works for both the significant snow clearing and the logistics that were brought to bear from the crew in Dawson City to take prompt, diligent, and logistically well-prepared actions to open up the north Klondike Highway so that supplies could get to Dawson City and the environs of Dawson City. I certainly know — hearing it in my office — that people were concerned, and a shout-out goes out to the Highways and Public Works crew in Dawson for their great work.

Additionally, the cost of electricity and fuel has gone up significantly in the past year. This has impacted all of government. I know it has impacted Yukoners as well, of course, but it is particularly felt by the Transportation division and the Property Management division in Highways and Public Works.

Highways and Public Works' Transportation division is made up of people who plow our roads, fix our bridges, install safety measures, and manage the territory's aviation network. They perform these essential services on the roughly 5,000 kilometres of road. This requires, as one might anticipate, a lot of fuel. Increased fuel and electricity costs in the 2022-23 fiscal year have resulted in an overage of approximately \$1.7 million for the Transportation division.

Highways and Public Works does not just maintain a formidable amount of roadway. Our Property Management division also manages over 550 buildings across all of the Yukon government. However, they are not just buildings; they are spaces where Yukoners can seek emergency and specialized health care, learn about First Nation and Yukon heritage, access legal supports, and for thousands of children across the territory, this is where they go to school. This is infrastructure that allows our government to provide essential services to Yukoners. Unfortunately, our buildings are not immune to increased electricity and fuel costs, and Property Management has therefore incurred an unexpected increase of approximately \$500,000 this past year.

That is basically a summary of the operation and maintenance expenditures, Deputy Chair. I will now move on to the capital funding pressures.

Moving on to capital funding expenditures, Highways and Public Works is projecting an increase of just under \$37.5 million. At this point, I need to emphasize that — and as you have heard from the Minister of Finance — across government, we have managed to contain this pressure within the approved capital main estimates by working together as one government. You will see in the 2022-23 *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* that the estimate remains at \$546.5 million on an all-government basis — therefore, not requesting any additional authority to spend on an all-government basis. There have been no changes to this total amount in the supplementary budget in front of us today.

However, as indicated by the Minister of Finance, there have been several changes to how the money is being allocated.

Some of the key infrastructure projects being managed by Highways and Public Works — and there are three that, I imagine, will be in the focus of this debate — namely, the Nisutlin Bay bridge, Yukon Resource Gateway project — primarily the Carmacks bypass and the Dempster fibre project along the Dempster Highway have had major unanticipated financial pressures placed on them and, in some circumstances, an acceleration of the project, which I will get to.

At the same time, there have been decreases in other capital projects across all of government. As part of the coordinating of the overall capital budget, Highways and Public Works regularly monitors project progress and spending performance across all of government to identify opportunities to offset any capital budget increases. In sum, taking a whole-of-government approach, we offset the financial pressures facing key infrastructure projects from funding that was predicted to lapse, and that became clear as we moved further into this fiscal year. And I certainly commend the Capital Planning Office at the Department of Highways and Public Works for their significant and detailed work in order to reach the point where there was no additional all-of-government ask. This explains why there is no change to the overall capital budget vote despite the increases in the requested legislative spending authority to the Highways and Public Works vote.

Returning to Highways and Public Works and the changes to and focus on the department's capital vote, the increase is primarily due to work being done on the Nisutlin Bay bridge replacement project. The Nisutlin Bay bridge is a key part of the Alaska Highway's transportation infrastructure and is an important landmark for the community of Teslin. In the spring of 2019, the Yukon government and Teslin Tlingit Council signed a project charter agreement for the bridge replacement. Through the project charter, we have been working together to design and build a safe, reliable structure that also improves access for pedestrians and cyclists. This project will provide a significant positive economic outcome for the territory, local businesses, and the community of Teslin.

As many of you know, the bid prices for this project came in higher than expected due to current global economic circumstances and the high premium on steel and other materials; however, an all-of-government decision was made to move forward with this critical piece of infrastructure, and the contract was awarded in May 2022 into this current fiscal year.

Following that, Highways and Public Works worked hard to find solutions to address the increased costs. For example, we are working with Transport Canada to secure additional funding through the national trade corridors fund to support the increased cost of the project. However, the project cost in the 2022-23 fiscal year still increased.

We also required additional funds to support an accelerated project under the Yukon Resource Gateway program. The Gateway program includes infrastructure upgrades for up to 650 kilometres of existing roads in areas of high mineral potential and active mining in the Yukon. What sets this program apart is our commitment to collaborating with Yukon First Nations. Our government has and will continue to seek input and finalize project agreements with every Yukon First

Nation for Resource Gateway components that are within their respective traditional territories.

Additionally, the program will provide opportunities to Yukon First Nations through short- and long-term employment opportunities, training, and benefit agreements. This year, we had the opportunity to accelerate the work scheduled on the Carmacks bypass project.

The Carmacks bypass project was the first under the Gateway program to enter the construction phase. The community of Carmacks and the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation have identified the bypass as an important project. The project plans include a new road and bridge from south of Carmacks to the existing Freegold Road north of town. With this new infrastructure, industrial trucks will be able to bypass the community of Carmacks, in turn creating an enhanced and safer flow of traffic for residents.

The accelerated timeline on this key project came with increased costs in 2022 and the 2022-23 budget; however, the total project cost has remained the same. The Yukon Resource Gateway program is vital to our territory's economic success. We know that improving infrastructure to Yukon's most mineral-rich areas will set us on a course for a more prosperous future, aligning eventually with the federal government's critical mineral strategy. With this in mind, our government has focused on moving this project forward and increasing the flexibility of the funding program with the Government of Canada.

The Yukon government was successful in negotiating a contribution agreement with the Government of Canada that resulted in the Yukon Resource Gateway program's completion date being extended from 2025 to March 2031. The funding program now includes additional flexibility to focus on projects that First Nations and communities have requested. This flexibility allows us to include additional road components on the Silver Trail, the North Canol, and sections of the Robert Campbell Highway. Our government takes good fiscal management seriously and the Gateway program is no exception.

The accelerated Gateway project schedule resulted in higher expenditures in fiscal year 2022-23 than were initially forecast; however, Highways and Public Works did our best to be strong fiscal managers to mitigate the higher costs. Funding pressures in our capital projects were offset by deferred Highways and Public Works projects. By strategically reprofiling these funds, we were able to cover the majority of the accelerated expenditure for this Gateway project.

Another project we made more progress on than originally anticipated was the Dempster fibre line. While this did result in additional spending this year, I am happy to share that half of the fibre conduit installation has now been completed. This includes the installations under the three major rivers — the Mackenzie, the Peel, and the Arctic Red. While completing this project is important, so too is environmental protection. One of the other reasons that there were additional unanticipated costs this year was to protect permafrost.

When installing the fibre line, the crews came across permafrost ground in an area that they were not anticipating.

This required them to adapt the installation methods so that the fibre line installation did not disturb the ground. Environmental protection is a key value on this project, and although there can be additional costs, it is well worth it to ensure that the project is done right.

In summary, the *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* budget requests for Highways and Public Works is a total increase of approximately \$41.26 million. Keeping our infrastructure safe and well-maintained is vital to the functioning of our territory.

These funds have contributed to the services we need for our daily commutes. We are committed to keeping Yukoners moving. Through these investments, Yukon Highways and Public Works is continuing to contribute to Yukon's vibrant and healthy economy. The initiatives I have highlighted not only add value by securing Yukon's infrastructure and assets but also contribute to a better quality of life for everyone.

I look forward to answering questions from members opposite with respect to the various projects that the Department of Highways and Public Works is involved in, including those that form part of the supplementary budget legislative authority spending request, but at this time, seeing the time, Deputy Chair, I move that you report progress.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Riverdale North that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

May the House have a report from the Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole?

Chair's report

Ms. Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 209, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report the bill without amendment. Committee of the Whole has also considered Bill No. 207, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23*, and directed me to report progress.

Speaker: You have heard the report from the Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole.

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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 5:30 p.m.

The following documents were filed March 8, 2023:

35-1-116

Watson Lake Housing Needs Assessment — Final August 28, 2020 (Pillai)

35-1-117

Yukon Medical Association's statement on the 2023-24 Budget address, letter re (dated March 3, 2023) from Alex Kmet, President, Yukon Medical Association to Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee, Minister of Health and Social Services (McPhee)

35-1-118

Yukon implementation of the *National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence*, letter re (dated February 28, 2023) from the Yukon Women's Coalition to Hon. Jeanie McLean, Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate (Clarke, Y.)