



Yukon Legislative Assembly

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HANSARD

Tuesday, April 4, 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 — Lane 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
Lane Tredger	Third Party House Leader Whitehorse Centre
Annie Blake	Vuntut Gwitchin

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

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

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Tuesday, April 4, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker absent

Clerk: It is my duty, pursuant to the provisions of section 24 of the *Legislative Assembly Act*, to inform the Legislative Assembly of the absence of the Speaker.

Deputy Speaker takes the Chair

Deputy Speaker (Ms. Blake): I will now call the House to order.

We will proceed at this time with prayers.

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Clarke: For the Yukon Climate Leadership Council tribute today, I would like to welcome, from the Department of Environment, Rebecca Turpin, Alison Fung, and Emma Seward.

Applause

Deputy Speaker: Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES

In recognition of 2023 IODE Dawson Ice Pool

Hon. Mr. Silver: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Liberal Party government and also the NDP to pay tribute to my friends and neighbours in my home town of Dawson City as the community begins placing bets on the exact date and time that they believe the frozen Yukon River will break in front of town. It is a unique Yukon tradition that has been happening, in some fashion or another, since 1896, the year that hopeful prospectors began flooding Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in traditional territory.

This contest is all about community. It is a symbol of getting through the winter together. Its importance has changed over the years. Back in the day, it was a sign of paddlewheeler traffic soon to arrive to replenish supplies. Now, and this year more than ever, it is a sign of a busy summer and a last gathering before everyone gets extremely busy welcoming tourists, mining folks, and folks who make hay while the sun shines, basically.

I have been in the classroom, back in the day, when the sirens have gone off and the whole school — the whole community, really, it feels like — arrived on the banks of the river to breathe in the extraordinary sounds and movement of a Yukon River breakup. It is absolutely the definition of “awesome”. Ever since the 1940s, the much-loved ice-guessing contest has been run by the local chapter of the IODE. Our

community is extremely grateful for their amazing work. All proceeds of the contest stay in the community, supporting local organizations — including the women’s shelter, the local Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon programming — and also provides parcels to seniors at Christmas.

The earliest recorded breakup was April 23, 2016; the latest was May 28, 1964. Last year, the river began flowing on May 7 at 9:23 p.m., and in 1896, the ice broke up on May 19 at 2:35 in the afternoon. Once enough water pushes out the ice, the huge wooden tripod placed on the ice near the Dänojà Zho Cultural Centre will stop the clock and will mark this year’s official time.

So, everybody, place your bets. It goes to a great cause, and good luck to whoever wins this year.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the Dawson City Ice Pool contest. This is a true Yukon tradition, and the records since 1896 are there to prove the fascination with the spring ice breakup.

In 1940, the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire, or the IODE, took over and made it into a fundraiser.

It’s basically a 50/50 draw where the winning ticket, with the correct guess of date and time, receives half the pot, and the other half is used within the community.

The earliest the ice has gone out, as was mentioned, was April 23, 2016, and the latest was May 28, 1964. Now, that was a big flood year and was the buildup of Front Street to compensate for future floods. We watched ice bob above Front Street and the water came up and over. Everyone, young and old, filled sandbags. All hands worked hours, and even the young ones could hold bags open.

The other notable year was the large flood on May 2, 1979. At 5:09 a.m., the ice moved and packed up. The ice and water flooded the small city. It came so quickly, with the power of water moving buildings and things in its wake like pieces of a board game. The dike was built with an extra layer of height to protect the national historic sites and property was seen as the solution.

I remember, as kids, we all wanted the ice to go during the day because, when we heard the town siren, we ran from our classrooms and headed to the riverbank. Teachers had no control. No matter the time, if it was at night when the siren happened, you pulled on your clothes and headed down. I think it was an unofficial school day off.

Dawsonites had a ritual around the ice. Some would walk daily along the banks, watching for change, and many took meals down to sit and watch a chunk of ice move here and there. The sounds and smells and visiting — such excitement and fun to see the large chunks of ice boiling and rolling over and over. It was a majestic, noisy thing to witness, and I am sure that Dawsonites today still have the same excitement of the ice going out. During those days, along with the big ice pool, the local stores had minute pools where, if one guessed the minute, one to 60, they would garner prizes and much-added fun. But

that changed with the lottery rules — welcome to modern times.

With COVID, the IODE adapted and, in 2020, the ice pool went online and tickets are available until April 15. You can go to the IODE web page and buy full books with 10 guesses for \$20. That's a bargain. So, get your tickets, and when the river ice tripod moves enough to trip the clock, perhaps it will be you who has the closest time and date.

So, congratulations on 83 years of coordinating the ice pool contest tradition. To the amazing women of the IODE, I am so proud of what you have accomplished and still continue to this year.

Applause

In recognition of Yukon Climate Leadership Council

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I rise to pay tribute to those who sat on the Yukon Climate Leadership Council. Youth council members represented a diversity of perspectives and expertise, and together produced *Climate Shot 2030 — Recommendations on how to reduce Yukon's greenhouse gas emissions by 45 % by 2030*.

Today, we would like to pay tribute to each member of the Yukon Climate Leadership Council for your dedicated time and effort in preparing this report. Thank you to Coral Voss, David Silas, Forest Pearson, Hector Campbell, Kim Lisgo, Kirsten Hogan, Michael Ross, Rosa Brown, now-Chief of Kwanlin Dün Sean Smith, Sruthee Govindaraj, Margret Njootli, and Steve Roddick. Each of them is a leader when it comes to addressing climate change, and we thank them for their valuable work.

Climate Shot 2030 provides recommendations to support meeting our goal of reducing our greenhouse gas emissions by 45 percent below 2010 levels by 2030. These recommendations span areas such as: education and awareness; leadership; capacity building; emissions reductions within our homes, workplaces, and communities; clean and healthy mobility; and clean energy.

I also want to acknowledge the council's innovative use of a reconciliation framework to guide and evaluate their recommendations. Using a reconciliation framework, the council's recommendations were guided by the four pillars of self-determination: opportunity, equity, community, and involvement. This is a welcome approach and will help to ensure that climate action in the territory is supporting reconciliation and a better future for all Yukoners.

Madam Deputy Speaker, *Our Clean Future* strategy was designed to be adaptive. Every year, we track progress by reviewing our actions and determining what types of adjustments will need to be made to meet our goals. This is where the helpful advice and perspectives of bodies like the Yukon Climate Leadership Council and the Youth Panel on Climate Change play an essential role. We have had the opportunity to meet with the council on several occasions since the release of their report, and we are currently considering how to integrate their recommendations into *Our Clean Future*.

During our next annual reporting update, we plan to share more information about how the council's findings have

factored into *Our Clean Future's* strategy so that we can address them moving forward.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Yukon's 45-percent reduction target is not wishful thinking, but it is ambitious. It is just as ambitious, if not more, when compared to all the other targets set by jurisdictions across Canada.

Once again, I would like to thank all members of the Climate Leadership Council for their valuable contributions to this effort.

Applause

Mr. Istchenko: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize the work of the Yukon Climate Leadership Council, a group of individuals brought together as a result of the 2021 confidence and supply agreement between the Yukon Liberal caucus and the Yukon NDP caucus.

Climate change is a challenge that no government, organization, or group of individuals can tackle alone. It takes input, ideas, and solutions from experts and academics, as well as those who are on the ground dealing directly with the effects. We would like to thank the council for their work to date on the recommendations to address the complex issue.

I would like to note that we believe that it is a missed opportunity to not have representatives from the mining industry, the Fish and Wildlife Management Board, renewable resources councils, and other groups that, as I mentioned previously, are on the ground working, dealing directly with the effects of climate change. Hopefully there is consideration given to these gaps going forward and the makeup of the council is adjusted to reflect the missing representation.

I have seen the effects of climate change first-hand in my riding. We continue to see the changes to our environment and deal with the challenges that they bring, so thank you again to the council for their work, and we look forward to seeing the solutions they brought forward and how effective they are against the challenges we face.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to honour the Yukon Climate Leadership Council. I have been thinking a lot about what it means to honour someone. What does it mean to honour this group of people and their work? It means respect, it means listening to what they have to say, it means taking their work seriously, and it means taking real action in response to the recommendations that they presented.

As a member of the Yukon NDP caucus, I feel a lot of responsibility for making sure that the work of the Yukon Climate Leadership Council is honoured. It was, after all, due to our negotiations that the Liberals agreed to a 45-percent target and promised to form the council to find ways to reach that target, so I feel a lot of responsibility for making sure that the work of the council is not wasted and that the hours upon hours of time that the council spent researching, discussing, weighing options, and making hard decisions is honoured.

We have seen six months go by with no response to the report. We are told that it will be four more months before a

formal response to the recommendations will be given, so the question is: Do these actions honour the work of the council?

Here is how the Yukon NDP will honour their work. We will continue to bring up the report with this government at every possible opportunity. We will ask questions about the council's recommendations, individually and as a whole. We will demand concrete responses from the Liberal government. Where the ministers have made weak commitments, such as responding to the report 10 months after it was delivered, we will hold them to these commitments, and we will push them for better, stronger commitments. We will push the Liberals to make a plan to reach their legislated goal of a 45-percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, and we will demand concrete action as a result of that plan.

We will honour the work of the Climate Leadership Council by committing to implementing their work because we know that our future depends on it. We know that each member of the council gave up hundreds of hours of their time for this project because they can see the crisis that is upon us, and they have hope for the future — if we act now. We are so grateful to the council for showing us a way forward. Thank you to each member for your incredible work and dedication to the territory.

Applause

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

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Mr. Istchenko: I have a letter from the Retail Council of Canada, dated February 17, 2023.

Mr. Hassard: I have for tabling a document filed with the Supreme Court of Yukon on March 17, 2023.

Ms. White: I have for tabling a news release from the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction entitled *Emergency Department Visits for Alcohol, Cannabis and Opioid Use Among Youth*.

I also have a 2017 report from the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research entitled *Reducing Alcohol-Related Harms and Costs in the Yukon: A Policy Review*, and I have a document entitled *An Alcohol Strategy for the Northwest Territories Final Report*.

Deputy Speaker: Are there any reports of committees? Are there any petitions to be presented? Are there any bills to be introduced? Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House supports the Premier and Minister of Highways and Public Works meeting with the executive of the Yukon Contractors Association on April 5, as agreed to by both parties in March to discuss issues of mutual concern.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to increase the fines and penalties for drivers illegally passing school buses that are stopped with flashing lights.

Deputy Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Yukon Forum

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I rise to highlight the Yukon Forum and its critical role toward reconciliation in working in true partnership with Yukon First Nation governments. The Yukon Forum is a regular meeting between leaders of the Government of Yukon, Yukon First Nations, and the Council of Yukon First Nations. On Friday, March 31, we held the 24th Yukon Forum since its revitalization in 2017. It was my first Yukon Forum as Premier. I am proud to carry on our government's unwavering commitment to the Yukon Forum.

The Yukon Forum is the cornerstone of our approach to cooperative governance, collaboration, and reconciliation with First Nations. It is a venue for us to meet government to government with Yukon First Nation leaders to discuss our shared priorities and identify areas of collaboration.

I value the thoughtful perspectives that First Nation leaders bring to the forum. Reconciliation is about ongoing relationships, and the forum is a way for us to maintain and strengthen those relationships.

I was very pleased at last week's Yukon Forum. We were able to meet, not only as governments but as people — with the most recent forum including a leaders' retreat where we could have more candid and personal conversations.

We face many challenges as governments, and the solutions will only be effective if they are collaborative. The pressing issue of the substance use health emergency was discussed at great length. We have been working tirelessly with Yukon First Nations and other partners to coordinate a response, implement harm-reduction strategies, expand access to treatment and recovery services, and increase public education and awareness about the dangers of substance use. We know that more collaboration and innovative approaches are needed to see change in Yukon communities.

At the Yukon Forum, we shared a draft of the substance use health emergency strategy with First Nation governments for their feedback. This draft strategy includes recommendations to respond to the substance use health emergency and is currently structured around four key areas for growth: prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery support, and community safety.

We also discussed our commitment to working with Yukon First Nations to implement community wellness plans, which will be tailor-made to reflect the unique needs of each Yukon community.

Another topic discussed at the Yukon Forum was our clean energy needs and the potential to connect to the British Columbia grid. This will be a large-scale project, and partnership with First Nation governments would be critical to

its success. We began a discussion on how we can work together to explore technical feasibility and costs of the project as well as potential economic opportunities.

I look forward to continuing these and other important conversations and continuing to take action together to advance reconciliation with Yukon First Nations and solutions for the benefit of all Yukoners.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the update from the Premier on the most recent meeting of the Yukon Forum. I am pleased to hear that discussions included topics of importance to all Yukoners. We have discussed the substance use health emergency many times in this Chamber. We have pressed the government on taking action to combat the opioid crisis, including creating new treatment beds, so I am pleased to hear that this was a top-of-mind discussion for the Yukon Forum.

I hope that the Premier can use his response to share what next steps were identified by the forum to address the substance use health emergency. How does the government plan to work with First Nations to address this health emergency, and when will the draft strategy that the Premier referenced be finalized?

I am also pleased to hear that the government and First Nation governments talked about the potential power grid connection to BC. We agree that a grid connection to BC needs to be explored. I would note that the Liberals' current budget makes no mention of the BC grid connection, and it doesn't appear anywhere in their five-year capital plan. So, I am very interested to hear what next steps the government is taking on this important project. As well, I agree that First Nations will have to be involved in a grid connection, so I am interested in hearing from the Premier what role Yukon First Nations will play in connecting Yukon's grid to the south — as well, if the Premier could update us on what talks have occurred with First Nations in British Columbia about this project.

I thank the Premier for the update, and I look forward to hearing his response to the questions that we have raised.

Ms. White: So, it comes as no surprise that Yukon's ongoing opioid crisis was again a topic discussed at last week's Yukon Forum. Since declaring a substance use emergency over a year ago, people continue to suffer. This is a hard reality for everyone in the territory because we have all been affected, and it is especially hard for communities that have been hit the hardest.

We are glad to know that a draft of the substance use health emergency strategy has finally been shared outside of Cabinet. So much depends on the actions that are hopefully laid out in that strategy. People in communities are on edge and looking for concrete actions and directions to tackle this crisis.

When speaking of a BC grid connection, we are hopeful that any decision to proceed doesn't hinge on the approval of future mining projects, because if Yukon wants a future where its diesel communities are on the grid, then let's plan for that because it is the right thing to do and not because mining requires more energy than we can produce.

So, it is important that Yukon First Nation chiefs and Yukon government ministers continue to meet to discuss other topics that are important to Yukon at the Yukon Forum.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Again, the Yukon Forum has happened four times per year since we were elected in 2016. It was our government that resurrected this important event. Previous to 2017, the Yukon Forum was very sporadic. It is something that is codified in legislation, but it was important to really be committed to that legislation, which is the focus that we have had.

Working together with Yukon First Nations, the Yukon Forum continues to set the territory on a path of reconciliation for the benefit for all Yukoners. It is an event, again, that we all look forward to every quarter, and it's a way that we can create space to advance shared priorities.

Through past forums, we have collaborated to bring a more unified and strategic approach to our engagement with the federal government. This is something, as well, that was discussed on Friday. We again signed our memorandum of understanding on heritage management. The Yukon is the only jurisdiction in Canada that has co-managed historical sites with self-governing First Nations, and these are just a couple of examples of that work.

I want to thank everyone for the work that they did to pull this event together. It was beautiful to be in Haines Junction, as always. I know that it was a busy weekend with a lot of different activities happening there in the vibrant community of Haines Junction.

I will just touch quickly on some of the questions. When it comes to the draft strategy that was tabled, the Leader of the Official Opposition was just asking what the time frame is. The time frame has gone back to First Nation governments to review. The Minister of Health and Social Services thought that it was really important to ensure that all the leaders there are seeing their governments and their teams identified within that strategy — looking at the end of May — but also, to be open to the House, the minister also said that the First Nations will have the time they need — if they need a little bit more time — because it is important that everyone is working on this together.

Part of the work that will be identified in there — there are a number of actions about partnership, but I want to leave that until the next rounds of feedback.

On that same strategy, I would just say to the Leader of the Third Party that it wasn't just inside the Cabinet; there was broad dialogue with a number of non-government organizations, a number of stakeholders, a number of First Nation governments, and First Nation entities — really, across the spectrum — that has fed into that work, and now it has gone back to other levels of government.

Concerning the grid connection, early work being done — there was good support at the table. To again be accountable to the House, the communities that are in micro-grid situations, like Old Crow or Burwash, still flagged the fact that they need to continue to work with government on other renewable infrastructure, but there was good support around the table. The

ideas were around financing models — but just the partnerships that need to be in place where there is direct impact from this project.

We have been having discussions — both the Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and Yukon Energy Corporation and I — as the critical minerals strategy for the country is built out, identifying this as a key goal. But to answer the question for the member of the Third Party, no, it's not linked to a specific project or projects. It's really about the future of the Yukon. With our 125th anniversary coming up in June, we have to think about the next 125 years. This is an investment that is nation building. It's about reconciliation and it's about a clean future in the Yukon.

Deputy Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Mineral staking

Mr. Istchenko: Earlier this year, the Ross River Dena Council announced that they have applied to the Canada nature fund to create a 41,000 square kilometre protected area in the central east region of the Yukon. According to the CBC Yukon report in February, the proposal accounts for roughly eight percent of the Yukon's land mass that would be set aside for protection.

Furthermore, the CBC article noted that the motivation behind this proposal isn't limited to protecting the land; it goes much further saying that the aim is to implement Indigenous self-governance.

My question for the Yukon government is simple. What is the Yukon government's position regarding the development of a 41,000 square kilometre protected area in this part of the Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The Government of Canada has committed to conserve 25 percent of lands and waters in Canada by 2025 and work toward conserving 30 percent by 2030. As recorded in the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database, the Yukon has already conserved approximately 19.1 percent of its area. The new agreement, which was signed in December 2022 by me, along with the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Minister Guilbeault, provides \$20.6 million over the next three years to the Government of Yukon. The Yukon was the first jurisdiction to sign a nature agreement with Canada.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* will support Indigenous leadership and conservation and increase protection of sensitive habitats and recovery actions for species at risk as well as the protection and conservation of new lands in the Yukon.

Under this new agreement, we will work toward meeting the 25-percent target by 2025 and are determining how we can make meaningful contributions toward 30 percent by 2030.

Mr. Istchenko: In the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* that was signed by the Minister of Environment last year, the Yukon government agreed to the target of 30-percent protected and conserved areas by 2030. The proposal by the Ross River

Dena Council would seem to fit with that goal; however, I should point out that the region contains hundreds — perhaps thousands — of active mineral claims. Many of those claims are for critical minerals that are needed to meet the growing challenge of supply and the transition to a green economy.

So, if the government proceeds with the Ross River Dena Council proposal, what will happen to the existing claims in that area?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The challenge, in the questions from the Yukon Party, is this jump to some final decision — jumping again with a bit of fear or jumping again where it is: What is going to happen when this decision is made?

What I can share is that we sit down bilaterally — government to government. We have sat down with the Ross River Dena Council. We believe that it is important to be at the table together. We are aware of the proposal that has been made. They have shared some of the goals, and we, as a government, have taken no position. We are trying to rebuild a relationship that was damaged over a long period of time. We understand the importance of critical minerals. That is why critical minerals are identified in *Our Clean Future*. We think that it is a critical part of transitioning. We balance that in our discussions.

So, at this time, I know that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and I — we had meetings with the Ross River Dena Council in January at Roundup. We are committed to going out and having further conversations. The conversations have not only been about protection; the conversations have been about access to minerals. Both of those things have been discussed at a high level. I think that the framework, on a government-to-government basis, is something that I will hold off at this point in getting into detail on because our negotiators are still at the table. But really the interest is to make sure that, in all parts of the Yukon, there is land protected —

Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Istchenko: So, currently, the Yukon has over 50 percent of our land base withdrawn from staking — a significant portion of that is in the traditional territory of the Kaska. In October 2018, the former Premier told the Legislature that, at that time, he anticipated that the staking ban in the area would be lifted by April 30, 2020. Obviously, that didn't happen, but we would like to hear an update on the current staking ban.

Can the Premier confirm if negotiations are still underway to lift the staking ban, and if so, when would we see the ban lifted?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Pillai: It is a good question, as the Member for Lake Laberge said. It is a good question, and probably the answer sits on the other side of the House, in some ways, about how we got there. But really where we are — I think that anybody who is watching this file closely would know very well that there was a significant court decision that was made. Part of the challenge is how to deal with what has come out of that court decision, and truly modernizing the legislation is a key part of it. That is why we believe that it is important to have

a balance overall within the Yukon — a balance of protection but access to critical minerals. It is important.

When we signed on to *Our Clean Future*, we had all stakeholders, including First Nation governments as well as our government, sign on to those goals. Critical minerals are there. I have seen no discussions where First Nation governments have not come to the table and said, “We need to have a balanced approach.” That is the discussion that has been ongoing.

We believe that there is a pathway through. I am not going to stand here today and say that I’m going to solve the problem that was left from that legal case by this date. Are we working toward solving that problem? Absolutely. Did the previous government have a chance to solve it and not solve it? Absolutely.

So, we will continue to have chats around reconciliation, focus on reconciliation, and have a balanced approach to both the economy and the environment.

Question re: Mineral staking

Mr. Kent: I would just remind the Premier that he has been in government for seven years, and it’s time to start leading.

As the Dawson regional land use plan approaches completion, there has been renewed interest in how the government plans to resolve the issue of alienated or expropriated mineral claims. We know that, last year, the government announced a deal with several mining companies to relinquish thousands of claims in the Peel land use area, and in that case, the claims were exchanged for relief of work requirements on claims held elsewhere in the Yukon. While that may have worked in the case of these claims in the Peel, it’s not a model that will necessarily work in all cases.

My question for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources is simple. Does the government have a claims compensation policy for mineral claims that will lose their value based on government policy changes, protected areas, or land use planning?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thanks for the question. In fact, we are working toward the completion of the Dawson regional land use plan. I am not prejudging where that goes at this point. I will say that the work is in progress. I thank all Yukoners for providing their input.

We did the same with the Peel plan. Of course, under the Yukon Party, the Peel plan ended up in the Supreme Court. We came back; we corrected that. We have worked with claim holders throughout the Peel and, again, that process has been working very well. I will look up the numbers again, but it is significant — the percentage of claims that have been relinquished within the Peel. We have been doing that work. The member opposite is asking about what we will do with Dawson. We have a good track record working through the Peel planning process. We will see how that works.

I think that the important thing is that we — together as Yukoners, the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in government, and the Yukon government — arrive at a Dawson regional land use plan, and

then we will work through what the challenges are, based on wherever that plan lands.

Mr. Kent: So, between the new protected areas that will be established in the Dawson regional land use plan and the remaining claims and protected areas in the Peel land use plan, as well as accelerated land use plans elsewhere, we are likely talking about thousands of claims that the Yukon government will need to provide compensation for. With the announcement last year, the government has established a clear precedent that these claims have a monetary value and that the government will provide compensation in exchange for them being relinquished.

Going forward, it is important that these types of deals be done in some sort of predictable and transparent way to give certainty to all involved. So, will the minister agree to consult with industry about the development of a mineral claims compensation policy that will pay a fair market value for claims that are impacted by government decisions or land use plans?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Will we continue to talk with industry? Yes, absolutely. Have we been talking with industry? Absolutely. We have been working with them. I have the numbers in front of me. More than 6,500 claims out of 9,000 mineral claims in the Peel have either lapsed or been relinquished in exchange for non-monetary compensation. That is significant.

As I have said, we have been doing the process differently from the Yukon Party. We made a decision that we would, in concert with Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in, protect the most sensitive areas before the planning process started. Then, when the draft plan came forward, we took all of the recommendations from the planning commission; we protected those areas or put to conserve those areas. Then, when the recommended plan came out, we did it again. So, we are doing this as a progressive process so that we end up with fewer conflicts to begin with, and the process has been working very well. We will, at all times, work with the industry.

Mr. Kent: So, the problem is that the one process that the government has invoked will not work for all claim holders. It seems that even claims that are outside of protected areas are being affected.

Earlier this year, CBC Yukon reported that YESAB had recommended that a drilling program on the Michelle property in the Peel watershed planning area not proceed. Since the recommendation was made on December 16, 2022, the Yukon government has delayed issuing a decision document, even though several months have passed.

We have heard from several mining companies that they are watching this with interest, as it will indicate whether other properties in integrated management areas can be developed. This has prompted more questions about the development of a policy for paying fair market value for claims that are impacted by land use planning and land use plans. So, when will the government begin consulting industry on the development of a claims compensation policy?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I just stood up and, in my last response, I said that we would continue to work with industry. The members opposite have a specific policy that they are

trying to craft. The department has been doing a great job — so, just hats off to EMR and the team that has been working there. I just mentioned that 6,500 out of 9,000 mineral claims in the Peel have either lapsed or been relinquished in exchange for non-monetary compensation. It is a great job that they have been doing, and we will continue to work with industry and work to get this right.

You have to see the other side of the argument. It is almost as if — hey, we shouldn't land use plan. Well, we should. We should do the land use planning; it is hard work; it is important work. Of course, there are some challenges, but it is better than not planning, and those are the agreements that we signed with First Nations. We will do the planning.

Question re: Yukon Liquor Corporation social responsibility

MLA Tredger: Yesterday, we asked the minister to tell Yukoners what his government was doing to implement the *Putting People First* report recommendation to reduce the hours of operation of establishments selling alcohol. In response, he said that they were — quote: “paying attention” and “having those conversations”. The Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation report gave this Liberal government an F when it comes to regulating alcohol. So, while this government definitely knows about the impact of expanded hours, they don't seem interested in getting the job done. Instead, they are handing out licences to private liquor emporiums and offsales that are open later in the downtown core. This is in direct contradiction to the *Putting People First* report.

Can the minister tell Yukoners why they are cherry-picking the recommendations of the *Putting People First* report?

Hon. Mr. Silver: It is an interesting line of questioning from a political party that is looking at decriminalizing opioids across the nation, but at the same rate, we are not cherry-picking any statistics. The hospitalization rates data, for example, used in *Putting People First*, related to alcohol, are based on cases per 100,000 so that we can compare ourselves to other jurisdictions with other data.

Since the *Putting People First* report was written, under the — I will probably get accused of cherry-picking statistics here. New data was released, demonstrating the hospitalization rates for Yukon decreased by seven percent in 2018-19, which is the second-largest decrease across all jurisdictions.

To be clear, *Putting People First* is focused on recommendations for the government, but is not a specific study on the link between hospitalization and offsale hours, as the member opposite would make you believe. So, again, we take the balance of our control of alcohol and cannabis, as mandated by law, very seriously here in the Yukon. We will continue to work on the whole-of-government approach — of the reporting of what is important to Yukoners — balancing the need to have a tourism and culture industry, but also knowing the reports that are coming out of Health and Social Services as well.

MLA Tredger: The government keeps mentioning this whole-of-government approach, but Yukoners know that this is

not what is happening on the ground. In reality, when this government hands out liquor licences, they are not assessing how the community might be impacted. The Canadian alcohol policy report also recommended that this government — quote: “Ensure the Yukon Liquor Corporation reports to a ministry with a focus on public health and/or safety...” That's a pretty simple request.

Will the minister require the Yukon Liquor Corporation to do socio-economic assessments with the Department of Health and Social Services before handing out liquor licences?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I will continue to allow the boards to do what the boards are initiated to do, and I will keep my political interference away from that.

We are going to continue to balance the health and well-being of Yukoners while supporting local licensees who contribute to a strong economy. Corporate profits are reinvested in a wide range of government programs and services that support Yukoners. This is extremely important. When it comes to licences and reviewing those applications, the Yukon Liquor board takes a wide range of issues into consideration, including population, economy, economic activities, hours of service, schools and daycares in the vicinities, and alcohol treatment facilities, for example, or public parks. There is a whole list of things, so for the member opposite to say that these things are not being considered is completely unfounded. We have strategies in place.

We know that the Northwest Territories released an alcohol strategy aimed at reducing alcohol-related harms in their territory. It's always great to see a perspective from there as well. We recognize the health risks that are associated with alcohol use, and we will continue to deploy a variety of public awareness strategies to help promote responsible consumption.

MLA Tredger: Well, I'm glad that the minister is aware of the Northwest Territories' strategy on reducing alcohol-related harms, because we seem to be missing that in the Yukon.

They just released a sweeping 15-point strategy that includes better public education, investment in harm reduction, more support for parents and communities, coordinated community-specific outreach, and greater community control over liquor sales, and much more.

The Canadian alcohol policy report told the Yukon's Liberal government five years ago to develop our own strategy, and to do so without the lobbying of private industry. When will the minister listen to all the experts and create a Yukon strategy to address alcohol-related harms?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, we are paying attention to other jurisdictions, and we are also paying attention locally as well — to our plans, including *Putting People First*. We are also interested in national studies. In January of this year, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction released updated, low-risk drinking guidelines, which are also supported by the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health, for example. The member opposite makes it seem like we are not paying attention to these things. We are. We absolutely are.

These updated guidelines recommend a weekly alcohol use of a maximum of two standard drinks or less to avoid alcohol-

related consequences and higher health risks. Our government is currently developing a substance use health emergency strategy, which includes recommendations to address alcohol use in the territory.

Again, I completely disagree with the phrasing of this question from the member opposite. This is extremely important to the corporation. It's extremely important to our government, and we need to balance the well-being and the health of Yukoners while also supporting local licensees who are contributing to the absolutely strong economy here in the Yukon.

Question re: Whistle Bend development

Ms. Clarke: Yesterday, I asked about the phases 6B and 8 land lottery package, and the minister did not answer my question. I will ask again on behalf of Yukoners.

The upcoming land lottery will include 82 single-family lots, 33 townhouse lots, and four multi-family lots. According to the land lottery package, construction of these lots is not yet complete. Why is the government releasing these lots when they are not yet complete?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am very pleased to get the opportunity today to talk about all the work that our government is doing to help with lot development and the real estate market in the territory.

We are making historic investments in lot development and housing. The budget for 2023-24 has \$26 million for land development in the Yukon, with an additional \$22.4 million for housing projects in Dawson City, Watson Lake, and Teslin. I will say that this year's budget — as I said — includes \$26 million, and it is important that we also note, Madam Deputy Speaker, that, according to the Yukon Bureau of Statistics, investment in building construction in the Yukon for December 2022 increased 20.8 percent compared to December 2021, in contrast to a national increase of 6.2 percent over the same period of time.

We just recently got data from the Bureau of Statistics that says that, in February 2023, the preliminary seasonally adjusted value of building permits — \$19.5 million in the Yukon — increased by \$5.4 million or 38.7 percent compared to February 2022. In Canada, the total value of permits decreased by 15.2 percent during the same time period.

The Yukon Liberal government is working very hard to put lots in the hands of Yukoners.

Ms. Clarke: Again, we hear an unanswered answer; the minister keeps ignoring my questions.

Despite the lots in phases 6B and 8 not being completed, the land lottery packages note that these lots are still subject to a three-year building commitment. How will the Yukon government enforce a three-year building commitment when it cannot even guarantee when the purchaser of the lot will have access to the lot or start development?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: So, I talked with the department about the lottery process. The outstanding work for phase 6B includes some minor lot grading, some paving, and some finishing off of sidewalks, and for phase 8, there are some seasonal deficiencies and lot grading touch-ups. They are

anticipating the work to be done fairly shortly. We think that selling the lots or putting them in the lottery at this time gives purchasers the opportunity to plan. Development permit applications can be completed by purchasers, and the process for approvals through the City of Whitehorse can commence once the agreement for sale is in place.

So, this is about getting the lots in process and moving. We anticipate that the work — I think that it got cut off last year just because of the early frost, but that is fine. The work is underway this spring, and we anticipate it being fairly close to on track. I think that it is important to get the lots out now.

Question re: 2 Lodgepole Lane concerns

Ms. Van Bibber: A property with dilapidated buildings and possible contamination on Lodgepole Lane has been creating issues for several of my constituents.

In December, the City of Whitehorse sent a letter to the Minister of Environment and the Minister of Health and Social Services regarding this property. The letter from the city notes that environmental health officers issued an unfit-for-human-occupancy order on the premises, and ground-staining soil samples were collected. Additional samples from May 20, 2022, all suggest the presence of hydrocarbons and that the water sample was above the standards of contaminated site regulations.

The City of Whitehorse has requested assistance to remediate and clear out the property. Will the Liberal government commit to assisting the City of Whitehorse with this problem property on Lodgepole Lane?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am glad to rise today to speak to the Lodgepole Lane property, which, of course, has been in the debate in the Assembly over the course of the last year or so. So, 2 Lodgepole Lane is a neglected private property that sits in a secluded neighbourhood off the Alaska Highway within the boundary and authority of the City of Whitehorse. There is a long history of complaints, spill reports, site visits, and multi-agency involvement involved in this property. Environmental protection officers have been involved in dealing with seven spill reports since 2016 and have actively assessed contamination claims and other concerns.

The Government of Yukon is aware of the issues reported at 2 Lodgepole Lane regarding public health, safety, and environmental concerns. While there is some evidence of hydrocarbon contamination on this private property, it does not appear to be significant, and the Government of Yukon will continue to work with the City of Whitehorse as the primary lead on any enforcement should any action be deemed to be necessary.

Madam Deputy Speaker, without strong evidence of a clear responsible party or significant adverse effects, the Department of Environment has no ability to order or direct the current property owners to remediate.

Ms. Van Bibber: Neighbours and residents in the area want to see this property cleaned up. The city has very clearly asked the minister for help, as they have legislation, regulations, and resources that the city does not. Unfortunately, the most recent letter from the Minister of Environment

suggests that the Yukon government is unwilling to help, so I would like to request that the minister reconsider the government's position on this issue.

Will the Yukon government help the City of Whitehorse take action to get this property cleaned up?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I believe I have provided the response, but what I would say to Yukoners today is that I have a good working relationship with the City of Whitehorse on many files and will continue to work with the mayor and council on this file. If this matter has risen to the level where there is sufficient concern, which I set out in my first answer, then certainly we are open to assisting.

So, I am prepared to continue to dialogue on this file, as I have dialogued with the City of Whitehorse on other contamination files, on active transportation, and on infrastructure where there are common goals with respect to both the Department of Highways and Public Works and Department of Environment, and mayor and council.

Spills on private properties are common, and living near a site with contamination does not necessarily present an inherent risk to public health. 2 Lodgepole Lane was added to the contaminated sites information map, which is a public inventory of Yukon properties for which the department holds evidence of contamination at one point in time. While the Department of Environment tracks these sites and regulates remedial efforts, there is no evidence of significant adverse effects present at this property.

Question re: Physician billing system

Mr. Cathers: Thousands of Yukoners don't have a family doctor, and we have heard issues about physician burnout and challenges with recruitment and retention. The Minister of Health hasn't been helping, as we have seen the doctor recruitment position cut, bursary programs reduced, and government consistently failing to pay doctors on time. Some bills were outstanding for over 90 days.

A recent report by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business says: "Doctors in Canada are collectively spending approximately 18.5 million hours on unnecessary paperwork and administrative tasks each year, the equivalent of an incredible 55.6 million patient visits annually..." The current system for paying Yukon doctors is cumbersome and adds a large administrative burden on doctors, and, worst of all, government can't keep up with processing the paperwork that they have created.

Will the minister agree to stop putting paperwork before patient care and move to a model where doctors are paid in a timely manner?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Our government is committed to increasing access to primary health care services and to working with our physician partners. Access to primary health care services is a challenge in many jurisdictions facing global health human resources shortages. We are working with our health system partners, and we are working with the Yukon Medical Association. We have negotiated a new memorandum of understanding, which will help to increase Yukoners' timely and same-day and unscheduled access to primary health care

services, which, again, is just one kind of care that Yukoners deserve, and it will help us foster a strong and healthy community of physicians through innovative initiatives that support existing physicians. It will attract new providers and reduce operating costs for physicians.

Before the member opposite quotes a letter from the Yukon Medical Association — if that's, in fact, where that person is going — I hope they quote the entire letter, because it certainly is supportive of our relationship and our work moving forward together.

Mr. Cathers: We need action, not talking points.

Doctors have pointed to a more efficient payment model used by jurisdictions like Alberta. That approach sees doctors paid in a timely manner for health care services, and government audits those billings on a random basis. CFIB estimates that cutting red tape in the Yukon could result in a major increase in the number of patients that local doctors are able to see.

Their estimate of total patient visits that could be scheduled if governments eliminated physician red tape is over 50,000 more patient visits in the Yukon every year.

The Canadian Medical Association and the Yukon Medical Association have also called for government to reduce the administrative burden on doctors. Will the minister finally listen and agree to fix the territorial Liberal government's cumbersome physician payment system?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: If there is a cumbersome system, it is only one that was inherited, and we are absolutely fixing it. We have worked through *Putting People First*. We have worked in collaboration with the Yukon Medical Association. We are building a very strong relationship with them going forward. Ensuring that physicians are paid within an appropriate time frame is a priority for our government and our physician community.

In January, there was a backlog of physician claims that was identified. We have taken immediate action to address those concerns, and we are working to resolve those outstanding claims as quickly as possible. In some cases, claims may require a manual assessment or additional information. I can indicate that this system and that backlog has been resolved. As of tomorrow, all of the claims will be paid up. I am sure that won't impress the members opposite, but it will impress Yukoners because this is an important piece of service to provide the best health care possible.

As of March 8, 2023, Insured Health Services have paid over \$1 million toward physician claims. As I have noted, they are all up to date this week.

Mr. Cathers: We have heard from Yukon physicians. The Liberal government's cumbersome physician payment system is making it hard to convince doctors to move to the Yukon or provide locum coverage. No one wants to wait over three months to get paid, and new graduates from medical school can't wait that long to pay student loans. It is an impediment to recruiting new doctors, and the administrative burden of basically facing an audit every billing cycle is resulting in Yukon doctors having less time for patient care. CFIB says that red tape negatively impacts patient care by

limiting both the time that physicians can spend caring for existing patients and the number of new patients that doctors can take on. They estimate that cutting red tape would result in over 50,000 more patient visits per year by Yukon doctors.

Will the Liberal government finally agree to listen to doctors and cut red tape by following the lead of provinces like Alberta and using a more efficient billing system that prioritizes patient care ahead of paperwork?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: So far, in the 2022-23 fiscal year, we have paid \$28.8 million in fee-for-service physician claims. Our team is committed to ensuring that the payments are made promptly and efficiently to physicians. Moving forward, as I have said, we are up to date. We are working with the Yukon Medical Association to focus on short- and long-term options to enhance the physicians' claims and payment system to make it smooth and to remove the red tape that is being alluded to in the preamble to this question.

Caring physicians here in the territory are focused on their patients and focused on providing service to their patients. Our job is to make sure that they are properly paid and on time for those services. We have done it.

Deputy Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

We will now 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 in to Committee of the Whole.

Deputy 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

Deputy Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Deputy Chair (MLA Tredger): Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 208, entitled *First 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

Chair (Ms. Blake): Order. Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

Bill No. 208: *First Appropriation Act 2023-24* — continued

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Economic Development

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I would like to first welcome the officials who are joining me today. They are Deputy Minister Justin Ferbey, and our director of finance, Beth Fricke, who is here as well today.

I also want to take a moment to thank officials in the department. I am going to go through some prepared remarks and will touch on some of the highlights, but we have been asking a tremendous amount from this group of 53, 54, or 55 people — depending on the year — since 2016, primarily through the pandemic and then on some bigger projects that we will likely talk about a little bit later today around the work we have done with the community of Skagway — very complex work. There are a number of initiatives that we will be rolling out through 2023. We have another very significant year ahead when it comes to a number of strategies and programs. So, we have asked a lot, and there has been consistent delivery. Watching the growth of the department since 2016 has been extremely impressive, and I thank the folks who are there doing that work and for what they do, and their commitment to Yukoners and to the Yukon private sector.

I have to make one other mention. Steve Rose is here with us today. I will mention it for Hansard. He is a former assistant deputy minister — consistently the most passionate Yukoner when it comes to budget debate in the Legislative Assembly and around economic development. I thank him for being here. It's a ritual. There are a few things that I get ready for, and when Mr. Rose arrives, I know that it's time for budget debate and Economic Development. Thank you for being here.

I am pleased to rise to speak to the Department of Economic Development's operation, maintenance and capital budgets for the 2023-24 fiscal year. At the Department of Economic Development, we remain focused on funding Yukoners, businesses, and community organizations to meet their unique objectives while providing economic and social benefits to the territory.

Data from Statistics Canada indicates that the Yukon's real GDP grew by 10 percent in 2021 — double Canada's growth of five percent in the same period. The Conference Board of Canada predicts continued strong growth in the Yukon's GDP through 2023.

Yukon also continues to have among the lowest unemployment rates in Canada, averaging 3.7 percent in 2022 — and, I believe, last month it was the lowest in the country. Again, there are many available jobs in the Yukon. There were 1,320 in December 2022, for a 6.6-percent job vacancy rate. The average wage offered for these jobs is close to \$24 per hour.

The population continues to grow, reaching a new high of 43,964 at the end of June 2022. Average weekly earnings are

up, and retail sales are still strong and rising. Preliminary numbers for 2022 show Yukon-wide retail sales of over \$1 billion for the first time, up nearly 17 percent over 2021.

The latest numbers this morning on residential real estate investment, seasonally adjusted, for February 2023 compared to February — we are at an almost 40-percent increase in investment. We're seeing a decrease across Canada on average, but, again, an increase here in Yukon, so we're happy to see that consistent confidence in real estate investment at the residential level. All of this demonstrates the economic growth that our territory is experiencing, and the department will continue to support the advancement of the territory in a sustainable and environmentally responsible way.

The department administers a very broad range of funds and supports Yukoners across all industries. Recent projects approved for funding through the department include: funding for the Yukon motorcycle park to complete the development of accommodations businesses focused on the motorcycle rider market segment; support for the Council of Yukon First Nations to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the presentation of *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* to the federal government; funding for the Yukon Transportation Museum to create three digital experiences expanding and sharing Yukon heritage; and supporting the production of the documentary *The Ballad of Caveman Bill*, which premiered last month at the Available Light Film Festival.

To continue this important work, our operation and maintenance budget for the 2023-24 fiscal year is \$26,474,000, with a capital budget of \$999,000 — just under \$1 million. So, \$3,922,000 has been allotted to Corporate Services to keep the department's programs running smoothly. This includes: the deputy minister's office, Finance and Information Management, Human Resources, and the Policy, Planning and Communications branch. The deputy minister's office is responsible for ensuring that the department's goals and objectives are met. A budget of \$505,000 has been designated for this work.

With a budget of \$993,000, Finance and Information Management provides financial oversight, budgeting day-to-day financial transaction processing services, and other administrative support services.

The Human Resources unit has a budget of \$310,000 and provides services in the areas of staffing, job design, classification, labour relations, organizational development, human resources planning, and other human resource management services to the department.

The Policy, Planning and Communications branch provides a full range of policy development, communications, and public relations functions, as well as support for legislation, regulations, policy analysis, strategic planning, and legislative sessions. The Policy, Planning and Communications branch has been allocated \$2,114,000 for this work. The branch represents the Yukon in a number of trade negotiations and discussions with other jurisdictions. Among these is the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement*, negotiated by all 13 provinces and territories and the federal government to address barriers to trade, investment, and labour mobility in our country.

As chair of the Committee on Internal Trade in 2022, the Yukon facilitated an annual meeting of the CFTA parties on December 8, 2022, in Toronto. Key decisions related to trade in cannabis and financial services were adopted at the meeting. This effort was led by the branch. Staff are also chairing the Regulatory Reconciliation and Cooperation Table, a table that is tasked with identifying regulatory barriers to trade within Canada and working collaboratively among jurisdictions to reconcile those differences for the benefit of goods and service providers, investors, and consumers across Canada.

Through our work in these negotiations and at these tables, we are reducing barriers to the free movement of people, goods, services, and investments within Canada to enhance trade, investment, and labour mobility opportunities for Yukoners and Yukon businesses. This branch, along with the Business and Industry Development branch, is also engaged in ongoing discussions to determine the future of the Skagway ore terminal. We continue to work with the mining industry here in the Yukon and the municipality of Skagway to identify both short-term and long-term options for tidewater access, recognizing that Skagway is the port of preference for most Yukon mining companies.

Moving on to Operations, the assistant deputy minister's office is provided with \$2,240,000. The assistant deputy minister's office directly supports the program areas in the department that offer programs and services to keep our communities healthy and vibrant.

Most of the allocation is dedicated to the economic development fund, which has a budget of \$1,960,000. The fund supports projects across the territory that provide long-term, sustainable economic benefits to Yukoners. Projects supported in the 2022-23 fiscal year include: Yukon Brewing to attend Whisky Live Paris 2022 and to help grow exports of Yukon Brewing's single malt whiskey to France; Icefield Fuels Corporation to purchase a multi-access calibration system at its Whitehorse facility to expand its production capacity; and Kaska Dena Designs to attend the international Indigenous Fashion Week in Paris to gain exposure in the international market. From April 1, 2022 to January 13, 2023, 51 projects have been supported through the economic development fund, with a total contribution commitment of \$2,233,029, including several multi-year initiatives. This fund is administered through a collaborative effort of all of our Operations staff.

This brings us to the Business and Industry Development branch. The Department of Economic Development supports the growth of the private sector through the Business and Industry Development branch. The department is making \$2,721,000 available to the branch this fiscal year. This includes \$1,616,000 committed to transfer payments that support various organizations and businesses, including chambers of commerce throughout the Yukon. This also includes transfer payment agreements with the Yukon Mining Alliance to support the mineral exploration and development industry and to attract investment. We also support the Yukon Chamber of Mines for the Yukon Geoscience Forum, Yukon Mining and Geology Week, and Roundup.

Our government continues to promote the Yukon as a world-class mining jurisdiction, adhering to strong environmental, social, and corporate governance practices. With two operating mines, and the potential for others to start or restart in the near future, mining continues to be a bright spot in the Yukon economy. The Yukon's impressive endowment of minerals attracts attention from around the world. This means more mining jobs in communities and more money for local businesses involved in the industry.

Outside of mining, the branch promotes and facilitates the development of Yukon's strategic and emerging industry sectors through projects that benefit the Yukon's economy. This includes administering the business incentive program and assessing projects for eligibility under the economic development fund. The business incentive program provides rebates on eligible Government of Yukon contracts promoting Yukon hires and Yukon-made goods.

The Business and Industry Development branch also builds connections with Yukon businesses to increase exports, support trade agreements, and attract investments and talent to the territory. These funds will allow the Business and Industry Development branch to continue this important work.

Moving on to the department's immigration unit, the budget allocation of \$804,000 will allow the immigration unit to continue its work. This year is set to be another significant one for the unit as there is still an ongoing need for workers in the territory. The immigration unit administers the Yukon nominee program and the Yukon business nominee program to meet labour market needs. The Yukon nominee program assists employers in finding employees through both the skilled workers and critical impact worker streams when local workers are not available. The program is administered in partnership with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Once a nomination has been approved, nominees can apply for permanent resident status.

In 2022, the Yukon nominee program utilized its full annual allocation of 300 spaces for the second time since the program was established in 2007. The strategic use of immigration programming can help us to meet the Yukon's future economic and community development needs. Our immigration unit is also an effective resource when helping with world issues such as the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. Immigration staff oversee the Ukrainian family support desk to provide information and help Ukrainians who want to come to the Yukon. As of January to March 1, 2023, the support desk has received 325 inquiries, including 58 Ukrainian citizens seeking jobs and relocation in the Yukon. As of March 1, 2023, at least 50 Ukrainians have chosen to settle in the Yukon. This is just one example of how our immigration unit supports newcomers to the territory in addition to administering the usual programming.

The Department of Economic Development also supports market-driven media production in the Yukon. The Yukon's film industry and musicians have valued contributions to our economy and play a significant role in showcasing local talent on the larger stage. This fiscal year, Department of Economic Development has identified \$2,269,000 for the media

development unit. Media development provides funding to help Yukon content creators make their sound and media productions a reality. Additionally, these media productions provide employment opportunities to locals and showcase the Yukon to other parts of the world. Four new media funding programs, including administrative business guidelines, were announced on January 10, 2022 to support the production of professional film, television, and digital media projects.

As of February 23, 2023, we have approved 18 film applications for \$1,524,810, with total anticipated spending in the Yukon of \$8,819,283, creating local jobs and building capacity while supporting Yukon businesses and entrepreneurs and contributing to economic diversification.

Last fiscal year, we also revamped how we provide funding support to the territory's performing artists. The new performing musicians fund held its first three intakes in 2022-23, approving funding for 32 musicians for a combined total of \$305,539. This included nine established musicians and 23 emerging musicians. I am glad that the department can help the territory's musicians and filmmakers to meet their full potential. These funds will allow this important work to continue.

Moving on to regional economic development, for this fiscal year, 2023-24, the Regional Economic Development branch has budgeted \$4,492,000. From that total, \$2,950,000 will be directed toward the community development fund. The community development fund, which is well known, assists projects that provide long-term economic and social benefits to Yukon communities. Examples of previously funded projects include: \$202,599 to the Village of Teslin to build a playground in the new Sawmill subdivision; \$152,616 to the City of Dawson for the expansion and upgrade of their city's skate park; and \$75,000 to the Village of Carmacks to repair, improve, and extend the existing riverfront boardwalk.

Through these and other projects funded by the community development fund, we are supporting events and initiatives that build up communities around the territory and improve the quality of life for residents.

In the period of April 1, 2022 to February 2023, 67 projects have been supported through the community development fund with a total contribution commitment of just over \$3 million.

The branch, in partnership with Business and Industry Development, is also responsible for assessing applications to the economic development fund. The funding program, delivered through the Regional Economic Development branch, benefits Yukoners across the territory and from all walks of life. This budget allocation supports their unique priorities.

The Technology and Innovation unit of Economic Development plays a key role in promoting an entrepreneurial culture that attracts and supports start-ups. Over the past five years, the Yukon's technology industry has been growing and represents approximately 3.5 percent of Yukon's GDP. The department has committed just over \$2.1 million to technology and innovation programs for 2023-24.

The branch continues to support the knowledge sector through partnerships with members of the Yukon's innovation

ecosystem to deliver on programs such as YuKonstruct's 12-week training program called "Startup Bootcamp", TechYukon's North of Artificial Intelligence program, investment ratings workshops for entrepreneurs and angel investors through the partnership between Yukon University and Innovation and Entrepreneurship and Vancouver spring, Yukon University's Innovation and Entrepreneurship's innovation grant, Yukon Innovation Week, and the Hall of Innovators, co-sponsoring of the Yukon research internship program, and continued support for Yukon University's IncubateNorth program to provide space, tools and services to help market-ready start-ups grow.

With that, I will get a chance to touch on the labour market unit later on today, as well as our operation and maintenance budget. I think that with that, I will just cede the floor to the Member for Porter Creek North.

Ms. Van Bibber: I too would like to welcome the officials to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon, and also thank them for the briefing on the budget.

The economy is always top of mind. It is what keeps us, as a people, healthy and able to live comfortably in our communities. After the COVID problems — and we as a society are still adjusting to many of those changes, however slight. So, for the businesses that are struggling through and still trying, with the continued cost of rising costs, wages, et cetera, it has been a tough slog.

Now, the Liberal budget stresses that we have an amazing GDP, a strong labour market, and low unemployment rates in Canada. On this note, I would like to ask a few questions.

When visiting communities, especially during the tourism season, it is hard to see businesses closing early and opening late due to a lack of staff to operate. How do we reconcile the lack of employees and then state that we have the lowest unemployment rate and the best GDP economy? Can the minister also tell me what programs the government has in place to enhance and assist any business so that they can hire staff to continue to grow and succeed?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: In response to the preamble, I think that looking at the strength of the economy, of course, is something that the business community needs to be proud of, and I think that our communities need to be proud of it — and the public servants who do that work to ensure that there have been interventions to help. It has made a difference. I think the interventions that were made in two subsequent years — although there has been a tremendous amount of pressure and stress on the private sector during that period of time, we also saw a leading economy in the country during COVID, and we saw positive growth during that period of time. I think it is important to reflect on that.

So, that gave significant tail winds for the sector, and we have seen that statistically with the data that has come out in a number of different areas, whether it be employment or in the strength of the overall economy or specific sectors. The investment that has been made over the last number of years has also helped, and that is where we are really seeing the private sector benefit from significant construction budgets and capital budgets. That, in turn — getting back to that comment

by the member opposite — making sure that you have healthy communities, that they are vibrant, and that you have that economy, you also want to be investing in the infrastructure in those communities. That also, of course, helps the quality of life. Again, that creates an ecosystem where you are in a position where you are driving economic growth, but, again, you are building healthier and happier communities. There is a direct correlation between so much of that.

When it comes to labour, of course, to say there are a few things we are dealing with and grappling with in the Yukon that are of national significance — labour challenges are one of them. There are probably five things that we talk about a lot in the Legislative Assembly. Provinces and territories are battling to find appropriate capacity in health care workers. There are challenges around the opioid crisis, which we have now seen the federal government invest in because it is really something that is hurting our communities, it is hurting our families, it is also hurting our economies, and it is also something that is of national significance. We are dealing with housing and a housing challenge across the country. We are dealing with the labour market in the same way, and we are seeing a real lack of people out there to take these jobs.

So, it is true — we do have a low unemployment rate. Do I think that is a good thing? I think it shows the strength. Do I think that I would like to see more individuals from the population out seeking work and more opportunities to fill some spots? Absolutely. I think you make a very good point.

Over the last couple of years, we have seen those challenges with hours of stores and the hospitality industry. I don't want to lean too much into the Tourism and Culture minister's lane, other than to say that he is taking on work where — at one point, we had the opportunity to have Economic Development and Tourism and Culture working together. Why is that important? It's important because, of any region in the country, the Yukon, through the Department of Tourism and Culture, looked at how we could do direct investment into communities to ensure that there were opportunities for housing — in some cases, seasonal housing. The seasonal housing had a direct correlation to providing an opportunity and stability for those seasonal workers for tourism, so it was really not just about recruiting people; it was about making sure — so that work is underway.

We have Carcross. Work is being undertaken and going toward completion in Carcross, as I understand it — I will leave to him to speak to that — for a number of units that can fill their seasonal housing need. Now we have been working with Dawson — the private sector and we have spoken to a number of leaders — and are just really waiting to see. We have resources, but we want to see some business people take on that work. There are a number of things, but I will leave it again to the Minister of Tourism and Culture to speak to this.

We have a number of programs that are underway and I will touch on them, but it's also about supporting other organizations. It's supporting TIA with their recruitment and retention. It's about making sure that we're continuing to put those advertisements out, whether it be just for the opportunity that exists — the incredible job that Tourism has done on our

tourism campaigns also draws people to try to understand what the Yukon is all about and what the opportunities are that are here.

Before I touch on it, there are two or three different programs that are more macro and are more individual. Through labour market — we are also investing in a number of different organizations. I will touch on the Warrior program, which is both through Education and the Department of Economic Development. But it's not just building skills and core competencies for individuals to go and fight fire, it's about engaging with a group of young individuals — individuals who we think really need to be part of our labour market and engaged in the work opportunities that are out there. Once those core competencies and skills bases are in place — I have been there for the opening and closing on a couple of different occasions — and what you hear from the instructors for those individuals is — you go off to do what you want to do to be part of the labour market. That could be construction, that could be tourism — you name it. But it is really about engaging some of those folks in that age category, in their 20s, whom we need to get into the market.

We are moving a number of initiatives, as requested. We have projects under Building UP, and that's to strengthen labour market participation of those not in the labour market yet — including foundational skills, skills for success, vocational skills, disability supports, and employment assistance services.

We also have wage and training subsidies through the Staffing UP program, which helps employers find, hire, and keep suitable workers who they need for their businesses to thrive.

Labour Market expects to invest over \$7 million in 2022-23 to help individuals meet their labour market goals and help employers recruit, train, and retain staff they need for their businesses to thrive. There are a number of different pieces there. Of course, our labour market strategy is due to be rebuilt, and under the current circumstances that we are seeing in the country, it's a very important time to do that work.

That is some of the view from the department. Those are the programs, and it is something we won't be able to do alone, but we will have to be working with non-governmental organizations and skill builders, as well as the private sector, in order to continue to deal with some of the gaps we are seeing in our labour market.

Ms. Van Bibber: On that note, the Labour Market Development branch, which was moved from the Department of Education a year ago — are they the ones who are working on this strategy for the whole of Yukon, and has that been a good move for the Department of Economic Development?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I caught a couple of things there. I apologize if I missed it. Is the work being done, probably strategy-wise, for all the territory? Has it been a good move to move the unit over from Education to Economic Development? I think that's the question.

Yes, I think, absolutely. It was a very significant undertaking the last time that strategy was built. I think it was a 10-year strategy. I can remember being on the stakeholder

side, and it was a very involved process, which goes out to a lot of individuals. It is significant. There is a lot of opportunity for feedback into it.

So, that absolutely has to be a visionary document, and it has to take into consideration the current scenario that we are in when it comes to our labour market. Do I think that it is a good move? I do, and I think that it is a good move because the Department of Education has so many initiatives that are underway, and I think that, whether it be all the great work and progressive and visionary work on the First Nation School Board, I think that it is — supporting a college now that has moved into a university under this last — under our government, and having Canada's first university north of 60. I think that there are more expectations, just in general, around education and the current modernization of a lot of systems.

Having labour market, where there is still the ability to communicate back, of course, with Education, their specific areas around — such as apprenticeship, which has stayed — but moving that team over and really plugging them in with Immigration, to say that we believe that labour market is a driver for the economy, and we need to take a look at what this can be. Early on, you could see, at a national basis, that there were going to be challenges from a standpoint of labour. So, everybody is competing in different ways, and so I think that having their ability to be there is going to be great.

To be open to the Assembly, there were existing contribution agreements in place for a number of different organizations, and you want to continue to do that work and contribute, but we have an opportunity with the new strategy to get out there and really look at how we can build our labour market. Our first obligation is to a number of Yukoners who are probably in their 20s. There have been some real impacts on young adults who graduated from university or high school during the pandemic. How do you engage? And I think that there are other individuals who we have lost from the labour market during that period of time. Those are a lot of individuals who are Yukoners; they have grown up here; they have homes here; and those are the individuals who I am asking the department and the unit to really focus on. How do we get those individuals into the labour market? They are going to have less pressure on housing stock, and it is part of our obligation, as government officials, because they are our clients and they are Yukoners.

I am going to share a few things when it comes to Labour Market Development. When it comes our contributions by sector, about \$25,000 has gone into the accommodation and food services. When it comes to administration support, waste management, and remediation, it's about \$25,000. When it comes to agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting, and our investments there in the labour market, it is about \$211,000. Arts and entertainment and recreation are about \$10,000. Construction is just under \$70,000. Health and social assistance is about \$13,000. Information and cultural industries are just under \$12,000. And manufacturing is just under \$5,000.

But really, it has been around other services — again, just under \$3 million; professional, scientific, and technical services, about \$1.1 million; real estate rental and leasing,

about \$50,000; retail trade, just under \$70,000; transportation and warehousing, about \$10,000; and then, again, public administration, just over \$200,000.

If you want to break down how we are investing in communities, we have just over \$90,000 that has gone into Carcross; just under \$40,000 has gone into Dawson City; Haines Junction is just under \$10,000; Mayo is just under \$10,000. Significant investment into Watson Lake is just over \$50,000. Teslin is just under \$60,000. The bulk, of course, is in Whitehorse, through a number of different programs that are centred here at just over \$4 million. And again, other community centre is \$10,000.

So, community breakdown — sector breakdown — again, we think it has been a good move. I want to welcome all of those folks from the labour unit who are now with us at Economic Development, and I am looking forward to the strategy that will be built for all Yukoners.

Ms. Van Bibber: I thank the minister for that update; that was very good. This government praises the population growth at a time when there is such a lack of affordable housing, along with an increase in public service, and then, this year, we are increasing from 300 applicants in the Yukon nominee program to 430 approved applicants, and I am sure they will be filled. How does the government assist in relocating these people? With a lack of affordable housing for our current population, how do we manage to encourage and accommodate more to the Yukon through these programs?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: When it comes to housing or the population growth, I think the difference has been — a previous Yukon Party government also was very vocal about success and population growth, and there have been significant examples of that. We have also made positive comments about that, and I think it shows vibrancy. When you look at somewhere like the Northwest Territories right now where they have seen a retraction in growth, it's causing concerns.

We know that in the first five years of our mandate, we had a population growth of 12.1 percent. We know that our housing unit growth was 12.9 percent. I think the difference on it is that we are making a more significant investment in housing as we see the growth; we are making more significant investment in affordable housing units, and we are seeing record growth in residential housing. We are trying to ensure that all of the housing ecosystem is keeping up, yet you are right, there have been other pressures with the economic success.

Of course, that is the balance, but we also know that affordability is not a regional issue. It has been driven by significant population growth across the country. We are also seeing different factors that we have had to deal with, such as the supply chain breakdown that has driven housing costs up. Because of a lack of labour that has been this generational change, we have seen more labour costs associated with per square footage buildout. There are a whole bunch of different factors that have driven that, but we know that, as we have talked about the growth, we have also talked about investment in a number of different areas.

Of course, we are seeing a bit of a cooling down of the market. We hope that this gives us time to be in a position to

catch up. We are seeing a lot of rental investments coming online, and we think that this is going to be significant. We believe that putting out private sector opportunities, where we can see high densification, is also going to be good, because that labour market driver — I think a lot of times that demographic — tends to be new professionals or new people to the workforce coming out of a post-secondary experience, so they are hopefully in the rental market first, and we want to make sure we have that. That's a whole other calculus when you're trying to densify your core so that you can have more vibrant communities.

So, there's that underway, but moving back, how do we think about immigration? Well, when we think about immigration, we do know that there are needs. We do know that we have an ability to bring a little over 100 more people in this year's immigration. What we believe is going to be really important is how it's focusing on diaspora areas and populations with family support.

So, when we think about that, it's primarily about how we support, as an example, working with the Filipino community to ensure that people who are in their family networks can come over, because we think there will be better success on retention and for those individuals to make the Yukon their home because they will have support systems in place.

In many cases, family members will provide some of those initial accommodations, and that is something that is celebrated and supported. We think that is part of what we have to do. That has been something that has worked in the past, but it's also an important conversation to continue to have. How do we see family members move here, and how do they have support systems — and that will reduce the unique opportunities we need for housing when it comes to immigration. We do need to see growth. We don't comment on growth without thinking about the challenges that growth causes. We think that, on the housing piece, we need to see a continued investment in a number of different ways, but we also know that our allotment, through the immigration program this year — that program, which we will probably talk about at some point this afternoon — the nominee program is really driven by the employers going out and finding individuals. Then they go through a process.

The employers are out there, really trying to use this program. We are probably going to see that number of individuals that has been allotted — we are probably going to hit that mark halfway through the year, maybe even quicker. It could be three or four months, and we will have our 400 individuals. What we have seen in the past is that the federal government will likely not allot new opportunities to us. We have a lot of employers, and some employers are providing accommodation. Some employers are working with other family members to identify folks. That's kind of happening organically as well. That's why we are focusing on some of those key countries. Primarily, I am thinking of the Philippines when I think about that.

I think that hopefully gives a little bit of sense of how we are thinking about those things, but it is important — you are right — to be contemplating the effects of growth and to make

sure you have strategies in place that are working in parallel to that growth.

Ms. Van Bibber: That leads right into my next question. On the news last week, the shift in the immigrant applications seems to have come from India. I believe it was last year or the year before that there was much ceremony over an MOU signed between the Philippine government and the Government of Yukon.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I'm glad you asked that question. There are two parts to that, I think. First, it's important to understand that the diaspora, the country of origin, is really being driven by the employer relationship. So, we have seen a change over the last little while; it was something that we heard in the media this week. We haven't dug into it as much to understand if it's the specific fields that are being recruited or there are other families who are now working alongside employers to help. We're not sure, but what we do know is that it's important to see that long history from both countries, really, when we see many of the business leaders in the community.

I will speak to the part of the question about the MOU with the Philippines. On March 18, 2022, the Yukon and the Philippines signed a memorandum of understanding on the employment and protection of Filipinos under the Yukon nominee program. The Philippines reorganized its departments, which was one of the significant delays, at the federal level following a general election. So, work on the MOU implementation continues with the new Department of Migrant Workers, which was formed in February 2022. The Department of Economic Development is working to finalize the implementation guidelines for the MOU with the Philippine Department of Migrant Workers, and it's expected to be completed in the coming months.

The MOU will make it easier for Filipinos to come to the Yukon, while reducing cost. As well, the implementation guidelines are still being negotiated. We're in a good position because the Consul General of the Philippines, who was stationed in Vancouver and who worked with the Government of Yukon — and is now the ambassador to Canada for the Philippines, so good support there as we move to fix this and to finish things up.

The Yukon-Philippines working committee to develop implementation guidelines has been in contact regularly since September 2022, and the guidelines have undergone several revisions. My sense is that they are getting quite close on the work. Yukon officials last met with their counterparts at the consulate on March 2. Talks were productive, and Economic Development is currently awaiting the next text proposals from the Philippine Department of Migrant Workers.

I think we are well on our way to getting that completed. This was something that was leading in the country. We have had other provinces reach out to us and ask if we could help support them.

We were concerned about the delay. To be open to the House, I was invited to travel in 2022 to sign it. It was in the middle of a federal election in the Philippines, and our judgment call at that point was to wait. There was still some

text work to be dealt with; we decided to wait. That was the advice from Foreign Affairs officials, as well as our own officials at Executive Council Office, Intergovernmental Relations. After the election, we saw a change in leadership, and that change in leadership led to a restructuring of the labour departments and a brand new federal department. You can imagine the magnitude, with the size of the Philippines. A big transition in government has slowed things down, but we still think that this is leading-edge work. As we know, this will continue to support many individuals from the Philippines to come to the Yukon to make it their home.

Ms. Van Bibber: Now, the foreign workers program has many issues, as many who come to Canada can't practise in their known fields — be it a nurse, doctor, or engineer. There are even qualified tradespeople and skilled labourers. They are wanting to come here for a better life and, most often, we know that they take lower paid jobs to be accepted.

Do we work with the federal government to help these qualified people acquire certification faster for the Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think that we speak with the federal government at a national level — the conversation — but it really comes down to regulatory bodies, which, in many ways, are not governed at a federal level; it is jurisdictional. The Yukon has brought this conversation to the table — the Canadian trade table. It is something that we felt was very important to push and to talk about. We have sat down — and I will give you an example — with the Canadian Medical Association and had an opportunity to sit with them to talk about their work, but really, it is something that has to be undertaken with regulatory bodies, depending on the area of expertise at the professional level. Again, it also depends on what the regulatory body is.

The Yukon — labour mobility is an important tool for addressing the shortage of professional and skilled workers in the territory. However, the process of credential recognition between jurisdictions can complicate matters. I can tell you that, from the table, many jurisdictions are taking a much, much different approach. We do have some strategies — I will hold that for now — on what we are deploying in 2023. I want to make sure that they are fine-tuned before we have an opportunity to speak to the House, but this is really a focus on how we're going to deal with health care opportunities, how we are going to deal with recognition, and how we are going to deal with other jurisdictions and work with other jurisdictions.

So, we have a number of things. This is a focus that I've really wanted to work on for a while. That's partially why we also wanted Labour Market Development to be next to immigration in the Department of Economic Development. There are a number of areas — the forum of labour mobility ministers and its working groups — and we continue to participate in that. We are also waiting to see — this spring, the Government of Ontario also spoke about hosting a conference around this.

You see also in the health care deal that we negotiated that there were some other funds in there for the recognition of foreign credentials. We also see in this year's federal budget

some dollars concerning recruitment and retention in rural areas for medical health staff.

Some of the other things that we have undertaken — funding incentives to provide Yukon First Nation citizens with introductory experiences in careers are going to be important, and that goes back to people who are already Yukoners.

Also, one of the things that we tried to undertake is that we put a proposal in. The proposal has been submitted to Canada for funding to support and create a system for recognizing the credentials of internally trained health care workers. We want to build that at home. We are waiting to see what the response is on that. I have talked to the minister in charge of health for Canada as well as the deputy minister and assistant deputy minister, and we have also spoken with the minister of intergovernmental — so we are waiting to see a response from that.

Again, the Labour Market Development branch expects to invest about \$7 million this year in this, so it's a live topic. We are learning from probably the positive and negative effects of strategies from other jurisdictions. We think it's important. We have heard many in the House speak about this. It is something that we're focused on. We are also looking at how we can track individuals, as you spoke to, who are here and are underemployed. I will be meeting with a number of groups — at least one significant group — over the next month, and we think it will be important to have conversations that pertain to the questions that you raised today.

Ms. Van Bibber: The minister, in his opening statement, mentioned getting ore to tidewater. With the Skagway dock being renewed for the next several years, the money being invested in the Skagway dock — \$17 million USD, or \$24 million CAD — can the minister tell us if this is the only cash infusion that he expects to be asked for? Also, can he tell us how much the Alaskan government has invested into this project as well?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: That initial investment for us — just over \$17 million — is for the platform work. There has been a dialogue and a bit of debate in the House around what type of ore-loading infrastructure should be put in place. There is a cost associated with that, and that is still going to be a discussion with the private sector as well as government entities once it has been defined what infrastructure it should be and what the model is to pay for that. So, there is a potential of further investment, but that is yet to be seen based on the infrastructure decision or choice that will be made.

When it comes to the Alaska state government, we don't have complete visibility to what is being leveraged by the municipality of Skagway from the Alaska government. I mean, this is a complete redevelopment in that area in Skagway. So, we can request that information at our next set of meetings and, if they are comfortable, we could share that, but their municipal government — quite transparent. But I don't have the dollar figure in any potential bilateral agreement or TPA between the state and the municipality accessible to us at this time.

Ms. Van Bibber: So, an initial investment and possibly more to be asked for — the minister also mentioned that it was a very complex situation dealing with a cross-border

investment with government dollars. Has the initial agreement been signed? Can the minister tell me when the next set of meetings are?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Two important points that we have to share — first, our latest meeting was today. We did meet with officials today, so this is ongoing and a live subject. I think it is important to bring to the House that, between all the design work that we have been doing on this project as well as the legal services, we are at about a million dollars spent to date. That's important because we have engaged legal services — I believe both in Canada and the US because of the complexity, and we needed to have legal representation on both sides of the border to ensure that we had the proper advice as we have gone through on this process to date.

Ms. Van Bibber: One question — and I believe it will be the last for me. I wanted to take an opportunity to clarify who would be the lead department on the debate for the Yukon convention centre. Will it be the Department of Tourism and Culture, or will it be the Department of Economic Development?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: It will be the Department of Tourism and Culture.

Ms. Van Bibber: We will look forward to more conversation on the convention centre and its progress.

I would like to thank the staff for being here.

Ms. White: It's a delight to be here discussing the mains for the Department of Economic Development. Thanks to the officials for being here and, of course, for the great briefing.

The first thing I want to start with is the paid sick leave program. I asked about the paid sick leave program during the briefing but was told that it had yet to be decided whether it was going to be COVID or if it was going to be rolled over into something else. Here we are. It's April, so I am hoping that the minister can share with me what the paid sick leave program will now cover.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The current program — we have extended the terms of the program as the same considerations that were in place before. It's the same program. It's around COVID and respiratory — that's the way that it's in place right now. To be open to the House, we are doing some work to look at how this program could best meet the needs of the community. We have gone back and looked at some of the documentation and the work that was done by the committee that came out of the CASA work and the "what we heard" document concerning that.

We are watching what's happening across the country. We've seen that Ontario has just cancelled their sick leave program. We have seen British Columbia have a program, and I think they have legislated that to have the private sector contribute to that program, and we're seeing that in some other jurisdictions.

We have just extended the program out at this time and we're doing some work around what this next generation of the program would look like. I know that Community Services had a plan to undergo some work on it as well. At this point, it's exactly like it is and we're going to be coming back with some more information on that.

Ms. White: I'm just going to ask the minister to expand on that. He said "COVID and respiratory" issues, so am I to understand right now that it would only cover things like COVID? And if that's the case, understanding that we don't have the testing centre anymore, that we're not doing the testing like we were, for example, during the two deep dark years of the pandemic, how would an employee indicate to their employer and how would an employer apply if COVID is not being viewed in the same way?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I want to clarify. Right now, the work that's being done inside our department is looking at bringing forward a new program and we're looking at having to backdate some of the work that is in place. The previous program was done through employer attestation. That was how we approached it. What we're really trying to do, without pre-empting the decisions of Cabinet, is we're trying to broaden the type of illness that would be covered. Then what we're looking to do is move that very quickly, and if there's a gap — because we accepted applications — and I apologize, but we accepted applications up until March 31, and for any period of delay over a week or two until we go live — and it could be up to three weeks, depending on when it gets through Cabinet — then we would be looking at having to backdate, but we're looking at broadening the terms of illness that would be in place.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. Just for clarity's sake: Is there an expectation that a new program will be established and be ready to go in approximately three weeks so that employers could apply for a sick leave program rebate within the month?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: That is our goal, yes.

Ms. White: So, how will this new program be communicated out to the territory?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: There will be an extensive communications program that will be associated with our submission to Cabinet. There are a lot of approvals to this that have to go in place. We would use our standard communication. We would be going out to a number of business organizations that we have identified to work with. Again, we would be going out with different levels of media and platforms of media. It would be driven, not just through Economic Development, but also through the Executive Council Office.

Ms. White: So, I guess another follow-up on that same thing, understanding that, for example, this budget was handed to Members of the Legislative Assembly just about a month ago, and knowing that the deadline — we are always going to hit the March 31, and then it was going to roll over on the \$750,000 — was going to be in Economic Development. How come we are still waiting the three weeks or so for approval from Cabinet to be able to roll out that new program?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, in this year's budget, there is \$750,000 that is still in our budget that we would be using for the extension of the program.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that, but if we look at the line item, the \$750,000 is now in Economic Development, where before I believe it was in Community Services under the Employment Standards Board. So, there was always the

understanding that it was going to move from the Department of Community Services Employment Standards to the Department of Economic Development. So, I am just asking why the work wasn't done so that there would be this seamless transition between March 31 of the previous budget and April 1 of the budget going forward?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Because I asked the department to revisit the scope to ensure that we would be in a position to cover maybe a larger array of illnesses, based on — versus what we saw, and we want to make sure that work is done properly. We haven't completed that work. We have gone back a couple of different times on it. We wouldn't have wanted to see a gap, but you know, we think that we are on our way to a stronger program.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that answer, and it should surprise no one, but I have always said that when we are sick, we should not be at work, and I believe that fundamentally for the Assembly as well — that it should not just be COVID that has us calling in remotely. When I owned a small business, the last thing that I needed was my entire staff to be taken down by one strain of a cold or one strain of a flu, and it was important for me that they not work. So, I appreciate that we have moved it; I just wanted to know when we could expect to see that and the terms of those programs, because I think that it is really important.

I am going to move on to the performing musician fund. I have recently had a conversation with a musician who was talking about how incredible this fund was, and they said, you know, we can get flown to the east coast, we can get all the support, we can rent a car, but it doesn't cover the cost of gasoline.

The reason I want to ask this question is that it seems to me, if you were a member of a band, or a band, and you were doing a lot of travel, that you may not have the financial means to pay up front for things like the cost of gas, but I was told that, in this program, you can rent the car, you can get flown across the country, and you can do all these additional things, but it doesn't cover the cost of gasoline.

So, I just wanted to ask the minister if he was aware of that or if the person who contacted me was incorrect in their interpretation?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I know if that musician also spent some time in here, then I wouldn't have to follow up on that item, that I am getting reminded of now. It might have been brought to my attention.

What I will do is I will share a little bit about the program, and then we can have a look into that. I am being reminded that I might have had a follow-up with that conversation I had on the same subject, so thank you, if that is the case. I think that it is important to understand — to share with folks — the amount of work that has been done. I do speak very positively about many of the things that have been undertaken in a department, but almost every program has been revamped and that takes a lot of work. We are seeing, if you look at it — when it comes to film — we touched on it before — we are seeing almost \$9 million in direct investment in film coming up this next year. We are seeing real growth, and we are seeing growth both

domestically and we are seeing it from Yukon homegrown projects, and we are seeing investment coming in from other areas of the country, and I guess you would say, internationally.

That is driving diversification. For anyone who watches this, it is not easy to undertake. It's the same thing as how we've bet on Yukoners. We have bet on their talents, and we have done it when it comes to musicians. We increased the annual budget of the program by \$250,000 — from \$50,000 to \$300,000. So, it was a big jump in the program. We launched it in June 2022, and it held its first intake on July 4, its second intake on September 15, and its third intake on February 6, 2023. Three review committees of music industry professionals, which is important — like, they're folks from across the country, just to make sure that there is integrity in that system, of course, and accountability — and we have approval of 32 projects.

We will go into it. I wanted to share that, because I think that the team has done an incredible job working with professionals, both locally and nationally, with our team and the folks at media. Some of the things that are covered are music video content and sound recordings. Our team just got back to us and said that gas will be covered, but they have to make sure that they provide receipts for gas, so it would be covered — also marketing activities such as touring, showcasing, and training and development of Yukon musicians. So, it was really, really good work. It is a small team at media. I want to thank Iris Merritt, who was a pillar and now has retired, and Neil Macdonald, who is another talented, talented Yukoner who grew up here and then was in the private sector on the film side, and is now the leader in that shop. There are some other great individuals — Andrew and Cindy and other folks there — who are doing great work and have taken on a lot of changes. It's great to see an ability to bet on Yukoners and the work they do, and now we're seeing that pay off in real growth and diversification in those sectors.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that and for the clarification. To be clear, there is no criticism about the program development, and no criticism about the work that is being done behind the scenes. I appreciate the increase from the \$50,000 to the \$300,000. That's a massive jump, but according to someone who has applied for the program, they were originally told that, although they could get flown to Halifax and could rent a van, the problem came when it came time to gas up the van.

So, I appreciate that the minister has said that gas is able to be covered and that it's just a matter of keeping the receipts. I think that's important. I think it's also important to make sure that, when people are applying, they understand that this part of the tour is also supported, and it's not like: We will get you the van, but you are going to have to find a horse because it's the only way you are going to get between places. I think that's important. I do appreciate that and just look forward to those musicians being able to get that follow-up feedback.

There was a little bit of a conversation before on the nominee program, but the minister knows that this is one of my favourite topics, so we're going to go back to it. In all my time in this Chamber, I have always maintained that, from my

perspective, the nominee program is an immigration program — that many, many people will come here far more skilled than the jobs that they will take because they are choosing to use this as an access for immigration. At different times, I have been told by different folks that it's not an immigration program, it's an economic program, and it's to support businesses, but I have my opinions about why people come over.

I know that the number of possible nominees this year has been increased, so what I want to talk about a little bit is that nominee application progress. How does a business — maybe if the minister can walk me through how a business goes about bringing over a nominee.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I want to go back to that last question concerning the funding for the sound recording. I want to mention that, in the transfer payment agreement between the artist and the department, there would be an area or a line item that would have maximum travel cost. I do want to just state that there are applicable expenditures that would go under travel, and if something like fuel was not covered, that might be because they have already reached the total amount for travel costs. I think we have got there, and we know that the fuel cost is something that can be recovered based on that program.

We drive opportunity for individuals to come into our economy. I don't think we have to get into a situation of too much debate. I think, for us, we want to see those individuals come over and become part of these economic opportunities. You will hear me say — and I think that all of us in the House, from any political party, will say — that we also understand the positive impact that it makes to the culture of the Yukon and the richness of the Yukon. I shared it — and many of us in the House, from all three political parties, were at different events where we crossed over. I can remember one weekend not too long ago where we had a solemn event with all three parties, I believe, represented. That was a vigil for the Ukrainian community. The next day was Rendezvous, and then there was a fundraiser at our mosque downtown for the Syrian and Turkish earthquake victims. Later that day was an event by an African cultural and leadership organization. It was great. I had one of my kids — my son — with me, and we had an opportunity to hit all three of those events. It's pretty incredible what all of us have the opportunity to be exposed to and experience. It is pretty incredible. It's pretty moving.

For all of us — you bump into individuals on the street and they are from so many backgrounds. It's adding to so many things — the cultural delivery opportunities, whether it be in arts or music and dance. There is the cuisine that we have access to. I think, for all of us, people come to the Yukon and they show up and are completely taken aback by what's here.

I was talking to consul generals when they arrived. They are just blown away by what we have access to. There is nothing more exciting to me than to drive into some of our smaller communities and see individuals who have come through the nominee program, who are out there working and adding to the labour force — Takhini Hot Springs and Takhini gas bar, right through to Carmacks, Dawson City and beyond. It's pretty incredible.

I hope that lots of these individuals, from wherever their country of origin is, are coming here and adding to our community. In many ways, this is the history of Yukon — if we go back 125 years to the beginning of the Yukon being a territory and what happened. We had people from absolutely all over the world coming to the Yukon — many moving on, some staying — and then adding to our social fabric, and we are seeing that again. It's pretty moving to watch that happen.

The nominee program process is a 10-step process. Eligible employers advertise a position locally and nationally, and if no qualified Canadian or permanent resident applies, they go to the program. The employer offers a full-time permanent position to an eligible foreign national. The employer and foreign national complete all required forms for the Yukon nominee program. Step 4, the employer submits a completed application to the Yukon nominee program, ensuring that all forms and documents are included. Step 5, if the employer is approved, the foreign national information is reviewed. Step 6, if the foreign national is approved, the individual becomes a territorial nominee. Step 7, once the application is approved, both the employer and the nominee must sign a tripartite agreement, TPA, with the Government of Yukon, and that's an area that we have talked a lot about — how to ensure those commitments to respect and safety and other things for the individual, and that's the step where that is captured.

Step 8, nominee submits application to IRCC, which is the federal entity of immigration in Canada, for a temporary work permit. The nominee also submits an application for permanent residency after signing the tripartite agreement. Step 9, the nominee works for an employer under a temporary work permit while the permanent residency is in process. Step 10, the nominee meets all admissibility checks, which is security, health, and criminal checks, and then, once permanent residency is received, the nominee becomes a resident of Canada.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. Having spoken to numerous employers who have either sponsored nominees to come over or are looking to, there is a fair amount of stress on the side of the employer because you really are dealing with someone's life. You want to make sure that you go through the process correctly; you want to make sure that you are not breaking any rules so that they don't suffer the consequences. One of the questions that we have often had here or we have discussed here is what level of support the department is able to offer to people filling out that paperwork. So, is there someone who specializes in the nominee applications within the Department of Economic Development who supports businesses in those applications?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, my understanding is that there have been extensive supports, both during the application process — as well as understanding the supports that have to be there for the relationship of the program — where there are a number of individuals who work in the unit who have very strong skills and are multi-talented to do that work. We are also in a position where we are continuing to have pressure and growth with the number of individuals that we want to support and the obligations that we have put on the unit — things like

having the scenario that happened with Ukraine and starting up our help desk. Those are some of the same individuals who are doing that work, and we have seen different streams, of course, over the last while. Again, it is the whole group — the whole team does assist with businesses and accessing the programs. But we are also constantly monitoring to see — with some of the growth and the quantum of individuals that we do have access to bring in — and to make sure that we are still providing appropriate services to the private sector.

We have four officers in the department, and there are three specifically for the Yukon nominee program who would focus on supports, but also client supports too. So, they are working on both sides of the equation on this and monitoring to see if we have the right capacity in place.

Ms. White: I appreciate the minister taking the time through this because I have obviously never applied for a nominee position, but I do have more questions.

So, with the paperwork, is it all immigration paperwork, for example, required for the Government of Canada or is there specific paperwork that is just required for the Government of Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Just confirming with our officials — the majority of it is for Canada, but there is an obligation for some of the paperwork for here. I do appreciate just being able to touch on something that I know the member opposite and some other members of the House — and it has been something across the country. There was a frustration and delay with processing times, but our processing times have been the fastest in the country. I think that we are at about 60 days — I think that is where we were. I am sorry if I have missed it; it might even be better timing for us to process, but we have seen Canada and IRCC with significant backlogs and they have affected the processing time for us for the permanent residency, and we have seen it just in general — some real challenges. I think that has been well spoken to across the country — those challenges. It is something, of course, at our FPT — federal-provincial-territorial — meetings for immigration that is a very hot topic from all jurisdictions.

Going back to the paperwork — both sets of paperwork, however — there are some very specific questions that are related to the Yukon — but paperwork going to both levels of government.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. Since we started with the nominee process a very long time ago, has there ever been a time when the department has gone back to businesses that have successfully sponsored people and to nominees or people who came through the nominee program to sit down and go through the process to find out — like, were there some steps that were really beneficial or were there some that were hindering for the nominee who was coming? Were there specific things that they would have benefited from knowing or were there absences in information? Has there ever been a time where the department has gone back and essentially sat down with people who have successfully gone through the program or maybe even with employers who have not successfully gone through the program to find out what their experiences were?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We have. We are just on the cusp of getting ready to complete our immigration strategy. We held off on releasing it because there was a federal-provincial-territorial meeting in Halifax that just occurred in March, and we were really trying to get a sense of what the federal government was looking at over the next number of years and ensuring that this was captured in the strategy. We have done even more — I have asked of the department. It is about going out and having discussions with employers. There are a lot of employers, of course, who have been return clients for us and have used the program. So, there is a fairly continued dialogue — and to be open, as you know, the employers in the sector are not shy about talking about challenges or opportunities for improvement.

We also have been in dialogue with individuals who have gone through the program to get a sense from them. We have also had times where our team has gone out and sat with individuals who have had things that were pretty negative from their prerogative. So, I commend the unit for going out — sometimes where we have had individuals who have wanted to voice their experience and things that could be improved on. That was some of the work that was done leading up to the building of our new strategy, so I think our new strategy does encompass many perspectives around the nominee program, and just immigration in general.

I think that the work and the consultation that was undertaken through that gives us an opportunity to have a strategy that is improving a multitude of programs, but I have to say that, with Canada, it's a tough conversation.

Our official is just touching on the fact that, through that tripartite agreement, there is a continuing discussion between nominees and employers. Really, if you hear about somebody doing something inappropriate — such as a nominee not being treated properly — that tripartite agreement really is the framework to go back to, and that is the commitment that everyone has made to each other.

It is fair to say for the table that we have a system in the country — and it has been like this through a multitude of governments, so this has not changed. We have had federal governments change politically, but one thing that has been constant is the governance model for Québec is different from everyone else, so there's a lot of conversation at the ministerial table about immigration from all corners of the country, wanting a bit more control, and they see their counterparts in Québec where they have a different governance model.

The reason why I bring that up is that it is still stringent for us to be able to make certain decisions or change program elements. We have control over what we do here, so we do try to ensure that we are consistently improving the elements that we have control over and responsibility for. We don't mind courageous conversations. We are open to feedback, be it positive or negative. We are committed to making sure that our programs work as best as they can for our clients, who are these foreign nationals who have chosen the Yukon as a destination and, as well, the employers who are providing them with opportunities.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. So, one thing that happened when the website switched over is that things — for example, I used to be able to find an example of the tripartite agreement online, but I can't find it now. I can find the list that the minister just read off, but I can't find a mock document anymore. Within the nominee page, it does talk, for example, about the median wage. It does say that the guaranteed employment offer outlines all conditions of the position, and the median wage must be provided. Low-income cut-off levels must be met as determined by Statistics Canada.

When we're talking about Yukon, where would an employer find out what that median wage is? Because if I click on the link, it takes us to the Canadian website, and I would suggest that those are not super applicable to us.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Just because I don't have the site in front of me — and I want to make sure that we do some digging — we'll get back in a written submission on any really detailed elements, such as this, that we're being asked about today. We can come back. We'll find out exactly where we're posting that information and what information is provided publicly or if there has to be a request to the unit.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that because, as an example, on the Canadian government website where it talks about median wages — for example, I'm just looking under median wages for a retail sales person. It does say that these wages were updated on November 16, 2022 based on the 2016 version of the NOC. But, for example, it says that, in Yukon, the lowest amount is \$15.70 and the highest amount is \$17 — so I guess the average is \$17, and the highest is higher than that.

So, just knowing that someone is going to be trying to figure out what that is — I'm just curious as to how that's calculated.

I appreciate it, and I look forward to more information coming back about that.

One of the things that we talked about in the fall was knowing that there were employers who were going to the Department of Economic Development looking to apply for nominees, and we had hit our maximum number. I know that there were negotiations and the Yukon has increased that number, but how is that allocated? For example, for people who had indicated that they wanted to apply last year when there was no more allocation, is it a first come, first served? Was there ever the ability to say that you were interested once it reopened? How does that work?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: First come, first served is the approach. Last year, even though we had hit the mark, as a department we were trying to continue to process applications as advanced as we could while we were waiting to get our next allocations.

Partially, as I mentioned earlier in questions from the Official Opposition, there is a very good chance we are going to hit this high-water mark of 400 people. We might hit this in Q1 of the fiscal; if not, just into Q2. Part of that is because we did have all of that pent-up interest coming out of the 2022 calendar year, but 2022-23 fiscal.

At the table in the summertime, we pushed, and we did a specific intervention from the Yukon at the table in the meetings in Saint John, New Brunswick, to really push to

ensure that we had our allotments earlier, because there have been delays, which makes things even more difficult for us.

We are happy to see that we have our allocations. I can tell you that, right now, that's an announcement that we made. We have processed 237 applications already to the end of March. That's where we are. This is moving very quickly, and we will continue to have that discussion. There were good questions from the Member for Porter Creek North. We are balancing. We know we have to fill the positions, but we are also in a position where we have to understand what it's doing to housing stock and the balance of that. Then, of course, we want the private sector to have the ability to have the maximum hours of operation and maximum revenue for their businesses.

As well, to the previous question, Canada publishes the median wage for every NOC code, but I am going to go back to find out where we may post that or where our links are. That's published on jobbank.gc.ca. That is posted by ESDC, a federal department. I will see where we have links on our sites that provide that information, so individuals can find that out, as they are thinking about looking at our program.

Ms. White: I do thank the minister for that and for the conversation around it. I am actually going to go back to the performing musicians fund to seek clarification. I appreciate what the minister said, but I did just reach back out to the musician friend of mine, and they were under the impression, for example, that you could drive — let's use Edmonton for an example — between here and Edmonton, and gas was available, but if you flew to Edmonton and needed to rent a vehicle, then it was not available. I just want to make sure that, for example — if that was the case — if a band was going to fly to another jurisdiction and rent a vehicle to be able to get around to tour, gasoline was still part of what the travel costs could be.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I guess I would touch on two points. One, I think it is probably really prudent to ensure that whatever the travel budget line item is in the TPA, it's discussed and is encompassed, so, if it is a flight, then it is a rental and travel or fuel. We are getting into the minutia. I think I would say, please have the musician reach out to us. We've spoken to our officials today. We know that fuel is something that is a covered cost. We are talking about something — I think this is very specific — it is probably based on an experience that has occurred. I know we would cover it, but let's ensure that — we can casework and work with you on it for that specific person and figure out if something has been missed or if there is another — as we say, there are always three sides to the story. We can dig in together on this one.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. I do appreciate it, and I'm happy to send the person along and assist as required — but I think the challenge becomes that, if it is a more systemic thing and we just haven't looked at the program in that way — like flying, for example, to Halifax, renting a vehicle and touring — just making sure that what we are trying to do with the program fits its thing. We don't want to do casework every time a musician is trying to tour and they hit this barrier.

It is just making sure that the program is doing what I think we all hope it to do.

I wanted to know about the expansion of the Skills for Success program. It is in a couple of spots in the budget — transfers from Canada — but it is substantially more than it has been before. So, what is the line item this year for Skills for Success?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I do want to go back — I'm belabouring too. We just had all our officials — we went through our program, fuel was covered. Maybe it was something under the old one and we can look through it. Anyway, I appreciate your kind comments about the program. We're excited about it, but we're always looking to monitor and adapt.

The objective of the Yukon Skills for Success project is to demonstrate improved labour market outcomes for the individuals in the Yukon with a focus on underrepresented individuals seeking to support and advance toward their labour market goals. I just want to check with officials.

This was something that came from a transfer agreement with the federal government, and it was an extra \$1 million, and it was to: increase the number, variety, and quality of services, tools, and training resources available for service providers, individuals, and employers to measure and develop skills for success; increase the number and variety of opportunities available to prepare individuals for jobs that are in demand; and acknowledge the significance of First Nation ways of knowing, doing, learning, and being with respect to the Skills for Success model, and advocate for inclusion within it.

I touched on the Warrior program, which is one great example of being able to engage with students in this way. I will say this: we are budgeting this, but we tend to partner with a multitude of organizations to build out these programs. We get submissions, and we review the criteria, the curriculum, and the outcomes, and then we define how we are going to deploy these funds.

Our team is keenly focused on trying to ensure that individuals — Yukoners — who are not engaged in the workforce, who have slipped, for one reason or another — we need to focus on those individuals. This has been work that has been long focused on. I had a chance to do this in another professional career. It is important work. It is extremely important work, and we owe it to engage with those clients. It is also going to be key because our solution cannot only be to have people migrate from other parts of this country or internationally. That cannot be our only strategy. We need to have Yukoners make the decision to investigate different areas of work and careers — who live here now.

If they need supports and a boost into other areas, we need to fill that with a multitude of partners, which we are working with. We also need to ensure that individuals who have gone off and are coming back home have a chance to have those opportunities as well.

Ms. White: I agree with the minister. Really, any time we can lift someone up and give them more skills and support them in those decisions, I think that it is an important part, and I appreciate that.

My last question is — actually, there is a line item in the budget that said “trade school registration fees”, and I imagine that the dollar amount, which I really appreciate — because my colleague Elizabeth Hanson always said, “You have to put a dollar in just to hold it; you can’t have a zero because otherwise it doesn’t work in accounting.”

I just wanted to know what the new trade school registration fees were, and if there were specific schools that we worked with or what that line was specifically.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: So, the process for us — it is actually a revenue item for us, in the sense that we identify seats in a multitude of schools — I can get you some more information on it. Then we fund an individual. We then get a repayment for the trade seat through our funding program that we have held for that individual — that seat that has been held. That is how it is being shared with me. So, I will get you a bit more information on it. I will give you a sense of where we are holding some of those opportunities, and then I will bring that back to the House, but that is how it is used.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that and the conversation today, and I thank the officials and look forward to seeing you in the fall, if that is what is required, and I will leave it to my colleague.

Deputy Chair (MLA Tredger): 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: Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any further general debate?

Mr. Kent: There is just one item that I wanted to follow up with the minister on, and this is from my discussions with the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources when that department was up, and it is with respect to the mineral exploration fund. So, just to go back to the 2021 Yukon Liberal platform, it said that they would support junior mining companies operating in the Yukon through the creation of a mineral exploration fund, and then we jump ahead to February 22 of last year, and a news release was put out, quoting the Minister of Economic Development saying that the Government of Yukon has issued an RFP to study potential models for a mineral exploration fund to support junior mining companies. Then, the RFP was put on Yukon Bids and Tenders. However, it looks to me, on reading the Bids and Tenders document here, that there were three bids submitted, but the bid was terminated.

So, I am curious if the minister can explain where we are at with this campaign commitment, as it was in the 2021 mandate letters, but then, I looked at the Minister of EMR’s 2023 mandate letter, and it has disappeared, so I am not sure if

this commitment has been abandoned or paused or where we are at with it. So, I just wanted to give the minister an opportunity to tell us the status of this campaign commitment.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I will speak to the process first, from last year, concerning the tender. The member opposite is absolutely correct: it was written into the mandate letters in 2021, and then, in 2022, the department completed a preliminary review for a number of fund models and then tendered a contract for fund design in February 2022. Three proponents submitted bids by April 2022. One bid met the technical requirements for the project, and that bid was rejected due to a substantially higher cost than the RFP budget. The department continued to have discussions on the subject and to do further investigation.

I would say that the model that was contemplated is something that is a real challenge to try to fund. There have been unsolicited proposals over the last six years by one organization. To be open to the House, it’s difficult, because the unsolicited proposal that we did receive — we did do some due diligence on it. We had a legal firm review it, and the difficulty was that there was a substantial amount of money that was requested by the organization to, at that time, take on the work, so really, what we’re talking about here is: How do we have a pool of money in place focused on junior mining companies in the Yukon to help them de-risk some of their exploration and their advancement?

The model that has seemed to be productive is a model in Québec. I think that they have even put in fairly significant government money. I don’t have all the details in front of me now. The challenge is the amount of deal flow that a fund specific to the Yukon would have access to. That is what we’re hearing from others who manage funds.

The two things that I am still working with our team on is, one, that British Columbia, as a government, did have the mining sector representatives from BC, but also representatives who work in the Yukon, approach, through their mining associations, to see British Columbia build a fund. Our officials reached out to British Columbia and said that maybe there is an opportunity to work with the BC government on the fund, understanding that a lot of companies in the Yukon have headquarters in Vancouver, and they’re working in both jurisdictions. It would really be about the ratio of the total fund, and how it’s deployed into the regions. The BC government did not end up following up on the creation — and I don’t know if that’s still in order, but we’re open to that.

The second opportunity is that it seems that at least one or two of those funds that have had interest in the Yukon have now gone directly to the private sector — to First Nation corporations — and there seems to be a dialogue happening there. We are not party to that dialogue, but we are waiting to see if there is going to be any ask by the Yukon government. So, this might be completely driven by the private sector with a focus on the Yukon, but I think that, at this point, trying to bring in other dollars from big firms that are out there, just for the Yukon, seems to be a challenge, but there is an opportunity, I think, still at hand.

So, it's not shelved, but I think that the form it will take would be different from what we initially understood or thought, and that is based on a series of work and due diligence and legal analysis. So, I think there has been good work done on it, and it is still something that we are looking to see — in some form. There are other pieces: How do we potentially leverage credits — tax credits — that are beneficial through companies that do work? We have reached out and had discussions with some organizations, like PearTree, firms that have done charitable credits, and there might be an opportunity there.

So, yes, we are still looking; we think it is still important. I think the Yukon mineral investment program, as we know, has been a good program. It has been something — through successive — I think all successive governments have contributed to it, and it seems to have leveraged in — you know, is there something else that we can do to parallel that work?

Mr. Kent: So, just a quick follow-up — the minister referenced an unsolicited proposal, and I am kind of curious about that — what exactly that was. Is that what led to the commitment in the 2021 platform to create the mineral exploration fund? Is the minister able to give us any more details about this unsolicited proposal?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: No, I think the genesis for the conversation was — there was this proposal, and I don't have all of the terms here or the names, but I can just make sure that there is no NDA, and if there is not, we will provide it. I would think that the member opposite probably had the same conversation with maybe the same organization or others before — and maybe not. It was mostly junior mining companies in the Yukon that came — maybe they had that conversation with the member opposite — maybe not. With us, they just came and had discussions and said, look, these are some organizations that we are working with, and this is something that is really working in other jurisdictions, like Québec. So, there are two or three local companies that — and people I know who have worked with both me and the member opposite too — brought the concept. We needed a transparent process in order to undertake the work.

So, the initial proposal — we did some work on and focused on, and we had to just see how to handle it, and then we went back out to more of a public offering.

Our budget for the work on that RFP that we put out was about \$50,000. The one proposal that did meet technical requirements came in at \$200,000. So, that is why we didn't go down that road any further, but, again, we will look to see, and I would bring it back in a written submission. We will work to bring back some other information to the House.

Really, one detail I can share is that the proposal was kind of structured like, "Provide us with a million dollars and then we will go make this work." So, you can imagine the fun I would have bringing that one to the House and answering questions during Economic Development with the opposition on that one. Anyway, we did not go down that road, and we still think there might be other opportunities available to do something a bit more structured.

Mr. Dixon: I have two areas of questions for the minister. The first is on a trade issue, and the second is on a technology issue. I will start on trade. In particular, the issue that I would like to raise with the minister relates to the export of eggs. The reason why I'm asking this in Economic Development and not in Energy, Mines and Resources is that the issue is one of market access and trade policy, as opposed to the programs that are available in EMR.

Members will recall that, during the negotiations of the CFTA, the parties — the provinces and territories — agreed to maintain the supply management system, whereby a number of products, of course, are governed under the supply management system and the quota system. This system obviously does not directly benefit the territories in any way. In fact, in many ways, it hurts the territories by increasing the price of food in a region of the country that already faces food security issues. This was something that was not viewed positively by territories, but ultimately, the territories were placated in the negotiations by committing to two working groups that were created under the CFTA.

A few weeks ago, my colleague, the Member for Porter Creek North, wrote to the minister and asked for updates on the work of those two committees, and the minister wrote back, indicating that the first working group, which was the working group on economic development opportunities and initiatives in the territories' food sector, had completed its work and had done a final report in 2018 with recommendations.

So, the first question I would like to ask the minister is where that report is available, if it's available publicly or not, and if it can be shared.

The second working group that the minister referenced in his letter to the Member for Porter Creek North on March 10 was the working group on the development of the food sector in the territories, and the minister noted that work had not begun with that working group. So, I would like to ask what priorities the government has in mind for that working group.

With that in mind, I will turn now to the issue at hand that I referenced, and that is the fact that currently, a significant barrier to growth for egg producers in the Yukon is that they cannot export out of the territory. We are not included in quota; we don't have access to quota here in the Yukon. That was a decision that was made many years ago to not include Yukon in the quota system. The Northwest Territories is actually included in the quota system, but only for eggs. So, NWT has access to the 30-some-odd percent of the quota that is allocated to Canada's western provinces; Yukon, however, does not. So, the inability of Yukon egg producers to export outside of the Yukon is a significant barrier to growth.

So, I would like to ask the minister if he would consider using either the working group that I mentioned earlier or perhaps another means — perhaps the trade table itself — to discuss an option that would allow Yukon egg producers to have a solution to this problem, because we are not explicitly in the quota system, and we don't have an exemption from the quota system, so we are left with a bit of a rock and a hard place for this industry, where they can't export outside the Yukon. They can't export to BC; they can't export to Alaska or other

provinces. So, this is obviously frustrating for at least one company that has reached the point where they could feasibly export their product outside of the Yukon.

So, I will leave it — based on my series of comments and questions — for the minister to comment on. Is this something that he would be willing to pursue, to find a solution to allow Yukon to export eggs beyond our borders, and if so, what is the minister considering on that front?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am intrigued by the question, because my sense would be that if the member opposite would support a free market, laissez-faire economic model — my sense, from the question, is that he is very the position of the Yukon Party? is that they are very supportive of seeing this quota system in place, and the implications to the rest of the agricultural industry and the private sector are so, I think, significant. That is of concern.

The challenge with the quota system is that it is the implication to the rest of the private sector that has invested in egg production. So, if you look at an organization — there is one organization that has probably talked to the member opposite about this — and I did not know. I will have to go back and check — there must have been a change that there is not allowed to be an export to Alaska, because the Alaska export opportunity was really something that was governed by the Food and Drug Administration, and I agree that there is a great opportunity there. I had discussions with Mr. Constantine back in 2009 around that opportunity. It is a \$2-billion opportunity. He was the head of the Food and Drug Administration out of Anchorage at the time. It is really about how you get into that market, but the quota system is more governing for the national situation, and the challenge is the implications to all the other egg producers. There are people who sit on the board to oversee the egg producers of Canada who have quietly said “My lord, do not do this in the Yukon. You have this great opportunity for growth.”

That is an interesting approach by the Yukon Party. I have talked to many egg producers. Some have great fear in the level of regulation that now would have to go on top of the whole industry. I will take note of that. I think that in this particular case — we have sat down with the producer — part of the challenge, I think, is — and I don’t want to get into too much of the file, because there is a lot of information that is specific and has probably been shared with the member opposite and me — but it’s really about: How do we provide an accountable and fair way for organizations to get the funds that they need to grow and expand?

In that case, I remember conversations with some of our proponents, where one producer can go into a scenario, and depending on how much market share, they really could have a very strong, viable business without breaking into other regions — in some cases, they can go into other regions — but when you’re thinking about scale, and you’re thinking about supply chain, sometimes that is difficult, but with the Alaska market and the Yukon market, as I remember, you can really provide some significant market share and drive your revenues in a way that would sustain your business.

What we have to figure out, I believe, is: How do we provide the funding? There are Canadian resources to do the funding. The member opposite is right that there is that interest. If you’re part of the quota system, then you can — does that leverage your ability to look at leveraging other programs that exist? When you really look at all of the entire implications, they are significant. That has been part of the conversation in general around this topic, and what has happened in the Northwest Territories concerning their work.

So, it has been more of a dialogue that has happened between the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources under Agriculture, and then back and forth with some of those organizations. It has also been something that the Agricultural Association has taken on in some of their dialogue, but it has been interesting, because it’s not just about — there are other areas that we are starting to be able to invest in. Part of what we wanted to see from the economic development program was some unique investment, potentially, if it came up, into areas. Like, we want to see milk production. We want to see value added to milk production. We do want to see that enhancement of where we can move in on poultry. We want to see where we can move in on pork and how we take up that market share. It’s probably one of the best opportunities, not to just ensure that there’s food security, but to ensure that we diversify our overall economy as well.

We have looked into it. I don’t mean to be too challenging to the concept. I have to say, I had to educate myself on a number of elements of it, because you also have to be at a certain level of magnitude in a bunch of different areas of agriculture in order to hold real sustainability. When I started as minister responsible for agriculture, my first meeting, I sat down. Walking into that, at the end of the meeting, one of the very well-known farmers and growers pulled me aside afterward, and said, “Look, it’s great to see market gardens. It’s great to see greenhouses, but we need to have significant investment in a number of different areas.” It’s not just about your house. You have to think: How do we sustain ourselves as a territory? I think our growing forward in some of those investments is going to be some of the key things in the growth we have seen.

I will go back and see if anything has changed since then with our officials concerning the quota system or the implications of the quota system.

The working group — I just asked the officials. I can go back to that 2018 final report from the food working group. This was about supply chain, if I remember. Some of those early conversations during the negotiation of the CFTA — the territories came to the table. The working group final report identified recommendations for advancing the development of the territorial food sector, which has great potential correlation with negotiations when it comes to eggs. The recommendation to address challenges related to four key areas: access to capital, which I just touched on earlier; innovation and research; regulatory development and, again, how do you make sure you have the regulatory environment or the representatives here that can provide the ability to efficiently grant the right for food to move through approval processes, and that is something that we

have heard is always going to be required, especially here versus other provinces; and then local food production. So, a bit of information on that, but we can come back with a final report.

I think the other item — we will see if there is a fit between — I will check in with Agriculture about the interest on quota for eggs and if it should go back there. Again, officials between three territories resumed their meetings earlier this year on that work. We would also have to create a costly, local egg marking association, as well, to provide ourselves with the opportunities to export in some of those areas concerning the US. So, there is that opportunity, but a very costly association, which we would need, as well, to join the national supply chain. So, there is some extra red tape and cost.

Mr. Dixon: Can the minister explain what he meant by “the establishment of a body to allow for the export to Alaska”? He sort of trailed off at the end there. He said that something would need to be established in order to allow for the export of eggs to Alaska. Earlier in his comments, he said that there were no regulatory barriers to exporting to Alaska, so I just ask for some clarification.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Sure — so, my understanding was that there was an opportunity to market — to sell to Alaska — but our officials are just saying that one of the things that you have to do, which is — you have to have an egg marking association. So, I will look into that. So, I don’t think it is a — I don’t know if it is a trade barrier, but it might be something to do with inspection. I want to make sure if that is at the national level. So, know that it is a regulatory — but I think it is more; it is probably a food health inspection, and I will find out more on that.

Mr. Dixon: So, I think what the minister is referring to is a system that would be analogous to what the Northwest Territories has, which is the Northwest Territories Egg Producers Board, which administers the industry’s implementation of the regulated egg marketing system in the NWT, and that includes the allocation of quota, and that is the whole point that I am asking about — in order to allocate quota, you need a board. That is what the minister is talking about. So, the question for local egg producers is simple — it is about market access. I know the minister has raised a number of issues about funding, but fundamentally, the issue is about market access. They want to be able to sell their product to other jurisdictions. If it is Alaska, I understand that it would be a different process than it would be to the rest of Canada, but my question is very simple: Will the minister consider taking steps to negotiate market access for Yukon-grown eggs to other parts of Canada?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I will go back. At this time, I guess what I am saying is that I want to see complete growth in the market. I don’t want to see limitations put on all the other egg producers. The understanding I have, as we have done the due diligence, is that once you enter the quota system, there is then a regulatory system as well. I could be wrong, but my understanding is that then there are limitations on all of the other producers. So, we are in a budding market. Our agriculture industry is, in many ways, like where other

jurisdictions were 100 years ago. We have innovation and we have technology that is being deployed, but we are in this situation where we have 150 farms and there is growth.

The egg farmers who we have talked to were very concerned about the limitations. People who are in the industry and leaders in the country have said quietly, “You’ve got this opportunity to not have all this regulation and red tape put upon you.” My sense was that part of the challenge to get market access, even at a local market, how you expand, is about access to capital. I will tell you what — we can debate it back and forth. I want to go back and see what the true implications are to the private sector.

The member opposite is saying, I think, that it’s about market access and that this market access is to go and negotiate that, and the market access outweighs the cost to the private sector in those negotiations. So, there’s a difference of opinion, based on the information I have. I will go back; we’ll take a look; we’ll talk to Agriculture. Again, I think that the member opposite is lobbying on behalf of one grower, not the entire group of growers, and I have had discussions with them. We will see if that perspective has changed.

If not, if we have the agriculture industry saying, “This is what you need to do”, and if the majority of growers are saying, “This is what you need to do”, and if we’re limiting their growth and access and that is what we’re hearing, I will confer with the Minister responsible for Agriculture. I will make sure that the implications that I thought existed, and the impacts to all those other growers, are not as relevant as we thought, and if that is the case, then we would have a look. Again, when we talk about being in an envious position, as I understand it, and the member opposite would know from work on the trade files when it comes to our ability around lumber, around milk, and around eggs — right now I feel that what we need to do is ensure local purchase.

We have a lot of market share that is available to local producers. I am not about — as soon as you get into all of these different opportunities, it will come with regulation red tape. I like the fact that there is a lot of flexibility in all of these industries right now, but I will take a look at that particular topic.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the minister’s offer to look into that further, because I think that, based on his comments, there is some misunderstanding, so I encourage him to go back and look at my comments and consider how we can achieve the goal that I think we both want, which is the ability for the industry to grow and to move into a point where we can see our products being exported outside of the Yukon, which will, of course, allow even further growth, but I will move on.

My next question is about the government’s investment in the Panache Ventures capital fund. This is a fund that the government invested in back in 2019, and I am wondering if the minister can tell us how many new local tech start-ups were funded through that fund.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: There has been one local company that has been invested, I believe — I don’t have it at my fingertips. There is a commitment for investment in two other companies over a period of 10 years. There was also a commitment for

mentorship. There was a commitment for a seat on the board, which is filled by a local individual who has been identified through the consortium that we supported to invest. I think that they have said that their investment has been strong and the returns have been strong. There is also a commitment to host a summit. We have been in a dialogue with Panache about that. It was pushed out, based on the fact that we were dealing with some concerns about bringing a whole bunch of people in — as you can imagine — in 2020 and 2021.

There has been a dialogue — just coming to terms — they have presented a concept for a much more significant conference, and I think that our team has gone back and forth with them, based on what a budget would look like. So, there is still an opportunity now for investment in two more companies. There has been a lot of dialogue about this because of the success on the ROI and the return on investment by the fund to date. They have made smart choices on the companies they have invested in. I know that there is some real rigour on how they look to invest, but I think the other thing that is really important about that is that there has been a lot of critique in the House about it. I think it is important to note that this consortium has now gone out and invested with Northwestel in some fibre infrastructure.

It was interesting. The Canada Infrastructure Bank was applauding the fact that they did an \$8-million investment with a consortium of First Nation development corporations in Alberta. I believe that this group went off on their own because of the network that they build together on the Panache deal and did about a \$15-million deal, I think, with Northwestel on some fibre work.

I think that is the same group that has also been having some conversations around the mining piece. Really, investing in that — now we are seeing Yukon-owned companies that are working on a number of opportunities — still looking to see what the investment will be in the start-up ecosystem here and still making sure that our organization is providing opportunities for the folks at Panache to have discussions with the ecosystem here.

Mr. Dixon: So, my specific question was: How many local tech start-ups has the fund supported? I would note that, prior to the investment of the Yukon government's \$2 million, Panache invested in Proof. That was the one company that the minister has cited as having seen investment from this fund. Of course, that happened before the investment in the Yukon, though. Since the investment of the Yukon government, though, how many technology start-ups have seen investment from this fund in Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Proof has been the only company to date that they have invested in.

Mr. Dixon: So, as I said, that investment in Proof occurred before the investment by the Yukon government. Since this investment of \$2 million was made, we haven't seen a single, new investment in a tech start-up. Can the minister tell me what entrepreneurial and investment capacity-building programs has Panache led in the territory?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: A bit of background on it — to date, on the capacity-building piece, Panache has met and/or coached

over 16 Yukon firms, participated in the Innovation Commission, and invested in the one enterprise, which was Proof, that the member opposite spoke about. I think there was ongoing work there, but we will leave that.

The investment and support to the First Nation group — we think this is something that has been quite strong — in setting up this investment opportunity, and I think they are working on a number of other things.

The key to this is that there are number of different places where we are investing. I went through them at the start of the budget. Some of the things that the member opposite — there may have been one or two of those things that were supported by the individual who is asking the questions. What we have tried to do is invest in a number of other tools, including NorthLight. We are looking at every area, whether it is a start-up or further growth. Some of these bigger pieces of the ecosystem — things have to be trending in a very specific way, with some real opportunity for growth in order to see this fund, and we are seeing the results of the fund. That is why we had a long period of time where we could see Yukon companies potentially be invested in this. Again, we are still waiting to see those Yukon companies that are going to meet that threshold. We have touched on some of the other pieces, which is the coaching that is happening. I look forward to the next question.

Mr. Dixon: I will just ask the minister to repeat the first part. I think he said that, so far, they have hosted 16 meetings. Can the minister confirm the number of businesses that have been supported by coaching, training, or education networking or other events such as pitch competitions?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, the number that I provided was 16 separate companies that were mentored by the group.

Mr. Dixon: The minister said that they had a very successful return on investment. What is the return on investment for the \$2 million that the Yukon government invested in this fund?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We provided that funding directly to the development corporations. This has been a long dialogue and debate, specifically between the member opposite and me, about the value of this. If we look at how Economic Development has invested in grant systems all along, we believe that providing this funding — I have gone over this a number of times and quoted the areas of chapter 22 that I believe were the policy levers that provided it. What we have seen is that a group pulled together, and they have a return that is coming back — not to the Yukon government, but to those development corporations that are owned by Yukoners. They are reinvesting their money and returns into the Yukon. We have a consortium now that is looking at telecommunications investment that did not exist before this. We are looking at a group that is also looking at other private equity opportunities together. We still have not lost the opportunity. We are still waiting to see the opportunity for investment directly into the ecosystem. We have seen a number of companies that have been mentored, and we think that this is a good investment.

Time will tell on the investment, but there is a commitment in the work that has been done with those organizations. We stand by the investment. We think that it is good. I think that

the member opposite has heard directly from a lot of those organizations that they believe it's a strong investment, but it always has been an area of debate between us here in the Assembly.

Panache has joined the Yukon First Nation Chamber of Commerce. They have: held morning CEO breakfasts; attended the YuKonstruct demo days, which was touched on by the member opposite; engaged in coaching and mentoring; consulted with Yukon University on the development of their entrepreneurship programs; and attended the First Nation chamber and CEO check-in — so a number of things that they are doing. We think these are things that were not a commitment in their work, but we're happy to see these partnerships in place.

Mr. Dixon: I guess we will agree to disagree on the success of the investment — or the so-called investment — for \$2 million to get 16 companies mentored. That breaks down to about \$125,000 per company per mentorship. I am not sure that this is an appropriate return, given the level of investment. I also note that, according to the minister's statements here today, we haven't seen a single new local tech start-up invested in as a result of this fund.

I take the minister's point that time will tell. We are about three and a half years or close to four years into this investment and I don't think the record so far has been sterling, but I hope I am proven wrong over the course of the next few years. With that, I will conclude my remarks.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, I am closing on that one. I do appreciate the comments. There has been a fair debate on it. I think it's important. We have a different opinion today. As the member opposite stated, there is a disagreement with the member opposite on the value of that investment into those corporations, the value that we're getting out of it, the interpretation that we had on the justification of the investment, and the value of having that organization and that consortium working together to invest. I think that they have other — probably exciting — things coming. Those organizations were pretty clear to all members of the Assembly that they felt that this was a good decision, but you are right that there are elements that we will watch and see how they progress.

With that, I want to thank the officials for coming in today. I want to thank our deputy minister, Mr. Ferbey. I want to thank our director, Beth Fricke, for all the preparation and the work that you have put into this today.

To the members opposite, from both parties, if there are areas where we need to provide further information, I think we made those commitments. We will follow through and, with that, I will cede the floor back to you, Deputy Chair.

Deputy Chair: Is there any further debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development?

Seeing none, we will proceed to line-by-line.

Mr. Dixon: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, 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 7, Department of Economic Development, 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 \$26,474,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$999,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$27,473,000 agreed to

Department of Economic Development agreed to

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, in Bill No. 208, entitled *First 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 10 minutes.

Recess

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

The matter now before the Committee is Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, in Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Tourism and Culture

Deputy Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I would just like to begin by welcoming our officials back: Deputy Minister Justin Ferbey, and our director of Corporate Services, Kate Olynyk. It is my pleasure to introduce Tourism and Culture's main estimates for the 2023-24 fiscal year.

The work of the department continues to support our commitments that we have made to Yukoners.

In my mandate letter from the Premier, I am tasked with advocating for the tourism sector through increased tourism capacity in Yukon communities and the stimulation of destination development and expanded visitor infrastructure. One example of that is the new convention centre, which has now entered the RFP stage — thanks to our partnership with the Yukon Convention Bureau. I have spoken about that previously here.

I am also tasked with continuing the collaboration with the Yukon Tourism Advisory Board to implement the *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy*. The Yukon's tourism industry

has long been a significant factor in helping drive our strong economy, but it isn't just our amazing natural beauty that draws visitors from around the world. The unique art, culture, and history make the Yukon such a great place to live and attraction as a destination. Of course, the mandate letter also refers to the Cultural Services portfolio.

I will talk a little bit about the budget. This coming fiscal year, the department has identified an estimated budget of \$34.6 million. This is a 4.4-percent decrease over last year's mains. This year, the department's O&M budget shows a decrease of \$626,000 from the previous year's estimates. Key changes in the operation and maintenance this year include a decrease of \$1.463 million for COVID-19 response. The 2023-24 budget for COVID support is set at \$767,000, which will go toward implementing the final year of the Yukon tourism relief and recovery plan. This was a three-year, \$15-million investment to drive the recovery of the Yukon's tourism sector, now well underway.

Funds will be allocated toward recovery initiatives, such as enhancing marketing of the Yukon as a destination in key markets and investing in a place brand for the territory. It is led by the department's Tourism branch. Work on a Yukon place brand began several years ago and will be completed later this year. Working off the Yukon story project, which was informed by in-depth, one-on-one interviews with more than 80 diverse Yukoners from across the territory, a brand strategy and brand toolkit have been developed. This will include guidelines and a video. It will be available to all Yukon businesses and stakeholders to assist them with talent attraction, export marketing, investment attraction, and tourism.

Next is an increase of \$190,000 for the scenic drives program. This will provide additional funding for site maintenance and for a number of rest areas due to increased cost for program delivery.

We also have an increase of \$500,000 for the community tourism destination development fund. This new annual funding program makes available \$1 million to Yukon businesses, First Nation governments, First Nation development entities, municipalities, and not-for-profit organizations for projects that will improve tourism-related services and infrastructure. Eligible projects are tourism-related services and infrastructure, like improving accommodations, attractions, activities, and amenities.

The department's 2023-24 budget has an increase of \$259,000 for the Indigenous artist and cultural carriers microgrant, which is designed to support Indigenous artists. I spoke about that just last week, I believe. Of that funding, \$250,000 is recoverable, thanks to the strong and successful partnership built with Canada Council for the Arts during last summer's co-hosting of the Arctic Arts Summit.

I will also mention \$750,000 toward various actions under *Creative Potential*, the Yukon's creative and cultural industry strategy. This funding will be used to grow and develop Yukon's creative and cultural sector, and includes new funding opportunities, modernization and streamlining of existing funding supports, and continuing labour market supports to enable access to sector-specific training. We announced the

creative and cultural career advancement fund of \$150,000 last week as well.

Moving to the capital budget, as I mentioned earlier, this has a decrease of \$958,000 over the previous year's estimate. The change is represented by a decrease of \$850,000 for the arts and heritage collection facility. While the funding is not allocated in the department's budget, it remains a mandate letter commitment, and we are working with the Department of Highways and Public Works to move forward with planning and design for this multi-year project. There is also a decrease of \$300,000 for the Yukon permanent art collection storage project, which has been delayed.

This year, we have an increase of \$300,000 for the purchase and installation of eight digital information kiosks across the Yukon and one in Alaska. These interactive kiosks will include information about tourism businesses, upcoming events, transportation options, and other travel updates. The first one will be installed in the Skagway White Pass & Yukon Route train station this spring. The purpose is to inspire and inform visitors to come to Carcross and beyond via the train or an independent tour bus, car rental, or other means on a day trip, and is part of a larger effort to create more digital touch points in the overall Yukon visitor experience.

We have an increase of \$300,000 in our capital budget for the visitor exit survey project to enable the tourism industry to better quantify and interpret visitor trends and behaviours. Finally, there is an increase of \$30,000 for the Yukon permanent art collection to expand the collection to be more inclusive of different media, in accordance with the creative and cultural industries strategy. I will end my opening remarks there, Deputy Chair.

The work of the Department of Tourism and Culture is deeply human — encompassing living and past histories, creative expressions, and pride of place. It is through the department's work that the stunning natural beauty, extraordinary heritage, and unique voices and perspectives of those who call the Yukon home are supported, showcased, preserved, and enriched.

I would just like to thank the department. It has been my honour to work with them, and I am looking forward to the upcoming summer season.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you, Deputy Chair, and also, welcome to the staff. I am sure that Deputy Minister Ferbey is getting tired of this place.

As you know, tourism is one of my favourite topics, and as this season is fast approaching, and we always want to ensure that we have the best for our many guests and visitors, I covered many of the questions during the supplementary debate, but I have a few more for the minister.

Under the capital decreases, one being the Yukon permanent art collection storage project, it says that the project is deferred to a future fiscal year. Now, when will this storage project become a priority, and why is it being moved off into future years? Can the minister give us a timeline?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Maybe I can just clarify. We have two projects that are at work. One is about shelving and other work at the Arts Centre, and for our collection there, and there

is some work that we need to do with the city around water pressure, and Highways and Public Works, to try to make sure that the sprinkler system is up to code. That work has to happen first, and then the other work, where we are talking about a new home and a more permanent place. For that work, the planning work is still there, but it is sitting under Highways and Public Works for this year. We will begin the planning work this year, but I am not sure if I caught which one of those two questions the member was asking about.

Ms. Van Bibber: It was listed under the budget as storage project, so that is where I got that. The Yukon Archives preservation program says new equipment supplies will be delayed for a future year again. This is very vague and concerning, and we hope that this equipment is not extremely essential to the preservation program. Can the minister give us an update?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The department is indicating to me that it is a supply chain issue for some of the materials; they would have to dig in a little bit deeper to figure out what that is. They are also letting me know that there is nothing at risk within the archives — there is no concern at the moment that anything is at risk. So, the problem is simply that we are not able to get all of the materials as needed in the time we had hoped, and they have raised no flags with me.

Ms. Van Bibber: We have heard that there has been a very difficult time to book rooms in spots, particularly this upcoming summer for visitors, and it also runs directly into the fall season. I know outfitters are also having a difficult time to honour their commitments to guests.

Now, the *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy* was completed in 2018. It included a commitment to — quote: “Explore opportunities to increase accommodations”. Since then, we have seen the High Country Inn taken out of service as accommodation, and other hotel developments have been delayed.

So, can the minister share if the government has also heard these concerns from tourism operators, and what efforts have been taken to increase accommodation, as was stated, since 2018?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: So, I know that when I have talked with the Tourism Advisory Board, they have raised the situation of hotel rooms as an important limiting factor right now. We know, for example, that NVD — this past fall or over the winter — announced their intention around a new build here in Whitehorse. We know that there is lots of demand. In the past, we have supported some investigative work around this. We have funding programs available for groups if they want to look at business plans to try to attract investments. So, there are some ways in which we support. We also are doing work with the Tourism Advisory Board around the development strategy and how to move toward implementation of the development strategy. Then finally, we have seen interest that has been proposed around the building of a convention centre with various groups. The last time that I had a look on the MERX system, there were quite a few groups that had pulled that contract or taken a look.

I guess there is a range of ways in which we support the sector to help foster it, and I am happy to answer further questions if more detail is sought.

Ms. Van Bibber: The convention centre — the RFPs have been out, and you say that various groups have taken a look — that is, I think, how you put it. Could you give us a further update on that project?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Just in terms of groups that had pulled the RFP — it doesn’t indicate necessarily how many are submitting a bid, of course. It’s just those that have shown some interest. There are 10 to 15 names that we had already seen. I certainly have had a few conversations with groups that are interested. I shepherd them toward, of course, the Yukon Convention Bureau. So, there has been some interest expressed in the community about the bid proposal, and we are looking forward to more conversation on the bid.

Ms. Van Bibber: That’s great that we have such interest in this proposal. I am sure that there will be more questions coming down the tube on that particular one.

I am going to switch gears here a little bit and go to those fancy digital signs that we have on the Alaska Highway, both north and south of Whitehorse. I am curious as to why, as a valuable message conveyer for border-issue information or ferry-issue information, we are not using this to tell visitors about problems along the way and/or good things — other things that could be used. It seems to me that, a lot of times when you drive by, they are blank and there’s nothing there. I am just curious.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: There is a policy that works on how those signs are used, but what I will do before we come back up with Tourism and Culture is that I will have a conversation with the Minister of Highways and Public Works just to ask. I know that there is information given to travellers if we are aware of those concerns or conditions, but I will ask what that policy looks like and how it can complement the work of Tourism and Culture. The main purpose is safety — as an information tool.

Deputy Chair, seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes 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

Deputy Speaker resumes the Chair

Deputy Speaker (Ms. Blake): I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:28 p.m.