



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 122

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Wednesday, April 5, 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

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Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
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Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, April 5, 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. Streicker: We have several guests in the Assembly today who have come, I think, for the petition that is going to be tabled. Could we please welcome: Sibell Hackney, Joel Hackney, Dave Paquet, Sheila and Dennis Senger, Stephen Burles, and Colleen Clark. There is one more guest who I think would like to be introduced by the NDP, but if we could welcome them, please.

Applause

Ms. White: I appreciate that gesture, but I would like to invite my colleagues to join me in welcoming someone who is no stranger to this Chamber, as she was here way back in the 1970s. Eleanor Millard, thank you for coming today.

Applause

Deputy Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of National Dental Hygienists Week

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to acknowledge National Dental Hygienists Week.

The month of April is Oral Health Month, and an important part of the celebration is National Dental Hygienists Week, which is celebrated annually during the first week of April. This week's theme, "Oral Health For Total Health", reminds us that taking care of our mouth, teeth, and gums positively impacts our overall physical and mental well-being, not to mention our smiles, which spread joy and positivity throughout our days.

Having good oral health starts with seeing a dental hygienist and therapist regularly and seeking their care and guidance. They can offer individualized treatment recommendations for daily care as well as oral conditions or tobacco cessation, nutrition counselling, or oral cancer

screenings. Dental hygienists teach young children proper toothbrushing techniques and how to make healthy dietary choices; I am pretty sure we can all remember a warning about too much candy. They can refer children to orthodontists to see how their faces and jaws are growing and how their teeth will function in the future. Dental hygienists also provide services to seniors in our communities or living in long-term care. They provide essential primary health care and promote good oral health, which would not be possible without the help of our dedicated oral health professionals.

We all know that some Yukoners may not be able to afford to see oral health professionals. That is why I am very proud that we launched the Yukon dental program this year. This program supports people who can't afford dental work to get treatment through the Yukon health care insurance plan. Thousands of Yukoners, including children, can now see oral health professionals and receive much-needed dental services and treatments. Oral diseases often begin in preschool years when children are still learning their oral care routine and don't have regular access to an oral health care professional. This program can help with prevention and therefore overall better health outcomes. I am pleased that through federal and territorial programs, Yukoners can have access to essential oral health care.

This is a great reminder today to make an appointment and to visit your dental hygienist or therapist even if it is not your favourite thing to do. Your gums will thank you. Good oral health is all about good overall health. Please look after it.

Applause

Mr. Cathers: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize National Dental Hygienists Week, celebrated from April 4 to 10. This annual event is organized by the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association and focuses on the importance of maintaining good oral health practices while promoting dental hygiene as a profession and celebrating the importance of hygienists to our overall health and well-being.

It is important to understand that taking care of your teeth and oral health daily can play a large role in your overall health. Good dental hygiene habits should be established early in childhood, and parents and guardians can help by helping children develop routines, including twice-daily brushing as well as flossing and rinsing. Children and adults should aim for regular checkups with both the dentist and the hygienist.

Dental hygienists not only perform professional teeth cleaning, but they are also trained in prevention, assessment, and treatment for oral health issues. They conduct initial patient screenings and check oral health history, brushing and flossing habits to help advise patients on care, and also assist dentists in deciding treatments for tooth and gum diseases.

So, we encourage all Yukoners to use this week as a reminder to practise good oral health habits for the health of your teeth and overall well-being. Thank you to all of our dental hygienists for the role you play in the dental health and the overall health and well-being of Yukoners.

Applause

Ms. White: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to dental hygienists. Brace yourself, folks, because this one is going to be a mouthful.

Each and every dental hygienist deserves a plaque. It is a difficult job but one that is critical to the health and well-being of Yukoners. I used to joke about how teeth were luxury bones because our public health insurance didn't cover dental work. But now we can proudly say that, in the Yukon, we have changed the composite of our oral expectations. You could say that it is our "crowning" achievement.

To tell you the "tooth", though, it is not a very funny joke if you are in need of dental work and can't afford it. The preventive work that hygienists do is a great example of the types of upstream health care investments that governments should be focusing on. Beyond bad breath and cavities or tooth loss, poor oral health can have so many damaging effects on people, from cardiovascular disease to cancer, arthritis, and kidney disease. Oral health can have a huge impact on our lives.

Hygienists play a critical role in keeping Yukoners healthy and able to keep munching away on our favourite foods. It is a tough job. It requires a great deal of technical knowledge and interpersonal skills, but it is also physical. Long days on your feet, bent over patients in the chair, and staying focused on the little details of our mouths — it is a lot.

I know that when you think about a dental hygienist, you probably think about getting your teeth cleaned, but they do so much more. Some hygienists can perform fillings and take X-rays; some work in public health programs in schools, providing services where there is no dentist available.

So, with Yukon's new dental program that will see up to 8,000 additional Yukoners having access to dental support and with a national shortage of these highly skilled workers, our local dental hygienists are working extra hard from working extra shifts or skipping lunch breaks. They are doing the hard work to make sure that everyone gets the health care that they deserve.

So, I hope that I have drilled it into everyone how much respect I have for people doing this work, because I know that they have "fillings" too.

Applause

In recognition of Dawson City International Short Film Festival

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I rise today to pay tribute to the Dawson City International Short Film Festival. Taking place this weekend from April 6 to 9 on the traditional territory of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, the Dawson City International Short Film Festival has been celebrated every Easter for 20-plus years. This annual festival is presented by the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture, or KIAC, and each year they host an impressive and colourful collection of diverse and thought-provoking works that leave audiences inspired and entertained. They will sell you the whole seat, but you will only need the edge.

First founded in 2000, the festival showcases breathtaking films of all genres and provides an international stage for

talented filmmakers to present their work to the world. Festival-goers also get the chance to partake in special events such as meet-and-greets, filmmaking challenges, youth screenings, and awards. The festival offers a multitude of workshops and immersive experiences supporting the ongoing growth and development of Yukon filmmakers and industry professionals.

This festival is one of the northern-most competitive film festivals in the world and, over the years, has given so many Yukoners an opportunity to tell their stories here and abroad. In fact, the festival will kick off tomorrow with a special screening of *Polaris*, an award-winning film produced and filmed in the Yukon in 2021. Yukon producer Max Fraser will be in attendance for the screening and will host a Q&A afterward. If you are in Dawson tomorrow, I encourage you to go and hear about this amazing achievement.

Another notable screening is *Dawson Defrosted*, which showcases recently discovered film footage from Dawson's past as well as many Indigenous-made films and youth contributions.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to congratulate all of the talented filmmakers who will be showcasing their work at this year's festival. I also want to thank the festival committee and the team at KIAC for their commitment to making this festival a success. A shout-out, as well, to the Dawson City Arts Society and all of the screening sponsors and funders.

The Dawson City International Short Film Festival is something that many Yukoners look forward to each year. It is a time to come together in support of great films, no matter the length, and media, arts, and the gifted filmmakers who enrich our lives with their stories and visions. Please check out this year's festival and get ready to ooh and aah.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the 2023 Dawson City International Short Film Festival.

Since 2000 on Easter weekend, the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture, or KIAC, has organized and presented the film festival, and it has grown in stature. From around the world, short films — 30 minutes or less — of all varieties are showcased along with workshops, special events, challenges, and so much more.

An opening reception where one can schmooze with the filmmakers, sponsors, and other film buffs is happening on Thursday.

The range of short films submitted and the Q&As after continue to be such a treat for all ticket holders. The topics that films take us to are always part of the discussion.

There are coveted awards as well. One has already been given — the Trailer Contest Award — and that was won by Chantal Rousseau for *Raven at the Dump*. There is the MITY — which means "made in the Yukon" — Award, the MITY Emerging Artist Award, and a MITY Youth Award for artists 18 and under. There is the Lodestar Award for the best Canadian or international film entry. And, yes, all attendees get a vote — the Audience Choice for which all films are eligible.

A Sunday street festival — featuring perogies at 5:30, hosted by KIAC, and accompanied with music by Ryan McNally. They all get wrapped up with the (S)hiver Party at the Pit that evening. How uniquely Dawson is that?

The range of films submitted look interesting, thought-provoking, and fun. It will be a busy weekend as we step into spring. Kudos to the KIAC staff, filmmakers, sponsors, volunteers, and organizers who make this weekend such a great time for all. Small-town Dawson City has done it again.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to add our voices in tribute to the Dawson City International Short Film Festival.

I read that this is their 24th year. Congratulations. I can't believe that, as of next year, this festival will have been running for a quarter of century. It's an Easter ritual for many Yukoners to travel to Dawson for this amazing festival. It is among the most northern competitive film festivals in the world and features special events ranging from master classes to a street feast.

Short films have always been my favourite films. They have so much opportunity for experimentation and innovation, and they are still accessible to both audiences and filmmakers. I was particularly excited to see all the films by Yukon youth in this year's program. I'm sure that for many of them, it's their first film to be screened at a festival, so congratulations to them on their debuts, and we look forward to all their coming creations.

Congratulations to all the filmmakers, organizers, staff, volunteers, and sponsors who make this remarkable festival happen. Thank you to everyone who supports this through their attendance. We wish you all a fantastic film festival.

Applause

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

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Mr. Cathers: I have for tabling today, first of all, a document from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, entitled *Patients before Paperwork: Nova Scotia's approach to improving patient care by reducing physician red tape*.

I also have for tabling a news release from the Government of Manitoba dated March 24, 2023, entitled "Manitoba Government Announces Members of Joint Task Force to Reduce Administrative Burdens on Physicians".

Ms. White: I have for tabling three items: One is a CBC news article dated October 28, 2016, entitled "Yukon pharmacists' request for expanded powers gets positive response from 3 parties"; a letter that I wrote to the Minister of Health and Social Services about prescription contraception; and the response to that letter.

Deputy Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

PETITIONS

Petition No. 18

Mr. Kent: I have the following petition for presentation here today, and it reads as follows:

I have for presentation the following petition to the Yukon Legislative Assembly:

This petition of the undersigned shows:

THAT ending the time change by switching to year-round Daylight Savings Time, also known as DST, has resulted in many people struggling with the lack of daylight in mornings in the winter;

THAT the negative impacts on families had not been predicted or expected by a lot of people before the switch was made;

THAT the survey done by the Government of Yukon prior to the switch to DST was flawed, as the survey let people fill it out multiple times if they used more than one computer, phone, or tablet;

THAT the Government of Yukon can use more secure surveys, and has recently done so with Yukon Bureau of Statistics surveys using a unique link or pin number for each person;

THEREFORE, the undersigned ask the Yukon Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Yukon to do another survey, one that uses a secure method to avoid repeat comments, asking Yukoners if they want to return to our own time zone; Yukon Permanent Standard Time UTC-9h, to stay on Permanent Daylight Savings time = UTC-7h, switch to Permanent Standard Time = UTC-8h, or go back to seasonal time changes UTC-7h and UTC-8h for half a year each.

This petition is signed by 299 individuals.

Petition No. 19

Mr. Cathers: I have for presentation as well — I would note that it is a petition very similar to that tabled by my colleague, but since both have distinct wording and were signed by hundreds of people, I will also read it out.

I have for presentation the following petition to the Yukon Legislative Assembly:

This petition of the undersigned shows:

THAT ending the time change by switching to year-round Daylight Savings Time, also known as DST, has resulted in many people struggling with the lack of daylight in mornings in the winter;

THAT the negative impacts on families had not been predicted or expected by a lot of people before the switch was made;

THAT the survey done by the Government of Yukon prior to the switch to DST was flawed, as the survey let people fill it out multiple times if they used more than one computer, phone, or tablet;

THAT the Government of Yukon can use more secure surveys, and has recently done so with Yukon Bureau of Statistics surveys using a unique link or pin number for each person;

THEREFORE, the undersigned ask the Yukon Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Yukon to do another survey, one that uses a secure method to avoid repeat comments, asking Yukoners if they want to stay on Daylight Savings Time, switch to Standard Time, or go back to seasonal time changes.

I believe that there are 118 signatures on the petition.

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

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to give Yukoners the option of applying online for burn permits that are required from April 1 to September 30 each year, while also maintaining the option of applying for those permits in person.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to ensure that the chronic conditions support program is able to meet the needs of seniors by taking action including:

- (1) increasing efforts to recruit and retain qualified health care professionals; and
- (2) providing reliable services that meet the needs of their clients now and into the future.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to take action to reduce the administrative burden on doctors by following the lead of the Province of Manitoba and working with the Yukon Medical Association to establish a joint task force tasked with finding solutions to reduce administrative burdens on physicians.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to use line 23600 of the Revenue Canada Notice of Assessment when calculating eligibility for Yukon dental program for individuals who split their income with a partner.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to review and expand the chronic disease and disability benefits program to include more chronic conditions.

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

THAT this House wishes the Jewish community in the Yukon a happy Passover.

Deputy Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Integration of Yukon's health and social services

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I rise today to update Yukoners about how our government is transforming the Yukon's health and social system to put people first by increasing the integrated services to avoid gaps in care and improving access for all Yukoners.

To begin, I am pleased to welcome the Yukon's Emergency Medical Services team, or EMS, to their new home with the Department of Health and Social Services. On April 1, this exceptional team joined the community primary care division, which will allow for closer collaboration between the EMS and other health services, such as Community Nursing and Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services.

Welcoming EMS to Health and Social Services is an important step toward achieving a more modern, integrated, and seamless health care system. Our goal is to improve the system for Yukoners and health care providers by removing some of the barriers people face as they move through different points of care. An integrated health system is a key pillar in *Putting People First*, and we are committed to building a person-centred, holistic, and collaborative health care system. Together, we will support improved health care coverage in our communities, an increased role for EMS, and better coordination overall as Yukoners move through the health care system.

Our government knows that Yukoners care deeply about the increased sustainability and efficiency of our health care system. When it comes to access to primary health care services, we must focus on building closely connected, interdisciplinary care teams. This means a shift to having a range of professionals provide health care information, support, and guidance to patients across the Yukon.

Expanding the scope of practice for pharmacists in the Yukon is another way to increase this integration. On Monday, our government announced that pharmacists in the Yukon are now authorized to prescribe and administer travel and publicly funded vaccines for Yukoners who are age five and over. This change recognizes the value of pharmacists' clinical expertise and training. It will also help reduce the pressures on emergency rooms and doctors' offices and improve overall convenience for Yukoners.

Last month, we expanded the Find a Primary Care Provider program, formerly known as Find a Family Doctor program, to include nurse practitioners. This is in response to the increasing demand for primary care service providers and will go a long way to help ensure every Yukoner is better able to connect to a variety of trusted health care professionals as part of an integrated health care team.

These three initiatives are further steps in our government's transformation of our territory's health care system. I am so proud of our government's work, as we build a national leading health care system where Yukoners can connect to trusted health care, access a variety of care providers, and receive care in their community.

Mr. Cathers: This Liberal government is in its seventh year in office. Contrary to the minister's assertion, one of the things this Liberal government will be remembered for is their neglect of our health care system. Thousands of Yukoners don't have a family doctor; we have heard issues about increasing physician burnout and challenges with recruitment and retention.

Under the Liberal government, the Yukon slipped to the worst doctor-to-patient ratio in the entire country. We have seen the doctor recruitment position cut by this government, medical bursary programs reduced, nursing bursaries reduced, and health profession education bursary reduced.

Yesterday, we called the minister to account again for the government's continuing failure to pay doctors in a timely manner for health care services they provide. Some bills were outstanding for over 90 days. The minister dismissed this yesterday, claiming the problem had been solved. While we hope that is true, it actually remains to be seen if the minister will live up to her statements.

This Liberal government also shortchanged our hospitals millions of dollars in funding they need this fiscal year again. In November, the CEO of the Yukon Hospital Corporation told this Legislative Assembly that the portion of their O&M budget that they need from the Yukon government for the 2022-23 fiscal year was \$103.5 million. I refer anyone listening to Hansard from November 22, 2022, page 2846, to read what the CEO said about their O&M budget required from government for that fiscal year. The CEO said — and I quote: "YG's annual O&M budget for the fiscal 2022-23 is \$103.5 million." So, the hospital witnesses said that they needed \$103.5 million in O&M core funding. They got only \$88.9 million — see page 7-4 of the supplementary budget. That is a hole in the hospital budget of over \$14.5 million. The number actually understates the problem, as unexpectedly high inflation also takes a large bite from the hospital budget. Hundreds of surgeries were cancelled by the hospital due to a staff shortage. That tracks back to a lack of money. This Liberal government bears direct responsibility for that.

We saw the government delayed in paying pharmacists for some items for many months — owing hundreds of thousands of dollars at one point, nurses who didn't receive bonuses promised by the minister, which led to grievances filed against this government, and in the area of the regulated and funded midwifery program — which has been committed to and reannounced many times by this government — we saw government ban midwives operating in unregulated private practice, fumble the ball for over a year on starting the program, briefly run it, and then abruptly shut it down.

The Health minister declared a substance use health emergency last January. She and her colleagues seemed to see that as a substitute for taking action. It is not. The Yukon has the worst rate of opioid-related fatalities in the entire country, and the government has yet to create even a single new addictions treatment space.

We are pleased to hear that this government expanded the scope of practice for pharmacists. However, they were very slow to listen to calls to do that, and today's statement is just a

reannouncement. We were also pleased to hear that EMS is rejoining Health and Social Services, but again, today the minister is just reannouncing old news. As for the Find a Family Doctor program, it is of little use when there are no doctors taking patients.

To actually improve our health care system, the minister can start by paying doctors, the hospital, nurses, and pharmacists on time and not waste this House's time with reannouncements.

Ms. White: I am delighted to respond to a ministerial statement on improvements to the health care system, considering just how badly they are needed. From low wages for nurses, to social assistance policies, to the low medical travel subsidy, to limited coverage through chronic — so much needs to be improved in the health care system — but on all of these issues and more, this government has consistently refused to listen. Every week we bring individual stories to the floor of this House with the permission and encouragement of people to share their experiences with this government, but in response, this government tells Yukoners that their lived experiences are salacious, or not the facts, or that their situation is unique and should be fixed through casework. Then, when we zoom out to talk about issues at a systemic level, this government insists that we prove it with individual stories.

So, it doesn't matter how Yukoners' concerns are framed; the government just doesn't want to hear it. Patients, health care workers, and policy folk are all telling this government about the barriers that they face and solutions to remove them. So, what is lacking from this government is political will, and I will remind the minister that the Liberals were a majority government prior to the 2021 election.

So, prior to signing the CASA, there was no political will from the Liberals for harm-reduction investments and a supervised consumption site, or safe supply. There was no political will to increase social assistance rates, to create a public dental program, to open a managed alcohol program, or to invest in students who want to pursue medical studies. Outside of their commitments to public health in both CASAs, they are ignoring a list of evidence-based solutions listed in the *Putting People First* report.

So, in the three years since it came out, just 14 out of 76 recommendations have been completed, and there is still no concrete implementation plan with deadlines for this report. In the meantime, this government is chipping away at the foundation of our public health care. So, let's name this pattern for what it is: The government is underfunding, criticizing, and then privatizing. They are selling off the publicly owned Macaulay Lodge, and because of the shortage of seniors housing, they turned to a private, for-profit facility, handing over millions of dollars of public money in the process.

When nurses called for better wages, this government refused and instead offered a — yet to materialize, for many — one-time bonus. Meanwhile, the hospital and this government have turned to the innovation of relying on private agencies to supply travel nurses to the territory.

During a severe shortage of primary care providers in the territory, this government decided to give public money to a private medical clinic to offer walk-in services. They called it “start-up funding”. Unsurprisingly, this idea didn’t get off the ground. Instead of moving away from fee-for-service for a truly public primary care system, this government tried to apply start-up culture to our health care system.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is frankly rich that this government is talking about improvements to the health care system when they are moving at a slow pace to make these improvements. But back to the three specific things that the minister chose to highlight in her statement today. We raised questions about the long response rate for EMS and got no clear answers. Does the Minister of Health and Social Services have plans to resolve wait times for EMS?

The minister said that EMS would have an increased role in Health and Social Services, and considering, through no fault of their own, that they currently don’t have the capacity to fulfill their existing responsibilities, does the minister plan to add additional paramedic teams to EMS?

On nurse practitioners, since adding nurse practitioners to the Find a Primary Care Provider program, how many Yukoners have come off that list and have been connected with a nurse practitioner? How many nurse practitioners are working in the territory? Do any existing clinics in Whitehorse, outside of the bilingual health centre, plan to hire nurse practitioners?

So, we are thrilled to see that the government is finally listening to the pharmacists and expanding their scope of practice. Today, I tabled an article from 2016 — that’s seven years ago, which includes the whole length of time this Liberal government has been in power. This article title reads, “Yukon pharmacists’ request for expanded power gets positive response from 3 parties”. So, why did it take the Liberal government six years to implement this request?

I look forward to specific and clear responses to each of these questions from the minister.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: This is wildly disappointing, but certainly not unexpected, that the opposition parties — both of them, actually — in today’s response to the ministerial statement would provide Yukoners with completely inaccurate information — assertions by both of those parties that are not correct — and what Yukoners deserve is accurate information. Just one example is that surgeries have not been cancelled, despite the fact that, for political purposes, the member opposite would say such a thing. It is not accurate information. It does a disservice, frankly, to Yukoners.

By working toward an integrated health system, we have committed to *Putting People First*, and we are forging a trusted, person-centred, holistic, and collaborative health care system. I am truly excited that the transition of the Yukon Emergency Medical Services, or EMS, from the Department of Community Services to the Department of Health and Social Services will allow closer collaboration and better care for Yukoners.

We have engaged with EMS about how to do this and how to best make this change, and both departments continue to work closely with all affected staff on the transition plan. We

know that it will take some time to integrate the two areas, but we are excited about the opportunities that this integration presents in terms of better aligning the services for Yukoners.

The close working relationship between EMS and other emergency response teams will continue to be supported and upheld. I would certainly like to thank our partners at the Department of Community Services. Their great work has allowed EMS to grow and to implement innovative programming, which has improved EMS services for all Yukoners. We are especially grateful for their dedicated response to the substance use health emergency and their work to provide valuable supports to those in need at 405 Alexander Street.

EMS members are there for us when we are at our most vulnerable. They include emergency medical responders, primary care paramedics, critical care paramedics, advanced care paramedics, emergency response communication officers and management, along with other support staff. Their actions, their skills, and their dedication save lives every day in this territory. If you have ever had an emergency yourself or been present for a family or friend in their emergency, then you have seen this remarkable dedication in action — I have. Welcome to the team, welcome to EMS, and welcome to Health and Social Services.

Regarding the Find a Primary Care Provider program, it’s expanding to include nurse practitioners to help connect Yukoners with more choices for their health care services. This move represents our commitment to ensure that every Yukoner has access to a primary health care provider, something that is happening not only across this country, but across the world as part of the system that is in-person and family-centred, that is culturally safe, that is anti-racist, that is accessible, that is integrated.

The Yukon Party was satisfied with an acute care system that failed Yukoners and was financially unsustainable. Our Liberal government is committed to transforming the Yukon health care system as we implement the recommendations from *Putting People First*. I’m not sure why the members opposite don’t hear that.

Recommendation 2.2 calls for connecting every Yukoner to a primary care provider, a physician, or a nurse practitioner who provides care as part of an integrated health care team. We are very excited to expand this program and to work with the nurse practitioners who can prescribe medications and can have a full scope of practice.

We are also thrilled to see Yukon pharmacists now authorized to prescribe and administer vaccines as part of our government’s broad transformation to health care.

I would very much like to thank all of our health care workers, the individuals who provide front-line service —

Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD**Question re: Nisutlin Bay bridge replacement**

Mr. Hassard: On October 18 of last year, I asked the Minister of Highways and Public Works if the Nisutlin Bay bridge project was on time and on budget. He said that, as far as he knew, the bridge project was on budget, and later that day, he told the media that the project had all the necessary licences and permits in place.

We have since ATIPP'd the minister's briefing notes, and those notes reveal that the government did not have the federal *Fisheries Act* authorization until the day I asked the question, which, as I said, was October 18. This means that the government did not have the *Fisheries Act* authorization until almost six months after the awarding of the contract. The note also reveals that they did not have a water licence until late August.

So, why did the government award a contract of this size before they actually had the necessary permits and licences in place?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The Nisutlin Bay bridge is a critical link along the Alaska Highway. It is an important landmark for Teslin. Through the project charter, we have been working together — with the design and build — to build a safe, reliable structure that accommodates more traffic while also improving access for pedestrians and cyclists.

As indicated, a tender was posted on October 13, 2021 for two prequalified contractors and closed on February 3, 2022. An approximately \$160-million contract was awarded on May 3, 2022 to Graham Infrastructure LP. The project was scheduled to begin in the summer of 2022, with a winter shutdown between mid-December to the end of March 2023.

Project work for the 2023 construction season started as of March 16, 2023. Work will continue to ramp up over the spring. The following work has been completed to date by the contractor: mobilization; site preparation; construction camp and project office set-up; initial steps for pit and quarry development for granular and rock production; partial, temporary works, such as trestle bridge construction, which includes piling and building access ramps; civil work such as clearing and grubbing of new alignment; and fish salvage work. The following work is also planned by the contractor for this spring and includes temporary and permanent work such as piling cofferdam and complete access —

Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hassard: Unfortunately, the minister did not provide any answers there.

The fact that the government awarded the contract without having the federal *Fisheries Act* authorization in place is significant. It is significant because the authorization created substantial new conditions on the project, which has shifted the work plan. The minister's own briefing notes acknowledge this. Here is what the note said in October 2022 — and I quote: “The department is working with the contractor to assess and potentially adjust the workplan based on *Fisheries Act* authorization conditions.”

My question is: What is the new project timeline now that the conditions of the *Fisheries Act* authorization have been assessed?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I will continue on this amazing piece of Yukon infrastructure, the biggest piece of Yukon infrastructure in the history of the Yukon, linking southern Canada with Alaska and providing incredible opportunities to the Teslin Tlingit Council and to the Yukon in general.

As indicated, the water licence for the project was issued on August 31, 2022 and the *Fisheries Act* authorization was issued on October 17, 2022. My understanding is that discussions continue with Graham Infrastructure LP with respect to the timeline for the project going forward but that the timing of these water licences was consistent with the bid that Graham Infrastructure LP made and that some of the risk was actually accepted by Graham Infrastructure LP with respect to that. But those discussions are ongoing.

In addition, we anticipate that now approximately 10,000 to 12,000 cubic metres of rock will be required for the project, as well as roughly 90,000 and 110,000 cubic —

Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Hassard: So, we have heard from the contracting community and from companies working on the project that the conditions imposed by the federal *Fisheries Act* authorization have caused a substantial change in the work plan and the overall project timeline. This highlights why the government's decision to award the contract before the federal *Fisheries Act* authorization was granted was significant. This poor planning has now caused significant delays in the project and likely some very large change orders.

So, can the minister tell us why the government did not apply for and receive the federal *Fisheries Act* authorization until almost six months after they awarded the contract?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The Yukon Party left us in an infrastructure deficit. Our Liberal government has fostered the strongest economic growth in the country by working in partnership with First Nations and modernizing the territory's infrastructure. The Yukon Party completely fumbled this project in 2014, in large part due to an inability to work with the Teslin Tlingit Council.

Our Liberal government signed a project charter in 2019 with the Teslin Tlingit Council. This will ensure that we maximize economic benefits for local residents when it comes to this project. This project is an excellent example of the benefits provided by the Yukon First Nation procurement policy and will create jobs for Teslin Tlingit community members and Yukoners.

We will continue to work with the contractor to complete this project by September 2026. The Nisutlin Bay bridge will be the largest capital project in Yukon history. There are admittedly a lot of moving parts and it will take a number of years to complete, but it continues to move forward despite the misinformation being spread by the Yukon Party. And, once again, 2014 — didn't get it done.

Question re: Nisutlin Bay bridge replacement

Mr. Kent: So, my colleague was unable to get answers on timelines from the minister, so maybe I will have better luck on budget questions. As my colleague from Pelly-Nisutlin has pointed out, the government's failure to secure the necessary licences and permits for the Nisutlin Bay bridge will likely cause significant delays in the project. However, it will also likely have implications for the cost of the project.

So, on October 18 of last year, the minister said that the project was on budget. Can the minister tell us if he stands by that comment and if this project is still on budget?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: When I provided that update to the Chamber, that was the correct information that I had at the time. Discussions now are ongoing with Graham Infrastructure. I have had opportunities to meet with the management of Graham Infrastructure LP in Teslin on a few occasions and have been impressed by their can-do attitude. Their employees have advised that they are problem-solvers and that they accept and embrace this project. As I said previously, there are a lot of moving parts with respect to this project and, over the course of the next three and a half years, it is possible that there will be some additional costs, but when I answered the question in the Chamber at the time, that was the most up-to-date information that I had.

Mr. Kent: It sounds like we are getting somewhere with the minister now. It is not on budget, from what I gather from his response, and we will see if we can get to some specifics. So, according to the minister's briefing notes that we accessed through ATIPP, the department was well aware in the fall of last year that the project was going to be overbudget. Here is what that note says: "We are working with our federal counterparts to secure additional funding to support the increased costs."

The existing contract is for about \$160 million. The five-year capital plan only includes a range of \$110 million to \$125 million, so how much additional money is the Yukon government requesting from the federal government, and has that money been secured yet?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: As indicated, there are additional discussions with Graham Infrastructure LP with respect to this matter, but, at this time, there have not been additional requests made of the federal government, but we certainly thank the federal government for its contribution to the Nisutlin Bay bridge, to national trade corridor funding for the road construction from Carmacks to Dawson City, to the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport parallel runway infrastructure program, and ultimately to the main runway program as well. The current federal government has been an amazing partner with respect to moving the Yukon forward in unprecedented manners.

As I have indicated previously in the House, we anticipate that, for fiscal year 2022-23, there will be approximately \$500 million of capital spending that will go out the door. In the final year of the former Yukon Party government, they were not able to get even \$200 million out the door. We are moving the Yukon forward on many fronts.

Mr. Kent: So, these questions are about the Nisutlin Bay bridge, and I hope the minister can focus on that specific project — the Nisutlin Bay bridge.

So, it was not lost on Yukoners that last week's federal budget largely ignored the Yukon, and it included no new funding for Yukon infrastructure projects. The biggest infrastructure program — the Investing in Canada infrastructure program, or ICIP — has come to an end, and a replacement has not been announced. Just a few weeks ago, the minister told the Legislature that they had applied for another \$52.5 billion from Transport Canada, but that barely covers the existing funding gap, let alone the cost increases that the minister has said are yet to come.

So, how much more does the minister think the Yukon government needs to budget to ensure that there are sufficient funds to complete the Nisutlin Bay bridge?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I just want to clarify a couple of comments that were made by the opposition concerning the ICIP funding. First of all, there was language in the federal budget — language that we were pleased to see — and it really talked about the reallocation of the ICIP funding across Canada. It talked about how regions — as our interpretation — that have fully used their ICIP funding have the opportunity to again have access to funds that haven't been used across the country. I think that is important. I think it is important that we still have the opportunity to continue to invest in infrastructure across the territory. Again, we were happy to see that.

We have also worked with the federal government around flexibility within our ICIP funding. That is something that all three northern premiers have worked toward; we think that is a possibility. Again, it is really about maximizing the use of those funds. It is about investing in infrastructure. When I think about Nisutlin Bay bridge, what comes to mind is: What was the cost of the Nisutlin Bay bridge in 2014, really, versus now? What was the cost of the fibre line to connect the north back in 2013 or 2014?

So, being able to be bold, make these decisions, undertake these projects, and execute partnership is important. When you wait and you don't take these things on, it costs the taxpayers over the long run. So, we are going to continue to build —

Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Greenhouse gas emissions

MLA Tredger: Scientists around the world have told us that we need to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 45 percent below 2010 levels before the year 2030. It's ambitious, but we don't have a choice if we want our children to have a future on this planet.

Through our confidence and supply agreement, the Yukon NDP pushed the government to commit to these ambitious climate targets. To help the minister achieve the 45-percent reduction, we enlisted the help of some brilliant Yukoners to form the Climate Leadership Council. They provided a report, called *Climate Shot 2030*, to the minister on how to achieve the 45-percent reduction.

It has been more than six months since that report came out, and the minister still has not responded. We're starting to wonder if he actually thinks it's an emergency.

Can the minister finally tell Yukoners what new actions this government is taking in order to achieve a 45-percent reduction in the territory's greenhouse gas emissions?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thanks to the Climate Leadership Council — they provided a range of suggestions. We sat down with them and talked about how they would integrate with the existing actions, including attempting to get a clear measurement about what they might achieve in terms of emission reductions.

We put them into several groups: those actions that we could execute very quickly, those that would take more work to integrate, and those that would take more analysis work even to understand their benefit. We brought the Climate Leadership Council in to sit down with the Energy branch and the Department of Environment. We committed to them — and we have committed here in this House — that we would integrate that into *Our Clean Future*.

We annually report on *Our Clean Future*. Our next one is due this summer, but the work is ongoing right now around those actions to move them as quickly as possible while we do our diligence in order to prepare for them.

MLA Tredger: The minister wanted help to come up with ideas to get to 45 percent, and fair enough — it's a tall order. Now he has those ideas, but we are still waiting for action. The Climate Leadership Council put their lives on hold to come up with a plan for emissions reductions in the territory that would give us a fighting chance. Their plan has three key principles: that government must lead, that this requires a wartime-like effort, and that the plan must be hopeful and grounded in the idea that a low-carbon future is a better future for everyone.

So, the minister says that we will find out in the next update what he is doing. Will he commit that the next update will include a plan to reach the 45-percent emissions reductions?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I have met with the member opposite, and I have talked about what is in that plan. It doesn't have a plan to get to 45 percent, so I will make that clear right now, but I have said that directly to the member opposite.

We have also discussed this with the Climate Leadership Council. Their plan had a lot of ideas, many of which are already partially in *Our Clean Future*, so there is some double-accounting there.

So, no, we don't have actions or recommendations that get us to 45 percent yet, but *Our Clean Future* was always meant to be an adaptive strategy that we would work to continue to improve on, and some of the actions will move faster than others. So, we will continue to work on the strategy. Our goal is 45 percent. We understand the urgency.

I would like to thank the Climate Leadership Council, the Department of Environment, the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, and the Department of Highways and Public Works. We have all been working together to realize these actions as quickly as possible.

MLA Tredger: I think I just heard that we don't have a plan. We don't have a plan coming to get us to 45 percent.

I know the minister might be worried about how mining companies will react and how the Yukon Party will attack him if he takes stronger action on climate, but Yukoners want to see a bold vision for our territory — one that lets our youth see a hopeful future for themselves.

Right now, I only hear climate dread from young Yukoners. They are worried about their future and what it will look like. The minister knows the science. It's time for action. Why won't the minister listen to the scientists, the UN, and his own Climate Leadership Council and commit to a plan for reaching 45 percent?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Here I am, Madam Deputy Speaker, on my feet, making the commitment that we are going to reduce our emissions by 45 percent by 2030. The actions that we have in place right now in *Our Clean Future* are not enough. That's why we asked the Climate Leadership Council to sit down and work with us. They made 61 recommendations. We worked through those recommendations. When we add them in, it's not enough. We will continue to look for additional ways to make that commitment. That's our goal. We are committed to it.

Question re: 2 Lodgepole Lane concerns

Ms. Van Bibber: Yesterday, I asked a question about the government's response to the City of Whitehorse's request for help to address the terrible condition of 2 Lodgepole Lane. The minister insisted that the City of Whitehorse is the — quote: “primary lead on any enforcement should any action be deemed to be necessary.” However, we have heard clearly from the City of Whitehorse that action is definitely needed and the city wants the Government of Yukon to help deal with it.

So, will the Government of Yukon agree to help the City of Whitehorse address this contaminated and unsafe site in my riding?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the question from the member opposite. I will just provide some of the background that I provided yesterday and provide some additional comments.

2 Lodgepole Lane is a neglected private property that sits in a secluded neighbourhood off the Alaska Highway within the boundary and the authority of the City of Whitehorse. There is a history of complaints, spill reports, site visits, and multi-agency involvement associated with this property.

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, they do 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 action be deemed 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: At Monday's city council meeting, the mayor made it clear that more action from the Yukon government is needed. She said — quote: "I think it's made very clear that City of Whitehorse has done what is within our jurisdiction under the *Municipal Act* and under our bylaws, but there's some more work to be done with Yukon government."

The Government of Yukon has legislation, regulations, and resources that the city does not, so will the Government of Yukon use the tools available to them to help the city deal with this pressing issue in my riding?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the advocacy on behalf of the citizens of Porter Creek North. 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 on this property.

We have previously committed to supporting City of Whitehorse officials with technical expertise and navigating applicable regulatory requirements. The Department of Environment will continue to operate within its legislative authority with respect to any contamination issues at 2 Lodgepole Lane.

If there has been a material change in circumstance — and Mayor Cabott last night may have indicated that there was a material change in circumstance — I certainly look forward to those ongoing conversations, as I always do, with the Mayor and Council of Whitehorse.

Question re: Whistle Bend development

Ms. McLeod: Yesterday, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources spoke about the delays in construction of Whistle Bend phases 6B and 8. In his words, he said that the work was delayed due to the frost, but he was — and I quote: "... anticipating the work to be done fairly shortly." As we understand it, the contract for phase 6B construction was cancelled before it was completed last fall, but the contract for phase 8 was not cancelled.

So, can the minister explain why the contract for phase 6B was cancelled and why the contract for phase 8, which was also not completed, was not cancelled?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I am happy to go back to our departments and check in on what the situation was with respect to the contracts last fall.

Ms. McLeod: Thank you for that commitment.

As the minister stated yesterday, he expects the work on phases 6B and 8 to be done fairly shortly. So, can the minister tell us when the work to finish these lots in phases 6B and 8 will be done?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The note that I have, when I checked in with the department, was that they thought that it would be happening this spring, but I don't have a physical date

in front of me. The note just indicated that it was expected during the spring and the early summer of 2023, to make sure that work would be done, and that it was good to still put the lots up for lottery. We will see what Yukoners — whether they wish to still put their names in on those bids — I am guessing yes. We will work with them around that situation. I think that we keep them very informed, through that lottery process, about what the rules are, about what the situation is, and we will continue to work with the public as they move through the lottery process.

Question re: Infrastructure funding

Mr. Istchenko: Earlier this week, the Mayor of Haines Junction wrote to the Minister of Community Services to request clarification about a project in my community. The mayor noted that there appears to be significantly less funding available for important water and sewer infrastructure projects in the community of Haines Junction. The current budget only includes \$250,000 to \$600,000 to complete phase 3 of the water and sewer upgrades, but according to the mayor, the project is likely to cost much more than that.

Can the minister confirm whether or not there is enough money budgeted to complete phase 3 of the Haines Junction sewer and water project?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I do appreciate the question this afternoon on infrastructure development here in rural Yukon — in this case, specifically in Haines Junction. Through the small communities fund and Investing in Canada infrastructure program, over the last eight years, Canada has approved more than \$565 million in the Yukon, alongside the Government of Yukon's contribution of \$188 million. This has been invested in more than 110 projects. The Canada community building fund has brought a total of more than \$178 million to Yukon since its inception in 2014 and has allocated it directly to communities and First Nations for their own project prioritization.

I know that there is a lot of concern about infrastructure that is being whipped up by the members opposite. I am fully committing to those projects that have already been approved through the Investing in Canada infrastructure program to be funded through that program. The members opposite can certainly consult our five-year capital plan to see what's coming and how those things are going to be funded in the future. That's a new initiative. I know that the members opposite never did the proper planning, but we have done that. We have a plan in place, and everybody can look at it. I urge the member opposite to have a look.

Mr. Istchenko: So, the lack of commitment to funding projects in the community of Haines Junction beyond next year is raising the concerns of members of my community, as well as the contracting community that does the work on projects like this. As the mayor noted in his letter to the Minister of Community Services, there is concern that there isn't enough money budgeted to complete phase 3 and no money at all for phase 4, and actually, I did have a look at the five-year capital plan.

Can the minister explain if the five-year capital plan is wrong, or can my community expect the completion of phase 3 and the start of phase 4 to be delayed indefinitely?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I really do appreciate the Member for Kluane referring to the five-year capital plan. It is a good plan and a good initiative. I am happy that it is proving of some use to the member opposite.

I want to say that the Investing in Canada infrastructure program that we have subscribed to and pulled on very hard continues — even though all the projects have been assigned and allocated, that program continues well beyond 2030.

So, the money has been allocated but not necessarily spent at this time. So, we are going to continue to work through those projects until all of the money is spent, and right now, all of the money is allocated.

Mr. Istchenko: So, the reason the municipality wrote the letter is because there is nothing in the five-year capital plan. Early this Sitting, the minister faced questions about the fact that the Investing in Canada infrastructure program from the federal government is ending, and there is not yet any replacement for it. My colleague asked the minister what the municipalities should expect going forward, and the minister said that this was just speculation and hypothetical, but this is a very real example of a project in a community that has an uncertain future.

So, can the minister make a clear commitment to my community that phases 3 and 4 of our water and sewer upgrades will be completed?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We are talking about the Investing in Canada infrastructure program today. We have talked about our five-year capital plan and the projects that are laid out in there. We have municipalities that have outlined — through an extensive program that my predecessor in this role conducted to identify priorities to communities throughout the Yukon. We have actually delivered projects throughout the territory — to Dawson City, to Mayo, to Faro, to Watson Lake, to Whitehorse, to Beaver Creek, to Carmacks, and to Haines Junction. We have delivered programs to every single municipality; it is outlined in our budget. We have done so every single year. I am very happy with the work that the highways department and all of the departments of our government have done in making lives better for Yukoners. We are going to continue that work because it is good work, and we are committed to 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 into 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): Order. Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 26, entitled *Act to amend the Municipal Act (2023)*.

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. 26: *Act to amend the Municipal Act (2023)*

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 26, entitled *Act to amend the Municipal Act (2023)*.

Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill No. 26, entitled *Act to amend the Municipal Act (2023)*.

This bill amends the *Municipal Act* to extend the term of office for municipal and local advisory councils from three years to four. This change will be in effect for the October 2024 general election. The Government of Yukon supports local governance in eight municipalities and in many unincorporated areas through local advisory councils. Local advisory councils serve in an advisory capacity to the Minister of Community Services. Community Affairs ensures regular contact with both municipalities and local advisory councils to discuss individual and collective issues and to provide opportunities to meet with relevant government departments.

I would like to take this moment to thank those folks for all the great work they do, because it is just extraordinary.

This bill supports the resolution of the Association of Yukon Communities, which represents both municipalities and local advisory councils in the Yukon. The resolution, which passed unanimously at the association's 2022 annual general assembly, requested the Yukon government to increase terms of office to four years and explicitly requested that the change come into effect prior to the next general election for Yukon municipalities, which will take place in October 2024.

This amendment also aligns with the response from the public engagement we held last fall. This change will provide councils with additional time to enact strategic priorities, to plan beyond a three-year term, and to set the direction required to address the needs of their citizens, which are increasing with population growth.

As stated in the Association of Yukon Communities resolution, the longer term of office will also allow councils to meet increasing requirements related to the implementation of First Nation land claims and self-government agreements and

the transfer of administration in control of land and resources from Canada to the Yukon.

The amendment is straightforward. Section 52 of the *Municipal Act* is replaced with the following: “General election of council

“Each municipality shall hold a general election (a) on October 17, 2024; and (b) on the third Thursday of October of every fourth year after 2024.”

We look forward to responding to questions that may arise this afternoon.

Ms. McLeod: I want to welcome the officials to the Legislature today to help us out with any questions. As we indicated at second reading, we do have a few questions.

Can the minister confirm whether AYC was consulted on the drafting of this legislation?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Before I begin my answer this afternoon, I do want to recognize my two officials, who I did not introduce in my opening statement. Thank you to the Member for Watson Lake for jogging my aged memory. We have Jaime Mellott — I believe that it is her very first time in the House, correct? Yes, it is. We also have Matt King, who is my deputy. They are here to assist with this debate this afternoon, and I thank them for being here.

So, we took the — AYC came to us with this resolution. We took the resolution we had and started working with the AYC on the engagement process. The purpose of the engagement was to gather public feedback and municipal feedback to help the Government of Yukon determine whether to amend the *Municipal Act* to change the terms of service. The engagement process was hosted on Engage Yukon. The engagement was from September 1 to 28, 2022. In total, the questionnaire received 149 completed responses from Yukon residents.

Ms. McLeod: I thank the minister for that information. I am happy to see that 145 Yukoners were engaged on this. My question was really about whether or not AYC was specifically consulted on this legislation. Were there any sit-down meetings with the board, or did this take place by e-mail, or perhaps there is some more information here?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The team at Community Services is often involved with the Association of Yukon Communities. They asked that we change the legislation to a four-year term. We consulted with municipalities about whether they wanted a spring or a fall election, and so we took their advice and worked it into this very simple amendment, which the overwhelming response was that we wanted to have an election in the fall. So, these dates were picked and worked into the legislation.

Ms. McLeod: Now, we understand that LACs are certainly going to be affected by this legislation and that they have raised concerns about the amendments. So, can the minister confirm whether the department has worked with LACs to hear their concerns and to consult with them on these changes?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: In May 2022, the Association of Yukon Communities passed a unanimous resolution at their annual general meeting requesting that the Yukon government extend the term of office for municipal councils before the next

election in October 2024. The resolution also directed that the organization work with the Government of Yukon to engage with Yukon citizens and seek their input on extending the term of office.

I have a letter from the Association of Yukon Communities, dated May 16, that said, “As you will see, members unanimously supported this resolution and has called on me to write you to impress on you the importance of moving this forward now so that it can be implemented at the next general election of councils in October 2024.”

We invited councils to provide government-to-government feedback. We did not receive any formal feedback from any LAC opposing the AYC resolution, which again, was unanimous, and the AYC does represent local advisory councils. Our community advisors, who work closely with unincorporated communities, informed local advisory councils about the public consultation process and encouraged them to participate. Any informal feedback we heard during the conversations with our local advisory council colleagues was also provided to the policy team leading the public consultation.

We appreciate, of course, all the work the local advisory council representatives do. They are volunteers, and they do an invaluable service to their communities, and we certainly appreciate that. We know this change — which has the support of the government, AYC, and a majority of Yukoners with an opinion on the matter — will be a positive move for councils across the territory, including local advisory councils. I have met with local advisory councils and have not heard any concerns about this. I know my colleague, the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes, attends local advisory councils on a regular basis. It is an incredible schedule that he keeps, working with these councils, who are his constituents. He also informs me that the local advisory councils are supportive of this move.

Ms. McLeod: I will take what the minister says, that there were zero concerns raised with the minister or with the department — indeed, with the government — about any of these changes, and I will leave that there. Can the minister explain a little more about what the role of the director is in setting the terms of LACs?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The director sets the term of the local advisory council according to section 41 of the act. The OIC will align the local advisory council election with the municipal election, which is how it has been done in the past — like, it is not changing direction in that case.

Ms. McLeod: Now, we have heard concerns from smaller communities that the four-year terms may impact them differently than larger communities, given the lower populations, and sometimes they already find it difficult to recruit council members. So, can the minister outline what discussions took place with smaller municipalities and if the department heard how the change might affect them, as well as any work that the department will be doing going forward?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: This whole initiative was started by the Association of Yukon Communities, of which small communities are equal members. So, the Association of Yukon Communities represents all municipalities in the territory. The

great thing about the organization is that all municipalities have an equal voice at the table.

Stemming from their annual meeting, I got a letter that said, “As you will see, members unanimously supported this resolution and has called on me to write you to impress on you the importance of moving this forward now so that it can be implemented at the next general election of councils in October 2024.” Members unanimously supported this resolution, so it came to us from the Association of Yukon Communities, which represents all municipalities, including local advisory councils. They asked us to do this and to fast-track it so that it would be in place. It was an initiative of the Association of Yukon Communities, which represents all municipalities, big and small.

They were in favour of this and they impressed upon me to do it quickly, which is why we are here this afternoon. They wanted to do an engagement with the public. We worked with the Association of Yukon Communities on that engagement. We did that.

I have spoken to the president of the association. He has been very gracious and quite forthcoming in his praise for this initiative and wants to see it happen.

In our engagement, I will say that there were some themes that emerged from the comments left by respondents. We did talk to municipalities. We heard what they had to say. If anybody had some strong opinions to share, we urged them to do it through the consultation — through the engagement that we had.

The common themes that emerged from comments left by respondents who participated in that engagement said that the four-year general election cycle is consistent with other Canadian jurisdictions. Less frequent elections will save administrative work and budget. Election fatigue could be reduced with less frequent general elections and less overlap with other levels of government. A longer term of office allows a council to plan and achieve more with less frequent transition periods and less frequent shifts into election mode. Many commenters said that councils would have the time, continuity, and stability to advance priorities and complete initiatives. A longer term of office could make a council complacent or stagnant or be a disincentive to timely action. The inability to replace an ineffective council for an additional year is a concern. Without a recall mechanism and accountability structures at other levels of government, commenters said that more frequent elections are a safeguard.

Other concerns were the existing frequency, acclamation, and the likelihood that it would increase a longer term, giving advantage to incumbents and the quality of candidates. A longer term of office could deter candidates from running. Family responsibilities and financial restraints can make it difficult for a candidate to commit to four years. Several commenters proposed two-year terms or staggered four-year terms as alternatives. One asked for a limit to term served; however, they were in the very, very small minority of any respondents.

The majority of the comments, as you saw, were positive, and the response from the public was overwhelmingly positive to four-year terms. That is it.

I really do want to take this moment to thank all of our municipal representatives for stepping forward and participating in public life at the local level. It is really the most intimate of government public service and it is not for the faint of heart, but we have a great slate of candidates, and have had for many, many years. I really do appreciate them all stepping up to serve their communities.

Ms. McLeod: Of course, we all support the work that AYC does. They are a great body; they do a great public service for us all.

To kind of recap what I believe I heard the minister say today, the AYC put forward a resolution and then wrote to the government and asked them to proceed with this type of legislation, and the government engaged in a public consultation in which 145 Yukoners participated, but there was no additional discussion or consultation on the bill itself with municipalities or AYC. That is what I believe I heard today.

We will be supporting this bill today, and I want to thank the officials for being here. I will turn it over to the Third Party.

Ms. White: I welcome the officials today in the room. It is a pleasure to have the deputy back for multiple times and, of course, the first time we have had Ms. Mellott.

The one thing I just wanted to highlight is that election season in the Yukon has changed drastically, including the fact that with municipal elections, we now have signs. I am glad that when we talk about the changes to the *Municipal Act* right now, we are talking about 2024 and then four years after, but there are going to be some years where it overlaps. So, if we're talking about, in this case, the third Thursday of October every fourth year after 2024 — in Yukon for the territorial election, it's the first Monday in November, and the federal election is a maximum of five years. The expectation, of course, is that the next federal election will be October 20, 2025. There are going to be times when those elections overlap, and in my experience, having run in numerous elections at this point in time, there is something that is quite easily called “election fatigue”. At times, people don't actually know why you are there or for which level of government you may be there.

Was there ever any consideration in looking at this — what we're talking about — with municipal, territorial, and federal all happening between October and November — where they will overlap? So, for sure, if the federal government goes for the full five-year terms, there will be overlap in 2040, for example, between the municipal election and the federal election, so we will see no less than, I would guess, three, four, or maybe five political parties for the federal election. We have seen that previously. We will see signs out for municipal candidates, and then there will be times when it overlaps with the territorial one as well. We know that there are, so far, 19 ridings in the territorial one. I am thinking of some prime areas like the left-hand side driving into Riverdale and how that can be a wildly exciting time because it is two ridings — then, of course, adding municipal election signs and federal election signs.

So, was there ever any consideration about trying to separate when these elections would be held?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I will say to the member opposite that it was an issue that my good colleague from beautiful Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes and I did discuss.

When I was speaking to municipalities in the run-up to this legislation and its drafting — actually before the “what we heard” document — I did ask all mayors and councils to consider whether or not they want to do a fall or a spring election — because there seem to be an awful lot of elections coming up in the fall — and whether or not we should actually look at a spring election for municipalities. Overwhelmingly, I think, the information came back that they prefer the fall. So, we did consider it, we did ask, and that is where it was.

Municipal elections are the only fixed date, so it is hard to know when a federal or territorial election will occur. Federal and territorial elections are variable in year and time of year, as they can be called earlier than required. So, this is a fixed date, but overwhelmingly, people want it to be held in the fall and not the spring.

Ms. White: Just for a quick verification — when the minister said that there was the ability to call elections at different times, he was referring to the territorial and the federal elections; is that right?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: That is correct.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that clarification. So, I guess the next question would be: If we find ourselves in a situation where there is both a territorial and a municipal election and if municipal leaders have said that they would prefer a fall election, would the minister entertain the concept of opening up the *Elections Act* to change the fixed date for the territorial elections?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: That is a question for my caucus. We have not discussed that at all.

Ms. White: I would actually suggest that it is a conversation for the entire House and everyone here, to be fair, as opposed to just necessarily the current government.

I appreciate that this is here. I was there at the AYC meeting where this was passed unanimously. I had conversations with leadership about when they kind of expected to see it. They, like many, were surprised that it came forward, but I think that is fantastic, so we look forward to passing it.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Bill No. 26, entitled *Act to amend the Municipal Act (2023)*?

Seeing none, we will now proceed to clause-by-clause.

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all clauses and the title of Bill No. 26, entitled *Act to amend the Municipal Act (2023)*, read and agreed to.

Unanimous consent re deeming all clauses and the title of Bill No. 26 read and agreed to

Chair: The Member for Takhini-Kopper King has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all clauses and the

title of Bill No. 26, entitled *Act to amend the Municipal Act (2023)*, read and agreed to.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

Clauses 1 and 2 deemed read and agreed to

On Title

Title agreed to

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I move that you report Bill No. 26, entitled *Act to amend the Municipal Act (2023)*, without amendment.

Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Whitehorse West that the Chair report Bill No. 26, entitled *Act to amend the Municipal Act (2023)*, without amendment.

Motion agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

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

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any general debate?

Department of Education

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am very pleased to rise in the House today to present the Department of Education’s 2023-24 mains budget. Before I begin my opening comments, I would like to introduce the officials who will assist me today: Mary Cameron, the Deputy Minister of Education, and Megan Foreman, senior advisor in the Department of Education — welcome.

Over the past year, the Department of Education has remained focused on the important work of recovering from the pandemic, responding to the Auditor General of Canada’s review of kindergarten to grade 12 education in the Yukon, and implementing the recommendations from the 2021 review of inclusive and special education and the safer schools action plan.

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

to take this opportunity to thank everyone who is on the journey with us. Thank you to all Yukon First Nations, partners in Education, teachers, administrators and other school staff, early learning educators and program operators, students and families, and staff working in our central administration. We are working with our partners and stakeholders to reimagine education and create school environments that are safe, inclusive, and build on student strengths. We are working to ensure that every child feels connected and supported to thrive.

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

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

In 2023, the department has a total budget request of \$279,461,000. This represents a \$7,375,000 increase over last year's mains, primarily for early learning and childcare, the First Nation School Board governance, and the Yukon Association of Education Professionals collective agreement increases.

Operation and maintenance makes up \$244,155,000 of the total request, with the remaining \$25,306,000 allocated to important capital projects.

I will now go over some of the key initiatives in a bit more detail. The Government of Yukon and the Chiefs Committee on Education, First Nation School Board, and the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate share the common goal of providing high-quality and culturally appropriate education, based on Indigenous world view, for all Yukon students. The First Nation School Board currently governs eight schools across the Yukon. This is an historic step for Yukon First Nations and their citizens. Three more schools recently voted to join the board for the 2023-24 school year, including the schools in Pelly Crossing, Carcross, and Kluane and Destruction Bay.

The First Nation School Board is enabling Yukon First Nations to reclaim greater responsibility for the administration and management of education programs for students and their communities. We are pleased to have reached an agreement with the board of trustees on a new 15-month funding agreement for the First Nation School Board.

We are investing in the success of the First Nation School Board, and this funding agreement will support them to implement their vision for education in their schools. We are providing over \$35 million for the period of April 1, 2023 to

June 30, 2024 to ensure the success of the First Nation School Board and their schools.

This funding agreement includes unique funding for indigenization initiatives. This reflects the First Nation School Board's need as an Indigenous school authority. It also acknowledges the leadership role the First Nation School Board will play in developing and delivering Indigenous language and culture curriculum and educational programs. This work will ultimately benefit all Yukon learners and will improve outcomes for Indigenous and rural students in all Yukon schools. We are committed to ensuring that all Yukon school authorities have equitable resources to deliver high-quality and culturally appropriate education.

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

In our request for the 2023-24 mains, there is \$1,022,000 allocated to this work. One of the initiatives I would like to highlight in this work is the Ready-to-Learn Schools. We launched this program in the fall of 2022 at several Yukon schools. Ready-to-Learn Schools is a program that supports schools in effecting positive social change and well-being for all students and staff. The program is grounded in the understanding that children can only be ready to learn when they feel safe and calm.

This model trains teachers and staff to be developmentally responsive to recognize that a child's chronological age may not match their emotional, cognitive, or social age. Most importantly, it helps educators understand how trauma and toxic stress impact brain development, functioning, and learning. We look forward to continuing to support the rollout of this program for students and staff.

\$500,000 of the budget for RISE is dedicated to improving mental health outcomes for youth. We take the mental wellness of students seriously, particularly as we move forward from the pandemic, and we are continually assessing the needs of students. The Department of Education is developing a comprehensive mental health and wellness approach. This is an important part of the overall work we are doing to reimagine inclusive and special education. It will align with Yukon's mental health strategy and be guided by the recommendations from the Yukon Youth Calls to Action from the 2022 Youth Summit, which brings forward important perspectives from youth on supports that will work for them. We look forward to continuing to move this critical work forward.

In the 2023-24 mains, you will also see that we are requesting an increase of \$3,467,000 for early learning and childcare. This is fully recoverable from our multilateral agreement with the Government of Canada. This funding will

support us as we continue to work with Yukon First Nations and other partners to enhance early learning and childcare programming in the Yukon. We are working toward a future where all families have access to high-quality early learning and childcare that is affordable, accessible, and inclusive. This year, we are investing heavily in professional learning and development opportunities. This includes innovative and flexible training options for early learning educators to become fully qualified while continuing to work.

We are working with partners on several exciting initiatives, including partnering with the Yukon University to offer the professional diploma pathways program for early childhood educators; funding Yukon University to provide enhanced course offerings in rural Yukon communities; partnering with the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate and the early years program to offer an Understanding the Early Years course.

In addition to these partnerships, we are also providing education bursaries for post-secondary study, as well as enhanced bursary options up to \$500 for educators to access other learning and development opportunities. All of these initiatives are supporting the growth and expansion of high-quality early learning and childcare in the Yukon.

I will move on to some of our capital investments, starting with the biggest build that we are undertaking right now — Whistle Bend Elementary School. We are building the first new Whitehorse elementary school in over 20 years in Whistle Bend. This will provide students with a modern learning environment and support a thriving and growing community. In the 2023-24 mains, you will see \$20,300,000 allocated to this school capital project.

The Whistle Bend school is a key investment, with construction scheduled to be completed during the 2023-24 school year. I would like to acknowledge the members of the newly established Whistle Bend Elementary School Council. They will have an important role in guiding aspects of the school build and will assume regular school council duties, such as hiring a principal once the school is closer to completion.

The next project that I would like to talk about is Kêts'ádañ Kù. This is a very special project for Yukon. As part of our commitment to reconciliation and long-term capital planning for Yukon schools, we are pleased to be working in partnership with the Kluane First Nation on Kêts'ádañ Kù. Moving the current Kluane Lake school from Destruction Bay to Burwash Landing has been a long-standing request of the Kluane First Nation. The Government of Yukon and the Kluane First Nation continue to uphold the memorandum of understanding, which outlines a shared commitment to plan the construction of a new school in Burwash Landing, to be known as “Kêts'ádañ Kù”; the meaning of this is “House of Learning”. Kêts'ádañ Kù is a priority, as it will support Kluane First Nation citizens to learn and thrive in their community. You will see \$3.5 million allocated to this work in the 2023-24 mains.

In conclusion, thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to speak to Education's 2023-24 mains budget. As we look forward to the year ahead, we know that we must strike

a balance between making actionable progress and taking the time needed to build trusting relationships. We must do things differently if we want to see different results. This budget will support this important work, and I look forward to seeing the progress as we continue to make improvements to our educational system for educators, current learners, and future generations of learners.

Mr. Kent: I also would like to take the opportunity to welcome the officials to the House here today, as well as those officials who participated in the briefing on the mains and gave us the information and took questions that we had at the time and, of course, those who are supporting the minister and her officials remotely here today as well.

The first item I wanted to talk about — because we just talked about it earlier this week during a ministerial statement — is the new funding agreement with the First Nation School Board. In the minister's final response on the ministerial statement, she said — and I quote: “I can assure the member opposite that the full \$35 million is included in the 2023-24 budget, and I am looking forward to debating and going into all of those details.” Now we will have the time to get into some of those details.

My question is with respect to the budget itself — the Education budget. On page 8-16, I can find, under School Authorities, a transfer payment to the First Nation School Board of \$3.998 million. So, I guess my first question for the minister would be: What is that transfer payment designed to cover for the First Nation School Board?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am happy to rise today and talk about the important work that we are doing with the First Nation School Board and the funding agreement that we recently announced and reached — again, an historic milestone for Yukon. It is significant that we are at this place in Yukon in terms of really investing in reconciliation. I just want to understand that we are trying to look through and identify the exact area that the member was asking about. I think it is the \$3.998 million — is that the amount that we are talking about? Okay, so, this is part of, of course, the larger transfer payment agreement with the First Nation School Board. There were a number of areas that — as I have spoken about a few times, there is operational support and maintenance of the schools, and there is also funding for board governance and administration of the eight schools, and then there are discretionary grants as well. So, I believe, if I am identifying this in the correct way, this is for the board governance and administration of the eight schools.

Mr. Kent: Yes, the line item that I was referring to is under Other Transfer Payments and School Authorities. It is on page 8-16 of the budget. It says First Nation School Board at \$3.998 million. If the minister could agree to get us a breakdown of that line, I guess, that would be helpful, just so we get a sense of where those dollars are going. As I said, when I went through the budget, that's the only place that I could see specifically where a transfer payment was being made to the First Nation School Board, so that was obviously before the announcement was made earlier this week about the \$35-million, five-month program.

So, what I will do then is jump back to page 8-8 of the budget, Operation and Maintenance (Vote 03-1), Kindergarten – Grade 12. The line item there is \$113,280,000. So, the minister, as I mentioned, said in her ministerial statement response that all of the O&M money for the First Nation schools was included in this budget, so I'm going to make an assumption that the O&M piece will be reprofiled for this line item. I am wondering if the minister can give us a sense of how much of that \$113.28 million will be reprofiled to the eight original schools that signed up for the First Nation School Board and how much will be reprofiled for the three additional schools that will be coming on for the 2023-24 school year.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Due to the timing on the First Nation School Board funding for the 2023-24 budget, it is not shown separately; it is included within the K to 12 budget line. In the future, though, the First Nation School Board will be a separate line item that is similar to the Francophone School Board, but I can go through it for a bit more detail based on the eight schools that we now have. Again, we will be working with the First Nation School Board trustees to bring those other three schools in.

The total funding, as per the transfer payment agreement in the fiscal year 2023-24, is \$28.2 million. The majority of the First Nation School Board funding was found from within the K to 12 existing school budgets — that being \$18.2 million. There were other internal budget transfers, such as \$825,000 from various branches within the department and in-kind custodian services from Highways and Public Works for \$806,000. There is a total increase in the department's budget for the First Nation School Board for 2023-24 in the amount of \$2.771 million. The remaining \$2.4 million will be found from within, and then there will be future budget exercises that we will go through in terms of really defining this.

Again, it's due to the timing of when the First Nation School Board came into effect. Working through this 2023-24 budget, we are not showing all of these line items separately, but in the future, it will be seen similar to the Francophone School Board.

Mr. Kent: The minister can correct me if I am wrong, but I believe she said that the majority of the money was coming from within existing budgets, but I would like to take her back again to her comments in the ministerial statement. She said that the full \$35 million is included in the 2023-24 budget, and I look forward to debating and going into all those details, as she said, but I think she said that there was \$28.2 million in 2023-24. I don't want to make assumptions, but I am assuming that the balance will be in the 2024-25 budget because of the school year not lining up with the fiscal year. I just want to be sure that the \$35-million funding agreement — there is no new money? It's all coming out of the existing budget, and it's all in the 2023-24 budget; there won't be a need for a supplementary this fall.

Hon. Ms. McLean: The member is correct in terms of all of the money being within the 2023-24 budget. There is a portion in the 15-month agreement that will go into the 2024-25 budget. There will be no supplementary budget around the allocation for this fiscal year — other than the additional three

schools that will be coming on. That agreement has yet to be expanded and entered into with the First Nation School Board, but that will take effect in the new school year of 2023-24.

Mr. Kent: Maybe what would be helpful for us as legislators is if we could get the minister to provide us with a breakdown of the \$35-million, 15-month funding agreement, obviously recognizing that there will be eight schools on for the first number of months and then that would bump up to 11 — and then what the breakdown is between the pillars that the minister spoke about in her statement. Just to remind the minister, she said that there was funding for the operation and maintenance for First Nation School Board schools, the establishment of school board organizational capacity, and the development of Yukon First Nation language and culture curricula and education programs.

Obviously, we are not looking for that today, but if the minister could come back with a legislative return or a letter to the Member for Takhini-Kopper King and me, that would be helpful for us to understand where this money is going.

One of the other questions that I had asked the other day in my ministerial statement response was about equity. When it comes to the operation and maintenance side of things, can the minister tell us if an equitable amount of per student funding will be provided to those schools that have decided to continue under the Government of Yukon or the Department of Education governance? I think that is what we would be looking for. Obviously, there are going to be some differences when you have smaller schools, rural schools, or that type of thing.

But I think that the school councils and the members of the education community that I have been talking to over the past number of weeks about the First Nation School Board and the funding are just looking for the assurance that there will an equitable amount of per student funding given to those schools that have decided, for one reason or another, to stay under the existing governance model.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, a tremendous amount of work went into ensuring that the First Nation School Board had the resources that they needed. A lot of people worked very intensely on this. Up until March 31, we were under an interim agreement that was for \$13,094,188. That was for the fiscal year that we are just coming out of and then looking, of course, at the complexity of setting up a whole new authority going into the next school year.

It was important, of course, that we take the time needed, and you will be able to see more of the breakdown in those specific line items as we go forward and enter into the longer term agreements and move into that funding cycle. It will be a lot easier going forward. I am happy to bring back a legislative return that provides that breakdown of all of the areas that are included, including the money that is found within — and then the new dollars that were added to the Department of Education budget. I talked about that in my opening comments — just over \$7 million in new money that is related to early learning childcare and the First Nation School Board — new dollars coming into the mains this time around.

In terms of equitable — we have certainly taken a long look at this because we are really not starting from a place of equality. And if we were starting from a place of equality, I think that we would have been having a lot of different discussions in our territory. I think that the Auditor General report points us directly to a place that tells us that outcomes — particularly for Indigenous children — have not been the same as for other children. We are not starting from a place of equality, so we have to invest more in the First Nation School Board to bring us to a place where — we have a journey through equity to get there.

The First Nation School Board, as I have said, is currently operating eight schools, and this is versus the two schools that the CSFY operates. I know that you are asking something else — in terms of other authorities and the Department of Education authority — and I will get to that. We will include some of this information or all of this information that I am talking about now in the legislative return.

I think that it will be helpful to understand how we got to where we are. It was done through negotiation and done very similarly, in some ways — and then there are some unique aspects with the First Nation School Board that are different from the Francophone School Board.

In terms of board administration and governance, it is done by way of a lift, which is a 20-percent lift, which is the same as CSFY and also the same with the First Nation School Board. They are calculated on the same drivers and factors.

This is not an exhaustive list, but they include teachers' wages, EAs — educational assistants — custodians, utility supplies, program materials — those are all part of the O&M. Again, looking at those additional costs for board administration and governance, that is the same need that the CSFY has.

Governance examples may include: rent, trustee honoraria, and administrative staff, such as finance, reception, and other support staff members. Again, this is not an exhaustive list but are examples of what would be included in governance — ongoing costs of community committees, as well, would be within that category. Again, the O&M funding is not different from CSFY, except for Yukon First Nation language teachers and other funding for board administration and governance, as more staff is required to run the eight schools. Again, we will be revisiting this as we enter into agreements with the other three schools, bringing it up to 11.

One of the things that folks — this is definitely quite a difference in terms of the number of rural schools that are under the First Nation School Board. Rural schools have higher fixed costs than Whitehorse-based schools, as well, and typically have lower enrolment, which inherently drives up the cost per student when you do the calculations. So, that is not how we do the lift, based on per student; it's really based on the overall O&M of the school, and then there is a 20-percent lift that is calculated. That is pretty straightforward.

Perhaps, I will just stop there on that part of it, but the member asked about the equitable application of these types of investments that we're making with the First Nation School Board.

We also have — when working, of course, government-to-government with Yukon First Nations, they are an essential partner. We do have education agreements with some First Nations, but we also have transfer payment agreements with all 14 First Nations. So, we are funding based on priorities that are identified through the First Nation and also, of course, the joint actions that we are taking together. We have what is called the “joint education action plan”, which is certainly a huge priority, where we have identified with Canada, Yukon, and First Nations our priorities, going forward.

I will continue to build on this answer, because I think that it is a really important part of the work that we are doing.

Mr. Kent: So, I just want to touch on that question that I asked about equitable funding for students who are in First Nation School Board schools and those who are in the schools that are still under the governance through the Department of Education and school councils and that.

I mean, the minister, I think — and without the ability to go back to Hansard instantaneously — I believe she said “not starting from a place of equity”, but there are a number of schools that are not under the First Nation School Board that still have Indigenous students. There are still a number of Indigenous and First Nation students in, you know — not to pick on any particular schools here, but, of course, Elijah Smith Elementary, for instance, would have a number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. I think, you know — obviously, many of the high schools in Whitehorse that have decided to remain under the school council and department model would have a number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Then, of course, schools that are under the First Nation School Board — many of them also have a mixed population of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

So, I am just curious why the minister wouldn't commit to equitable funding for students across the board here, especially when there is a mixture of Indigenous, First Nation, and then those who are non-Indigenous in so many of our schools that are in the territory here.

Hon. Ms. McLean: It is an important question that the member poses around equity for all children and certainly an area that I have spent a lot of time thinking about and working with our partners on. We know that, especially from the recent Auditor General's report — and, again, really similar to the one that was 10 years before that in terms of outcomes, and we know that language, culture, and heritage revitalization is a very important aspect of work that we are committed to doing in all of our schools. Safer, healthier, and thriving communities are inherently linked to rebuilding First Nation identity and connection to heritage. We also need to focus on leadership, education, and training programs that are really grounded in culture.

Yukon First Nation languages, as we have said in this House just recently on Indigenous Languages Day, are in critical condition, with a number of dialects that are down to only just a handful of fluent speakers. The Department of Education is working with individual Yukon First Nations regarding bilateral government-to-government education agreements, which include discussions on allocation for

indigenizing education and language, culture, and heritage programming in schools.

In the 2023-2024 budget, the Yukon government is providing almost \$1.2 million to the Yukon First Nation language centre, part of which will support planning for more First Nation language teachers' training. A specific priority for the Government of Yukon is to work toward a shared commitment with Yukon First Nations and Government of Canada to address and take meaningful steps to revitalize Yukon First Nation languages, culture, and heritage.

Also, I think it's reflected, of course, in Yukon's strategy on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit-plus people. It includes the foundational value of culture, language, spirituality, and relationship with the land, which guides our work in that area as a government.

The Government of Yukon is interested in continuing with the work from the joint education action plan, also known as the "JEAP", to which all Yukon First Nations and Canada are partners, as well as advancing specific funding conversations with Yukon First Nations and Canada on how to advance language, culture, and heritage priorities in public school settings.

The Yukon government continues to explore other options for sharing existing capacity and resources for Yukon First Nation language programming with Yukon First Nation governments to support their language revitalization initiatives and to meet the department's obligations to provide Indigenous languages instruction, specifically Yukon First Nation language instruction, to Yukon students. I think one of the aspects of this agreement that we have entered into with the First Nation School Board trustees is a provision that the materials and curriculum and resources that are developed by the First Nation School Board are also going to be shared with all schools. I think that is a very strong added value to this agreement, and we know that we are on track to decolonize education, but indigenization and world view from that perspective needs to be done by First Nation people themselves.

We are in this very unique place in Yukon where we are figuring this out together. I think that it truly is the vision that the elders had in *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* 50 years ago when they envisioned a Yukon that works together. I think that is what we are seeing with the First Nation School Board and the values that will come out of that.

I thank you for the question, because I think it is a really important one that gets right to the heart of much of the work that we will be doing — especially over this next year — with the First Nation School Board. As we look at all the work that is happening, we are in a very transformational period, I think, within education. As I have said many times, it is an exciting time for education, so I am very pleased with where we have landed and what education will look like — and the outcomes that will inevitably be seen by all of us in government and for the generations to come. I will stop there and look to further questions.

Mr. Kent: I will perhaps put in a request for the minister to, if she can, get some information back that I think would help inform the debate that we are having here about equitable

funding for all Yukon students. When I look at the February 2023 enrolment reports, there are 4,773 students in urban schools, which is Whitehorse and just schools in the periphery — Grey Mountain and Hidden Valley — and then 1,083 in rural schools. I don't want to get too specific with the numbers of Indigenous students, but if the minister would be able to provide us, at some point, with the total number of Indigenous students in the system and then how many of those are attending First Nation School Board schools and how many are attending schools that are either run by the Francophone School Board or run by the school councils and the Department of Education, I think that would give us a better understanding of the dispersal of Indigenous students throughout the system and give us an idea of how to make sure that we support all Yukon students, which I am sure is the goal of the minister and is a goal that is shared by us in the Official Opposition.

Just one other quick question with respect to the First Nation School Board — and the minister brought it up in her previous response, so I wanted to quickly follow up on it. When we received the briefing on the 2023-24 mains from department officials, they left us a handout. On page 6 of that, it talks about internal budget transfers in the First Nation Initiatives branch — a transfer from First Nation Initiatives of \$62,000 to support indigenization of the curriculum with the First Nation School Board.

The minister talked about indigenization of the curriculum and decolonization of the system. I'm wondering if there will be an opportunity — and if the minister has any idea — and, if so, when that opportunity will arise for members of the broader school communities to understand exactly what the indigenization of the curriculum is going to look like. Is there some sort of public process that would be planned to help inform all members of the different school communities, regardless of the governance model, on what exactly this will look like? I guess the question for the minister is: Does she have any idea of the timelines to get this done and if or when there will be consultation to help explain what this looks like to the broader school communities?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The member talked a lot in the preamble to some of the questions — and quite a few questions, I think, posed throughout that. He started out around enrolment, so I will speak a little bit about that in terms of where we are at and what our numbers are.

The Yukon population is increasing, and we expect it will continue to grow over the years to come. We are prioritizing work on long-term capital planning, of course — as we have talked a little bit about in the House this year — including the recently announced replacement of the École Whitehorse Elementary. A new Whistle Bend school will help address enrolment growth in the north end of Whitehorse and will have added portables — and I know this is about school growth, but I think that it definitely factors in — as I have said, this transformational time that we are in with education. Enrolment at schools is high — and, of course, when we have that high enrolment in a school, we work around capacity and we work with all of our partners.

The Department of Education, of course, works with the Yukon school boards, both the First Nation School Board and the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon, to assess their enrolment pressures. I know that the member is specifically asking about how many Indigenous students we have throughout all of our schools, and I will be happy to bring that number back. The total enrolment, though, as of January 2023, in all Yukon schools is 5,820. That is up by 21 students from May 2022.

When we worked with the First Nations Chiefs Committee on Education, it was definitely one of their desires to work within the *Education Act*, which is what we have done to establish the First Nation School Board. It was a desire, of course, to uphold the vision of *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* and not have that division of students, whether they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous. That is not our interest, as Government of Yukon — dividing Yukoners on this, and nor is it the interest of the Chiefs Committee on Education, the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, or the current trustees. It is not the desire, and so we have worked in a way of collaboration and inclusivity. Those are very important in the work that we are doing with the First Nation School Board, so I am happy to bring back those numbers and identify exactly where Indigenous students are or aren't. I think that the interest of the First Nation School Board has not been about dividing Yukoners, but it is really about being inclusive and ensuring that every child has what they need in our education system, and really, that is our desire — to get there.

I will point to a few areas of work that we are doing right now, and I will get to the reimagining of inclusive and special education, because I think that it is so vitally important — the work that is happening there. There are many factors that contribute to a student's success in school, including high-quality instruction, engaged learning, and student support networks — both at and away from school.

The student outcome strategy is a really important area to look to and will help us develop a deeper understanding of how we can best support Yukon students and make evidence-based decisions that will ensure every student in the territory has an opportunity to succeed. I know that folks have probably seen this when we submitted an update to the Public Accounts Committee. It was a very in-depth report about where we've been, where we are, and where we're going on all of these areas, so it is captured there as well. The department has contracted IRP Consulting and engaged with Yukon First Nation governments on the initial development of draft student outcome statements. This phase is now complete.

The next phase, which is underway, includes sharing the draft student outcome statements with our partners, the advisory committee on Yukon education, teachers, students, families, and other education partners. As part of this second phase, IRP Consulting has hosted a couple of public and virtual meetings. That was done over a two-week period in March. Again, this work is being led by IRP Consulting. By working collaboratively with First Nation governments, as well as our education partners, we will help sharpen our focus and target supports that will improve outcomes for all Yukon students.

It is important that we take the time to do the foundational work in a very meaningful way so that we are united in a collective understanding of the outcomes we want for our Yukon public education system. Also, the Yukon-wide *How Are We Doing?* student data reports support the Department of Education and our partners in a deeper understanding of what is happening with our students. The latest report is available.

I think that's an important part to look to. I am happy to provide more information, if members wish. It is captured in the Public Accounts report as well, but there is also, of course, the work that we're doing on RISE. We have put a tremendous amount of effort into this. Again, RISE is out of the 2019 audit and the review of inclusive and special education and the student attendance report that was done by the Child and Youth Advocate.

We are working with our partners and stakeholders to reimagine and create schools that are safe, inclusive, build on student strengths, and ensure that every child feels connected and supported to thrive. There is a lot more that I can say and will say about the work that is happening under RISE.

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: Order, please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any further general debate?

Mr. Kent: I want to just move on to some other topics now. I thank the minister for the responses on the First Nation School Board questions. I will review the Blues and look forward to getting a legislative return on the commitments that were made.

The material from department officials that was provided at the briefing told us that there were 1,187.48 FTEs in the Department of Education. I am just wondering if the minister can tell us how many of those FTEs are in the schools — are in the public school system — you know, First Nations — just a total number of those who are working in our schools.

Hon. Ms. McLean: For 2022-23, we have 652 FTE teachers and paraprofessionals, EAs, and remedial tutors. In 2022-23, we have 250.4 FTEs. The 2023-24 estimates are basically the same number of teachers, 562. That includes all school authorities. Paraprofessionals, EAs, and remedial tutors are 251.4 FTEs.

Mr. Kent: Just to be clear: 562 FTEs are teachers and 251.4 are paraprofessionals. Can I just get the minister to confirm that number? And then the balance to the 1,187, are

they working in the department? Am I correct in that assumption?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am just going to run through and give a listing, rather than having that other. Those numbers are accurate in terms of teachers and paraprofessionals, but I think just to run through the list, it says 1,116.91. So, under Education Support Services, under the Deputy Minister's Office, we have four FTEs; under Communications, we have seven; under HR, we have 16; and Finance, 15. Then under administration and support, we have two FTEs; under Student Support Services, we have 18.3; under Technology and Student Information, we have 9.5; under Facilities and Transportation, we have 46.38; and then under school authorities, we have 830.24.

Included additionally, which will increase the number, but we also have the teachers on call, which is 60.32. We have one auxiliary on call. That raises that number in the K to 12 to 891.56. Under the CSFY, we have 68.8. That is under school authorities. Again, the First Nation School Board is still within the K to 12 — the overall number.

Under Policy and Partnerships, we have two FTEs under Administration; Strategic Support, 23; Curriculum and Assessment, 11.5; Training Programs, 11; French Programs, four; Early Learning and Child Care, 15. Then, under the First Nations Initiatives, we have two Administration, six First Nations Program Delivery and Curriculum Development, and 23.19 First Nations Language Initiatives. With the change, with the added TOCs, it is 1,187.48. Then there are additionally two capital FTE school-based ITs, which are also part of the overall number.

Mr. Kent: I thank the minister. I appreciate that breakdown; that is helpful.

I do want to bounce over to a couple of questions about capital programs — specifically on modular classrooms. When I look at the 2022-23 five-year capital plan, it says that modular classrooms for this fiscal year of 2023-24 would be \$1 million to \$2 million. Then, jumping ahead to the capital plan that was tabled in March of this year, for 2023-24, there is no money allotted to modular classrooms. I am sort of curious why that money was taken away.

Because when — I am just going to highlight two of the high schools here in Whitehorse — CSSC Mercier, which, of course, is the francophone high school, and then F.H. Collins Secondary School, which is a dual-track English and French immersion high school. So, Mercier has a capacity of 150 students, I believe — from discussions with the previous Minister of Education when it was being constructed — and as of February 2023, they are at 116 students. If you start — well, I won't start projecting, based on tracking from EET to there. So, they are very close to capacity, and then F.H. Collins has a capacity, I believe, of 750, and they are at 724. One of my colleagues attended the F.H. Collins school council meeting, I believe in December, and it was mentioned at that time that they would be up for modular classrooms this year, but obviously, as I mentioned, there is no funding for modular classrooms.

So, I am just asking on behalf of that school community — that commitment in December for modular classrooms this year obviously isn't going to happen, so I am curious why that

commitment isn't going to be met for F.H. Collins and then if there are any plans for Mercier as they near capacity, as well, for what was designed for that school.

Hon. Ms. McLean: As I have mentioned even today and previously, we are working to engage with the school community on capital planning, and I have talked a lot about that so far this year.

The Government of Yukon's five-year capital plan includes school replacement and renovation projects to ensure that all of our buildings are safe and suitable for many years to come. We are pleased, again, that we have some really important infrastructure underway that is going to take a tremendous amount of pressure off our school growth — one of them, of course, being Whistle Bend. I have already talked about that project being done during the next school year. Then, we also have Burwash Landing, and planning has started for the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary School.

Capital planning decisions are based on current information and facility assessment and supplemented with education programming needs. Everyone in the House is aware that engagement with the broader Whitehorse community and partners is underway to determine a longer term plan for replacing and renovating other aging Whitehorse schools. The public can participate — this is ongoing from — it started on March 14; it will go until May 15, and that work is well underway. We will definitely continue to have conversations with Yukon school communities, including the F.H. Collins school community and the two Yukon school boards about facility needs, as we plan for future school projects.

I think one of the distinctions with the CSFY high school is that we have — they also have grade 7 students in that school, which is a factor. They have moved their grade 7s from the other school that they operate to the high school.

In terms of our investments that we have made — you know, Golden Horn — we did include a couple of modulars out at Golden Horn. This is definitely one of our ways of managing growth in schools. So, we did that in 2018-19 and 2019-20. For the first one and second one, it was 2019-20. We have also worked around modulars for Selkirk — modulars 1 and 2 and an addition — and Hidden Valley as well; we have included a modular there. We finished the modular and addition at the Robert Service School — so again, an important part of our management of schools.

We will continue to work with our school communities. Of course, as you have specifically asked about the F.H. Collins school community, we know that they are engaged in the current consultation that is happening now, and we will certainly gain more insight from that work.

I wanted just to add that, around French immersion programming and enrolment, we are very committed. We know that this is a very popular program. The Department of Education offers excellent French second language programming to students, and we are working with our partners and school communities to address the long-term needs of these programs. Currently, the overall student demand for the French immersion program is being met, and the Government of Yukon plans to continue École Selkirk Elementary as a dual

track. We have committed to long-term planning for French as a second language programs and to create a vision statement in collaboration with the French second language advisory committee, which I understand is currently being worked on. That will also bring some insights as we move into the “what we heard” document that is currently being — consultation is underway. We will have a lot more information that will emerge from that, and it will also take into consideration the work around the longer term vision from the French second language advisory committee.

Additionally, we completed, I think, the generic design and function plan that we have used to scale and design — for multiple types of schools. This is now referred to as the “Yukon schools functional program”. The plan outlines consistent standards for school design, construction — scalable. This is how we are now working on our plans for schools so that we don’t find ourselves again in these situations where a school like F.H. Collins has outgrown — way beyond the time that it should.

So, really better planning around school growth and really understanding the needs from the program perspective — also, of course, the quality of the building and all of those aspects as well — so, putting all of that information together to make well-informed decisions. Modular classrooms are how we will work with our short- and medium-term school needs. As I have stated, in 2022-23, Selkirk Elementary added a modular addition rather than a third portable, and this freed up an additional classroom for the school and is anticipated to be ready for occupancy soon. That is an exciting new addition that helps with some of the pressure, but I am really looking forward to outcomes of our consultation that is happening now.

Mr. Kent: I will forward that response along to the F.H. Collins school community. As I mentioned, it is my understanding that last fall, in December, there was a commitment made to provide them with modular classrooms, and that commitment has since been withdrawn. That, of course, is reflected in the budget documents with no money allocated. As I said, I will send that along to the school community, and then they can reach out to the minister. I am sure that they will just to seek some clarification around that previous commitment.

I do want to ask some questions regarding the two larger school projects that are underway in the department — the school in Burwash Landing as well as the school in Whistle Bend. I will just take the minister back to the Liberal 2021 election platform. It says in there: “Complete the construction of a new school in Burwash Landing by 2024.” It also says: “Complete the construction of a new elementary school in Whistle Bend by 2023 and establish a Whistle Bend School Council in spring 2021.” We obviously know that this commitment was delayed and wasn’t met, but I wanted to focus on the construction commitments here. So, as I said, the promise by the Liberals to Yukon voters in 2021 was to have Burwash Landing done by 2024, but then if I look at the five-year capital plan, there is a significant expenditure in 2025-26, which leads me to believe that this school won’t be ready until 2026.

Then, as I mentioned, the Liberals promised voters in 2021 that they would complete the construction of a new elementary school in Whistle Bend by 2023. Again looking at the five-year capital plan, in the last year, it’s a smaller expenditure of \$50,000 to \$100,000. I am assuming that is for furniture and fit-out and that type of thing, but it would appear that both of these projects are two years late from what the Liberals promised Yukon voters in 2021. So, I am wondering if the minister could explain why the construction time frames are different from what was promised when we were all going door to door a couple of years ago.

Hon. Ms. McLean: We are thrilled to be building new schools in the Yukon. Our government has committed to that. We did make those commitments, and we are standing by them as part of our commitment to reconciliation and long-term capital planning for Yukon schools.

We are really pleased to be working in partnership with the Kluane First Nation on Kêts’ádañ Kù. Moving the current Kluane school from Destruction Bay to Burwash Landing has been a long-standing request from the Kluane First Nation, and the Government of Yukon and Kluane First Nation continue to uphold what we are working with as a memorandum of understanding, which outlines our shared commitment to plan and construct a new school in Burwash Landing. Kêts’ádañ Kù is certainly a priority as it will support Kluane First Nation citizens to learn and thrive in their community. Regular meetings of the oversight committee and the project management team continue.

In July 2022, a Yukon asset construction agreement was signed with the Kluane First Nation that will provide benefit to the community through the construction of the school. We were thrilled to go out to Burwash Landing for Infrastructure Canada’s Investing in Canada infrastructure program announcement, which was in September 2022, and to visit the new site with Chief Bob Dickson.

The construction tender date and the project completion date will be confirmed as we move forward with the project planning process. The steps and commitments that I have outlined today are a clear indication that this remains a priority. It is in the five-year capital plan. It will be built.

Again, we are working with the community to ensure that we get it right and that they get the type of facility that will work for their community. We are working with the functional design that I talked about a few moments ago.

In terms of the Whistle Bend school, again, our government is very proud that we are investing in school infrastructure, and this new elementary school will be the first new elementary school in Whitehorse in over 20 years. Of course, it’s in Whistle Bend. I have had an opportunity to go and have a look at the construction, which is well underway and is expected to be completed in the winter of 2023-24. In preparation for the new school, a new Whistle Bend attendance area has been created. The attendance area is based on the city boundaries for the subdivision plus portions of the previous Takhini Elementary School area, which is now being governed by the First Nation School Board.

I definitely had an opportunity to welcome the newly established Whistle Bend Elementary School Council. The school council will have a very important role in guiding aspects of the school construction and will assume regular school council duties, such as hiring the principal once the school is closer to completion. Yes, it is in the five-year capital plan.

One of the things that really gives me a sense of pride is that we have a local construction company, Ketza Construction. They were very proud to take us through to have a look at the progress of the school. One of the points of pride that they pointed out is that the folks working on the site are Yukoners, from subcontractors all the way through. So, I think that is definitely a source of pride for the company but also for those who are working on-site. We definitely had folks talk to us about the fact that their children will be going to the school that they are building and that they are having that direct input into the future of their children.

Also, notably, before the actual construction started, Highways and Public Works and the Department of Education did a ceremony with Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council — a blessing ceremony of the land. As I have talked about before, we are really putting very specific intention into this construction that will help to shape our young Yukoners for generations to come. As we enter into all of these projects, that is how we are working. It is construction of a building, but it is so much more than that; it is an investment in the future of Yukon. We want to put all of that great energy into it, and that is what is unfolding through the planning process and through the construction. It is definitely a shift in how we do our work around decolonizing government, and we are doing things in a different way that truly puts intention — so, I think that the preamble to these questions around these important infrastructure constructions are not in the spirit of what we are doing with the education community. Of course, the local First Nation in Burwash Landing — we are working in a different way with our partners, and it is one that I am very proud of.

Mr. Kent: What I was merely pointing out was the discrepancy between the platform commitments of the Liberals and the actual delivery dates for when these projects are going to be complete — but, that said, I did make a commitment to the leader of the New Democrats, the Member for Takhini-Kopper King, to share the floor with her today, so I thank the officials for coming, and I will turn it over to my colleague from Takhini-Kopper King to finish the day, and hopefully, we get a chance of quite a few more questions. Hopefully, we get a chance to have Education back before the end of the Spring Sitting.

Ms. White: I thank my colleague for sharing the floor, and I am delighted, of course, to have the officials today in the Assembly with us. The first thing I want to talk about is the development of Department of Education policies. So, I have pulled up the student protection policy, which says: preventing and responding to harm by adults. Its effective date was September 29, 2022.

The first question I would have is: Without getting into details, was this policy created in response to events that have happened in Yukon schools?

Hon. Ms. McLean: There has been a lot of work that has happened over my almost two years as the Minister of Education. The health, safety, and well-being of students and staff is totally and completely our first priority. We have worked very hard, and I know that the member opposite is aware, of course, that there were situations that happened in a school in Yukon which resulted in a number of reviews, one of them being a review that I actually launched myself and which was done by Amanda Rogers.

We know that report was received and done within the time frames that we had laid out to have this work done in a timely manner and to have immediate action. It resulted in the safer schools action plan, which included 23 actions under seven recommendations. So, the safer schools policy that is referred to today is a direct result of action 6. So, we developed a student protection policy, preventing and responding to harm by adults, and related procedures and training in response to action 6 of the safer schools action plan.

The policy outlines our commitment to safeguard students while in the care of adults, while engaged in school-related activities, and, of course, there is a tremendous amount of work that has gone into the entire safer schools action plan, and there are other policies that are in place that we can discuss as we continue this discussion, such as the safe and caring schools policy and others that would pertain to the safety and well-being of students while they are in our care.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. So, I will just paraphrase and say, yes, it was created specifically in response. I can look at the website under Education Policies and, for example, I can see the moveable soccer goal safety at school facilities policy. So, that was a piece of legislation that was passed when there was a terrible incident in Watson Lake, so that's important.

When we go back to the student protection policy, it says that the purpose of the policy is: "To protect students from adult conduct that has caused or may cause harm to their wellbeing. Examples include conduct toward a student, that is: Abusive (i.e., physical harm, emotional harm, sexualized abuse, exploitation); or Otherwise considered inappropriate..."

Then, if I go over to the safe and caring schools policy, in the Principles, it talks about "School community members must exhibit behaviour that shows respect for the rights, property and safety of themselves and others." It goes through and it lists things, but the reason why I am bringing this up is that, during Question Period, I have asked the question about the development of policies, and so it is really clear that, when we go through all of these policies — and there is a great number of them on the website. You know, there is a lot — from educational use of copyright-protected work, framework for the provision of French first language instruction programs in the Yukon, off-site experiential learning policy, policy development process — there are all of these policies under the Department of Education, and they have all been written.

The one reason why I want to bring it up is that it says that the purpose of the policy is to provide clarity to the Department of Education staff and school community members on roles and responsibilities in relation to this policy. This one, specifically, is the student protection policy. But going through the student protection policy, it doesn't talk about student-on-student violence — specifically what happens if there is a sexual assault in school, out of school — it doesn't talk about that. It does really say though, in Principles — it says that it is a victim-centred approach, it talks about protection and prevention, creating safe and caring school environments, and then it goes down into Roles and Responsibilities — quote: “All Department of Education staff have a responsibility to work collaboratively with one another and with partner departments and organizations.” And it lists out what those responsibilities are.

The reason why I am bringing this up is that I really think that, in the example that I brought forward during Question Period, which was then followed up — the letter, you know — the minister was so upset with me that she wrote a letter to the editor, and I apologized. I didn't see that ahead of time, so I appreciate that the minister responded to that young person, but that doesn't change that young person's or that family's assertion that there should be a policy in schools.

In the communication that I received, including in Question Period, I was told that there were policies in place with the Department of Education that would address this. So, I have gone through them, including the one I am reading from right now — the student protection policy. I can go to the safe and caring schools policy, but the principles and then the standards of behaviour and all these things within the safe and caring schools policy don't highlight what would happen if there was an assault — like, a sexual assault — from one student to another.

I know that, prior to reaching out to the minister, I reached out to women's groups, and they were under the impression that, at one point in time, after the Child and Youth Advocate had made the recommendation, they had expected to be involved in writing a policy. We have recognized the importance of the creation of the sexualized assault response team through the Department of Justice because of how important — you know, what happens after a person has been a victim of a sexual assault. So, when I am going through these policies, I can't see one that addresses what happens if a student has been the victim of another student. I am hoping that the minister can point me to the policy that she believes answers that question, because I can't find it. I am just looking for some direction to find one that speaks specifically.

The reason why I brought up the student protection policy is because it very clearly lays out — very clearly lays out — when it says: “To protect students from adult conduct that has caused or may cause harm to their wellbeing.”

Then it says “Abusive”. Then it says, as an example, physical harm, emotional harm, sexualized abuse, or exploitation. It even says it there: “sexualized abuse”.

The reason why policies are so important and so powerful is that they lay out the steps that a school administration needs

to take. In this case, in this one that says it's protecting students from adults, it talks about how it is victim-centred — making sure that the victim is the centre of these decisions.

So, I would just like the minister to point me through — in the collection of policies — and I have them all online, so I will be able to find it when it gets mentioned to me — to where, in all of the Department of Education policies, there lies a policy that specifically deals with what happens if a student has been a victim of another — like, they have been victimized — sexual assault or physical assault — by another student.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, this is a very serious matter that I do not take lightly. We definitely work to support victims. Sexual assault, or sexualized violence, or violence of any kind is a very serious matter and has no place in society, much less in our schools. Any individual who has gone through this type of violence, my heart goes out to, because it is a very difficult thing to — especially, you know, for a young person to go through that type of traumatic experience.

I can always assure, of course, the House that, when those types of matters are brought to my attention, I follow up with those individuals and make sure that the supports are in place and that they are — that there are supports that are wrapping around that individual, because I think it is really vitally important. I have spent a lot of my time in government, since 2016 — and, of course, beyond — but in my role now really working to change our system, to unpack it and figure out what is not working — what does not work for folks who have gone through this type of violence?

So, the Department of Education definitely now has policies in place to address allegations of inappropriate behaviour, criminal activity, and abuse in schools. When we took office in 2016, there were limited policies in place to address violence in schools. We followed the Yukon's *Violence Threat Risk Assessment Protocol*, which is designed to respond to violent behaviour or threats by a student. That is an important one; that wasn't in place when we took office.

In 2018, our government introduced the safe and caring schools policy, which is an overarching policy that focuses on keeping schools safe. We also created — and I will talk more about it, as it relates to school settings — the sexualized assault response team, also known as “SART”, which is available 24/7 for victims of sexualized assault. This is a safe and confidential network to help individuals navigate the aftermath of these kinds of horrible situations. We take all allegations seriously and work with our partners, including school counselors and the RCMP, to ensure that these matters are investigated and addressed appropriately.

In terms of the approach that we have taken around sexual assault response as it relates to young people and its application, SART has a specific protocol relating to schools. The Government of Yukon, of course, as I have stated, takes allegations of student-to-student sexual assault or any type of violence very seriously. Education staff work with partners to ensure that incidents are investigated and addressed promptly. The students and staff can access supports through the sexualized assault response team — SART. The SART team provides victim-centered, trauma-informed services and

supports for victims of sexualized violence to people of all ages, genders, and sexual orientations, including children and youth and their families.

Children and youth can access any of the SART agencies either through the SART support line or directly through one of the partner agencies, including Victim Services, Whitehorse General Hospital, RCMP, and Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services. These agencies have committed to provide care in line with SART principals outlined — and we recently signed that protocol — and to coordinate with services in a manner that is consistent with the victim's choice.

There is a tremendous amount of information I can provide, and perhaps what I will do is, as I am going through this question, I can commit to bringing back some information for the member opposite about some high-level information about the protocol that's in place as it relates to SART application in schools, because I think it's important. I have been clear that I am willing to review our policies and procedures to make sure that they are meeting the intended outcome. I think that there was also a discussion about training or the lack of training. I think that was something that was brought forward.

I have gone back through, and I will talk a little bit about it right now, because it is really important that we get this right and that we work closely with government and non-governmental partners to promote safe schools in response to concerns of safety. Again, the safe and caring schools policy, the student protection policy, the sexual orientation and gender identity policy, non-violent crisis intervention training, available cyber bullying resources, and presentations with guest speakers — these are some examples of how we promote respectful and safe school environments in our schools.

We do take training very seriously. We know that we need to be providing the proper training to our education professionals to be able to have the knowledge and the skills to be able to respond to these delicate situations that can arise. I can go through some of that, or I can provide a bit more information to the member around the levels of training that our education professionals go through to be able to respond in an appropriate, supportive way, without judgment of the individuals going through these situations.

Ms. White: I almost don't know how to respond, to be honest, because a problem has been highlighted. The minister now is in reception of it — has received a second letter from a different incident. The only thing that I am really asking for is to develop a specific policy that deals with this.

I guess the question I have is — I can't imagine that anyone in Education would think that the victim of a sexual assault should have to be in a classroom with their assailant or in the hallways with their assailant, but there are no policies. There is a policy on vaping and smoking — around tobacco, specifically — that lays out expectations of how things are going to be dealt with. All I want is a policy.

I think that there are reasons to create a specific policy so that it clearly lays out to administration and to school communities that it should be centred around the victim — that an individual shouldn't have to see their abuser in the hallway

or that they shouldn't have to make a request to be removed from a classroom or have the assailant removed from a classroom.

So, all I am asking is that the Department of Education create a policy. I never thought that I would be speaking about this more than in the letter I wrote. I thought that this would be a no-brainer where — based on all of the experience that the minister has, which I have a huge amount of respect for — we could see that the best way forward is just to create a policy.

I am going to leave it there and just say that I really hope that the minister and her department can look at that and can look toward creating a policy. I will just give her an opportunity before I move on. I will be talking about something different next.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I respect the conversation that is happening here today. I have not said no to a policy. I wanted to point out all of the good work that has happened. As we wrap up the safer schools action plan, I am looking to the next steps. What are the other things we need to do to ensure that our schools are safe and that we have the right policies in place to ensure that — anyone experiencing any level of trauma or violence, particularly if it happens in a school setting — we have the very best response? So, I am looking to those next steps on the safer schools action plan as we wrap up, as I have said.

You will be hearing about the wrap-up of that action plan soon, in terms of meeting all of those 23 items that we worked across government on to ensure we have the right systems and approaches in place at that level. Now I am looking to what comes next. What do we need to do next to ensure that students are supported, that we are taking all of the necessary steps, and that educational professionals are supported in managing situations in school settings? I am looking forward to those next steps with the safer schools action plan. The member opposite will, I'm sure, have a lot of input, as well as all of our other partners who work with us on these important matters in Yukon.

Ms. White: I look forward to just a positive response, which is that a policy will be created. I am just going to highlight for the department that when I am back on the floor the next time, I will be talking about the SOGI policy. I have questions about that.

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

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King 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: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 26, entitled *Act to amend the Municipal Act (2023)*, and directed me to report the bill without amendment.

Committee of the Whole has also 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 now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

The following documents were filed April 5, 2023:

35-1-141

Access to prescription contraceptives, letter re (dated March 3, 2023) from Kate White, Leader of the Third Party to Tracy-Anne McPhee, Minister of Health and Social Services (White)

35-1-142

Contraceptives, letter re (dated April 3, 2023) from Tracy-Anne McPhee, Minister of Health and Social Services to Kate White, Leader of the Third Party (White)