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HANSARD

Thursday, April 27, 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

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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
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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, April 27, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I would like to welcome two people to the House this afternoon. We have Teresa Acheson from the Yukon Federation of Labour and Kurt Dieckmann, president of the Yukon Workers' Safety and Compensation Board. They are here for the Day of Mourning tribute this afternoon.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Clarke: For the Highways and Public Works grader station employees tribute, I would like to welcome to the House: Bobbie Milnes, director; Amy Tyrrell, office administrative supervisor; Mackenzie Ingram, superintendent, operational support unit; Scott Mueller, eastern area superintendent; Kelly Dewdney, manager of mechanical operations; Kevin Boutilier, superintendent of special projects; Dain Steiner, foreperson; Calvin Hoogland, also a foreperson; Geoff Hann, safety trainer; Angie Dickson, also a safety trainer; and Sarah Beisick, safety and training administrative assistant. Welcome to the Assembly.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am going to ask my colleagues to help me welcome a number of visitors we have here today for the tribute to the 150th anniversary of the RCMP.

With us today is: Chief Superintendent Scott Sheppard, Commanding Officer; Superintendent Lindsay Ellis, Officer in Charge, Criminal Operations; Staff Sergeant Major Rob Morin, Professional Responsibility unit; Staff Sergeant Kent Langley, Acting Officer in Charge, District Operations and Support Services; Staff Sergeant Eric Lane, NCO in Charge, Plainclothes unit; Staff Sergeant Jonathan Saxby, Criminal Operations Analyst; Sergeant Dustin Grant, Acting Officer in Charge, Whitehorse detachment; Sergeant Greg Holmberg, Acting District Advisory NCO; Corporal Brent Edwards, Acting Operations NCO, Whitehorse detachment; Sergeant Kim Sarson, NCO in Charge, Forensic Identification Services; Corporal Tim Anderson, Watch Commander, Whitehorse detachment; Constable Nikki Perro, Whitehorse detachment; Special Constable Scott Olafson, pilot, Air Services Section; and Sergeant Major Doug Spencer, retired member.

We also have with us Mark Radke, the Deputy Minister of Justice, and Ian Davis, Assistant Deputy Minister of Justice.

Thank you all for taking the time to be here today.
Applause

TRIBUTES

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Pursuant to Standing Order 14(3) and notwithstanding Standing Order 11(6), I request the unanimous consent of the House for the time allotted for the rubric Tributes today to exceed 20 minutes.

Unanimous consent to exceed 20 minutes for Tributes

Speaker: The Government House Leader has, pursuant to Standing Order 14(3) and notwithstanding Standing Order 11(6), requested unanimous consent of the House for the time allotted for the rubric Tributes today to exceed 20 minutes.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Unanimous consent has been granted.
 Are there any tributes?

In recognition of the National Day of Mourning

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to tribute the National Day of Mourning, which happens tomorrow.

On this day, we remember those who have lost their lives or suffered injury or illness at work. Why do we put safety at the forefront of every single job? We do it so all Yukoners can return home to their loved ones at the end of the day. That's why we learn, train, and remain vigilant when it comes to identifying hazards and donning personal protective equipment. Every workplace injury is preventable and every Yukoner is entitled to return home to their loved ones in the same condition they left for work.

Last year, one person died. They did not return to their loved ones at the end of the day. Mr. Speaker, one death has a ripple effect in any community. In our small territory, that ripple is more like a wave.

I will just take a minute to pause and pay tribute to this life lost. Another 780 workers were injured on the job last year — 780. Of those, 447 were so seriously injured that they lost time from work. The fact is that new workers and those returning to work after six months are at a higher risk of injury. Training to stay safe on the job is not something you do once and never again. It is continuous. You can't let your guard down; you can't grow complacent. That means continuously being aware, learning, and growing. Workplace health and safety is a mindset and we are all in this together. It is a collaboration between workers and employers throughout the Yukon — collaboration to ensure that we come home at the end of the day.

While working at the compensation board, I was sometimes challenged about the goal of zero injuries. I was told by some that it was impossible. A response to that assertion is easy. Look around the room, Mr. Speaker. Pick someone. Tell them that today they are not going to go home to their loved ones. Because if zero is not your goal, that's the trade-off — sacrificing someone. Zero is the goal. It must be the goal.

Anything else is simply not acceptable. So, be vigilant, be present, wear the gear, identify the hazards, look out for your co-workers, look out for yourself — come home to your loved ones, safe and sound.

The Yukon's Day of Mourning will take place at the workers memorial in Shipyards Park at 12:15 p.m. tomorrow. It will also be livestreamed on the Yukon Federation of Labour's Facebook page and the Yukon Federation of Labour's website.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize the National Day of Mourning held annually on April 28 in dedication to all those who have lost their lives or been injured on the job. Each year we gather and pledge our commitment to improving workplace safety so that we don't have to watch that numeric counter at the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board building increase. We have all seen that tracker and know what it means. Throughout the year as the number climbs, it means that more individuals have been injured in the workplace. Sometimes those injuries are fatal. The pain that results from each injury or loss is felt across the community. In a tight-knit place such as the Yukon, many are affected.

Tomorrow our community will come together at Shipyards Park to reflect and remember those who have been injured or lost their lives on the job.

Yukoners are encouraged to once again make a commitment to take the necessary steps and precautions to end accidents in the workplace, to work together, and to look out for our own safety and that of our co-workers, employees, and friends. We share a common goal — zero injuries and safe workplaces. The health and safety regulations are there. They are in place to help us ensure that everyone makes it home safely from work each day.

So, please, be responsible, be safe, and be mindful of others.

Applause

Ms. White: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon NDP caucus to recognize and honour the National Day of Mourning for workers injured or killed on the job. This tribute never gets easier — never once.

I am just one of the countless Canadians deeply affected by the Day of Mourning. For us, this is a day of deep contemplation, sadness, and regret.

How many new family and friends are feeling this new heartache of loss this April and how many new people will be joining ceremonies across the country? For some, this will be the first time because they have been impacted by lives that were lost or changed this year by workplace injuries or accidents.

There are countless numbers of Canadians who feel like I do and feel the very real loss of a loved one, a family member, a friend or a colleague who was taken away long before their time. Families, workplaces, and communities are never the same after one of these losses. I wish that Yukon families had

been spared this burden and were not included in these ranks, but we are and we continue to be. Those left behind all try to figure it out. They try to find the hidden meaning behind that loss and somehow make sense of the senselessness. It pains me deeply that people across the country and here at home are wrestling with these feelings of loss and heartache.

When we get up in the morning, going through our normal routine before heading out the door, how many of us stop and think that this may be the last time I do this? Maybe tomorrow my life will be different. We don't and we shouldn't because no one should live with these fears looming around the corner. But there exists a sad reality that there is no guarantee that you or the one you love will make it home from work. That's why we have the Day of Mourning to remember those who didn't make it home.

Every April, we mourn the lives that were cut short or were forever altered due to injury or illness. Loss is never easy but the unexpected loss to a workplace incident is indescribable. The Day of Mourning is more than just a ceremony or a pledge. It's about people and families. We honour those lives that have been dramatically altered, we honour those lives that were lost or changed, and we honour those who are left behind to do the remembering. We continue to pledge to do better and we pledge to keep each other safe.

Applause

In recognition of highways maintenance crews

Hon. Mr. Clarke: On behalf of the Government of Yukon, I rise today to thank the crews who maintain our highways and roads from the White Pass to the Dempster Highway, from Beaver Creek to Watson Lake. It is an immense responsibility to keep roads open and safe for all Yukoners and travellers. Our public service maintains nearly 5,000 kilometres of roads and most of this network is maintained all year.

The Transportation Maintenance branch employs approximately 280 people year-round. In the summer, that number rises to more than 300, thanks to seasonal workers. Throughout the year, many dedicated staff work far from home, stationed in maintenance camps. Many work late nights and early mornings.

Our crews also respond to emergencies. Sometimes they are first on the scene of a road collision and work alongside police or firefighters. They also respond to natural disasters. Every season, the team is there. The crew mitigates and responds to avalanches, particularly on the south Klondike Highway. In the spring, they respond to flooding and washouts. In the summer, our road maintenance teams have a role in keeping people safe and informed if there is a wildfire. They also respond to landslides as we recently saw on the north Klondike Highway.

Even during normal operations, the Yukon can be a challenging place to work. Our crews work outside in the cold, in the dark, and in remote places. They maintain ferry service at Ross River and Dawson City. We are so fortunate that this territory has such a dedicated and knowledgeable workforce. That is because transportation is the key to so much here in the Yukon. Their work deserves to be recognized.

Mr. Speaker, Highways and Public Works is a very broad department with many different roles. I recognize that every one of our workers has an important role, from engineers who design bridges, to maintenance staff who keep the roads safe, to those who are behind the scenes. It takes a remarkable team effort to keep our network open.

I will end this tribute with a reminder to check 511 Yukon for the latest road conditions and I wish everyone happy and safe travels this summer. I hope that you will find our road system safe and that we can all thank the people who work everyday to make that possible.

Applause

Mr. Hassard: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the hard-working men and women who keep our roadways safe throughout the year.

The work they do allows Yukoners and all those who travel to and through our beautiful territory to do so safely. We can see a fair amount of snow throughout the winter across the Yukon and it often accumulates quickly and without much warning. As many Yukoners commute through the territory for work or recreation, it's imperative that they are able to do so on clear and safe roads.

During a snowfall, our Highways and Public Works crews work with staff to monitor incoming weather, plan routes, and prepare equipment. They head out throughout the night, clearing and sanding with precision and professionalism so we can get to our destinations safely.

We thank all those who help to create safer driving conditions throughout the winter and maintain our roadways year-round. Your efforts and your dedication are very much appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that Kevin Boutilier might actually get around to retiring this year so we certainly wish him all the best in his future career, which I am sure will include a lot of hunting and fishing — so, all the best.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to the amazing people who maintain our highways. We all depend on highways. Some Yukoners need them to travel to Whitehorse for essential services. Others count on highways to visit family and friends in neighbouring communities and still others of us are grateful to have access to our favourite camping, paddling, and hunting spots.

The Yukon has thousands of kilometres of highways that need constant upkeep to withstand the wear and tear of traffic, northern weather conditions, and climate change. It is an incredible feat of logistics to keep these long, remote stretches of road in good driving condition and somehow the team at Highways and Public Works gets it done. From operators to camp cooks, from mechanics to the logistics people back at the office, there are a whole lot of people working hard to keep our highways safe and passable.

It can be easy to take that work for granted but our highways don't stay driveable by accident. So, next time you are driving on a highway, take a moment to think about all the

work that goes into making sure that you can get where you're going.

Thank you to the amazing team at Highways and Public Works.

Applause

In recognition of Royal Canadian Mounted Police

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for 150 years of service to the Canadian public — 150 years of keeping us safe and secure, peacekeeping, supporting communities by land, air and water, and learning from past experiences and challenges — 150 years of always striving to fairly uphold our rights and our laws, of putting their lives on the line for others, of being completely selfless.

It is my honour to recognize this milestone along with the 150th anniversary of the Yukon Territory — 150 years ago, Parliament established the North-West Mounted Police, which would eventually become the RCMP. The RCMP has evolved from a northern policing agency guarding the Chilkoot Pass and taking adventurous dog patrols through the Yukon wilderness, into a diverse, national organization working to keep Canadians safe from coast to coast to coast.

This historic anniversary gives us the opportunity to reflect on the history of the RCMP, the memorable milestones, and personal stories of unforgettable officers who left their mark while also acknowledging the advancements and achievements of the force.

For more than 30 years, I have had the honour to work with many outstanding members of the RCMP from near and far. The RCMP is committed to moving forward, to becoming more modern, diverse and inclusive, and to rebuilding trust from the ground up in areas where it has been broken. It is no secret that there are some darker chapters in the 150 years and the RCMP does not shy away from this. They have committed to look at the past with humility, embracing those difficult conversations, and demonstrating that action has and will continue to be taken to learn through reconciliation and beyond.

Every day, RCMP officers do something many of us cannot fathom. They leave for work and do not know if they will make it back home. Bravery, honesty, compassion, integrity, respect, and clear communication — these are all core values of the RCMP M Division and they embody this on a daily basis in their work not only in law enforcement but in crime prevention, investigations, assistance with emergency situations, and community activities.

RCMP M Division members have also embraced policing innovation. We have the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program, our crime reduction unit, our mobile crisis unit — also known as “Car 867” — our Historical Case Unit, our sexualized assault response team, and our integrated restorative justice unit. This just names a few of the critical partnerships that benefit Yukoners.

Happy anniversary to the RCMP. The Yukon thanks you for your heroic dedication in keeping our communities safe and supported.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition and the NDP to pay tribute to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or RCMP, on their 150th anniversary on May 23.

There are a few milestones that must be mentioned as we travel through those 150 years. In 1873, Ottawa passed the act to form the North-West Mounted Police. In 1898, with the discovery of gold and the influx of gold seekers, the police force, led by Sam Steele, was dispatched to the newest territory, Yukon, to enforce Canadian law and maintain the peace. In 1904, King Edward VII assigned the mark “Royal”, hence the Royal North-West Mounted Police, and in 1920, Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

From the start, First Nations and Inuit, hired as special constables, worked as guides and scouts. The special constable program expanded and gradually they could become full members if they chose. On May 23, 1974, women could join as regular members and Yukon had many who rose within the ranks.

There are many stories of the north that can be shared but, due to time, I cannot do them justice. The Mad Trapper of Rat River and the Lost Patrol were two such stories. With the Mountie image, the folklore captivated Hollywood and books so much so that the RCMP had to ensure their image was portrayed with dignity and correctness by providing a member to check content.

Many branches of the RCMP are well known: the protection assignment, most notably for the Governor General of Canada, the Prime Minister, and some federal ministers, as well as diplomatic detail. Those who serve as Aides-de-Camp for the Lieutenant Governors and Commissioners, thank you.

The ERT sections are emergency response teams who train to become an elite group of sharpshooters and tactical team members for crisis situations. My nephew, Patrick Ellis, was a member of the BC Southeast District ERT as a sniper assault team member for 13 years, and I’m so proud of him.

The RCMP just gifted King Charles a horse in celebration of the 150th anniversary and his coronation to be held on May 6. It is a tradition to gift a horse to the ruling monarch, but not just any horse — but Noble, a veteran of the RCMP’s Musical Ride with 90 public performances. The Musical Ride is a must-see, and looking at the Musical Ride schedule, they are due in Yukon next in 2026.

Take time to thank a police member for their work and commitment. They appreciate the support and acknowledgement of their duties. Best wishes to past and current RCMP members and staff, and to those who lost their lives in the line of duty, rest in peace. Three m’s — mountains, moose, and Mounties — are iconic to Canada and our identity.

The RCMP ceremonial dress, consisting of the red serge, breeches, high boots, and Stetson hat, are so Canadian. Today, I add a fourth “M”: moose, mountains, Mounties, and M Division. Thank you.

Applause

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Speaker: Under Tabling Returns and Documents, the Chair has for tabling, pursuant to section 18 of the *Human Rights Act*, the annual report of the Yukon Human Rights Commission.

Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I have three legislative returns for tabling today: the first, answering questions from debate on March 16 about how private schools are accredited; the second provides clarity on taxi services from debate on April 3; and the final return is from budget debate on April 5 related to the First Nation School Board.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I have for tabling 10 legislative returns: one is a response to a written question by the Member for Copperbelt North, and nine are responses to several members of the House pertaining to debate in Committee of the Whole on Bill No. 207, and Bill No. 208 on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House congratulates Darren Taylor on his recent election as chief-elect of the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in, as well as deputy chief-elect Erin McQuaig and councillors Kylie Van Every, Kyrie Nagano, and Ryan Peterson.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to provide more funding to the RCMP to help them meet the growing needs in the Yukon, including responding to the substance use health emergency by increasing police resources to tackle organized crime and the illegal drug trade.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Health and Social Services to increase the availability of addictions treatment services and aftercare, including in rural communities.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon Liberal government to address the needs and concerns of front-line service providers in Highways and Public Works grader stations by taking actions, including the following:

(1) increasing operation and maintenance budgets so roads can be maintained to a better standard;

(2) fully staffing each camp, including operators and mechanics;

- (3) keeping all camps open year-round;
- (4) spending capital funds on the Yukon's neglected highways including the north Alaska Highway and the Dempster Highway; and
- (5) brushing overgrown sections to improve public safety.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Overview of government activities

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I rise today to highlight our government's accomplishments during the 2023 Spring Sitting of the Legislative Assembly. It would be challenging to capture everything and impossible to measure the impacts to be seen in the years to come.

We began this Sitting by tabling the 2023-24 budget. The budget and five-year capital plan outlined the steps that our government is taking to build a Yukon where everyone has a place to call "home". We are working hard to make life more affordable. When we pass this budget, we will have: increased the Yukon child benefit to put more money in the pockets of families; extended the inflation relief rebate for the third time, saving money on the bills of Yukon electricity ratepayers; increased inflation relief payments to recipients of the Yukon seniors income supplement; provided millions in subsidies and supports for renters; extended the universal childcare program, which saves parents up to \$700 per month per child; and invested \$8.7 million in affordable housing in community housing development.

This is just some of what we are doing to respond to inflationary pressures on Yukoners and Yukon families. We know that young people are our greatest resource. We are reimagining our schools, creating an education system that works for all young Yukoners by engaging in public consultations on the future of Whitehorse schools and investing in rural education professionals, and the budget for 2023-24 is investing \$27.3 million for new schools and upgrades at existing schools and Yukon University.

We are delivering on our commitments to advance capital projects in education and we are close to completing the new Whistle Bend school and moving forward with construction on the new public school in Burwash Landing.

We are significantly strengthening our health care system. Some highlights include the launch for a new program that expands access to dental services across the territory — a first-in-Canada initiative that we are proud to partner with the Yukon NDP to support. We increased access to health care through the Find a Primary Care Provider program and programs that expand the scope of practice for pharmacists. We secured an increase to the territorial health investment fund from the federal government and we are also making significant investments in mental health supports across the territory.

Still, the substance use health emergency continues to have a profound and devastating impact on each and every Yukoner. I am going to take a moment to acknowledge all of those we have lost and the pain that their absences leave behind. We remain committed to working with First Nation governments

and community partners to build community-driven responses to the substance use health emergency, expanding access to treatment and recovery services, increasing access to safe supply, implementing harm-reduction strategies, and increasing public education and awareness about the dangers of substance use and how to be safe.

Mr. Speaker, my time for this statement is almost over but I look forward to hearing from my colleagues across the aisle before I continue to provide information about the work of our government over this past Sitting.

Mr. Dixon: Well, it should come as no surprise to anyone that we have a different take on the Spring Sitting and the Liberals' 2023-24 budget than the Premier does.

When we started this Sitting, we indicated that we had hoped to see a new approach from the new Premier. We wanted to see a new direction, a new vision, and some new ideas from the Premier and his government. Unfortunately, that has not occurred.

The defining direction of this government continues to come from the confidence and supply agreement with the NDP. Just about every single new policy or program that the Liberals have brought forward comes from their commitments to the NDP. From the increase to the Yukon child benefit, the new dental program, the new rent control policies that have disrupted the rental market, to the flawed paid sick leave program introduced this week, these are all programs and policies that we know would not have happened without the CASA, for better or for worse.

Unfortunately, the measures that come from outside the CASA are simply more of the same. It is the same old team with the same old policies. Unfortunately, time doesn't permit me to list the multitude of reasons that the Yukon Party Official Opposition will be voting against this government and their budget later today, but let's start with what was discussed yesterday. We highlighted the fact that Yukoners continue to be buried by the cost of living and rising inflation. The numbers don't lie; we have the highest rate of inflation in the country. Simply put, the Liberals' inflation measures are not working. In the words of my colleague from Kluane, we won't be voting for a government with the worst record on the cost of living in the country.

Let me turn to capital projects. The current budget shows that we are in a net debt position and that the forecast shows that things will only get worse. Meanwhile, just about every single large capital project that this government has underway is delayed or overbudget or on track for both of those things: the Nisutlin Bay bridge, the Whitehorse airport, the Dawson rec centre, the gymnastics facility here in Whitehorse — the list goes on and on. How these cost overruns are going to be paid for remains an open question. The feds are tightening their belts and the major infrastructure funds like the ICIP have run their course and have not been replaced. The Yukon contracting community is certainly well aware of all of this and they are just as worried as we are.

On to health care. We continue to hear from health care providers that the Liberals' promises are not being met with

action. We have heard that the morale of the medical community has never been lower than it is today. The red tape being heaped on doctors combined with government's inability to pay their bills on time is creating massive challenges for the recruitment and retention of doctors. All of this at a time when thousands of Yukoners don't have a family doctor. Wait times continue to grow, the hospital continues to be underfunded, and yet the minister stands today and says that things are going to be fine. Well, Mr. Speaker, yet again, we respectfully disagree.

When the budget is called for a vote later today, we will absolutely be voting against it, not just because it's taking us in the wrong direction, but because we don't have confidence in this government or this Premier. Quite frankly, we don't think that Yukoners do either.

Ms. White: I won't lie to this House when I say that I was surprised at the theme of today's ministerial statement, so today I won't be going through a long laundry list of things that the Liberals didn't get done in this Sitting because that's too easy. As a cheerleader, frankly, it's not my style. Instead of criticizing what I don't like about this government, I'm going to celebrate the second anniversary of the signing of the first confidence and supply agreement.

Two years ago, what some people said in this House was impossible became possible. Two years ago when we, as the Yukon NDP, ran a full slate of fantastic candidates and released an 84-page platform, we were told by the Liberals and the Yukon Party that what we were asking for was too much for Yukoners and that it just wasn't possible. I will remind the Premier that, during that election, it was his party that shared a meme of a giant boat stuck in the Suez Canal and compared it to the vision that the NDP put forward. They captioned a small machine trying to get it unstuck as the Yukon's budget, yet here we are, and in the same way that the small and determined piece of machinery got that huge boat unstuck, our small and determined team pushed forward and has made huge gains for Yukoners.

Fascinatingly, even after agreeing to two CASAs with many of the impossible requests, the Liberals have reported a surplus. It turns out that when people in positions of power say that something can't be done, it's not always true.

After the April 12 election results in 2021, the Yukon found itself in a minority government situation. It meant that parties would have to work together and the Liberals had no other choice but to listen and to work with us if they wanted to remain in government. Suddenly, our impossible ideas became feasible. Our vision for a better Yukon became possible because the political will was finally there. The impossible became possible.

When I talked about how important an increase to minimum wage was for Yukoners during the 2021 election, the Minister of Community Services told me that my inexperience was showing, but now, two years later, the historic increase to minimum wage has made it possible for more workers to live with dignity, so maybe it was the minister's lack of vision for this territory that was showing that day.

There is the new dental plan, which has now changed the lives of thousands of people who are now able to go to the dentist without draining their savings or going into debt to get the health care that they need. This program is changing lives. We have heard from folks who have been able to go to the dentist for the first time in years and from people who were able to get dentures they need for the first time ever. This is truly one of my proudest accomplishments.

The supervised consumption site is serving hundreds of people every month and saves precious lives every day. Thanks to the rent cap and ban on no-cause evictions, tenants no longer have to live in fear of being served an unethical and completely unaffordable rent increase. They don't have to fear becoming homeless after being evicted for no reason. It also means that Yukoners are no longer being priced out of the territory they call "home".

The bolder climate targets that we negotiated have been legislated, which means that the government must respect them, and this will give us a fighting chance against climate change.

Some workers now have access to their first-ever paid sick leave and they can stay home when sick without being worried about how they will afford groceries. This move would not have been made without the NDP's push through creating the Making Work Safe committee. This is just the first step, though, because we know this government program leaves many out, so we'll continue to fight to ensure that everyone has the access that they deserve.

All of these incredible achievements were labelled "impossible" two years ago by both the Liberals and the Yukon Party, but the Yukon NDP knows that when we fight hard for people, when we dare to lay out a bold and bright vision for what the future can look like, it can become reality.

In 2011, Jack Layton penned a final letter to Canadians where he said — and I quote: "Don't let them tell you it can't be done. My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we'll change the world."

Two years ago, we put forward a vision that was filled with love, hope, and optimism, and tomorrow is the second anniversary of when the impossible became possible.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate some of the comments from opposition members. I have to say that there has been a lot of good work coming out of the CASA. I support that, of course.

I remind the Yukon Party that they committed to making the same CASA deal that the Leader of the Official Opposition, who just went through a number of critiques about it but, of course, had committed — whether it was supported by his caucus or not, that is what was commented on publicly.

When I think about what we are talking about today, we think that the work we are doing — whether it was bringing to the table the work that the minister just talked about today with Car 867, the new long-term care rooms that we have put in place in Watson Lake, progress on implementation of *Our Clean Future* or *Putting People First* reports and engagements, or the future of Whitehorse schools, we think that those are

important things. We think that work is key versus the opposition focusing on me.

I will go back; I think there are a couple of points I should touch on.

It's interesting — there are some key points from the Leader of the Official Opposition about, first of all, the consumer price index and then he patted the back of the Member for Kluane on those numbers. Yet if you go back a year ago and add all the numbers together over that period — if you look at what is happening right now in the Yukon — not accurate.

Debt — when I think about debt and I look at the books, the majority of debt was put in place, even to this day — not seven years, but six and a half years later — actually, the member who is speaking off-mic contributed to probably most of it. The debt that is in place was here when we got here and that is the debt that we have worked around. The Member for Lake Laberge will remember the \$40-million “I don't know how I'm paying it back” loan — so, yes, there are some of those pieces.

We talk about global effects — global effects of supply chain. Yes, projects are more expensive. Everybody knows that; every government in the world knows that. It is not a localized problem; it is not a regional problem. Those are challenges that we are seeing — inflation across the globe, supply chain across the globe — and that does make it more challenging, again, to build things.

The Minister of Health and Social Services and I sat with leadership from across the different professional regimes that provide health on the front lines, whether it be the Yukon Medical Association — regulatory for nurses — union members. Yes, you know what? I think there is lots of work to be done — not just here, but everywhere in the country when it comes to that work. But that is work that I think is moving in the right direction, work that the minister is committed to, work that I am committed to. Again, this is not some regional challenge. There are lots of things that we will work on with folks in the health field — and, again, continue to see great health care delivered and a transformative *Putting People First* plan, which Yukoners wanted. That is the work that we have heard from.

Again, the Member for Lake Laberge put a motion on the floor today to put more money into the RCMP. The budget we will vote on today has \$3 million more, if I remember, for the RCMP, over and above. What an amazing opportunity: a motion on the floor today, which we didn't get to debate, saying, “I want more money”, and a budget that gives more money, and an opportunity to vote on that, but you know what will happen? I don't know. I know. Is there real strength behind that motion? Do you believe in that motion? Because you have an opportunity to back that motion today.

I think, when I look back at this team, and I look at what we have done with First Nations schools, Minister McLean —

Speaker: Order, please.

This then brings us to the Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Confidence and supply agreement impact

Mr. Dixon: In the first question this Sitting, I asked the Premier why he signed the CASA when it was so clearly terrible for the Yukon business community. I pointed out that there was no mention of the economy, small businesses, or the private sector anywhere in the CASA.

What there was, though, for Yukon businesses, was a pile of new regulations, red tape, and new costs to doing business. What I didn't know at the time, though, Mr. Speaker, was that the Liberals were just getting started.

Over the course of this Sitting, we have heard more and more about the many ways the Liberal government is hindering the private sector and creating obstacles to success for Yukon businesses. Yukon businesses thought it was CASA taking them in the wrong direction, but it turns out it is worse: it's the person steering the ship.

When will the Liberal government stop their blatant attacks on the private sector?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: It's always difficult taking advice on the private sector and business from many folks who have spent their entire professional career in the public service and not in business, but I will go back to my experience working in the private sector — owning businesses, running businesses. At 7:30 this morning, I had breakfast with the Yukon Chamber of Commerce, the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber of Mines, as well as the First Nation Chamber — very happy faces, because we just rolled out what is a leading program in the country when it comes to sick leave provisions — a new concept, a new idea — something we have not seen anywhere else in Canada.

So, a new idea supporting business. We talked about other things that have happened in the last six and a half years — the elimination of the small business tax, which no other jurisdiction has done; the general sales tax going from 15 percent to 12 percent; the millions of dollars that we are putting into supporting our labour force; and the fact that we have had the strongest economy, over that period of time, in the entire country because of the work of the private sector and the investment.

The facts are the facts. We have an extremely strong — we have led the country. We continue to lead the country — first year of over a billion in retail spending. I think it speaks for itself. Things are thriving when it comes to the economy. Throw rocks, but we know that the facts are the facts.

Mr. Dixon: Coming into this Sitting, we knew about the challenges that were posed by CASA for the private sector, but we didn't know that the Liberals were just getting started. Over the past few weeks, we have heard about the mountains of red tape that this government has heaped onto doctors. We have heard about policy changes at the Land Titles Office that, according to Yukon contractors, will “... add red tape and negatively impact the housing market...”, and we have heard about the government's plans for an EPR recycling system that, according to the Retail Council of Canada, will disproportionately affect small retail businesses here in Yukon.

The hits on the private sector just keep coming from this Liberal government.

When will the Liberal government stop trying to bury small business in red tape and start taking steps to actually help them succeed?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: There's a challenge with the billing system that the minister has been working on for doctors for billing. There was a conversation about pollution and the conversation about who should pay for that, and the work that has been done on consultation. There was one other thing, and that molehill has now been made into a mountain that things are horrible and the economy is bad; we're steering the ship, and things are bad. No, what is happening is that we are leading, quarter after quarter, in our growth as a territory.

As said yesterday by the Member for Porter Creek North, the strength, and where we're seeing in tourism, the growth in tourism — the growth in winter tourism — it has been said by the Yukon Party themselves. We're seeing the knowledge-based economy continue to grow. We're seeing diversification when it comes to technology and digital. We're seeing mining still strong and some of the biggest players in the world coming into the territory.

Built on a foundation of reconciliation, so yes, if there are ideas that you want to know that are not new for us, that we are going to stick with, it's reconciliation, building on that, ensuring that there is an economy that is modern, and ensuring that we work with the private sector, but all Yukoners — not just some — all Yukoners have an opportunity to play in this economy.

Mr. Dixon: Unfortunately, the reality is that the actions of this government don't match the words of this Premier. All we have seen from this government since the Premier came to office have been bad policies made worse. All we have seen is new and innovative ways to hold the private sector back and creative new strategies to stymie small business. They have come up with new regulations and policies at the weigh scales that are tying up the trucking industry. We have seen logjams in licensing that have created issues for the tourism industry. I won't even start on what they're doing to our placer miners.

The simple fact is that there has never been a government as bad for business as this one, so I ask again: When will the Liberal government stop their attack on the private sector?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I guess the simple question is: If this government is so bad for business, why has business never been better?

Question re: *Our Clean Future* implementation

Mr. Kent: Over the course of this Spring Sitting, Yukoners have seen the holes appearing in the Liberals' energy strategy. The minister has told us that the Atlin hydro project is on thin ice because of a massive funding shortfall. Projects like the grid-scale battery and demand-side management are either overbudget, delayed, or both, and the Moon Lake project, which was originally scheduled to come online in 2028, has now been pushed well into the 2030s.

Meanwhile, the minister has announced that they will be spending close to \$50 million on new permanent diesel

generators, and the number of rented diesels will grow to 22 and are being deployed across the Yukon.

So, can the minister tell Yukoners if this crumbling energy strategy will meet the legislated greenhouse gas targets by 2030 with such a heavy reliance on fossil fuels?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Just a reminder: the Yukon Party voted against the *Clean Energy Act*, and the Yukon Party's proposal to deal with energy is to build diesel plants and/or LNG plants. So, are we replacing our out-of-date and end-of-lifetime permanent diesels that we use for backup? Yes, we are. Has that always been part of the plan? Yes, it has. Are costs higher than originally anticipated? Yes, they are. That is true for the Atlin project; it is also true for diesel generators — so, prices have gone up and so has the price of fuel, by the way, which is the reason that we want to work to get off fossil fuels.

Look, we have a plan to transition our energy economy away from our reliance on fossil fuels. I know that the Yukon Party doesn't support it, but for Yukoners, it is important that we work on that plan together. Will there be challenges along the way? Absolutely. It is a hard transition, but it is an important one, and I want to thank the Yukon Energy Corporation and the Yukon Development Corporation for their hard work to realize that strategy.

Mr. Kent: We voted against the expanded targets because the Liberals and this minister don't have a plan to meet them. The original *Our Clean Future* documents had targets of 30-percent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions below 2010 levels by 2030. When the Liberals brought forward the legislation last fall, that target had increased to 45 percent based on the CASA.

In those original documents, they had planned on spending \$500 million by 2030 to get us to the 30-percent goal. Given that so many projects have gone overbudget and the target has now increased to 45 percent, what is the revised budget for implementing *Our Clean Future*?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Is the plan a good one? Yes, and you know what? I'll compare it to the Yukon Party plan, which, as a scientist, I had the privilege or the offer to try to review, and there is no comparison. Those plans that were put forward by the Leader of the Official Opposition, I think — one of the times on one of those renewed plans — were not going to get us anywhere.

Hey, Yukon Party, give us what you would like as a plan. Is it building diesels? Is it building an LNG plant? No, that won't help us to get toward this transition away from fossil fuels.

Are there challenges in this plan? Have costs gone up? Yes, they have, but you know what? The cost for diesel is much more than the cost of renewables if we invest in them up front, so that's why the energy purchase agreement for Atlin hydro was at 13 cents a kilowatt hour compared to — I think we're paying around 30 cents a kilowatt hour, or maybe it's 29, for diesel generation. That's why we need to invest to move off fossil fuels.

Will it take significant investment? Yes, it will. Will it change along the way? Absolutely. It is a huge transition.

Mr. Kent: The question is: What's the new budget? How much? It's shocking that the minister doesn't know.

The term "greenwashing" applies when organizations or governments spend more time and money marketing themselves as environmentally friendly than actually taking action, and that seems to be the case here where the Liberals have made big promises and strong targets but don't actually have any plan or actions to achieve them. They promised a great renewable energy future based on projects that may not even come online — and then quietly invest tens of millions on a fleet of diesel generators, both rented and owned. We're hearing from many Yukoners that *Our Clean Future* should be rebranded "our diesel future", based on the actions and investments of the Liberals.

So, will the minister now admit that there is no plan in place that will actually achieve the greenhouse gas targets that the Liberals have written into legislation?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: What I will admit is that the Yukon Party doesn't have a plan. I would be happy to take a look at their plan and review it again for them. The plan that we have — sure, some prices have gone up and there have been delays. The demand-side management system was delayed by COVID — yes, there are delays and, yes, prices have gone up for every infrastructure project around the world, I think. That's fine. Here the prices have gone up and I expect challenges on that front, but I have nothing from the Yukon Party about how they really want to get toward a transition away from fossil fuels.

We have a strategy called *Our Clean Future*. It has over 100 actions in it. We report on it every year; we update it every year. We have a renewable energy strategy, which they also agreed to and which we will happily continue to update and improve on as things change — no problem — because that is our view — that we need to work toward it. But it's not to go back to a dependency on fossil fuels that the Yukon Party is interested in.

Question re: Support for substance use emergency

MLA Tredger: Yukoners have been facing yet another wave of grief after multiple people have died from drug overdoses in the last two weeks. Deaths due to the drug-poisoning crisis are preventable. Safer supply saves lives, or rather it would save lives if it were actually available in the territory. But even though this government committed to making safer supply available across the Yukon two years ago, Yukoners still don't have access to it.

In Whitehorse, Yukoners are almost never offered safe supply. They have to jump through hoop after hoop to hope to access it. In the communities, safer supply simply doesn't exist. We have asked this government about safer supply repeatedly. Every time, they have refused to give a timeline or clear details on why they aren't providing safer supply. Without adequate harm reduction, more Yukoners will continue to die.

Will the minister tell Yukoners why her government is not providing safer supply two years after having committed to doing it?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I very much appreciate the question. I have been waiting for an opportunity to clarify what is incorrect information being given to Yukoners about safer supply here in the territory and the ability to expand it.

Our government is committed to working with our partners to respond to the substance use health emergency, which includes increasing access to safer supply. Offering Yukoners an alternative to an illegal and unregulated drug supply is known as safer supply, and it is one action that we're taking to respond under the substance use health emergency.

We're working with experts to ensure that we can expand access to the safer supply program that currently operates here in Whitehorse. If there is some misunderstanding about that, the Referred Care Clinic has served some 700 patients in monthly visits to the Referred Care Clinic. They have 616 patients currently registered there as of the middle of April.

In 2022, there were 267 clients who used opioid treatment services, which is a safer supply program. Opioid treatment services is expanding here in Whitehorse all the time. I look forward to providing more accurate information.

MLA Tredger: It's funny. I was talking with some workers who are on the front line of the overdose crisis, and I told them about the safer supply program, and they were surprised. They said that they would sure like to know more about it, because they haven't seen safer supply being offered anywhere on the ground.

The minister has just said that safer supply is offered at the Referred Care Clinic, but we have heard from providers and patients that the clinic is far more focused on opioid agonist therapy, instead of safer supply. When we talk to folks who use substances, almost none of them have ever even been offered safer supply. Even when folks proactively ask for it, it's rarely being prescribed.

At the mental wellness summit that the minister organized specifically to get ideas from experts, those experts said that safer supply should be offered proactively and automatically. It's clear that isn't happening. Can the minister tell all of these people why safer supply is still almost nowhere to be found in the Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: In Canada, the possession of controlled substances is prohibited under federal law. The Yukon has an exemption presented by Health Canada under the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* for the purposes of providing prescriptions under the regulations for prescriptions of controlled substances. Physicians may prescribe opioid agonist therapy. We have, in Whitehorse, a Referred Care Clinic that does just that. It is funded and has an increased budget this year, in the budget we are going to pass today, to increase the ability for safer supply.

The department continues to support physicians to expand their scope of practice. There are experts being assisted for training of local physicians to expand their scope for safer supply prescribing, which is the current method allowed in Canada to provide safer supply.

Nurse practitioners currently provide both opioid agonist therapy and safe supply medications under the authority of the Referred Care Clinic lead. These are opportunities here in

Whitehorse for safer supply and the expansion of that is being explored at the moment so that we could figure out how to best provide those services in communities across the Yukon.

MLA Tredger: Even after multiple deaths in two weeks, it seems this government is content to tick a box rather than actually provide safer supply to the Yukoners who need it.

If the government truly believes that this is an emergency, they should act like it. Here is what they could be doing: They could advertise that safer supply is available so that people know where to go to get it. They could provide front-line workers with information and referral forms for the program. They could support the Referred Care Clinic to offer safe supply proactively instead of leaving it as a last resort option. They could finally provide guidelines for Yukon doctors to prescribe safer supply. They could help pharmacists coordinate with health centres in the community.

Can the minister tell Yukoners why, despite declaring an emergency, this government hasn't taken any of these actions to make safer supply actually available?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I truly hope that Yukoners are listening and, more importantly, I hope that the member opposite is listening, because the concept of safer supply lives in the 2021 confidence and supply agreement. In addition to that, they would have information about the increase of these kinds of services here in the Yukon. In the 2023-24 budget, there is \$1.91 million, specifically for the Referred Care Clinic. The increase of \$279,000 in that budget includes the addition of two additional support individuals, who will work specifically for safe supply programs. These two new FTEs are for one social worker and one assistant to do this work at the Referred Care Clinic.

This increase also reflects the carry-forward of seven new FTEs included in the 2022-23 budget — two outreach licensed nurse practitioners, one peer outreach worker, two registered nurses, one registered nurse supervisor, and one social worker. As I have said, in 2022, there were 267 clients who used opioid treatment services, and in 2022, there were 747 monthly visits to the Referred Care Clinic. Opioid treatment services is expanding; it is an important service for Yukoners.

Question re: Affordable housing and land development

Ms. Clarke: Salamat. An ongoing theme of this Sitting has been the Liberals' inability to get enough lots out to market to meet the demand for housing. When the Liberals released their platform in 2021, it included a promise to release 1,000 lots over the course of a second mandate. We are now at the mid-point of this mandate, and Yukoners want to know the status of that promise.

So, can the minister finally tell Yukoners how many lots this government has released since the 2021 election?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We just put out a lottery last month, and that lottery closed just recently. We had 119 lots in that lottery, and they have just been awarded. We put out a press release last night. The plan is that we will have further rural lots later this spring, and that we will have more lots, as well, for Whistle Bend later this year. So, that is the work in progress.

Thanks to all Yukoners for putting their names forward. There were 82 single-family lots, four multi-family lots, and 33 townhouse lots, and those have all gone through the bidding process and are now awarded.

Ms. Clarke: Well, Mr. Speaker, yet again the minister has refused to provide Yukoners with the number of lots that the Liberals have released since the last election. That is likely because they know that they are way off track on their commitments to Yukoners.

So, will the minister now admit that the Liberals' commitment to release 1,000 new lots during this government's mandate is going to be another broken promise from the Liberals?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: What we are dealing with this afternoon from the member opposite are hypothetical questions. I can say that the Yukon Liberal government has made historic investments in lot development and housing. This year alone, we are investing \$26 million for land development in the Yukon, with an additional \$22.4 million for housing projects in Dawson City, Watson Lake, and Teslin. Mr. Speaker, we are doing more for lot development than the previous government ever even considered, and we are on track to fulfill our promises. That is what I am going to say this afternoon. I know there is a lot of discord being sown by the opposition; that is really not doing Yukoners any favours.

What this government is committed to doing — what we are focused on — is getting lots and more housing options into Yukoners' hands. That is the promise; that is what we are doing; that is what we are going to do.

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the inability of this government to get lots out is only part of the problem. The government continues to put up barriers to getting more housing out. We know that the flawed rent control policies have hurt the rental market, and over the course of this Sitting, we have learned that government policies are hurting the housing construction industry.

Here is what the Yukon Real Estate Association said in a letter just a few weeks ago — and I quote: "We feel this policy and other recent policies introduced by the Yukon government are contributing to increased costs and delays to new home construction..." Why is the Yukon government continuing to introduce policies that are increasing costs and delays to new home construction?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The things that I am thinking about are the stats that have come out over the last number of months. First, we have seen, month over month, significant value increases when it comes to residential building permits. We have seen really significant demand when it comes to townhouse lots with an interest in building rental and to sell. We were told by the Yukon Party that the policies over the first quarter this year would stop investment and that we wouldn't see interest in private sector development like 5th and Rogers, but they were wrong. We are seeing interest. We have had a number of local developers ask for an extension for the 5th and Rogers lot. We are seeing investment and demand in Whistle Bend lots. We are seeing the largest values in building construction, both residential and commercial, over the last

number of years of our mandate and again now — so a failed thesis by the member opposite.

Again, the statistical information shows us that there is a demand and people are investing. There are more opportunities that are coming in the rental market, and more people are ensuring that the Yukon is the place where they are going to follow their dreams and make this their home with a great quality of life that they have through the many works and programs that are being supported by the Yukon government.

Question re: Government relationship with municipalities

Mr. Hassard: Over the course of the Spring Sitting, we have learned more about how the Minister of Community Services' divisive and adversarial approach has damaged his relationship with the Yukon municipalities. It started when the minister tried to blame the City of Whitehorse for his surprising decision to cancel the 2027 Canada Games. That prompted a very public disagreement with the mayor, who wrote a letter dated March 13 of this year criticizing the minister. I will quote: "To state or even imply that the Yukon Government and the City of Whitehorse made a joint decision to cancel the bid to host the 2027 Canada Winter Games is not reflective of the facts."

She went on to call on the minister to publicly correct his statements, which of course he didn't. Will the Minister of Community Services admit that his abrasive and adversarial approach has damaged the government's relationship with Yukon municipalities?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: No.

Mr. Hassard: Another trend that has emerged has been the Minister of Community Services refusing to support municipalities on issues where the Yukon government clearly has a role to play. From Lodgepole Lane to the green streets in Whistle Bend, from recycling to animal welfare, the answer from this minister is always the same: It's the city's fault, or it's the city's responsibility. In fact, earlier this week, the minister tried to blame the city for his government's commitment to provide free transit. He said that the ball was in the city's court and it wasn't his responsibility. Yet again, the minister's adversarial approach is causing friction.

So, again, will the minister admit that his abrasive and adversarial approach has damaged the government's relationship with Yukon municipalities?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: At the risk of repeating myself, I'll say no.

But I want to commend the leadership at the municipal level because they are really a joy to work with and I've had lots of conversations with municipal mayors over the last — well, even last week, I called every municipal mayor, except for Watson Lake, and he and I have exchanged texts. We haven't been able to connect.

But we had really good conversations about municipal issues across the territory. I have asked the mayors what concerns they have and I have noted those concerns.

As far as the working relationship that I have with the municipal councils and the leadership of the municipalities, I

would characterize it as good. I enjoy the feedback that I'm getting from them on a regular basis. The Mayor of Whitehorse and I met yesterday again; it was a very cordial relationship. We were talking about all the land development that we're getting going. There is lots happening here. Because we're working so well, there are lots of things happening across the territory.

I could go into the capital plans and all the infrastructure that we're building and I could go into the lots we're building, but that's really a partnership that we have not only with municipal councils but with First Nations. It talks to the approach that this government has taken, working together with all of our partners across the territory to make life better for Yukoners. That's our goal; that's what we're doing.

Mr. Hassard: That is an interesting characterization, for sure. Unfortunately for this minister, his adversarial approach has hurt his relationship with Yukon communities. It started with the government's decision to cut the funding in this year's budget for rural land development. That prompted the Association of Yukon Communities to say this — and I quote: "We are disappointed and concerned that at a time when Yukon communities are facing shortages of land and housing that the Government of Yukon would cut the budget for rural residential land by more than half..."

We have heard similar concerns from around the Yukon, from Haines Junction to Teslin, from Watson Lake to Dawson City — the common theme always comes back to this minister. So, again, will the minister now admit that his adversarial approach has strained relationships with Yukon municipalities?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Three times the charm, Mr. Speaker — I will once again say no. The fact is that what is causing a lot of discord in municipalities is the Yukon Party math and also the Yukon Party's propensity for getting erroneous information before the public and the leadership of the territory's municipalities and other groups.

I will say right now that as far as rural land development goes, we are actually investing historic amounts of money in rural lot development. In Watson Lake, we have a number of lots coming in on Frances Avenue that the Yukon Party couldn't even envision because they could not work with First Nations, Mr. Speaker, but we can. We can work with First Nations and we can work with municipalities. We are creating partnerships across the territory to make lives better for Yukoners. That is the goal of this government, that has been the goal of this government for seven years, and that is the goal of this government into the future.

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.

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, in Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

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

Deputy Chair: The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, in Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any further general debate?

Yukon Development Corporation — *continued*

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I hope to not be long. I wanted to try to provide a little bit of feedback to the questions I heard from the members opposite during debate earlier in Committee of the Whole.

Welcome again to the President of the Yukon Development Corporation, Dennis Berry.

There was a request to get information about the history of the rental diesels and the costs. I have asked to get the information. I will make sure to table it, as well, as a legislative return, but it goes back as far as 2017-18. From that year, it was \$700,000. From 2018-19, the total is \$1.72 million. From 2019-20, it is \$4.37 million. From 2020-21, it's \$8.6 million. For 2021-22, it's \$6.1 million. In 2022-23, it's \$4.7 million. I will have to confirm that all costs are in there. One of the challenges, of course, is that it matters how much they are used, because the diesel costs — the fuel costs — change.

I won't do the 2023-24 projection because it is currently a projection. I have indicated that the utility will add five diesel units. Again, those are for a temporary replacement for the permanent fleet — two of them, the Faro diesels — and three are for our required backup for being an islanded grid. It really has to do with the formula.

There are a couple of other things that I was asked. I will provide a little bit more information. The members asked about the differences in costs with rental diesels versus going with a

permanent fleet instead. There was a press release put out by the members opposite — the Yukon Party — to talk about the long-term reliance on rental diesels, but the whole point of rental diesels is that they are year by year so that can change.

We had a presentation here in the Assembly — I have talked about it several times — when witnesses came in from the Yukon Energy Corporation. We were told the difference in the levelized cost of energy. The price difference from the rental diesels was that it was at \$210 per kilowatt year, and this compares to permanent diesels, which is \$253 per kilowatt year. That difference is 20 percent, meaning that the rental diesels are 20 percent less expensive.

That is the last information that I have — that we all have — on the difference. I appreciate that the members opposite say that those numbers are questionable. I have turned around and said to the utility that we need to continue to look at those numbers. They have explained to me that the cost of diesels generally is changing across the country. I said that earlier in Question Period today, so there is a lot of demand across the market. Other jurisdictions, as well, are using temporary diesels to deal with capacity shortfalls, so there is a lot of pressure on the market right now.

I have asked the utility to please make sure to get updated information just to make sure that we are as current as possible. In fact, we talked about the concerns that were raised about the forecasts that were put in under the energy purchase agreement application for Atlin. The Yukon Party had pointed out that, for example, demand-side management said that we were going to be there yet now, but it's still coming. The utility has indicated to me that they are looking to update their resource and capacity plan, you know, including forecasting, so they will work to update those numbers and, of course, will present them the next time that they are in front of the Yukon Utilities Board.

Okay, I know that's not all the questions that were asked of me during Committee of the Whole. I will commit to a legislative return on the costs over time of the rental diesels, as I have them, and will look for any other questions that are still outstanding and do my best to provide the information, either directly to members opposite or through a legislative return.

In case there are no questions today, I just want to, on behalf of all of us as MLAs, thank the department officials, and today President Berry for being here to answer questions for the members opposite.

Deputy Chair: Is there any further debate on Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation?

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

Mr. Kent: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 22 cleared or carried

Deputy Chair: The Member for Copperbelt South has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in

Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$11,427,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$12,012,000

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$23,439,000 agreed to

Yukon Development Corporation agreed to

Deputy Chair: 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*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

Deputy Chair: 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, *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any general debate?

Department of Education — *continued*

Mr. Kent: I thank the officials for attending here today. As I mentioned in an e-mail to the Government House Leader on behalf of the Official Opposition and the Third Party, and in order to expedite debate to get to Health and Social Services, we will have no further questions in Committee of the Whole for the Department of Education.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you for allowing just a little bit of time. I want to thank, of course, my officials for coming today — Deputy Minister Mary Cameron and senior advisor Megan Foreman.

They have done incredible work at the Department of Education. To all of those who are behind the scenes, I want to say thank you to all of them. Folks are working very hard. We have definitely worked to respond to 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 on attendance all highlighted that we can do better and we have to rethink how we are supporting diverse learners. We have taken those messages to heart and we are engaged in large-scale systemic change — moving away from the status quo in challenging work. We have heard loud and clear that the Department of Education needs to do a better job on working with Yukon First Nations and other educational partners. To this end, we are committed to finding better ways to work together to identify, commit to, and carry out

meaningful action that will achieve real change for our students.

I wanted to just highlight a few things because we haven't had a chance to talk about some of this in debate over the term of the Sitting. We have made huge strides, I think, in education. As I have stated, we still have work to do and part of that is a renewed vision and one that really spans through education overall. We are striving for a safe and inclusive education system that better supports all students to succeed. We have made progress on several initiatives to address system inequities, including launching the universal childcare model — over \$43 million in this 2023-24 budget. We have launched an enhanced early kindergarten and full-day kindergarten in most rural communities. We have worked with the Chiefs Committee on Education to establish the First Nation School Board. We were really pleased to sign a transfer payment agreement with the newly elected trustees just recently and this is over \$35 million for the operation of eight schools. There will be three more coming on. There will be a lot more to say about that as we move forward. We are finalizing a collaboration framework with Yukon First Nations, completing the review of inclusive and special education, and advancing reimagining inclusive and special education.

Yukon First Nations completing the review of inclusive and special education, and advancing the reimagining inclusive and special education work plan which is extensive. We have an extensive work plan — really great work that is coming out of there. We're looking forward to all of the recommendations that all of the working groups have been working on for some time and that we will start to see reflected in the 2023-24 school year. The work plan around reimagining inclusive and special education has been done with Yukon First Nations and other education partners.

We have launched the Ready-to-Learn Schools initiative, based on groundbreaking work by Dr. Bruce Perry's neurosequential model. This was intended to be incorporated into all of our schools. We have created a data-sharing MOU with Yukon First Nations on releasing publicly available student data reports. We are initiating the engagement phase of work to develop a student outcome strategy, which will look at the root causes of poor student outcomes, develop targets, and evaluate progress on closing gaps. Those are just some examples of the work that we have done to respond to the 2019 Auditor General's report on kindergarten to grade 12 education.

Again, there is a tremendous amount of work that is happening. Early learning and childcare is, I think, one of the biggest highlights and what we will start to see as a result on all the work on reimagining inclusive and special education. We will start to see those results in this generation that we're in and then, as we move forward, Early Learning and Child Care has that same forward-looking view. The department team has done exceptional work. We are leading the country in early learning childcare. We're continuing to work with Yukon First Nations and other partners to enhance early learning and childcare programming in the Yukon.

As we move forward to a future where all families have access to affordable, high-quality early learning and childcare

opportunities, we have made great strides in addressing quality by increasing wages for educators to some of the highest in Canada, introducing funding for operators to access comprehensive benefits, investing in continuing education for educators, and increasing our funding for programs and cultural supports to enhance early learning programs.

We are investing heavily in professional learning and development opportunities. This includes innovative and flexible training options for educators to become fully qualified while continuing to work. By investing in educators, the universal childcare program will continue to grow. Heavy investments here are really looking at the whole of that program around affordability, accessibility, and quality.

I just wanted to bring some of those highlights that we haven't really had a chance to talk about. There are so many great things happening in Education. Again, thank you to all of the staff in the Department of Education, and all of those who are doing the hard work in our schools, those who are supporting our young learners and working toward lifting them up and looking to great outcomes for them. Thank you so much to the department and all those supporting our children.

Deputy Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education?

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

Mr. Kent: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 3, Department of Education, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 3, Department of Education, cleared or carried

Deputy Chair: The Member for Copperbelt South has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 3, Department of Education, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$244,155,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$35,306,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$279,461,000 agreed to

Department of Education agreed to

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 208, *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any further general debate?

Department of Health and Social Services — *continued*

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I would like to welcome back Acting Deputy Minister Tiffany Boyde, Deputy Minister Ed van Randen and the director of finance, Rob Ganzer, from the Department of Health and Social Services. We look forward to questions with respect to the 2023-24 main budget for Health and Social Services.

Ms. White: As my first time up in Health and Social Services this year, welcome, of course, to the officials. I appreciated the briefing that you shared. I just really appreciate it. It is a big department and lots to get through, and the briefings are always, I think, one of the key points so I do thank them for that.

The first thing, Deputy Chair, that I would like to get into is actually just asking some questions about some of the minister's answers today in Question Period. So, can the minister tell me again the number of folks accessing the Referred Care Clinic that she used today?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I said a number of things earlier. I think the specific question that is being asked here is how many people are accessing the Referred Care Clinic. I also have some budgetary numbers that might help, both from 2022-23 and 2023-24. The facts I spoke about earlier were that, in 2022, there were 747 monthly visits to the Referred Care Clinic and 616 patients are recorded there for that year. I also noted that, in 2022, there were 267 clients who were accessing the opioid treatment services program. Those numbers are from 2000 and ended in 2022. I can see if there are any updated numbers and provide those.

I didn't mention these numbers earlier but they may be of assistance. Between January 1 and April 2023 — so just the first four months — there have been 270 clients enrolled at the opioid treatment services. There have been approximately 750 monthly visits to the Referred Care Clinic, recording 675 patients; 45 people admitted to the intensive treatment services; 356 people admitted to withdrawal management and 429 delayed admissions there; and I have the other numbers that I mentioned earlier with respect to 2022.

Ms. White: I do thank the minister for that. I will actually go off the numbers from January 1 until April of this year, just so we are in 2023.

So, just knowing that there are 270 clients that the minister just referenced accessing the opioid treatment, can the minister let me know if that is the opioid agonist therapy or whether that is the safe supply?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The information that I have at this point is that it's a number for both of those programs. We are trying to see if a breakdown is possible. If the member wants to

go on to the next question, when I get that information, I could provide it.

Ms. White: I am happy to wait for that number, but what I would like to do is have a conversation with the minister about the difference between those two things, because they are critically different. The reason why is that I just want to make sure that we are on the same page when we talk about the issue of harm reduction, or when I'm using the language of access to safer supply for community members. I just want to make sure that we're on the same page.

Can the minister walk me through the two different treatments that are available through the opioid treatment programs?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question; it is important to have an opportunity to speak about the services that are being provided in this way to Yukoners who are seeking assistance. I am going to start with the concept of the Referred Care Clinic. First of all, I agree that there is a difference between these kinds of care and the services that someone might be seeking. The Referred Care Clinic is a primary care clinic that is accessible by referral for vulnerable adults who may have unstable mental wellness and/or a substance use issue — it could be for either or both — and that they do not have another primary care provider, and they rely upon outreach services to successfully have care.

Yukoners can access the Referred Care Clinic with a referral from a psychiatrist or a Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services nurse, which is often the way that someone might get a referral there, because we want access to the Referred Care Clinic to be as easy as possible.

The Referred Care Clinic is co-located with opioid treatment services, which is the part of Health and Social Services that is focused on opioid treatment. Opioid treatment services is a low-barrier program that does not require a referral. These services support people to manage or reduce their opioid drug use. Physicians can prescribe evidence-based opioid agonist therapies, such as methadone, Suboxone, Sublocade, and Kadian to prevent withdrawal and reduce cravings for opioid drugs. Those are the opioid agonist therapies.

Safer supply may also be prescribed through the opioid treatment services, so the distinction between the two — the Referred Care Clinic with opioid treatment services is staffed by three general practitioner physicians per day. There are also 16 funded positions and a team of individual nurses, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, one community engagement position, an outreach worker, two social workers, and there are individuals with lived experience working there so that they can help others.

The Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services at the Department of Health and Social Services has established an overdose outreach team through the opioid treatment services that I just spoke about. The overdose outreach team provides harm reduction education, supports clients with system navigation, and provides connections to other services related to substance use. The team also provides supports to individuals who have recently experienced a drug overdose.

The overdose outreach team includes support workers, social workers, and community engagement workers. The team currently operates Monday to Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. There is also a phone number and individuals can be referred to the overdose outreach team. I can also note that the opioid treatment services program that I'm noting supports people to manage and reduce their opioid drug use. Physicians can prescribe evidence-based either safer supply or opioid agonist therapies. Not being a medical physician or person, I can indicate that the information that I have is that one is a safer supply for use by individuals who are trying to use drugs in a safer way, and the other is the opioid agonist therapy, which are drugs that don't necessarily require daily dosing, and are an opportunity to reduce cravings to opioids and other drugs.

I also have a note that safer supply in the Yukon has been defined as a prescription of controlled substances that replaces the use of illicit substances in order to ensure that someone who has a substance use disorder is not getting or using street drugs, which could be toxic and result in a drug poisoning. People who access safer supply carefully and regularly consult with the medical team about the best treatment plan for them and are connected to wrap-around supports and other substance use treatments, including medications. Safer supply is a harm reduction option that can be part of a larger treatment plan to help someone who uses drugs stay safer.

In comparison, opioid agonist therapy, or what is known as "OAT", is a prescription of a medication that stops people from going into withdrawal from opioid drug use and helps with cravings; patients are less likely to use opioid drugs as a result of having these reduced cravings. These medications can include Suboxone, Kadian, methadone, and Sublocade. People who access opioid agonist therapies also have regular contact with their medical team and have access to the same wrap-around services. Opioid agonist therapies is a treatment option that can be part of a larger treatment plan. Both safer supply, in the way I have described it here, and opioid agonist therapies are designed — perhaps at different stages of an individual's addictions and choices — to hopefully and ultimately have them not continue to use drugs.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that from the minister. I guess what I am going to say is that OAT — that includes things, for example, like methadone — is the idea about helping folks stop using drugs. It is about moving toward sobriety. It is very different. When I worked at Corrections, there were clients who I would take to the pharmacy, and they would get their methadone, and then I would drive them back to Corrections. Safer supply is not about sobriety. It is still about the ability to use drugs, but safer drugs.

So, one of the concerns that I have is that what we are hearing from folks on the street, from users and providers, is that when they go to the opioid treatment services, they are prioritizing OAT, rather than even offering safer supply, even when patients are specifically asking for safer supply. So, can the minister tell me why she thinks that might be the case?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I guess I would be very keen if the member opposite is aware of someone or knows someone who would be prepared to have their story told to us either through

the member opposite or directly. It's certainly not a policy of any kind. We have both programs available so that they are available to individuals. We are meeting people where they are. Both programs provide wrap-around services. Both programs are designed to understand that individuals who are struggling with any kind of opioid use and are seeking assistance need to be met where they are. They need to be provided with the services that they and their medical team, or medical professional assisting them, come to the conclusion would be the best option for them.

Certainly, if somebody has requested one and not the other — I don't want to second-guess a clinical decision, but I would be very keen to assist that person and make sure that their wishes are being properly respected. I don't want to make any assumptions about what kind of conversation, or what they might be seeking, but let me say, from a policy perspective, we are supporting both of these programs because we understand that individuals in the Yukon who are struggling with opioid use and abuse may need different kinds of programs in order to move away from the use of drugs. I don't think anyone — both programs are designed to help people stop using drugs. Those are valid and appropriate goals. Both programs are designed to have individuals be supported in a way that, hopefully, would let them do that.

Ms. White: I would say that Alcoholics Anonymous and managed alcohol programs are both designed to support people. One is toward sobriety and one is toward safety, similar to OAT and safer supply. So, I am hopeful that the minister, in the time that we have here today, of the 270 clients who currently access the opioid treatment services — if I can just get a number on how many are on the OAT program and how many are on the safer supply.

The challenge becomes that, when people reach out to us, I can't make them call the minister. I have written letters before about different things, and we can't make anyone do anything, unfortunately, but they do call. We have been told, in having conversations with clients at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, that when the RC Clinic comes to the emergency shelter, they are not offering safer supply to folks, even when people are asking for it. This is of concern, because when we talk about harm reduction, it's about preventing death.

One of my concerns is that there are a lot of different things in current systems where, unfortunately, someone's values can get tied in. We could talk about access to abortion. We could talk about different conversations with doctors over time, and that becomes a concern to me, so I am looking forward to those numbers of the 270 clients, because that is one that has been used.

Of the 356 clients who have accessed withdrawal management services, how many of them are youth, and how many of them are adults?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate this question, which I will come to in a second, but I just wanted to return to one of the others to make a note that one of the distinctions between safer supply — I'll call it — and the opioid agonist therapy is that safer supply requires daily dosing, which is not at all a

reason to say why one would be recommended over the other, if that somebody you know has had that experience.

Just to be clear for the record, opioid agonist therapy prescribes medication that lasts longer than that, so it's not a daily dose program — just to clarify that.

I am aware that we do have the number of youth versus adults, unfortunately, it is not at my fingertips at the moment, but we will provide it to the member opposite. Withdrawal management services, I should say, is a 24/7 medically supported program that provides a safe place for people in withdrawal from substance use. Services include medical assistance with withdrawal from substances, psycho-educational programming, and referral to ongoing treatment, counselling, and social work supports, therapeutic groups, and other support services.

There are 14 beds available for adults at the location, and there are four beds available for youth. I will say that, as part of the 2023 confidence and supply agreement, more licensed practical nurses will be hired to increase the bed nights that will be available.

Bed availability is a variable and offered on a first-come-first-served basis. Between January 1, 2022, and October 27, 2022, there were 1,640 bed requests postponed at withdrawal management. Clients who were delayed a bed were typically provided a bed within 72 hours, and then, between that same period of time, there were 735 bed requests that were supported at withdrawal management. Of course, people stay at varying periods of time there.

I do know that there is a breakdown of the number of youth, and I will continue to look for it in my notes. I don't seem to have it at my fingertips, but I will provide it.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. The reason I was asking about the number of youth who have been supported through withdrawal management services is because, actually today, we were contacted by someone who had concerns that their child wasn't able to access that support. So, knowing that there are four beds available, I just wanted to know, for example, if there were times when no beds were available. If youth were turned away, I would like to know how many were delayed service and what the average length of time for that delay was.

I believe the minister said it was 1,600 or so delayed between January and October of last year, and that normally they were given options within 72 hours, and that 735 folks were supported when they made the initial request. I do appreciate that the minister has just said that more LPNs will be hired to meet the requirement of the confidence and supply agreement. Can the minister let me know how many have been hired to date, or when that is expected to happen?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The information I have is that, as of yesterday, three people in LPN positions have been hired.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that answer. How many more are we expecting to meet that commitment?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you, Deputy Chair — 1.5 more individuals — FTEs — would be the full complement.

Ms. White: It is good news that we are closer to that number than not there, which I do appreciate. Knowing that

now we have four First Nations that have declared substance use emergencies, is there any intention of government to look at doing withdrawal management supports in rural communities?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the question.

I can note that the focus at the moment is not to provide the same kinds of withdrawal management services that are available here in Whitehorse in communities. One of the requirements of withdrawal management services is that the program be operated within 15 minutes of a hospital, so that is one barrier.

I can also indicate, of course, that in the last answer — the one before — I have read off a number of individuals who are required to operate — highly skilled professionals who are required to operate such a program. The availability of them and the current health and human resources crisis are difficult, if not a definite barrier. I can also note that we are working with First Nations with respect to increasing on-the-land treatment options, either as treatment for care — which wouldn't be the same as withdrawal management — and aftercare in the communities, wanting to support the focus on aftercare and on-the-land treatment options for individuals who might want to do that.

We also have a focus, moving forward, on community wellness — individuals who will be First Nation individuals chosen in collaboration with the First Nation communities to provide services in the communities.

There is a network of mental wellness support workers, counsellors, and mental health nurses who are providing services and care for Yukoners in every community. Services are delivered to communities. The kinds of services include rapid-access counselling, ongoing one-on-one counselling, group counselling, and workshops tailored to communities' specific needs, as well as support work, outreach, and harm-reduction services. This network of supports is able to appropriately, for the most part, support Yukoners returning to their home community after accessing mental health and substance use treatment, either in Whitehorse or outside the territory, which is absolutely critical. It is a critical piece; it's a critical focus that has not been there before.

We have certainly had individuals in the past who have been successful in treatment services but find the challenge often to be when they return to familiar surroundings, whether that be in a home community or back here in the Yukon, or from Whitehorse back to a Yukon community. It is the key. Certainly, in the conversations that I have had with First Nation governments, with First Nation health teams, and with individuals providing services in those communities, it is a missing piece of the puzzle — something we are trying to fill in through the services and supports that are there already and then with other services that should be enhanced.

Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services also works with each community to partner with local and First Nation health departments to support aftercare for Yukoners who are returning home.

There is much more to do here. It is a piece of the puzzle that we are focusing on with First Nation governments and

communities. I believe that it is — well, it doesn't really matter what I believe. What the department is focusing on is providing better service in that area and encouraging Yukon First Nations to provide enhanced, on-the-land treatment as they see fit, as they have designed for the purposes of filling that void and for the purposes of providing better overall mental wellness for their communities.

Ms. White: There are two communities — actually the two biggest communities outside of Whitehorse do have hospitals, both Dawson City and Watson Lake.

I bring that up because, at one point in time, I met a young person who was hitchhiking from Watson Lake to Whitehorse for the sake of trying to access withdrawal management services — trying to go to treatment, trying his best. So, I am going to put on the record right now that land-based treatment and that support when people are on that journey is critically important but so is the initial one, which is just trying to deal with that crisis right then, and we have two communities with hospitals. So, I just want to make that clear.

I am never going to get through all of these questions. I am just going to apologize for that right now.

So, the nursing shortage has been an ongoing concern for everyone in this Assembly and for different reasons. One of the things that I think is incredibly helpful when we look at trying to fill those positions is making sure that we have exit interviews with folks who are leaving those positions. I am curious how many registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, nurse practitioners or nursing home attendants have left their jobs — even, let's just say between January and now. Have exit interviews been performed with them?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I don't have numbers — I'm sorry — with respect to how many nurses will have left positions. I should say that the retention bonuses and the bonuses to retain and recruit nurses have had a positive effect on nurses in communities. I am going to speak here and all my comments are with respect to nurses who work for the Department of Health and Social Services. Nurses who work at Yukon hospitals do not work for the Health and Social Services department. Of course, I can't speak for their experiences although I can assure Yukoners that the health and human resources strategy that is being developed does include all personnel from the Yukon hospitals — all three of them — because it is most appropriate that our health and human resources strategy being developed currently does apply to all health-related positions across the territory — whoever is their employer.

I can say that there is no formal exit interview currently done when individual nurses leave the employ of Yukon government, although there are certainly informal conversations about why someone might be leaving or moving on. I appreciate the concept of a formal interview to understand why an individual — I think that we also have to have entry interviews — why someone might have come for a position, particularly in the current crisis of health human resources people — why someone might have chosen to come to a position and why someone might be leaving a position. More formal interviews are contemplated in the health human

resources strategy, which will be available this summer. It is being currently worked on by a very large group of individuals who are the decision-makers and responsible for all aspects of health and human resources. I know that the Premier spoke about it earlier today. He and I attended one of the meetings.

They are meeting almost weekly, I would say. It involves individuals who are decision-makers at the hospital, the Department of Health and Social Services, the Yukon University, Yukon Medical Association, doctors, Yukon Registered Nurses Association — the regulators from both of those organizations and professions — the Department of Community Services, the Department of Economic Development, the Department of Tourism and Culture, Yukon Housing Corporation, the Kwanlin Dün health centre, the Council of Yukon First Nations, and unions for both the medical personnel who work for the Yukon government, as well as those who work at Yukon hospitals. I am sure I am forgetting somebody. Also, there are representatives of all of the health professions.

Those departments are all named, as well, because they are either responsible to regulate or responsible for working on communications to entice individuals to come to the Yukon, and hopefully, solve this issue. I can say that, while it is a huge challenge everywhere in the country — I have spoken recently with my health minister colleagues across the country, and it is a top issue on all of our agendas when we get together, and a top issue for us to speak to Canada and the national organizations that regulate nurses and physicians so that any barriers can be reduced, including barriers with respect to internationally educated health professionals.

I appreciate that this is a little bit off the question that you asked, but these are all very important initiatives that will help us resolve this. What I was about to say is that, while this is a huge challenge for us, we have a dedicated group of people who are keen to work on resolutions, to work on removing barriers, and to work on all aspects of how we might have a spiderweb of solutions. We are, frankly, not talking about needing thousands and thousands of people to come to the Yukon to resolve this. We are a small territory, and we are aware of, first, where there might be vacancies currently and of all of the areas in which we would like to expand. So, we are not just trying to fill the vacancies that we have — we know that, in the future, we need to work, going forward, to make health care more accessible for Yukoners. Expanding that will be part of the equation.

Informal conversations are happening, as individuals might leave — certainly, as they come; health human resources strategy available this summer, which will include the concept of something more formal. I am also aware that the Public Service Commission is working on something that is more formal with respect to exit interviews, not just mainly focused on the health sector, but it is important in the current crisis for health and human resources, and other areas of the labour market, whether it be teachers, educators, labour individuals. I mean, there is — I think I referred to it yesterday, and I know that others will have heard — the tourism sector is having difficulty finding individuals to work. So, it will be an issue for

all sectors with respect to a Public Service Commission approach, which is probably going to be broader.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that there are challenges across government, but we are specifically talking about Health and Social Services, and I would have thought that, when health care professionals were so valuable, if they left, we would want to know why, and if there were things we could do to prevent it. So, I would just put a — you know — a wishful plug in for exit interviews to better understand why someone might leave.

Can the minister please tell me right now how many vacancies we have for Yukon government, when it comes to RNs, LPNs, NPs, and NHAs?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I have some numbers of percentages of vacancies, as opposed to individual numbers. I appreciate that the question is how many vacancies broken down by each designation of profession, but we have them broken down by where an individual might work in the department. I will provide these, and if the member opposite is looking for something more detailed, please ask.

As of March 20, 2023, Community Nursing is experiencing a vacancy rate of 36.5 percent for primary health care nurses. Community Nursing is a broad department and provides many types of positions, but this represents a recent improvement of 4.5 percent.

I should remind Yukoners that, back in December 2022, we announced a new package of retention and signing bonuses for nurses employed by Government of Yukon for a total cost of \$6 million. We have budgeted \$3.17 million in the budget we are currently discussing.

Evidence exists that the improvement in the percentages of the vacancy rate in Community Nursing is, at least partially, as a result of those bonuses. We have filled positions in two communities that were quite difficult to fill before. We have information from nurses who have decided to stay in positions — and said so — as a result of the retention and recruitment bonuses being considered positive and having a positive impact on their career path.

Between January and March of 2023, Community Nursing has hired four new nurses to support Yukon communities, such as Carcross, Haines Junction, and Watson Lake. As you can see, as I was saying earlier, the numbers here in the territory — even small numbers have a big impact. Four new nurses to support Yukon communities is certainly positive.

Within long-term care homes, we are experiencing a vacancy rate of currently 30 percent for nursing staff, including licensed practical nurses, registered nurses and nurse practitioners.

I know that is not the breakdown that has been asked for, but it might be of assistance.

And the home care program is experiencing a 36-percent vacancy rate for registered nurses and licensed practical nurses at this time. We are focusing heavily with respect to determining how we can remove and reduce the barriers so that individuals who are interested in practising their nursing career and having it here in the Yukon Territory are not only encouraged but supported to come and take those positions.

Ms. White: I can work with the percentage of vacancies for certain.

Can the minister tell me how many nursing agencies the government works with, and how many agency nurse positions are currently on contract with Yukon government?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The department has agreements with four agency nursing organizations at this time, and these organizations have not been used to fill all the vacancies that I have noted in my last answer. They are prioritized at this time to make sure that there are appropriate nursing complements in the communities outside of Whitehorse, to make sure that there is safe care there, and that is the priority in which we use agency nurses.

Ms. White: This is going to be a story, and there will be a similarity, and I promise that it will make sense.

I worked as an agency chef when I lived in England, and my agency was hired by people. They would call my agency and say, “We need someone tomorrow”, so I would get a phone call the night before, and I would get told where I was going. The interesting thing was, as an agency chef, I always almost double-earned the amount of money I was working with — the people I was working with — or more. The agency made at least that same amount of money again on top of me per hour.

If the minister can tell me the name of the nursing agencies that the government does contract out to. I am just trying to get an idea of how many agency nurses right now are working on filling those spots within the Yukon government Health and Social Services department because, as an agency chef, I made substantially more money than the people I was working next to. I am trying to get an idea of how many agency nurses are working right now for the Yukon government and, of course, the companies those contracts are with.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the opportunity to try to get the information. The names of the companies that I have that supply agency nurses in the Yukon Territory at this time are a company named Bayshore HealthCare, one named Canadian Health Care Agency, one named Calian Limited, and the fourth is Express Healthcare Professionals. I think I have that right. I certainly don’t disagree with the member opposite that the employ of agency individuals in whatever way costs the employer significantly more money because a portion of what is being paid is also going to the agency. From a quick look at the numbers by the department and some small amounts of data from the Hospital Corporation, it looks like we would pay the equivalent of three times what an employed permanent person in that position might make, although that does not take into account — I want to be clear — benefit packages that are available to individuals who are employed full-time or part-time in those kinds of positions.

In the fall of 2022, the Yukon government employed three agency nurses. We are looking for something that looks like what the number of agency nurses who might be available to us at this time — the estimate that I can make today is no more than 10, but if we can discover something that gives us a clearer number, I am happy to provide that. It could be as low as six or something like that, but I am estimating and I want to be clear

that it is less than 10 at this point, and we are looking for information on that number.

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

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any further general debate?

Ms. White: Even when we talk about agency nurses and we say not more than 10 — and we just said that we recognize that it’s at three times the salary, which is really the equivalent to 30 nurses. So, that is pretty hard to stomach, knowing that we’re in this shortage. There is that recognition that we need those agency nurses but what I would really like is for us to hire permanent nurses who work here.

The minister did reference the bonus before. Can the minister tell us if she has the number of nurses who are still waiting for the promised bonus exam fee reimbursement and when those nurses will get those bonuses?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: During the break, we received some information that I would like to correct because, as I said, no more than 10, but we now have information that an average of three agency nurses are being used by the department, which kind of aligns with the fall of 2022 when we had two nurses. About three are being used — of course, there are rotating opportunities and they move from place to place. I don’t disagree at all that our recruitment and retention abilities and focus have to manage to get people into those positions.

I have information regarding the specifics of the immediate retention bonuses, expanded scope bonuses, and signing bonuses with respect to the registered nurses and nurse practitioners. I am afraid I don’t have numbers with respect to the exam fees that we have reimbursed, but the licensing fees have been available to new employees for quite a long time, and the exam fees were an addition to expand the scope of options and bonuses that were designed for nurses here in the territory back in the fall of 2022. Of course, it includes the reimbursement of exam fees within the past 24 months, from the date of an offer for new nursing graduates who are hired after December 1, 2022, which is when the Yukon government announced those bonuses.

We could probably determine — again, I’m sorry, not for today — the exam fees that have been reimbursed. We are looking for that number, but if I get it before the end of today, I will be happy to provide it. I certainly agree that our focus on recruiting and retaining nurses in each and every one of those positions is key.

The option of agency nurses is, at this time, a necessary evil. I am speaking about the process and the cost, not the individuals who come and provide services to Yukoners.

I think — again, not that the member opposite will be concerned about what I think, but I see in the work that I do everyday here with the department that agency nurses are, at least, a portion of what will be required in order to meet the scale of service that we want to provide to Yukoners in the future. I see that across the country. It is an option. Young nurses and others, maybe later in their career, are taking this option, because moving from place to place, or travelling, or practising nursing in different places is appealing to them for lifestyle choices and other reasons.

We are very welcoming to our agency nurses. We are hoping that someday, when they reach the part of their career or their life where they would like to settle down, they will remember fondly their time in the Yukon and want to do that here, because we do have a very good lifestyle and very good opportunities for a variety of medical practice for nurses here in the territory, everything from a medium-sized hospital up to and including an extremely interesting and wide scope of practice when nurses are living in communities.

Currently, I just received a note that there are three agency nurses — sorry, I got off my question. So, for the question about how many exam reimbursements we have done, there are three waiting for that to happen, because the exams have been written in the last 24 months and they qualify under the program.

Ms. White: Have all the promised bonuses been given to nurses, including those on maternity leave? Has that issue been resolved?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: As of March 22, 2023, a total of 308 nurses employed by the Department of Health and Social Services have been paid an immediate retention bonus, and six have been paid a signing bonus — so, six new folks. The retention bonuses are paid on a go-forward basis on each paycheque, so it is available in that way. Over the next two years, retention and recruitment bonuses will be provided to registered nurses, nurse practitioners, and licensed practical nurses who are in a position requiring a nursing designation and performing duties for the government, as an employer, and we are doing that as of December 1, 2022.

Some of our nursing staff have raised questions about the administration of the allowances, and this has been brought to the attention of the department, which is working closely with the Public Service Commission to respond to these concerns as quickly as possible.

Administration of these allowances has been consistent with the delivery of other allowances and in accordance with other nursing retention letters of understanding within the Yukon Employees' Union collective agreements, so part of the issue with respect to the matters that have come forward for grievance have been as a result of the determination of the collective agreement. However, the Public Service Commission has received between four and six grievances — we understand it to be four — associated with these bonuses, and they, of course, are being managed through the normal grievance process. I think that is the answer to your question.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that.

I am going to do something that I don't often like to do, which is I'm going to actually read a couple of questions on to the record. If the minister is able to answer them, that's great, but I did make a commitment that I would share the floor, and I have gone through two paragraphs of seven pages of questions, so I'm giving up — not because of the minister, but mostly because I ask a question, then get a second question, and then I ask three more questions after that first question. I still haven't made it through the first page. I typically don't like to read so many together, but I will. It's about chronic conditions and disability.

It has been weeks since we flagged with the minister that hypoallergenic baby formula was not covered by chronic disease and disability, and I understand that the minister does not speak to individual cases, so I just want to ask the general question, which is: Is hypoallergenic baby formula now covered? There are countless conditions that are, in fact, covered by this program, but are nowhere to be found on the list that exists on the government website. It has discouraged a lot of folks from even bothering to apply for the program, so when is the website going to reflect all of the conditions that are covered?

Patients have come to us to express their concern that their health care provider never proactively offered to get them coverage through this program, or that their provider didn't really know about or know how to navigate the forms that they needed to fill out in order for the patients to apply, so is there mandatory training for providers to understand the process of how this program — so, this isn't just for Health and Social Services workers, but for all health care providers regulated by the government, including physicians — so is there mandatory training for providers to understand the process of this program so that more people have access?

Currently, chronic conditions coverage is drug- or treatment-specific, not condition-specific, so this means that when someone needs coverage for multiple medications, their doctor has to fill out a form for each of those medications, and it doesn't automatically get covered. Sometimes that means waiting months between appointments to fill out a separate new form, even though it's for the same condition.

I think what I meant — well, I know what I am asking for is their willingness to look into that process, to make sure that it is smoother for people. There is currently a \$250 deductible that you pay, once you get coverage, which is still a big chunk of money out front, and even more importantly, just on the barrier of that cost, is that you can't make that payment online. So, I can pay for my vehicle registration, I can get a fishing licence or a hunting licence, but I can't make the \$250 payment online, and it also, in my understanding — well, maybe the minister can clarify if that payment can be made in rural communities to the offices that exist there.

My final question on this is: Is there any interest or willingness from government to look at expanding the chronic conditions and disability program? As an example, I recently met with someone who has had hearing loss since birth. Their hearing aids were covered up until they turned 16, and then

after 16, they are not covered, but it is still the same hearing loss that they had as a child.

I thank the minister for the time today, and the officials for being here. It has been a delight, and I thank you for the time.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I will try to answer the questions. I appreciate the questions about the chronic conditions program. I can indicate that this has been a very recent topic on our weekly agendas with the deputy ministers and me because we, too, have concerns about aspects of this program and how we are communicating that to the public.

I appreciate the questions about baby formula. I am going to give you a bit of information. At this point, it is certainly something that is being resolved with respect to a particular family that has come forward. I know that the department officials have been in touch with the family and that is all I will say about that at this point.

I appreciate that not all conditions show on the website. We have, as of yesterday, approved a position that will be funded by the federal government that will be focused on improving our website — all of it — because it is incredibly important for Yukoners to understand as we move forward with *Putting People First*. It is an aspect of what we need to do with better communication.

There is no mandatory training with respect to the chronic conditions program, but better communication, I think, is what is really being asked about and better advertising about how this is available.

With respect to the question of a drug or treatment specific — maybe I can provide a bit of information about that, and it may be that the member opposite said this differently. A chronic disease is defined for this program as a health condition that is marked by a long duration or frequent reoccurrence and is specific to the chronic disease and disability benefits regulation. The program does provide coverage for approximately 80 chronic conditions, which are determined by regulation. I won't list them all here today in the interest of time — certainly not all 80 — but I take the point that they may not all be properly conveyed to the public, and they must be, in my view and in the view, I think, of the member opposite. The director of Insured Health, under the regulation, has the authority to designate a chronic condition as eligible for coverage. This process is based on evidence, best practices, coverage in other Canadian jurisdictions, and legislative criteria including the definition of “chronic condition” aligned in the regulation.

The \$250 deductible and being payable online is actually an improvement that is being looked at. I think that consideration with respect to the \$250 deductible is also something that we recently discussed at the table that I have with the deputy ministers, making sure that it is a low barrier — if it remains low barrier — for individuals to meet that requirement.

Expanding the program and review of the program has, as I have said, come to my table, instigated by me because I am aware of the difficulties with this program in a personal way as well as because individuals have spoken to me about it. I spoke a few days ago — this week — at our meeting with the deputy

ministers about this being a prime opportunity for us to look at the specifics of that program and how it should be and could be applied better for Yukoners.

Thank you for those questions. I hope I have answered most of them. If I haven't, I will be happy to do so.

Mr. Cathers: I would like to thank the Member for Takhini-Kopper King for handing the floor over this afternoon.

Since time is short, I am going to begin with a few questions related to wait times. The first on the list is: Can the minister tell us what the current wait time is for cardiac care? Secondly, in the area of ophthalmology, what is the current wait time to see an ophthalmologist, and what is the current wait time for cataract surgery? Thirdly, what is the current wait time for a non-urgent MRI?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I will try to answer these in the order that they were noted, Deputy Chair.

Cardiology services are provided by visiting specialists here in the territory. Of course, this is cardiology that is not emerging or an emergent situation; emergent situations are dealt with quite differently. The wait times and wait-list can fluctuate, based on the frequency of visits by the visiting specialists. Whitehorse General Hospital is supported by three visiting cardiologists who provide six visits per year, and two visiting pediatric cardiologists who offer two visits per year. Currently, the wait times to access a visiting cardiologist is approximately five months. There are 280 individuals on the wait-list to access this service. The Yukon Hospital Corporation triages referrals for cardiology services, with those with the highest need to be supported first.

The next question was about ophthalmology. In 2019, we implemented a two-year plan to successfully reduce wait times for cataract assessment. The plan has been extended to support managing wait times. We are meeting our target of completing cataract assessments within four months. These, of course, were done through the specialist services at Whitehorse General Hospital. The target wait time for cataract surgery is six months, and it is currently 10 months — so, off the target there by four months.

The Yukon Hospital Corporation and the Department of Health and Social Services, in partnership with the ophthalmologists, are currently on track to have the wait time within the target by the end of this fiscal year. Between 2019 and 2020, a combined total of 870 cataract surgeries were completed. In 2021, the Yukon Hospital Corporation completed 450 cataract surgeries — or they were done at the Hospital Corporation. In 2022, capacity for cataract surgeries increased to an anticipated 570 surgeries per year. I think that answers both cataract surgery and ophthalmology.

Lastly, I think that there was a question about MRIs. Yukon hospitals follow the national guidelines for triaging MRI referrals to ensure that those with the highest need are supported first. As of December 31, 2022, a total of 2,411 MRIs have been completed this fiscal year, and all wait times and targets are being met. They are categorized as follows: urgent MRI cases aim to be supported within seven days and are being completed within this target; semi-urgent MRI cases aim to be supported as close to 30 days as possible and are being

completed within this target; and non-urgent MRI cases aim to be supported as close to 90 days as possible and are being completed within that target.

The Yukon Hospital Corporation is using a combination of part-time, locum, and casual technologists to ensure that services are provided within the appropriate wait times — as well as full-time staff. I hope that answers those questions.

Mr. Cathers: My next question is: What is the status of the contract for the OB/GYNs? Additionally, there has previously been a discussion about the possibility of adding a third OB/GYN to provide additional support. What is the status of that? Finally, could the minister please provide us with what the current wait times are for OB/GYN non-urgent services and the number of patients who are waiting for those services?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate this question. It is something that we have been working on — I want to say “daily” — very recently to finalize the contracts with respect to the obstetrics and gynecology specialists.

Recent conversations have been extremely fruitful. We expect to be finalizing the contract within days for those services. It does contemplate a third professional specialist doctor being recruited, and that recruitment will begin immediately for the process going forward. We currently have two specialists who operate and practise in this area. Part of the conversations have been to recruit a third. They are supportive of that as are we, and that work will begin immediately.

The wait time currently for non-urgent services is between 12 and 15 months. The conversations we have had recently is that all parties are interested in reducing that for non-urgent care to six months — and the contract going forward — and the inclusion of a third specialist is aimed to achieve that.

I think the last part of the question was how many people are on the wait-list for non-urgent services and I don't have that information.

Mr. Cathers: My next question is about the government's commitment to develop a new health authority. Can the minister please provide us with information about the status of that, including information about the timelines associated with that development, the cost, and the consultation process. I understand that the Yukon Employees' Union had flagged this issue as one of the reasons that there was an impasse in the negotiations, so we are very interested in what consultation has occurred or is planned to occur with the union, with doctors, with the Hospital Corporation, other health professionals, as well as with First Nations and municipalities.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: One of the key recommendations in the *Putting People First* report is the creation of an arm's-length government agency for the delivery of some health and social services. Health and Wellness Yukon is the current working title of that organization. Health and Wellness Yukon is a foundational element of the health system transformation. Over time, we anticipate jointly improving the health care system, hand in hand with Yukon First Nations, such that it eliminates the systemic racism that exists in the system today.

Every Yukoner will have access to a regular care team by design and can receive quality services when needed. Having services that are connected to each other and are culturally safe

is the goal. Care is provided closer to a person's home or their community. Communities and people with lived experience are involved, and there is a focus on prevention, including investing in upstream determinants of health.

Our first priority, Deputy Chair, is to complete the legislation necessary to establish “Health and Wellness Yukon”. Setting up “Health and Wellness Yukon” is a complex initiative, quite likely the most complex program transition of Yukon's health care system that has ever been attempted or designed here in the territory, and we are going to take the time to do it correctly.

With respect to consultation of the parties that will be involved — first of all, I am not aware of the details but certainly I have not been provided with information that the current conversation and negotiations with the government and YEU have even contemplated the issues of consultation with “Health and Wellness Yukon”.

Of course, Yukon Employees' Union, the Hospital Corporation, medical professionals, nurses, other health care professionals, and First Nation leaders have been engaged and will continue to have an extremely important role in the development and transformation of the health care system.

The health system transformation team met with some Yukon First Nation governments and the Council of Yukon First Nations back in the summer of 2022 and have proposed the creation of a transition committee, which we are excited to see move forward as it will be one means of solidifying our partnership with Yukon First Nations. Then, in March of this year, 2023 — last month — First Nation leaders met and committed to establishing a Chiefs Committee on Health to provide advice on the implementation of the *Putting People First* recommendations and the oversight of the creation of Health and Wellness Yukon, as well as the oversight of the Health and Wellness Yukon transition committee. Membership of the Chiefs Committee on Health is being determined by Yukon First Nations, but all First Nations are welcome and encouraged to participate.

The transition committee will have First Nation membership and will lay the foundation of the health system transformation by providing recommendations related to the creation of Health and Wellness Yukon and identifying opportunities for health system integration. The Yukon Hospital Corporation is participating in the development of Health and Wellness Yukon and will be working with other health system partners such as the Yukon Medical Association, the Yukon Registered Nurses Association, allied professionals, and others.

We are also committed to engaging with staff and the Health and Social Services workforce and other stakeholders, and this engagement will occur directly with staff through union engagement. I can also indicate that learning from front-line staff, not only at the Department of Health and Social Services but the Yukon Hospital Corporation, will be key. We are committed to partnering with Yukon First Nations on key aspects of the health system transformation, including the creation of Health and Wellness Yukon.

It is critical that, in order to get this right, we build it from the ground up with all of our health care providers and partners at the table. It will be a change for some. It will be a welcome change for many. It certainly will be a welcome change for Yukoners who participated extensively in the expert panel that put together the report, *Putting People First*, which is what Yukoners have asked of us in transforming the health care system here in the territory.

The new health authority will respect the choices of Yukoners and recognize Yukon First Nation history, governance, and cultural traditions, noting that a key aspect of the work that will be done is to eliminate systemic racism that we recognize exists and to make sure that Health and Wellness Yukon going forward — the health authority going forward — is something that is supported by all of the players, all of the individuals who will have great advice about how to do this best.

Of course, there are very complex organizations that currently will be involved in the creation of Health and Wellness Yukon and will ultimately become a very serious part of the health authority.

We look forward to this work being done — an extensive collaboration with all of these parties.

Mr. Cathers: Just another point related to the health authority — the minister said she was not aware of union concerns regarding this. I would note that, where we're getting this information is from the Yukon Employees' Union website, under their FAQ about bargaining with the Yukon government. They say — and I quote: "We also have concerns about the anticipated impacts of the government's implementation of Wellness Yukon, the planned health authority..." That is a direct quote from Yukon Employees' Union website regarding it.

We have also heard the Yukon Medical Association, in the past, has asked government — they have expressed concern with the exact model envisioned in a comprehensive health review, which envisioned creating a third entity, in addition to the Department of Health and Social Services and the Hospital Corporation. They have specifically requested and encouraged the government to, instead of developing a third entity, if they're going to move forward with a health authority, to look at using the existing *Hospital Act*, which envisioned that the hospital might become a health authority.

I would ask the minister if the government is considering that request from the Yukon Medical Association but, in the interest of time, as we reach the end of the Sitting, I'm going to move on to a few other questions, and then provide the minister with an opportunity to respond.

I would ask the minister what the status is of the diabetes strategy. In May 2021, the Yukon Legislative Assembly passed a motion committing to the government developing a strategy by September of last year. I would also ask about the status of the child and youth health program. We understand a new clinic is planned to open in June this year at the old Wayfarer Oyster House building.

Is government providing support for this new clinic? Secondly, in that specific area, is the government considering

expanding the current child and youth health program? If so, would they consider moving pediatric allergy or urology to the territory?

I have two final questions before turning it over to the minister. I would ask if the minister could indicate — we know that the Yukon Medical Association in the last election had made the surgical services area — or the operating room, to use another term — a priority that they raised with all political parties. Could the minister please indicate what the status is of work on expanding and upgrading the surgical services area, including expanding capacity?

Finally, I would ask the minister, since we last raised the point of outstanding bills due to Yukon doctors, if she could provide an update on progress made in processing those — what she indicated were 22,000 outstanding payments to physicians.

One final question, Deputy Chair, before I cede the floor: Could the minister either provide or commit to getting back to us regarding the wait time to see an audiologist and what steps the government may be taking in that area to reduce wait times?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I will try to answer as many of those parts of questions that I can in the remaining time today.

I think I was first asked about the diabetes strategy back in — I think the member said last year. I think it was back in 2021 when the Legislative Assembly unanimously passed a motion — and I might have heard wrong — to develop a type 1 diabetes strategy. The Department of Health and Social Services continues to work with the T1D Support Network toward implementing a territory-wide type 1 diabetes strategy. It's currently being drafted. The work has taken longer than one might have wanted but we have been guided by the T1D Support Network and the work that we wanted to be done in conjunction with them and in collaboration with them. There were interviews and focus groups that were completed by the T1D Support Network back in the fall of 2022. That formed the basis of the needs assessment for the strategy. The strategy is expected to address areas such as management, treatment and care, data collection, learning and knowledge-sharing, access to devices, medicines, and other supports.

Alongside the T1D Support Network, Health and Social Services and a variety of partners such as the Department of Education and the diabetes educators and primary care clinicians were involved. The T1D Support Network had a funding agreement with our government for a pilot project to provide continuous glucose monitors.

I will stop there on that topic for the purposes of moving to the question about pediatric services. Between April 1, 2022, and January of 2023, Yukon's pediatricians have seen 267 unique children. There are pediatrician services available here in Whitehorse and rural communities. Locums provide coverage for pediatricians, if needed. I think the question was about a clinic going forward. We have been —

Interruption

Deputy Chair's statement

Deputy Chair: Order. As the business in the Legislature is still continuing, I will ask guests to hold any comments until afterward. Thank you.

Please continue, Member for Riverdale South.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: By continuing to enhance pediatric services and by implementing the person-centered approach from *Putting People First*, we are supporting the health and well-being of children. Yukon pediatricians provide a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to child health. The clinic, I am told, is moving to a better location to provide these services to children, to make sure that children's health is addressed, as well as the social determinants and child equity. The approach to pediatric care has helped reduce the number of children who need to travel for pediatric services by 93 percent since implementation of this program in 2017, I am proud to say.

I think that there was a question about claims for doctors' bills and the status of those. Back in January, our government took immediate action when the backlog of physician claims was identified. Part of the backlog was related to the negotiated fee increases that came from last year's memorandum of understanding that was signed with the Yukon Medical Association. Since then, it has been fully resolved. The issue of all claims has been paid up.

With respect to the negotiated fee increase claims, there are two sets of issues — one related to that; the other related to — as the member opposite probably knows, and Yukoners probably know as well, there is a three-year agreement with the Yukon Medical Association, and the agreement will help to increase Yukoners' access to primary care, while simultaneously reporting the dedicated health care providers in the territory and progressing with a digital health strategy for the territory, which will be an important improvement. We are working together on long-term solutions to improve an electronic billing system.

I think that one of the members earlier — I think it was maybe even in —

Deputy Chair: Order, please.

Termination of Sitting as per Standing Order 76(1)

Deputy Chair: The time has reached 5:00 p.m. on this, the 32nd sitting day of the 2023 Spring Sitting.

Standing Order 76(1) states, "On the sitting day that the Assembly has reached the maximum number of sitting days allocated for that Sitting pursuant to Standing Order 75, the Chair of the Committee of the Whole, if the Assembly is in Committee of the Whole at the time, shall interrupt proceedings at 5:00 p.m. and, with respect to each Government Bill before Committee that the Government House Leader directs to be called, shall:

"(a) put the question on any amendment then before the Committee;

"(b) put the question, without debate or amendment, on a motion moved by a Minister that the bill, including all clauses, schedules, title and preamble, be deemed to be read and carried;

"(c) put the question on a motion moved by a Minister that the bill be reported to the Assembly; and

"(d) when all bills have been dealt with, recall the Speaker to the Chair to report on the proceedings of the Committee."

Pursuant to the sessional order adopted on March 7, 2023, through the adoption of Motion No. 588, Standing Order 76 only applies to appropriation bills for this Sitting. It is the duty of the Chair to now conduct the business of Committee of the Whole in the manner directed by Standing Order 76(1). The Chair will now ask the Government House Leader to indicate whether the appropriation bill now before the Committee of the Whole should be called.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The government directs that Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*, be called at this time.

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

Deputy Chair: The Committee will now deal with Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

The Chair will now recognize the Member for Klondike for the purpose of moving a motion pursuant to Standing Order 76(1)(b).

Hon. Mr. Silver: I move that all clauses, schedules, the preamble, and the title of Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*, be deemed to be read and carried.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Klondike that all clauses, schedules, the preamble, and the title of Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*, be deemed to be read and carried.

As no debate or amendment is permitted, I shall now put the question.

Are you agreed?

Motion agreed to

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$1,454,002,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$483,834,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$1,937,836,000 agreed to

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to

Schedules A and B agreed to

Preamble agreed to

Title agreed to

Hon. Mr. Silver: Deputy Chair, I move that you report Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*, without amendment.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Klondike that the Chair report Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*, without amendment.

As no debate or amendment is permitted, I shall now put the question.

Are you agreed?

Motion agreed to

Deputy Chair: As the appropriation bill identified by the Government House Leader has now been decided upon, it is my duty to rise and report to the House.

Speaker resumes the Chair

Termination of Sitting as per Standing Order 76(2)

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report the bill without amendment.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

Standing Order 76(2) states: "On the sitting day that the Assembly has reached the maximum number of sitting days allocated for that Sitting pursuant to Standing Order 75, the Speaker of the Assembly, when recalled to the Chair after the House has been in Committee of the Whole, shall:

"(d) with respect to each Government Bill standing on the Order Paper for Third Reading and designated to be called by the Government House Leader,

"(i) receive a motion for Third Reading and passage of the bill, and

"(ii) put the question, without debate or amendment, on that motion."

Pursuant to the Sessional Order adopted on March 17, 2023, through the adoption of Motion No. 588, Standing Order 76 only applies to appropriation bills for this Sitting.

I shall, therefore, ask the Government House Leader to indicate whether the appropriation bill now standing on the Order Paper for third reading should be called.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, the government directs that Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*, be called at this time.

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

Clerk: Third reading, Bill No. 208, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*, be now read a third time and do pass.

As no debate or amendment is permitted, I shall now put the question.

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Dixon: Disagree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Ms. Clarke: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Ms. White: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are nine yeas, eight nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for third reading of Bill No. 208 agreed to

Speaker: I declare that Bill No. 208 has passed this House.

We are now prepared to receive the Administrator of the Yukon to grant assent to bills which have passed this House.

Administrator Webber enters the Chamber announced by the Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

ASSENT TO BILLS

Administrator: Please be seated.

Speaker: Madam Administrator, the Assembly has, at its present session, passed certain bills to which, in the name and on behalf of the Assembly, I respectfully request your assent.

Clerk: *Act to amend the Yukon Advisory Council on Women's Issues Act (2023); First Appropriation Act 2023-24.*

Administrator: I hereby assent to the bills as enumerated by the Clerk.

Administrator leaves the Chamber

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of the House for the Assembly to pay tribute to the amazing Helen Fitzsimmons, the Legislative Assembly Office's Director of Administration, Finance and Systems, at this time; following the tribute, for Helen Fitzsimmons to address the House prior to the adjournment of the 2023 Spring Sitting, notwithstanding any

Standing Order or usual practice and the order of business of the House; and for the transcript of the address to be printed in Hansard and form part of the records of this House.

Unanimous consent re tribute to Director, Administration, Finance and Systems, Legislative Assembly Office

Speaker: The Government House Leader has, Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of the House for the Assembly to pay tribute to the amazing Helen Fitzsimmons, the Legislative Assembly Office's Director of Administration, Finance and Systems, at this time; following the tribute, for Helen Fitzsimmons to address the House prior to the adjournment of the 2023 Spring Sitting, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice and the order of business of the House; and for the transcript of the address to be printed in Hansard and form part of the records of this House.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Unanimous consent has been granted.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: I will begin our celebration of Helen Fitzsimmons, the longest serving civil servant in the Yukon government, by having Introduction of Visitors outside of the normal time for introducing visitors.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: As we pay tribute to a great Yukoner, a lot of great, amazing Yukoners — for those who have sat in these seats, you know that the most nerve-wracking thing is missing somebody's name. I am leaning on my colleagues across the way to help me, but I am going to do my best with folks who have come in today.

I would like to welcome to the Assembly, Senator Pat Duncan, Sarah Edwards, Cheryl Huroscoc, Piers McDonald, Joanne Curial, Elaine Schiman, Kerri Scholz, Arthur Mitchell, Ted Staffen, Karen Lang, Ruth Armson, Jean Roberts, Patricia Cunning, Joyce Anderson, Pat Ellis, Peggy Hanulik, Chris Mahar, Ted Laking, Ellen Eby, Jane Anderson, Loretta Boorse, Dan Lang, Aidan Bell, Rick Smith, Porter Creek South's Dean Hassard, Doug Phillips, Lana Frazer, Shannon Baskerville, Liz Hanson, Jason Bilsky, Bengie Clethero, Julia Milnes, Anya Braeuner, Annette King, Christel Percival, Jodi and Mark Richardson, Richard Gorczyca, Max Harvey, Carrie Jackson, Kayla Fitzsimmons, Doug Fitzsimmons, and I know Janet Moodie and Patrick Michael.

Now, I am going to hand it to my friends across the way.

Applause

Mr. Dixon: With the same caveat as the Premier has provided, I will try to bat cleanup here. Of course, from our office, we have our staff from the Yukon Party: chief of staff Danny Macdonald, Kelsey Smeeton, Tim Kucharuk, Robin Balmforth, former MLA Glenn Hart, and Matt and Deana Lemke from the Hansard office, of course, who worked closely with Helen over the years. Well, here is one that you didn't introduce — Helen Fitzsimmons. I will leave it there.

Applause

Mr. Kent: I would like to welcome my wife, Amanda Leslie, and our young son, Eli Kent, to the gallery, as well as long-time friend Carolyn Thompson, who has joined them as well.

Applause

Ms. White: I do appreciate the caveat that the Premier has laid out for us and then was picked up by the Leader of the Official Opposition. I am going to do it differently; I am going to actually go by the rows. So, of course, I am so grateful to see: Lois Moorcroft, Denise Leschart, Eleanor Millard. Of course, Eleanor and Lois have been here. Also Max Harvey, the Chief Electoral Officer — and I am moving down the rows: Dan Bader and Jan Stick, who is also very familiar to the House. It has already been mentioned, but Piers McDonald — because he is also one of the premiers who is in the Assembly. Liz, you have already been mentioned but, of course, I'm going to mention you again.

Floyd McCormick, Tory Russell, we have Saba Javed, Pascaline Etter — and I'm moving over. Jean Johnson — how fun is that, that I get to introduce someone I have known my entire life.

There are so many, but I would like to point out to you that this morning, when I told Helen that it was going to be packed, she said, "There are just going to be a couple of people, Kate." There are just going to be a couple of people.

So, for anyone I have forgotten, thank you so much for coming to celebrate such an incredible person.

Applause

Mr. Cathers: I would also like to welcome all the visitors and mention a couple I believe were missed: Gordon Steele and Sue MacDonald, as well as — she was introduced, but I'll pronounce her name correctly: Elaine Schiman is here in the gallery. I would also just like to note — as Helen's MLA, I would like to thank her for all her help over the years and the excellent work she has done on behalf of MLAs in the current Assembly and past assemblies.

Applause

Speaker's statement in recognition of Helen Fitzsimmons, Director of Administration, Finance, and Systems, Legislative Assembly Office

Speaker: I will just get things started by saying a few words about Helen.

When I came here as the new guy from Pelly, I met Helen and was impressed by how much she knew about everything to do with the Legislative Assembly operations. It was then that I discovered that she had been an employee of the government for 44 years at that point. I thought to myself that Helen has worked in government longer than I have been alive, and she looks great. There is hope for me yet if I can get through this job and come out the other end as fit and as healthy as Helen.

I know others will get up to congratulate you on your long and excellent career, but I just want to say thank you, Helen,

for your dedication, your passion, your perseverance, your guidance, your respect for others, your professionalism, and most of all, the leadership you have shown throughout your entire 46-year career.

Helen, you have always been a rock to cling to for this Assembly during its many storms, and you will be greatly missed in our workspace. I know that there are many co-workers' lives and hearts that you have touched through your positive light as you put a smile on their faces.

Have a great retirement, and drop by from time to time to check on us. After all, you can skip out the door whenever you want.

Applause

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Helen Fitzsimmons, Director of Administration, Finance, and Systems, Legislative Assembly Office

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I have never seen the Legislative Assembly look so much like Romper Room in my whole life. I see Aaron, I see Crystal, I see — unbelievable. The who's who of Yukon are here today, and for good reason, as we sit here with the honour of paying tribute to Helen Fitzsimmons.

Helen is much more than just a long-time employee of the Yukon government and the Yukon Legislative Assembly. She is an icon of public service and a dear friend. Sadly, for us, although certainly exciting for her, Helen will be retiring this year, after an extremely impressive career spanning more than four decades — as of this summer, 46 years of service. She started when she was two.

Helen started with the Yukon government in 1978, immediately out of high school. Her first position was working in health care, collecting premiums for Yukoners and businesses. She then moved to Realty Services at Highways and Public Works, before starting in the Legislative Assembly in 2002.

According to Helen, the key to her success and longevity is building positive relationships — check; while negotiating with flair — check; leading others — absolutely; and also knowing when and how to say no. Helen says that it has been an honour to have worked in the Legislative Assembly for the past 21 years, and it has certainly been an honour for all of the MLAs to have her assistance. With all due respect to the Member for Lake Laberge, Helen is all of ours — all of the MLAs. We all definitely own Helen.

Helen's tenure at the Legislative Assembly saw her work with five premiers and countless MLAs. Despite these changes in leadership and political parties, Helen has reflected on the fact that every elected member has always done their best to serve Yukoners. Amen.

She is also proud of the fact that, with a small staff, the Yukon team delivers all the services that larger jurisdictions do as well. I have been in countless boardroom meetings and committees with Helen over the years, meetings with very tough agendas, some that take years to complete and some that take minutes to complete. What Helen always brought to the

table was extensive knowledge of public policy, best practices in other jurisdictions, a unique ability to communicate with all of the MLAs on very complex topics with ease. I always felt that we were in good hands with Helen in our meetings.

It's hard with three different political parties all trying their best to leave a meeting and to have that trust and that respect of the people who are running those meetings, and Helen really did do it with ease.

On a personal note, during my rookie years in the Assembly, and being the lone Liberal for years, we didn't have a lot of resources in our office, and Helen was our oracle — the all-knowing Helen, whom my chief of staff, Jason, called “the doctor”, because she was all-knowing and she always had the remedy for all of our afflictions.

She went above and beyond on every single issue. She went the distance for any problem, any question, or any concern. Mr. Speaker, you know this: She made it all look so easy. She always had a “it's no problem” attitude. Helen is grace under pressure. I would say that she emulates what it means to be a dedicated public servant but that would be such an understatement.

Helen, I think I talk for everybody in the gallery here: Thank you. You have been such an incredible part of this team and your remarkable years of service to all Yukoners. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Your dedication, your vast knowledge, and your positive attitude has been an absolute asset for all of us.

Thank you, on behalf of the Yukon government; we wish you all the best in your retirement.

Applause

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I have stood in this House and done many tributes to many wonderful people and wonderful causes over the years, but this is one that is particularly special, I think, to all of us. It's not just special to MLAs, but to all of us here in the gallery as well, from our colleagues and former MLAs who have served over the past many years.

In preparation for today's tribute, we reached out to many people — former premiers, former Speakers of the House, former Clerks, former staff, former colleagues — even former husbands — just kidding; I couldn't get Byng's number, so I didn't talk to him.

Mr. Speaker, every single person I spoke to absolutely lit up at the thought of a tribute to Helen. Many prefaced their comments and stories with, “Well, this won't be appropriate for the Legislature, but —” Some even offered pictures. I am told that there may be pictures of Helen coaching T-ball back when I was playing, so I look forward to seeing those. As diverse and varied were the things I heard from a variety of people, there were some unequivocal common themes that emerged that I want to share today.

First of all, to her person, Helen's sunny attitude, her kindness, and her generosity were commented on by everybody. One former MLA described her as a cheerful, bright light. Another former colleague called her one of the most kind and generous people in the world. Her sense of humour was top

of mind for many as well and, Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more.

Working so closely with a bunch of politicians of different parties at different times during different governments has meant that Helen has been at the absolute centre of plenty of conflict. Despite that, I don't think a single one of us can point to a time that Helen has been anything less than professional, positive, and anything less than a sunny disposition.

The second key theme on the topic of Helen was that she is so incredible at getting things done. If you have ever needed anything done in the Yukon government, Helen is the first one who we all go to. One former Speaker described repeatedly hitting a wall, trying to get Christmas lights put up on this building during the holidays. He tried the Premier, he tried the minister, he tried the deputy minister, but one day, after mentioning it to Helen, up went the lights.

A former Clerk used the old adage: "A committee of 20 deliberates plenty, a committee of 10 acts now and then, but most jobs are done by a committee of one, and more times than not, that one is Helen."

Throughout her years in the public service, Helen has built an incredible network of people who, because they think so highly of her, are always willing to take her call and get something done for her.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the last important point that I need to make is the genuine care that Helen has provided to each and every one of us as MLAs during her time in this building. Every single one of us knows that Helen is someone who we can turn to for just about anything we need. One former MLA even asked Helen to marry him — or to perform the services, at least. But on with a quote from a current MLA, Mr. Speaker: "For MLAs, Helen is more than someone who helps us with paperwork, budgets, and claims; she always takes time to ask about our families and how we are doing personally." It is those things that we will all miss and that make her special to all of us.

I'll only add to that by saying that absolutely extends to our families, as well, and those former MLAs, of course, include those who have passed on. For instance, I know that both Dennis and Archie cared very much for Helen, and her for them and their families as well.

So, Helen, on behalf of myself, our current caucus, all of our former members and, of course, all of our families as well, I would like to thank you, Helen, and wish you nothing but the best for your retirement and everything that comes next.

Applause

Ms. White: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP caucus to celebrate the incredible work of Helen Fitzsimmons, and I always get to go third, and I think today I actually am quite excited about it. I ask a little bit of leniency, Mr. Speaker, because in all my years here, I have always addressed the Speaker, but I'm going to turn a little to my left today — always to the left.

Her work in the public service spans my lifetime, and her work in this Assembly has spanned more than a few governments. I spent a fair amount of time thinking about

Helen and the impact that she has had on me and on all of my colleagues, both past and present. The work of a Legislative Assembly Office is vast, and there are many moving parts, both big and small, and they all play important roles — all important different roles — and they're all very critical.

In an effort to explain how Helen fits into all of this, I'm going to make a comparison using one of my absolutely favourite things on the planet and that's mountain bikes. When you look at a mountain bike, you notice many things, and the first thing that you might notice is the paint colour, and then the front fork and the rear suspension, because they dictate the smoothness of your ride; the wheel build dictates how your bike will feel as it rolls; the brakes — well, the brakes help you stop, so the better the brakes, the better you stop, so that's pretty important.

Then there's the derailleur, the part of your bike that allows you to change gears. The fancier the derailleur, the smoother the shifting, and all of these things could be flashy or not, but all of them are things that you'll notice at first glance — but there's one small, little part on a mountain bike that is critical to it functioning, and it allows all of these pieces to work together, and that's the rear derailleur hanger. It doesn't matter how flashy any of the other components might be: without this one small critical part, the bike is unrideable.

Helen is that critical part in so many different capacities: the Legislative Assembly Office, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Office of Child and Youth Advocate, and Elections Yukon.

She holds us all together. She makes it all work by allowing and supporting each of those other roles and all of those important offices to do the important work that they do. She lifts us all up. So, I can't even begin to list all that she does because there is not enough time to go through that incredibly long list of items, and let's be honest, we don't know what all of those things are, and I'm worried — I'm worried, because we are going to find out.

Helen, thank you for the kindness that you have always shown, for the care and the guidance that you have supported Todd and his family, in his battle with cancer, or how, without your support and your steely grace, it would have been impossible to navigate the many challenges that our very small team faced when Steve suddenly died in a workplace accident. You helped pick up the pieces, and you shielded Liz from the worst of it. These tremendous losses were made easier by your actions — crying twice in one day.

I want people to get a sense of you behind the scenes because these are examples of the core of you — the kindness and the compassion that you have always shown in crisis situations and crisis interventions for others in this House — past and present — that most will never know about but for which we are all very grateful.

I thank you for the advice and support that you have so freely shared with elected members and staff over the years. The impact that you made is felt every day. Kevin still calls you his guardian angel, and Denise says that it is because of you that she has a home. So, I thank you for the candid

conversations that you and I have had in the last decade, as I tried and finally found my feet.

Because, despite having seen you daily for over 11 years, I am not convinced that I have seen the same outfit twice. I will miss your incredible fashion sense and seeing your impossible shoes on a daily basis, including high-heeled winter boots.

I speak for the entire NDP family as we congratulate and thank you for your epic 46 years of public service. We are so excited for what comes next because you deserve the very best. Happy retirement.

Applause

Speaker: I would like to invite Helen Fitzsimmons to the floor of the Assembly to say a few words.

Recess

Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms escorts Helen Fitzsimmons beyond the bar of the House

Address by Helen Fitzsimmons, Director of Administration, Finance, and Systems, Legislative Assembly Office

Ms. Fitzsimmons: Thank you all so much. I really did think there would only be a few people here.

I feel privileged to be able to speak in this Assembly and it is truly an honour to receive these tributes. It seems like only yesterday that I was walking into this building on my first day of work in June 1978. I have seen many changes over those years and cannot believe how fast the time has flown by.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the 21 years I have worked with the Legislative Assembly and thank Patrick Michael for hiring me and believing I could do the job. I would also like to thank his successors, Floyd McCormick and Dan Cable, who continued to believe in me and supported whatever ideas I came up with — and I came up with lots.

I would like to thank all the past and present Speakers, MLAs, Legislative Assembly staff, caucus staff, House Officers and their staff, and the contractors who also help us — Hansard, AVCR Video, George and Bell Consulting, Computerisms, Bizont — and everyone in the Yukon government who helped me do my job. I feel so fortunate to have been part of such an incredible team, and I can't believe how much we have accomplished. Thank you for your support and encouragement.

In closing, I would like to thank my family — my mom and dad; my sisters Debbie and Beverly; my brothers Donnie, Doug, and Ralph; my partner Roger; and my friends who travelled this journey with me. Sadly, my mom couldn't attend today, but my dad is here and he turns 93 on Sunday.

My parents taught all their children to work so hard that your employer doesn't think you are replaceable. I think I honoured their wishes.

To each and every one of you, thank you again. It has been an incredible journey and, Kate, yes, this is a new outfit. I do have high-heeled shoes on. Thank you everybody.

Applause

Speaker: There will be a reception for Helen in the lounge area afterward.

Before I adjourn the Spring Sitting of the Yukon Legislative Assembly, I would like to extend my thanks on behalf of myself, as Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, the Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole, and on behalf of all members of our Legislative Assembly to the Clerk, Dan Cable; Deputy Clerk, Linda Kolody; Clerk of Committees, Allison Lloyd; Director of Administration, Finance, and Systems, Helen Fitzsimmons; Operation Manager, Warren Pearson; Finance and Operations Clerk, Lyndsey Amundson; as well as the Sergeant-at-Arms, Karina Watson; and Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms, Joe Mewett, who all provided invaluable support to all MLAs and their staff in order for us all to continue to do the important work that we are sent here to do on behalf of all Yukoners.

As well, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the skilled team of Hansard for their timely and accurate service and all the other background staff and contractors who kept this Legislative Assembly operating.

I would also like to thank Chris Rodgers, our camera operator for the Assembly. I would also commend the hard-working civil servants who deliver services to Yukoners and support to all of us, as members in our work.

I wish Members of the Legislative Assembly all the best for the coming summer season. I hope that all of us can look forward to the summer with family, friends, and the great Yukon outdoors.

As the House has, pursuant to Standing Order 75(4), reached the maximum number of sitting days permitted for this Spring Sitting, and the House has completed consideration of the designated legislation, it is the duty of the Chair to declare that this House now stands adjourned until the Special Sitting in Dawson City at 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday, June 13, 2023.

The House adjourned at 5:41 p.m.

The following sessional paper was filed April 27, 2023:

35-1-101

Yukon Human Rights Commission Annual Report 2021-2022 and Yukon Human Rights Commission Financial Statements Year Ended March 31, 2022 (Speaker Harper)

The legislative returns were tabled April 27, 2023:

35-1-89

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. White related to general debate on Vote 3, Education, in Bill No. 207, *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23* — private school accreditation (McLean)

35-1-90

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with MLA Tredger related to general debate on Vote 11, Women and Gender Equity Directorate, in Bill No. 208, *First Appropriation Act 2023-24* — taxi safety (McLean)

35-1-91

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. White related to general debate on Vote 3, Education, in Bill No. 208, *First Appropriation Act 2023-24* — First Nation School Board (McLean)

35-1-92

Response to Written Question No. 34 re: Nisutlin Bay bridge project (Clarke, N.)

35-1-93

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Hassard related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 208, *First Appropriation Act 2023-24* — active transportation (Clarke, N.)

35-1-94

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Hassard related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 207, *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23* — major project report cards (Clarke, N.)

35-1-95

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Hassard related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 207, *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23* — Jim Smith Building parking lot (Clarke, N.)

35-1-96

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with MLA Tredger related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 208, *First Appropriation Act 2023-24* — data breaches (Clarke, N.)

35-1-97

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with MLA Tredger related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 208, *First Appropriation Act 2023-24* — carrier compliance (Clarke, N.)

35-1-98

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Hassard related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 207, *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23* — Big Creek bridge subcontractors (Clarke, N.)

35-1-99

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Hassard related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 207, *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23* — Nisutlin Bay bridge winter shutdown (Clarke, N.)

35-1-100

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with MLA Tredger related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 208, *First Appropriation Act 2023-24* — greenhouse gas reductions (Clarke, N.)

35-1-101

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Hassard related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 207, *Third Appropriation Act 2022-23* — North Klondike Highway (Clarke, N.)