



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 136

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Wednesday, October 4, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall Sitting

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

CABINET MINISTERS

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

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

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

**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, October 4, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.**

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

I would like to begin the 2023 Fall Sitting of the Legislative Assembly by respectfully acknowledging all Yukon First Nations and also that we are meeting on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

We will proceed at this time with prayers.

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of changes made to the Order Paper. The following motions have been removed from the Order Paper, as they are now outdated: Motions No. 154, 474, and 637, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge; Motions No. 350 and 579, standing in the name of the Hon. Premier; Motions No. 475 and 611, standing in the name of the Member for Kluane; Motion No. 525, standing in the name of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin; Motions No. 558, 559, and 560, standing in the name of the Member for Copperbelt South; and Motion No. 610, standing in the name of the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin.

The following motions have been removed from the Order Paper, as the actions requested in the motions have been taken in whole or in part: Motions No. 16, 89, 240, 404, and 573, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge; Motions No. 33 and 144, standing in the name of the Leader of the Third Party; Motion No. 113, standing in the name of the Leader of the Official Opposition, on which debate adjourned on October 13, 2021; Motion No. 639, standing in the name of the Leader of the Official Opposition; Motions No. 116, 270, and 538, standing in the name of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin; Motion No. 278, standing in the name of the Member for Watson Lake; Motion No. 293, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre; Motions No. 343, 357, and 625, standing in the name of the Member for Copperbelt South; and Motions No. 499 and 680, standing in the name of the Member for Porter Creek Centre.

Finally, Motion No. 729, notice of which was given by the Member for Klondike on April 27, 2023, was not placed on the June 13, 2023 Notice Paper, as the motion was outdated.

INTRODUCTION OF PAGES

Speaker: It gives me great pleasure to introduce the pages who will be serving the House during the 2023 Fall Sitting. They are: Chris Cooper and Carter France from Porter Creek Secondary School; Luka Slykhuis and Junior Zang from CSSC Mercier; and from F.H. Collins Secondary School, Trinity Schwalm, Halia Fritzen Pealow, Sweta Patel, and Paisley Schroeder. Today, we have with us Halia Fritzen Pealow and Paisley Schroeder.

Applause

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Under Introduction of Visitors, it gives me great pleasure to introduce Annette King, the Child and Youth Advocate. From her staff, we also have Julia Milnes, Deputy Child and Youth Advocate, and McKenzie Amundson, client service administrator. In addition, I would like to introduce Rick Smith, investigator and compliance review officer and general counsel for the Office of the Ombudsman. I would also like to introduce Joe Mewett.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any further visitors to be introduced?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to welcome to the House today, first, Carly Rudolph and Linda Casson, both president and secretary for the Yukon Liberal Party. Thank you for being here today. Also, we have two young individuals with us today who are part of an Indigenous training program introducing youth to government. So, I would like to also welcome Arianna Porter and Emma Glada. Please welcome them to the House today.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McLean: I would ask my colleagues to please help me welcome some very special guests here today. The first one is Judy Gingell, currently the chair of the Yukon Residential Schools Missing Children Project but also former Grand Chief of the Council of Yukon First Nations and former Commissioner of the Yukon. Also joining her today is the vice-chair for the Yukon Residential School Missing Children Project, Doris Bill, who is also the former Chief of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and a co-chair with me on the Yukon Advisory Committee on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Welcome. Thank you so much for coming today.

I would also like to, of course, recognize one of my staff members from the Cabinet staff, Carla Gostick, who is a member of my team. Welcome to all of you. Thank you.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Streicker: There are a few guests I would like to ask us all to welcome: first of all, proud grandparents visiting from Winnipeg, Jim Sanders and Kerän Sanders; from the Yukon Development Corporation, the president and CEO, Dennis Berry; and the chair of the Yukon Development Corporation Board, Mike Pemberton. We also have with us Aletta Leitch, manager of energy programs; Heather Swystun, senior energy advisor; and Vera Schall, who is a senior energy advisor, but I first met Vera when she was a young teen organizing the Marsh Lake dog show for many years. If we could welcome them all, please.

Applause

Mr. Dixon: I see a number of folks who have joined us from the Yukon business community, so I will ask the members to join me in recognizing a few of them. I see Jen and JoMary from Bliss Salon. I see James and Randi Lopushinsky and Chris Young from Coldwell Banker, Walter Trotter and Chad Hardwood from Arcrite, Cat McInroy from Well Bread Culinary, and probably others whom I am going to miss right now, but I will ask folks to join me in welcoming them to the gallery.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Silver: I would like to ask folks to help me welcome to the gallery today — new to the gallery and new to the caucus office — Tash Watcham-Roy, who is the administrative assistant for the Minister of Highways and Public Works and the Minister of Environment and also the administrative assistant to the Minister of Finance, Public Service Commission, and Yukon Liquor Corporation. Also, beside her is Aaron Casselman, who is my ministerial assistant.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Sisters in Spirit Vigil

Hon. Ms. McLean: I rise today on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to the Sisters in Spirit Vigil held each October. This vigil is a time to come together to mourn and remember Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit-plus people who are missing or who have been lost to violence. But for too many Indigenous families in the Yukon and throughout Canada, every day is a day of mourning and remembrance. They continue to search for answers, closure, and healing.

This country has a dark history, Mr. Speaker, of discrimination against Indigenous women and girls. The colonial legal system stripped us of our traditional matriarchal roles and societal status for far too long. It denied us fundamental civil and human rights. Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit-plus people have inherited a legacy of discrimination, and we continue to suffer from those impacts.

We remain vulnerable to gender-based violence, yet we are resilient. Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit-plus people continue to show up and advocate for our loved ones and for systemic change. The ongoing violence that affects our communities is an emergency that demands immediate attention. We need to listen to the MMIWG and 2S+ family survivors and their advocates, and we need to act on their calls for justice.

On this day, I must also reflect on the recent news of the potential unmarked graves of the former Choooutla residential school site and the research that indicates that 33 children died at that residential school. My heart goes out to all of the family members of these innocent children, and my gratitude to the Yukon Residential Schools Missing Children Project, which led this research with sensitivity and respect for impacted communities and families — thank you.

Last week, I had the honour of participating in Wolf and Crow potlatches on the traditional territory of the Kaska Nation in Watson Lake.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the history between residential schools and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls is very much linked. These potlatches were held to honour the women and girls and two-spirit people lost to violence from that area of our territory.

Mr. Speaker, 16 names were spoken — 16 names. Nine others were honoured the week before in Ross River, for a total of 25. This represents more than half of all the lost sisters in our territory. They were daughters, sisters, mothers, aunties, wives, grandmothers, and friends. Today, we take time to mourn and remember, but we also stand together with the sense of resilience and determination. We remember our lost people not as victims but as symbols of strength, courage, perseverance, and our spirit as Indigenous people. We stand with the families today as we marched in the vigil, and I hope that it brought them some sense of love that we show for them.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to Sisters in Spirit National Day of Action 2023. It is always with a heavy heart that we rise in this House and across Canada on October 4 to bring the issue of missing and murdered women, girls, and gender-diverse people to the front of mind.

Certainly, it is one day to recognize an event, but we must remember them every day. The Native Women's Association of Canada continues to work, along with local associations, to bring awareness, educate, research, and collect data on this national tragedy. Across the nation, the red dress has been the visual symbol. Today, we wear blue to ensure that the Sisters in Spirit Vigil and Walk are visible to show our continued support for grieving families and loved ones.

This is one process in the healing and also gives an opportunity to honour the memories and lives of those lost to violence and death. Take a moment today to remember, and let us continue to place protections and safety nets for our vulnerable population.

Today, at the RCMP station on 4th Avenue, many gathered to comfort each other and to witness another year since our last vigil. As we move forward, thank you to those families who share their painful stories. Thank you to all who organize and support those in need. Thank you to all who give a part of their busy day to be a part of this cause, and thank you for remembering.

Ms. Blake: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to Sisters in Spirit. We commemorate this day to honour the lives of all victims and families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls across all parts of Canada and here in the Yukon while ensuring that their lives and experiences of injustice across all systems in society are not forgotten.

As a daughter, sister, auntie, and mother who comes from a long line of strong Indigenous matriarchs, I can't help but to feel the weight of systemic discrimination and ignorance as we

continue to have the need to designate a day to honour Indigenous women and girls whose lives have been unjustly cut short.

Today, I also remember the eight Indigenous women whom I have known personally and who have gone missing or been murdered, including Miranda Peter, Angel Carlick, Evangeline Billy, Joni Andre, Wendy Carlick, Sarah MacIntosh, Brandy Vittrekwa, and Ramona Peter. I think of all women and their families across the Yukon who continue to bear the weight of their losses while also upholding their strength in remembering the lives lived by these beautiful women and being the voice for change. We, as Indigenous women, are the core of our nations' communities and families, yet we need to fight for equality, respect, dignity, and justice. This continues to be evident in today's times, as women, families, and Indigenous leaders and allies across Canada continue to call on their government to search a landfill in Manitoba for remains of missing and murdered Indigenous women.

We also recognize the hard work of the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle, Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council, Yukon Women's Transition Home Society — also known as Kaushee's Place — Betty's Haven, the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society, Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, Yukon Status of Women Council, and the local RCMP, all of whom continue to lead the hard work of advocacy, education, relationship- and system-building to create safer, inclusive, dignified, respectful, and welcoming spaces across all parts of society, systems, and communities for and with Indigenous women and girls in the Yukon. Mahsi.

In recognition of Energy Efficiency Day

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute today to Energy Efficiency Day. This commemorative day recognizes our shared efforts to implement energy efficiency and sustainability in our lives. Energy efficiency is the cheapest, quickest, and cleanest way to meet our energy needs, bring down energy costs, and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. Smarter energy use also reduces the amount of electricity needed to power our lives.

Mr. Speaker, I can proudly say that Yukon residents are embracing energy-efficiency practices. Their participation in our good energy rebates and efficiency programs speaks volumes. For example, 150 homeowners have completed high performance upgrades to homes throughout the Yukon. These impactful upgrades reduced their home's energy use by at least 20 percent. Over the past several years, over 700 new high-performance homes were constructed throughout the territory. These new homes are 50-plus percent better than the current building standards. That's incredible and certainly worth celebrating.

Yukon homeowners have also switched to over 100 smart electric heating systems, including heat pumps and electric thermal storage units. We celebrate the forward-thinkers for showing us that we can reduce our environmental impact while keeping warm during the Yukon's cold winters.

Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge that First Nation governments, municipalities, businesses, and non-governmental organizations are taking action. To date, we have seen energy improvements completed for more than 150 commercial buildings, community centres, and administration buildings throughout the Yukon.

We can also be energy efficient through our means of transportation. Whether using zero-emission vehicles, the bus, an electric scooter, or human-powered kicksleds, these modes of transportation are absolutely more energy efficient. I'm very pleased to announce that we recently issued our 1,000th rebate for electric bikes here in the Yukon.

Our good energy rebate supports small energy-efficient actions like purchasing Energy Star home appliances all the way to major insulation upgrades and installing renewable energy systems. As a result, Yukoners are driving electric vehicles, timing their appliances for off peak, and producing renewable solar electricity on the roofs of their homes.

I applaud and thank all Yukoners for doing their part in integrating clean energy goals into their lives. By being energy efficient and practising smarter energy use, we are reducing our climate impacts and building a more affordable, reliable, and sustainable energy-efficient future for the Yukon. It's as easy as turning off a light switch.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Istchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize October 6 as Energy Efficiency Day and to recognize all those who do their part to increase efficiency and reduce waste in their homes and workplaces.

As we move into colder and darker months, we're going to start seeing sharp increases to utility bills. Families continue to look for ways that they can save money while also staying warm throughout the winter and not sacrificing to keep the lights on. There are small cost-efficient improvements that Yukoners can make to their homes that can really help to keep the heat inside where it belongs. These include window-wrap kits, upgraded weather stripping around the doors, and using thermostats to set lower heat at night or when they are not at home.

Further rebates exist throughout initiatives like the good energy program, which allows Yukoners to get money back on different larger scale upgrades and retrofits and purchasing clean transportation vehicles.

Rebates are also available for generating electricity from renewable energy sources and are further supplemented by accessing the microgeneration program.

The federal government also offers complementary retrofit grants for Canadian homeowners living in the north and off-grid communities.

So, I encourage all Yukoners to learn more about the things that they can do to help conserve energy in their homes and to reduce their overall energy footprint.

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to Energy Efficiency Day. There are fantastic people working on this goal all over the Yukon. Thank you to all the people at the Energy Solutions branch helping Yukoners make changes, big and small, to their homes and businesses to be more energy efficient. Thank you to everyone who has put money and effort into making their buildings and vehicles more energy efficient. We appreciate all of your efforts.

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Speaker: Under Tabling Returns and Documents, the Chair has for tabling *Report from the Clerk of the Yukon Legislative Assembly on the Absence of Members from Sittings of the Legislative Assembly and its Committees*, October 4, 2023; *Report of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly — Membership of the Special Committee on the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform; COVID-19 Pandemic — COVID-19 Vaccines in Yukon — Independent Auditor's Report — 2023 Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Yukon Legislative Assembly*, June 20, 2023; and a report entitled *Left in the Dark — Report 1 — Investigation into the mishandling of abuse allegations at a Yukon school by the Department of Education — A Report from the Yukon Ombudsman*, September 7, 2023.

Finally, I have four reports for tabling — four annual reports of the Yukon Conflict of Interest Commission to the Legislative Assembly.

Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have for tabling, pursuant to section 22 of the *Workers' Safety and Compensation Act*, the 2022 Workers' Safety and Compensation Board annual report.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Mr. Dixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have for tabling the *Fifth Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts*, dated June 2023.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I have for tabling the *Ninth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees*, dated July 5, 2023.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have for tabling the *Eighth Report of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges*.

Speaker: Are there any further committee reports to be presented?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 210: *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23 — Introduction and First Reading*

Hon. Mr. Silver: I move that Bill No. 210, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 210, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 210 agreed to

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 — Introduction and First Reading*

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 211 agreed to

Bill No. 29: *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023) — Introduction and First Reading*

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. Premier that Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 29 agreed to

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

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House supports the expansion of the Yukon home ownership loan program to help eligible Yukoners build or buy a home.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House congratulates Adeline Webber on her appointment as the Commissioner of Yukon.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House supports the Government of Yukon's ongoing partnership with the Government of Canada to provide the Canada-Yukon housing benefit which assists low-to-moderate income Yukoners to pay rent.

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

THAT this House is committed to protecting, respecting, and supporting students' rights through the continual evaluation, modernization, and implementation of the sexual orientation and gender identity policy.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to:

(1) continue to advance initiatives outlined in the LGBTQ2S+ *Inclusion Action Plan* that will help chart a path forward in ending discrimination and making Government of Yukon programs and services more inclusive of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in the Yukon;

(2) foster an environment that embraces gender equality by embracing the values of inclusion and acceptance; and

(3) ensure that all Yukoners, of all genders or sexual orientation, are protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

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

THAT this House acknowledges the importance of supporting low-income Yukoners affected by inflation by:

(1) increasing the monthly payments of the Yukon seniors income supplement by 37.5 percent; and

(2) providing eligible social assistance recipients with an additional \$100 per month until a rate review is completed.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House:

(1) condemns the spurious use of the notwithstanding clause to challenge education policies that cause harm to vulnerable individuals; and

(2) urges the provincial and territorial governments to refrain from the inappropriate use of the notwithstanding clause to take away vulnerable children's rights.

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

THAT this House supports the Government of Yukon working with the Government of Canada to support low-income homeowners' transition from home heating oil to low-emitting heating technologies that will result in an estimated \$1,500 to \$4,700 in savings on their home energy bills, thereby easing financial pressures caused by inflation.

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

THAT this House acknowledges the importance of supporting low-income Yukoners by:

(1) increasing the territory's minimum wage and tying future yearly increases to the consumer price index for Whitehorse; and

(2) creating a paid sick leave rebate program for Yukoners earning less than the average private sector wage, including self-employed Yukoners.

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

THAT this House supports the expansion and extension of the inflation relief rebate to reduce Yukoners' power bills.

I also give notice of the following motion:

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

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

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

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

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

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

I also give notice of the following motion:

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

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT, for the duration of the 2023 Fall Sitting:

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

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

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

THAT this House supports the annual increase to the Yukon child benefit that matches the Whitehorse consumer price index to ensure that the benefit keeps pace with the rising cost of living.

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

THAT this House congratulates Manitoba New Democratic Party Leader Wab Kinew on becoming the first First Nation Premier of a province in Canada and on forming government.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to accept the recommendations contained in the 2023 comprehensive municipal grant review as conducted by the Association of Yukon Communities.

MLA Tredger: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to implement the recommendations from the 2023 report on the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter by the House of Wolf & Associates Inc., entitled *A Path Forward*.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with the City of Whitehorse and the Council of Yukon First Nations in creating a downtown community safety officer program to:

- (1) provide safety and support to all citizens in the downtown area; and
- (2) address safety concerns of businesses, local residents, and people using the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Canada and the Government of Manitoba to search the Prairie Green Landfill for Morgan Harris and Mercedes Ryan.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House congratulates the Kwanlin Dün First Nation on the completion of the Haeckel Hill wind project.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Yukon Employees' Union collective agreement

Hon. Mr. Silver: It is an honour to share crucial information for the territory that will serve as a valuable resource for future generations and also provide insight into current issues.

The Yukon Employees' Union is a valued partner to the Yukon government. After collaborative discussions, we reached a new three-year collective agreement in June. This means that more than 3,500 public servants — including EMS personnel, home care providers, mental health wellness professionals, community nurses, continuing care practitioners, and various other union staff members — will receive the compensation that they deserve.

This agreement is fair and balanced. It recognizes the valuable work done by our public servants and the service that they provide to Yukoners. It upholds our commitment to fiscal

responsibility in managing public funds. The three-year agreement contains several updates and new provisions to benefit employees, including wage increases of 10.5 percent over three years for members. This is in line with the recently negotiated agreement for federal public servants. It also includes provisions to advance our recruitment and retention efforts, especially with in-demand health care workers and other key difficult-to-fill positions across government. This new agreement is in effect until December 31, 2024.

As we discuss the significance of the new collective agreement, it is crucial to recognize the far-reaching impacts that it has across the territory. When our public servants receive competitive wages, they have more resources to invest back into the local economy. This means more money flowing back into our businesses, cafés, restaurants, and local services. In short, by increasing financial security within households, we are increasing stability in our local economy. This stability attracts investors and encourages a business-friendly environment. It helps to create a foundation of growth, supporting businesses to expand, create jobs, and contribute to the economy.

I would like to express my gratitude to the dedicated members of the Yukon Employees' Union for their constructive engagement throughout this process. Their dedication to their work and their commitment to finding common ground for the good of the public servants is commendable. I would also like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the negotiating teams from both sides. Negotiations are not always easy. They require hard work and a relationship of trust and understanding that must be built and maintained. This new collective agreement demonstrates our government's commitment to fair labour practices, the well-being of our public service, and fiscal responsibility. Our government is now working to implement this new collective agreement and ensure that our public service earns the salary that reflects their hard work and their commitment. I hope that we will see support from all parties for our dedicated public servants. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Clarke: Salamat po, Mr. Speaker. When this was announced back in the summer, we were pleased to see that the Yukon government and the Yukon Employees' Union had reached a new deal. However, we do have some questions for the minister about it.

One of the most notable aspects of the negotiations of this agreement was the time that it took. The negotiations carried on well past the expiry of the previous contract in 2021 and dragged all the way into 2023. Several observers of the process have remarked that this was one of the longest negotiations in recent memory.

The process appeared to be quite difficult as well. After beginning in 2021, Yukoners saw the negotiations break off at various points, and the federal labour relations board had to step in to attempt to break the stalemate. Following that, the union had begun to prepare its members for the possibility of a strike vote in early June.

In the face of the impending strike vote, the Yukon government finally conceded and an agreement was reached. On June 6, CBC Yukon reported that the union had won its two main demands. Those were — and I quote: “... an across-the-board pay hike of 4.5 per cent in the first year of the deal, and three per cent in each of the next two years.”

The report from CBC also noted that the Yukon government backed off of a proposed change that would have frozen severance pay. So, perhaps the minister can explain why the government dragged its feet throughout this process and caused one of the longest negotiations in recent memory, only to then give in to the initial demands made by the union in the first place.

It's also worth noting that this agreement will expire in less than a year and a half. So, can the minister tell us what the status of the negotiations on the next agreement are? When will they begin formally negotiating? Does the minister anticipate proposing a freeze to severance pay that was such a big sticking point last time?

Finally, we are aware that one of the other issues that caused some conflict between the YEU and the Liberal government was the proposed creation of a new health authority. Here is what the YEU bulletin from May 2023 said — and I quote: “The government plans to offload government services to an arm's-length health authority. This devolution could mean the migration of entire departments and will most likely include the devolution of staff from all health and social services branches, Yukon hospitals, community health centres and more. This could affect fewer than five hundred people or it could impact greater than a thousand members — we just don't know.”

So, can the minister tell us if he has met with the YEU to discuss these concerns? Does the minister anticipate these concerns becoming another issue in the next round of negotiations next year?

Salamat po.

Ms. White: Today I celebrate the resiliency and tenacity of the public service and its union. I appreciate the angle that the minister has taken, but let's be honest. After 18 long months of this government playing games at the negotiation table, a strike vote was looming. This government chose to push union members to the brink instead of negotiating in good faith and supporting their employees. This agreement came at a time when communities across the territory were feeling the crunch of service gaps across every government department.

When the Yukon government chose to walk away from the negotiating table in May, the Yukon NDP was ready to join employees on that picket line — a picket line that we would not have crossed. As the largest employer in the territory, we expected the Yukon government to lead by example and to provide their workers with the best possible working conditions, not to play games and not to drag the negotiation to the brink of a strike. All workers need and deserve fair wages and good, safe working conditions. Many government employees are essential workers, and all Yukon government

employees are critical for the functioning of our territory. They deserve a fair contract for years to come.

The Yukon government, as an employer, should be a model for all to strive for. It should inspire other employers to do better instead of trying to shortchange their workers. This government often stands up in this House responding to our questions by accusing us of disrespecting public servants when we question the minister's decisions, but when it comes time to give them better working conditions and give them a well-deserved raise, they were met with 18 months of silence.

So, with staff shortages across the territory affecting much-needed services for Yukoners, this government seemed prepared to shut it all down. Rather than offering up competitive wages to attract new workers, they put lives and our economy at risk by trying to shortchange the members of the Yukon Employees' Union. Instead of addressing long-standing health and safety issues, they tried to create a two-tiered workforce by taking away severance for workers. When the workers asked for their fair share to help their wages keep up with inflation, the government walked away from the table.

The Yukon's public service does an incredible job of keeping the whole of the government services running, from health care to education, highways, public housing workers, building inspectors, the folks upstairs in Finance, and all those on the front lines in all of our communities. Without them, the government is nothing.

So, today I applaud the bravery of the bargaining team and all members of YEU locals Y010 and Y017 for standing firm and winning a better future, not just for Yukon government workers, but for all workers, as a new benchmark is now set.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I would like to respond by again acknowledging the hard work and dedication of the negotiating teams from both sides, which resulted in a government that, once again this year, is in the top 100 employers in Canada — an extremely important step that we are very, very proud of on this side of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, negotiations are extremely complex. In this case, there were a number of factors, including the increased inflation rates and also the availability of the parties that did influence negotiations. Nonetheless, we were all committed to reaching a deal. I have to say, as I listen to the framing from the opposition, I would like to emphasize again that our government never walked away from discussions — never. We also followed the process every step of the way, as well as direction provided to us by the conciliation board chair.

So, again — disagree with the members opposite as far as how they are framing these negotiations — these complicated, tough negotiations.

However, we did want to get this right and to reach an agreement that was fair and also fiscally responsible, and it takes a lot of time to do that as well.

We have seen across North America numerous collective bargaining negotiations that resulted in labour action or came very close. Changes in the labour market and the increase to inflation as well have changed the dynamics at the bargaining table. Every negotiation process is unique, and this definitely

was no exception. That being said, the results demonstrated the shared commitment of all parties to secure a strong outcome for all Yukoners.

What does this all mean for public servants? It does mean an increase in acting pay from five percent to 10 percent, an increase in retention allowances for social workers, new annual retention allowances for student support services, and also new pay grids for nurses and midwives. These are just a few highlights. I don't have enough time today to go over all of them. This investment reflects our commitment to the public service and to the public servants and ensuring that they receive the compensation that they need and that they deserve.

Our government believes firmly in this agreement and we believe that it is fair to our hard-working public servants, to upholding our fiscal responsibility and managing the public funds. This is reflective of how we retain our AA standard credit rating from S&P's global ratings again this year. With this agreement in place, our focus is on applying retroactive payments and ensuring that our public servants receive the support that they require, and this agreement marks a very positive step forward for all Yukoners. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Whitehorse Emergency Shelter

Mr. Dixon: Last week, a much-celebrated and award-winning local business was forced to close its doors because of the — in their words — “ruinous conditions” created by the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. Sadly, this should come as no surprise to anyone. Since the Liberal government decided in 2019 to take over the shelter and change its operating model to a so-called “low-barrier approach” which was much more permissive of drug and alcohol use, the results have been a disaster. Property damage, vandalism, harassment, open drug and alcohol use, and general crime and illegal behaviour have become the norm in the core of Whitehorse. How many more local businesses need to close before this government takes this issue seriously and actually starts making real change to the way that the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter is operated?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: First, I am going to say that I think I was pretty clear in my comments last week that we are taking this seriously and that there has to be change. For the business owners who are here — there are a lot of business owners who are here, some who have investments that are adjacent to that shelter that have been negatively affected by it, people whom I respect immensely. There are other business owners who are here who are just frustrated by seeing another business affected, people who have built the business sector here in the Yukon, and I, again, immensely respect those individuals, and I am validating the fact that something has to be done.

I am working with multiple departments. I think it was unfair that we put the onus just on one department. I think it has to be a multi-department approach. We do have to change what is happening. The activity that has been the most disruptive has been outside the building, and there has been a culture of

gathering and partying and really inappropriate behaviour. At the same time, inside the shelter there has been good work done, and we know that from the work we have done, the studies we have done, and the feedback. I think this is going to be a hot topic; it should be a hot topic. The public should keep us accountable for this. I look forward to questions 2 and 3, and I will let folks know in the Chamber what our plans are moving forward.

Mr. Dixon: The community is getting used to being told by the Liberal government that they take it seriously but then turning around and carrying on with business as usual as they have for the last number of years. For years now since the Liberals took the shelter over, there has been a steady stream of letters, e-mails, phone calls and complaints levied by businesses and residents about the increased crime and illegal behaviour in the area.

Even the mayor has weighed in and expressed concern on behalf of the municipality at the way the shelter is being operated. What is notable is that even people who need and who utilize the services of the shelter have complained that they don't even feel safe there.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, no one feels safe around the shelter anymore. So, when will Liberals finally admit that the changes they have made to the operational model of the shelter have been a disaster, and will they commit to making immediate changes?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Well, first, I would say there have been immediate changes. I think for anybody who has gone by — the first step was just the removal of structures that were outside. I think that they were leading to — folks gather, and I don't think that a lot of those individuals were seeking services. I think that it became a gathering spot, and then from there, some of the behaviour that was taking place was just disruptive and, in some cases, threatening to individuals. That is factual, and I will agree with the opposition on that point.

I think — to be open to the public in the gallery and business owners — you can talk about the service model, but the reason that the service model changed was because there were really negative things happening. They may not have been happening outside the building, but they were happening to the clients inside the building, and that might be easier for us all to deal with because we can drive by and don't have to deal with it, but there were bad things happening in that building to those clients — from one client to another and within the staffing model. That is why the decision was made. Those are the facts.

The other thing is — look, even members of the opposition know. It's a difficult one. I will take this, as Premier, and wear this and work with my colleagues and other service providers. But everybody on that side of the table made the vote in Management Board to fund this and build it where it is built. Even the Member for Lake Laberge has stood up and said that we shouldn't have built it there. So, we are all in this one —

Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Dixon: I remind the minister that other than a move of about a block, the shelter has been in the same area for decades and it wasn't until the Liberals took over the shelter in

2019 and changed the operating model that things started to go downhill.

Now, it is clear, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier is correct about one thing: He does bear responsibility for this. The Liberal government owns the shelter, they fund the shelter, they set the policy parameters within which the shelter is operated, and they are responsible for this. Only they can make the changes that are necessary to the operating model that has caused the problems that we see today. So, what immediate changes can the community expect to see to help resolve this disaster that the Liberal government has created?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: What I was getting at in my previous answer — which was just a quote from the Member for Lake Laberge when he said that, in hindsight, the location of the facility should have been different. I am just saying that — look, there were some steps in the early place, but I am stepping back from that and saying, “Yes. What are our immediate actions?”

So, we have moved structures from the front of the building. I have called for a meeting to go back with Connective, which is running it. I have gone through their transfer payment agreement. I think there are some things in there that really have to be focused on. The second paragraph talks about safety. I think there’s an issue on safety at this point in time. I have reached out to the City of Whitehorse. I have reached out to the Council of Yukon First Nations, and I also need the RCMP at the table with me.

We are shooting right now to have a meeting near the mid or end of next week to have players together. I think that we have to make incremental steps. We have to look at maybe some of those services potentially devolving to other areas. I think that having the number of things happening in that area right now is building too much activity. So, I think there are a number of things that we have to do.

But I also have tasked public servants across the government to come back over a period of two weeks to give me a set of options that we can look at. I have also sat down with the owners of Alpine Bakery. They have been very clear. They are taking the next six months and they are putting this on the government to make changes before they make a decision to reopen.

Question re: Whitehorse Emergency Shelter

Mr. Cathers: Well, local businesses and residents have been expressing concern about the situation surrounding the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter for years. Many have felt that these concerns have fallen on deaf ears with government. However, since the government was embarrassed by the closure of Alpine Bakery, we have seen the Premier finally turn his focus back to the Yukon. It has been clear from media coverage that the Premier has finally personally intervened in this file and has expressed disappointment with the current situation.

In fact, we are told that the Premier informed businesses that he has taken over this file from the Minister of Health and Social Services. Can the Premier tell Yukoners whether he is satisfied with the lack of action in making any sort of real

changes in the operation of the shelter by the current Minister of Health and Social Services?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: First, I would say that — and I have made the comments publicly — having one department deal with this issue was unfair, and that’s why I believe that having somebody in a role where I can still work hand in hand with the minister but also work with other levels of government which also have to be at the table on this — as anybody knows, Executive Council does do that work.

The little snippet about turning your mind back to this file — I’ll say this. Look, I don’t think my work ethic has ever been in doubt, and it’s good to see the Member for Lake Laberge back in the parking lot now that the summer is over because — I can tell you — I have been here working, but it is good to see him back.

On this file, I think that we are in a position where we have to ensure that we work across departments. This is a complex issue; we all know that. It makes great political hay. I am not discounting what folks in the gallery are going through. I have sat with folks who have options that they would like to work on in that area, and I don’t want to see the value of people’s assets decline. So, we will have to make incremental changes. I want to see some quick changes with the support of the public service. I need the support of the City of Whitehorse, I need Connective to continue to do their work, and I am also going to need the RCMP to work with us, hand in hand.

Mr. Cathers: I have to remind the Premier that this problem has been going on for years, including all of his time as Premier.

A day after the story broke about the closure of the Alpine Bakery, there was finally some action to remove the privacy structures along Alexander Street. This is something that businesses and neighbours had been asking for, for quite some time. In fact, we understand that this was recommended to the Minister of Health and Social Services well over a year ago, Mr. Speaker, but it wasn’t until the Premier was embarrassed publicly that any action was taken to remove these barriers.

How can the Premier still have confidence in the Minister of Health and Social Services when she has failed to act on even the most basic of recommendations to improve the operation of the shelter and safety around it?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Again, great political hay but not actually true — not correct. I would love to say that, in a 24-hour period, the contractor went and took the structures away based on my comment, but that’s not what happened. The minister directed the Department of Health and Social Services to put a contract in place. The timing was that it happened during that day. They can go back and we can present a document here in the House to show that. But, no, it wasn’t my doing and I appreciate the fact that the work was undertaken.

There are some things in the report as well that the Third Party touched on today. There are some things that I agree with, but I will stand up and say that there are some things in that report that I don’t agree with. There are questions about additional structures in that area. I am going to say that, in working with vulnerable populations in previous careers, I don’t think that having gathering spaces outside of that area is

something that I agree with. I am not going to support it. I think that we need to have more supervision in that area. I think that we are going to have to be tougher in a number of different areas. That is just my prerogative. So, if I'm going to take on this work with colleagues, with the business community, with RCMP, with the Council of Yukon First Nations and with Connective, I also will be helping to direct some of the strategy.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's nice that the Premier has finally realized this is a problem, but his government has been very, very slow to act.

In response to my colleague the Member for Porter Creek North back in the fall of 2021, the current Minister of Health and Social Services told the Legislature this: "We continue to explore the options that support creating a safe and harmonious community for shelter clients, neighbouring residents, and businesses."

It's clear that the Premier doesn't think the minister has been successful at this since he has finally personally intervened and taken this file away from the Minister of Health and Social Services.

Can the Premier tell us why the minister, after taking almost no action to improve the operation of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, still has his confidence?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Well, first, I think, if we go back to the work that has been done, I would go back to the two reports that we did. One, of course, was touched on today that was really about strategy on how to improve the workings on the exterior of the shelter.

The other was the Vink Consulting report that was done. That report really focused on: Is the work of the shelter internally that's happening — whether that's the culturally specific and appropriate programming or the other supports — are we seeing value for our money?

We know, from that work, that we're getting — for every dollar spent, the analysis was \$2.11 back on our social programming. So, I think the work by Health and Social Services inside the shelter is good work that is being led by the minister.

Our problem, as everybody in the gallery knows — and those who are listening — is what's happening outside of this particular structure.

We have a contractor who is saying they have an obligation up to the doors. We know that some of those individuals are coming in and out. So, I'm challenging that assumption. I think, overall, some of the biggest problems are happening a block or two away. So, what do we do? Do we go back to the old way of doing things where we are all comfortable in the Yukon because there were a lot of vulnerable people who were down on the waterfront because they weren't affecting things — but those were still vulnerable people in tough situations dealing with generational trauma? Maybe. I don't think that's where we go. We have to deal with the problem outside. It's not just about Health and Social Services and their programming; it's about our community coming together. I'm willing to take this on, but I have to get the help of —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Whitehorse Emergency Shelter

MLA Tredger: When we talk about the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and the neighbourhood around it, we're talking about people. At the core of this issue are people who have been deeply affected by two separate governments' mishandling of the situation. They are the people who live in the area, they are the business owners who make their livelihoods there, and they are the people who stay at the shelter — some of the most vulnerable Yukoners who are unfairly taking the blame.

The previous Yukon Party government failed all of them. The current Liberal government continues to fail all of them. Connective and CYFN work hard to deliver the essential services within the emergency shelter, but the safety of our neighbourhoods falls squarely on the shoulders of this Liberal government. There has been a lot of talk, a lot of promises, and no change on the ground. Residents, business owners, and shelter users are all being left to struggle on their own.

When can all of these people expect to see real action — not meetings — to make the downtown core a safe and welcoming place for everyone?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: So, for anyone who is not an elected official here and listening to this, you can see that there are many sides to this conversation. First of all, we have: Let's go back to the old ways where it doesn't really matter what happens to the clients as long as there is no disruption outside. On the other side, it is kind of an approach where it is saying: Don't worry about outside, but what is going to happen with the clients inside?

What we are saying is: The clients inside right now are getting good programming. I have sat with CYFN. We have done the analysis, but we have a problem on the outside of the building.

So, I don't believe that we are failing the individuals who are inside. I have to agree with the Leader of the Official Opposition — it is factual, and I have heard that there are individuals who are feeling uncomfortable accessing the services inside the building because of the activity on the outside of the building. I also think that we are seeing an increase in individuals from outside the Yukon who have made the Yukon their home. I know, from dealing with First Nation leadership — some who were here earlier today — that we see that. We see individuals from other communities outside of the Yukon, and they are also putting extra pressure that we probably didn't see in the same concentration before — the same number of individuals.

So, again, we will work with our stakeholders and we will make incremental change to ensure that there is good programming inside and safety on the outside.

MLA Tredger: I think that the time for incremental change has passed; this is not a new conversation. In 2015 when the Yukon Party built the poorly planned facility in a questionable location with no outdoor space and no consultation, the NDP asked how the neighbourhood would be involved. The answer, of course, was not at all. In 2017 when the shelter opened in the new location, the NDP asked the

Liberals how they would work with the community. The answer, as we know, is that they didn't.

Over the last five years, after report after report after report has come out on how to make the shelter work better for everyone involved, we have asked when action would be taken. The answer has been nothing but silence, and in the meantime, the situation has reached a boiling point.

So, we will ask again — this time about the latest report: When will the recommendations from the House of Wolf be put in place?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am going to say to the member opposite — whose constituents are downtown and who probably has their phone ringing off the hook and significant e-mails as they try to represent the individuals in their constituency — I will work across the aisle with you to ensure that we communicate with the constituents in that riding — the people who you represent — but the first step I need to do is to get the stakeholders together that are controlling the actual shelter. I need individuals, levels of government, and the RCMP that are handling things on the outside with community leaders. The next step will be to meet with individuals who live there, and then there are also business owners who have adjacent businesses. So, there are really three different sets of stakeholders that have to be met with, but I also want to be able to have the appropriate information and strategy before I meet with the citizens or the business owners, because, if not, I am wasting their time.

When it comes to what is happening inside — or the report from the House of Wolf — there are things in that report that I think are good. There is a conversation that has come to, I think, some resolutions. I am getting some individuals — safety folks or we will say “safety units” that are downtown. That is close to being in place and could be live by the end of October. I look forward to question 3.

MLA Tredger: What is absolutely maddening is that there have been years of meetings and reports full of recommendations to address the concerns that we are hearing. The latest report was made with input from the neighbourhood, from businesses, from residents, and from stakeholders. It has many concrete solutions that would make a real difference on the ground: a community safety officer program, public washrooms, and distributing essential services throughout the city instead of concentrating them all in a single building. It has been months since that report and years since these challenges started, but on the ground, we see no real action.

Will the government commit to publicly release their working plan so that neighbours, businesses, and people who use the shelter can see concrete actions and timelines?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think that's an appropriate request from the member opposite, but there are a couple of pieces to that. One is about the washrooms in the downtown core. I believe — and I will go back and check — that these have been identified and integrated in the official community plan by the City of Whitehorse. That's why I think it is really important to be working with the City of Whitehorse. I think that the other levels of government or NGOs, such as the Council of Yukon First Nations, have looked at overseeing the downtown safety

program. I had a discussion with our executive director over the weekend about this. They feel that, by the end of October, they could have individuals. That safety group would not just be focusing on the shelter but on the whole downtown core, because there are some really negative things happening, not just in that area, but in other spots in the downtown, so I think that is important to do.

We have to engage with the RCMP. There have been letters and there are e-mails that have been sent around. We have all seen them. There is video that has been released. In that video, we see things that are happening a block away, and there is criminal activity.

That is not just about the shelter contractor; that's also about us working with the RCMP where those individuals are doing things that are against the law. They are damaging property, so we also have to deal with that.

Again, bringing stakeholders together and coming back with a timeline, I think, is fair and is accountable — and that is something I will work with our team to do.

Question re: Policing priorities

Ms. Van Bibber: On June 7 of this year, the Minister of Justice provided the RCMP with the Liberal government's policing priorities. Noticeably absent from those priorities was any reference to the concerns that the business community has been raising for years about the rising tide of crime affecting businesses and communities.

Can the Minister of Justice explain why the government's policing priorities failed to include any reference to property crime, vandalism, or theft that has become so unfortunately prevalent in our Yukon communities?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I know there will be more detail from the Minister of Justice, but I think it's important to say that there is a constant dialogue that happens between the Minister of Justice, who has kindly invited me to some of those meetings — to deal with the leadership from the RCMP.

I think it's also important to note that it's a little bit rich when there was a \$3.5-million increase to the RCMP in the main budget and the Yukon Party voted it down.

That's factual. You voted it down — the money to ensure that we had extra supports at the shelter, but you voted it down — the \$3.5 million for the RCMP. That's factual. You can wiggle in your chair all day long, but that is a fact.

We need those resources in order to ensure that we can take on the challenges in front of us.

I will leave questions 2 and 3 to the Minister of Justice.

Ms. Van Bibber: In their 2022-23 annual report, the Yukon Police Council said they had met with the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce. According to the Police Council, the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce raised — and I quote: “... concerns related to shoplifting, break and enters, vandalism of private and public property, and public alcohol and drug use.”

Despite this, none of these concerns were included in this year's policing priorities. Why are the concerns of the Yukon business community not reflected in the government's policing priorities?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: It is my pleasure today to rise to address the accuracy and the information contained in the question.

Each year, the Yukon Police Council works to collect community perspectives and to provide recommendations to the Minister of Justice to inform the policing priorities for the Yukon RCMP. The 2023-24 policing priorities are adopted and ultimately presented to the minister from the Yukon Police Council, as well as information from the Department of Justice. They involve strengthening relationships and increasing public trust, enhancing policing targeted at toxic illicit drugs and serious crime and policing with First Nations. Mr. Speaker, they came from the community. Those policing priorities are provided input to the Police Council by Yukoners themselves. These are the priorities set by Yukoners. These are the priorities set by me, as the minister, and presented to the Yukon RCMP.

We look forward to future opportunities to do the same. I can note that the Yukon Police Council is unique in Canada with respect to setting policing priorities that come from the community and the importance of that voice.

Ms. Van Bibber: We know that the Yukon Police Council met with representatives of the Yukon business community but we aren't aware of the minister having such a meeting.

Before the government creates policing priorities for next year, will the Minister of Justice agree to meet with the Yukon business community to seek their input about the annual RCMP policing priorities?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think that the member opposite doesn't recall the way in which the Yukon Police Council was devised. It has the responsibility of engaging with diverse community groups across the Yukon, including stakeholders and the public. Elements and recurring themes from those engagements, as well as feedback received — as I have said — from the Department of Justice are incorporated into the annual policing priorities.

The Police Council travels the territory with respect to hearing from communities and the importance of the issues that are of concern to them. They do so annually and they present the council's recommendations for consideration in setting the police priorities. Conversations happen regularly with the RCMP about the importance of those priorities.

The chambers of commerce, of course, are important voices with respect to having input, but they are not the only ones. The chambers of commerce are welcome. They certainly meet with our Cabinet members on a regular basis on this and other issues and will continue to have the respect of this Cabinet going forward and their voice being heard in this conversation.

Question re: RCMP funding and staffing

Ms. McLeod: While Yukoners have noticed a significant increase in crime in Whitehorse, rural communities have also been affected by increasing crime. Several Yukon communities have faced increasing rates and severity of crime. Despite this, RCMP staffing levels have remained unchanged.

Will the Yukon government commit to providing additional resources to the RCMP specifically for addressing rising crime in Yukon communities?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We did, we have, and we likely will again. My question to the members opposite is: Will you support additional resources in the budget for the RCMP — because you didn't this spring — will you, when we put additional resources in, in the next budget?

Ms. McLeod: Not quite the answer that communities would like to hear.

So, while it's clear that more resources for the RCMP are needed overall, there have also been concerns raised about fully staffing the existing police positions that already exist in Yukon communities. We continue to hear about significant periodic and ongoing vacancies in several RCMP positions throughout rural Yukon.

What steps has the minister taken to help the RCMP address ongoing vacancies in policing positions throughout Yukon communities?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: It may be that the members opposite, when they had the honour of sitting in these chairs, were interfering with the operation of the RCMP on a regular basis. That is not what I do with respect to this job; it is not what our Cabinet does. The Department of Justice works to ensure the provision of a professional, accountable, and appropriately funded territorial policing service that is in response to the priorities of Yukoners and worthy of the public trust.

Our government funds significant and ongoing investment in Yukon police resources through the *Territorial Police Service Agreement* with the RCMP, as well as through investments with the Yukon First Nations and Inuit Policing program.

As the Premier mentioned, these are resources, increases in resources, services for Yukon communities across the territory that the members of the opposition did not support in this spring's budget. This year, the Government of Yukon approved a policing budget increase of over 20 percent compared to the previous year. The services provided by the Yukon RCMP are professional and important ones to Yukoners across the territory in each and every community, and they make the decisions about how those resources are deployed.

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, now, over the past year, we have heard more and more Yukon communities speak up about this issue. Earlier this year, we heard the municipality and First Nation in Mayo both specifically ask for increased police resources for their community. Last month, following a public meeting about the rising rate of crime in Watson Lake, the municipality issued a statement calling for an action plan. Municipalities and communities across the Yukon are looking for increased support from the Yukon government to address the growing rate of crime. What increased support will the Government of Yukon provide to rural communities and municipalities to address this issue?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The increase of over 20 percent to the previous year's budget for the Yukon RCMP by this year's government budget is an increase that reaffirmed our staffing commitment to a number of important initiatives, including the

Historical Case Unit while adding two officers to the crime reduction unit. Two additional resources have been added to bring the First Nations and Inuit Policing program complement to 19 resources, and most recently, this government approved additional resources for Car 867. Under the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy*, these resources expand the capacity of the mobile crisis response team from five to seven days a week to cover critical call periods and provide trauma-informed, client-centred support for people experiencing mental-health related issues. These services are important not only here in Whitehorse, but across the territory, and the opportunity for Yukon's professional, accountable, and appropriately funded territorial policing service that is here in the territory. The RCMP and their amazing work that they do across the territory is incredibly important to be supported not only by our government, but by all MLAs and communities across the territory.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 55(2), I request the unanimous consent of the House to move second reading of Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, at this time.

Unanimous consent re moving second reading of Bill No. 211

Speaker: The Minister of Finance has, pursuant to Standing Order 55(2), requested the unanimous consent of the House to move second reading of Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, at this time.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Unanimous consent has been granted.

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — Second Reading

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 211, standing in the name of the Hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I move that Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, be now read a second time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill No. 211, otherwise known as the *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* or the *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* for the 2023-24 fiscal year. Each year, the bill provides an opportunity to update this House on areas of spending that have deviated from those planned at the start of the fiscal year. While this can include shifting priorities in order to take advantage of opportunities, it is more often than not that this is done in response to unanticipated events. Over the last three years, Mr. Speaker, we

have become very familiar with navigating unexpected scenarios regarding both minor and major course corrections. While these scenarios may be viewed as potential disruptions to our plan, they also provide opportunities to test our abilities to respond to challenges and to improve how we do so, year over year.

In 2020 and 2021, for example, our government responded to extraordinary challenges when COVID-19 required unprecedented levels of health and economic interventions to keep Yukoners safe. During this period, we developed new ways to streamline our budgeting process to ensure that funding was directed to areas where it was most needed. In the summer of 2021, we turned our attention to responding and mitigating historic floods that swept through many of our communities.

This year, Mr. Speaker, we are contending with a range of compounding challenges requiring our government to adjust spending to meet the territory's needs. I will highlight a few of those now.

Most striking, perhaps, has been the latest fire season, which has been one of the worst on record in jurisdictions throughout the country. We have seen that all levels of government need to work in a coordinated and collaborative way to ensure effective responses. This work requires adequate funding to implement.

While the situation here has not been as devastating as it has been for our neighbours to the east and to the south, intense forest fires have been raging all summer in the Yukon. I know that the support of all Yukoners and all members of this Chamber was very much with the residents of Mayo and also Old Crow this summer, given the evacuations they experienced.

However, the reality of natural disasters and climate change in this territory do not stop with just fires. My community of Dawson City and the entire Klondike Valley faced the enormous struggle that comes from homes, businesses, and farms facing immense and sudden flooding. These impacted individuals have also called on our territorial government to provide assistance, which requires adequate funding to address, not unlike our needs stemming from the fire season.

Instances like these have required us to be on high alert in terms of mitigation, evacuation, and suppression activities to keep residents safe. While these actions come with a cost, we will continue to do what's necessary to keep our communities and our people secure.

Mr. Speaker, we are all attuned to rising inflation and the elevated cost of living that continue to present challenges, not only here in the Yukon but across the country and around the world. Yukon households are seeing their budgets stretched by higher prices, with lower income households feeling the worst effects. As a result, our government implemented a number of ongoing programs to make life more affordable for Yukoners.

Several measures included in the 2023-24 budget are already in place. In 2023-24, we extended the inflation relief rebate program, which provides a \$50-per-month rebate on ATCO and Yukon Energy utility bills for April and May billing periods, along with three more months that have been recently added. Ever since our government began implementing this

rebate, I have heard from Yukoners across the territory about how this has really helped in keeping their household expenses lower.

Other measures in our 2023-24 budget which will continue to make life more affordable for Yukoners include funding for food in Yukon schools, the timber harvest incentive and a support program for commercial fuelwood harvesters and retailers to boost the fuelwood supply, a monthly top-up of 37.5 percent to the eligible recipients of the Yukon seniors income supplement, a \$100 monthly increase to eligible social assistance recipients, a 10-percent increase to monthly payments to caregivers of children in out-of-home care, and a \$170,000 increase to the Yukon child benefit for modest- and low-income families. This is in addition to ongoing financial investments in early learning and childcare, which makes life more affordable for families as the new universal childcare program has reduced fees to less than \$10 per day on average. We have also created a temporary assistance program for Yukon landlords to support a stable supply of rental units.

With many higher costs being felt by Yukoners in their day-to-day lives, governments are incurring additional costs as well as we respond to higher costs of living.

This year, we negotiated a new collective agreement which recognizes increased costs of living for Yukon government employees. The Yukon government values the work of the Yukon public service and is pleased that a new collective agreement was negotiated with the Public Service Alliance of Canada and the Yukon Employees' Union. The agreement is fair and balanced overall, as it recognizes the value of our employees and the services that they provide to all Yukoners while upholding our fiscal responsibility as a government when it comes to managing public funds.

The agreement contains several updates and new provisions to benefit employees including wage increases of 10.5 percent over three years for YEU members, in line with the recently negotiated agreement for federal public servants. Not only does this carry an immediate cost for government going forward, it also requires us to meet our commitments to staff by providing retroactive payments to the beginning of this agreement.

Our government has also had to respond to events in our mining sector. The closure of the Minto mine in mid-May has affected Yukoners who are owed money by a former operator who abandoned the site. We understand that it has been a very difficult time for all who are involved. As a regulator, the Yukon government's focus has been on ensuring that the environment is protected at the Minto site. We have been applying lessons learned from Wolverine mine and moved quickly to ensure that water treatment at the site continues.

We are pleased that a court settlement has resulted in Selkirk First Nation, which owns the land that the mine is on, being due to receive over \$1.7 million in unpaid royalties.

Minto first started production in September 2007 and has gone through several ownership changes. The Yukon continues to be a top destination for mining operations around the world. In fact, in addition to copper continuing to command strong prices, it speaks very well to the prospects of the site finding a

new owner. We remain optimistic that a deal can be reached. In the meantime, we are undertaking water management and treatment activities at the site and working closely with the Selkirk First Nation on the planning for early reclamation and closure.

The Yukon government currently holds \$75.2 million in financial security for the site, and further work is underway to determine how it will be applied to the expenditures incurred by the government. We will continue to work in coordination with Selkirk First Nation to do what is necessary to ensure environmental protection, because this is in the best interest of all Yukoners.

Mr. Speaker, ensuring the health and wellness of Yukoners also continues to be a top priority of this government. This means ensuring that our health and social care system is equipped to provide the supports and services that Yukoners need and expect. Across the country, jurisdictions have grappled with increased challenges associated with providing health care to our citizens. The Yukon is not exempt from these challenges. From rising costs to longer wait times, all governments are looking for solutions to better deliver their services.

In the Yukon, we continue to identify pressures that cannot be covered from existing funds, and we are making adjustments to our budget accordingly. On January 20, 2022, the Government of Yukon declared a substance use health emergency in response to a surge in substance-use related harms, including a drastic increase in opioid-related deaths. This declaration was a commitment to respond — a call to action to all governments, communities, organizations, partners, and Yukoners to do their part. This is an ongoing territory-wide challenge that cannot be solved by the Yukon government alone.

In August of this year, the Government of Yukon, in partnership with First Nation governments and the Council of Yukon First Nations and in conversations with the territorial RCMP, launched the substance use health emergency strategy. This strategy marks the next step in the Yukon's approach to addressing the substance use health emergency and reflects a shared commitment by this government, Yukon First Nation governments, and partner organizations to address substance use and organized crime in the territory.

The strategy proposes 43 action items grounded in four areas of growth: prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery support, and community safety and well-being. Implementation of the strategy requires a collaborative approach that includes Yukon First Nation governments, communities, service providers, and other partner organizations, as I said. Regular updates, adaptations, and transparent reporting processes will ensure that this strategy remains relevant and responsive to changing circumstances and emerging needs.

Beyond these acute needs, we also continue to work closely with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to identify and meet their core funding needs as new and emerging pressures are identified to ensure that Yukoners have access to the services that they require. Making sure that our insured health

system has the funding it needs is also paramount. As our population continues to grow and the number of Yukoners over the age of 65 rises, we are responding to increasing demand and costs within the insured health services. This includes providing additional funding to address increased hospital fees as well as growth in areas such as medical travel, pharmacare, and physician payments. Health care is a core need for all citizens, and making sure that we have a healthy and sustainable insured health system continues to contribute to the overall health of our population.

While these supplementary estimates serve as a chance to respond to challenges, they also give us the ability to respond to opportunities. As a top mining destination, ensuring that companies have the means to bring their products to market is a priority for this government. We are fortunate that secure tidewater access can be found just a few hours away from our border in Skagway, Alaska. Maintaining a reliable ore export option in Yukon's nearest deep-water port supports mining development, mineral exploration, and investment in the territory.

It also helps to promote Yukon's position as a significant jurisdiction contributing to Canada's supply chain security, green energy targets, critical mineral goals, and more. We believe that we are working toward a mutually beneficial solution with the Municipality of Skagway which will secure long-term tidewater access for Yukon's industry. The Yukon will see preferential access to ore export facilities for 35 years with an option to extend this access for an additional 15 years. The territory will also seek a significant discount in all fees associated with use of the platform for the next 20 years. We look forward to further discussions with our partners as this agreement proceeds.

All of these converging challenges make for a first supplementary estimate that is larger than usual. At the same time, many of these unanticipated costs are becoming more predictable. While we may not know which challenge may pose a risk during any given year, we have come to know that events that were once categorized as once-a-century occurrences are becoming increasingly more common. In response, we are also improving how we prepare for them.

Most importantly, this government recognizes the need, with budget 2023-24, to return to more sustainable footing when it comes to budgetary planning. By reducing our capital plan from previous record levels of investment at the start of each fiscal year, we created a fiscal cushion that allows us to respond to these types of events when needed while continuing to remain in a healthy fiscal position.

We also expanded the use of tools that provide a further buffer in the face of uncertainty. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, this government introduced a new budgeting tool for the Yukon to help absorb some of the unexpected events heading our way. This tool, which began as the government's \$15-million contingency fund used primarily at that time for COVID-19 pressures, served us very well in responding to events while protecting the government's fiscal framework.

More recently, we expanded this contingency fund to provide a more realistic reflection of the challenges heading our way from one year to the next. This tool allows us to absorb the costs associated with some of the most acute needs throughout the year. Since its inception, this contingency fund has increased to \$50 million and helps us in our response to a variety of emergent issues.

Most of the events that I've touched on in these last few minutes have been absorbed by this fund, which has been exhausted in the first supplementary estimates.

While this tool protects Yukon's fiscal position, I want to be clear: All of the funding included in this contingency fund must be debated in this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, while I dive into the details of the spending included in this bill during Committee of the Whole, I would like to briefly outline the high-level changes to the fiscal framework before I wrap up my remarks today.

On the expenditures side, the first supplementary estimates will result in an increase of \$132.7 million in gross O&M spending, with an additional \$26.8 million in new recoveries and \$18.7 million in new revenues. There is no change in gross capital spending. However, there are several adjustments on an individual basis, with decreases in some departments based on timelines and the progress of various capital projects.

There is also a \$5.8-million decrease in capital recoveries. With the adjustments in spending, we will see a revised surplus of \$3.6 million or a \$44.7-million decrease from the main estimates in the spring.

At the same time, the revised forecasted net debt as part of the first supplementary estimates is \$423.8 million or an increase of \$49 million from the main estimates.

Mr. Speaker, while this may seem like a big variance, we would like to remind members about the significant unforeseen events that we have endured since passing the mains in the spring. I would like to reiterate the importance of the contingency fund in significantly reducing the impact to the territory's surplus position.

As governments across the country, we have all learned first-hand that we are not immune to global issues, whether those be from a constantly changing climate or a high inflationary environment. This government will continue to do what is necessary to protect our places and our people, all while making lives more affordable for Yukoners, building healthy communities, investing in our collective future, and advancing reconciliation.

At this time, we must find balance that ensures that we are doing so in a responsible way within the means of the territory. I am pleased to conclude my remarks, Mr. Speaker, by saying that prudent planning at the start of each year has ensured that we continue to have the flexibility to do so while remaining in a surplus position.

While I look forward to providing further details and answering questions about the spending included in this bill during Committee of the Whole, I also look forward to the remarks from other members during the second reading.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks today.

Motion to adjourn debate

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I move that debate be now adjourned.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Lake Laberge that debate be now adjourned.

Motion to adjourn debate on second reading of Bill No. 211 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 2:44 p.m.

The following sessional papers were filed October 4, 2023:

35-1-102

Report from the Clerk of the Yukon Legislative Assembly on the Absence of Members from Sitzings of the Legislative Assembly and its Committees (October 4, 2023) (Speaker Harper)

35-1-103

Report of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly — Membership of the Special Committee on the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (Speaker Harper)

35-1-104

COVID-19 Pandemic — COVID-19 Vaccines in Yukon — Independent Auditor's Report — 2023 Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Yukon Legislative Assembly (June 20, 2023) (Speaker Harper)

35-1-105

Left in the Dark — Report 1 — Investigation into the mishandling of abuse allegations at a Yukon school by the Department of Education — A Report from the Yukon Ombudsman (September 7, 2023) (Speaker Harper)

35-1-106

Yukon Conflict of Interest Commission Annual Report to the Legislative Assembly for the period from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019 (28 June 2019) (Speaker Harper)

35-1-107

Yukon Conflict of Interest Commission Annual Report to the Legislative Assembly for the period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 (19 June 2020) (Speaker Harper)

35-1-108

Yukon Conflict of Interest Commission Annual Report to the Legislative Assembly for the period from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 (15 June 2022) (Speaker Harper)

35-1-109

Yukon Conflict of Interest Commission Annual Report to the Legislative Assembly for the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 (28 April 2023) (Speaker Harper)

35-1-110

Annual Report 2022 Workers' Safety and Compensation Board Yukon (Mostyn)

35-1-111

Fifth Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts — Yukon Housing (June 2023) (Dixon)

35-1-112

Ninth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees (July 5, 2023) (Clarke, N.)

35-1-113

Eighth Report of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges — Ministerial Statement (October 4, 2023) (Mostyn)