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HANSARD

Thursday, October 12, 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

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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

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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, October 12, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: This afternoon, we have a few folks here for our tribute on the North American Indigenous Games. Please join me in welcoming: Marie Cairns, the director of Sport and Recreation branch; Megan Cromarty, assistant chef de mission for the North American Indigenous Games and First Nations recreation sport consultant, Sport and Recreation branch; Gael Marchand, chef de mission for the North American Indigenous Games and executive director of the Yukon Aboriginal Sport Circle; and, finally, Pat Joe, who is an elder with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

Please join me in welcoming them to the House this afternoon.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, we have some very special guests here who have joined us here today for the ministerial statement on the Child Development Centre. From the Child Development Centre, we have Dale Stokes, from the board of directors and accompanied by her wonderful support network. We also have Michelle King, program coordinator; Marguerite Kuiack, developmental therapist; and Erin Brost, administrative assistant. From the Department of Education with Early Learning and Child Care joining us today, we have: Clara Northcott, director; Miranda Colbert, supervisor of child care services; and Ruth Lane, early learning program specialist. Thank you all for being with us today.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I have the pleasure of tabling the Yukon Minerals Advisory Board's annual report today, and we have in the gallery the chair, Heather Burrell — if we could welcome her, please.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of the Dawson City Fire Department 125th anniversary

Hon. Mr. Silver: I rise today on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to the Dawson City Fire Department and their 125 years of service. Since 1898, the

department has protected the people and properties of the Klondike, making it Yukon's oldest fire department. Recently, on September 29, the department proudly marked its 125th anniversary with their annual firemen's ball, held at the Palace Grand Theatre. It was a roaring success with nearly 150 people in attendance, all dressed in their finest.

The Dawson City Fire Department sets the standard for civic service and commitment to community, to which all Dawsonites aspire. Their service is defined by their decency, honesty, and care.

Their dedication is expressed by the incredible number of volunteers who have decades and decades of service. Members like Eric Blattler, with nearly 40 years of service; or Buffalo Taylor with 45 years of services, and dozens more with over 35 years of service as well.

Thank you all for your tremendous service, and thank you to all the new recruits, who keep on turning up, attracted by the opportunities for service that the department provides. Mr. Speaker, the department responds to more than just fires. They are front and centre responding to other emergencies like flooding in the Klondike Valley this summer. A major demonstration of this department's incredible spirit was when every single firefighter responded without hesitation to the fire that claimed the Klondike Metallic Industrial building. Despite knowing the risks of being so near to a building that contains highly combustible materials, the courageous volunteers of the department battled the flames for over four hours, and ultimately kept the people of Dawson safe and prevented further damage from surrounding properties.

Locally, they have championed civic addressing projects and ensure that help quickly arrives when needed. They are a fixture at community barbecues and events whenever there is an opportunity to share fire prevention messaging as well. They also created a life-jacket library along the Dawson waterfront for anybody who needs a PFD. They manage the Dawson City Firefighter's Museum in Dawson, which is a must attraction for anybody visiting, providing valuable stewardship of the community's firefighting legacy, and they also assist in delivering Christmas hampers for elders every Christmas. Sometimes they even drive Santa around.

There are amazing people who work for this department and they are more than just a fire department. They are Dawson's reliable nucleus. They are the core that we all revolve around.

I want to thank them all. Former, present, and also future firefighters, thank you very, very much for your service.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the Dawson City Fire Department.

On June 13, in Dawson City, we held a Special Sitting of the Legislative Assembly and observed the 125th anniversary of the Yukon becoming a territory. We now have the pleasure of acknowledging the 125th year of the formation of a fire department at the height of the Klondike Gold Rush in 1898. This fire hall is not only the oldest in Yukon; it houses an

amazing museum with memorabilia and a collection of vintage fire engines, apparatus, photos and other fire-related artifacts.

The oldest, vintage fire truck is an 1897 Clapp and Jones steam pumper that came to Dawson in 1900 and has since been refurbished with fundraising done mainly by the local fire department; however, it does amaze me that a 1973 GMC K35 walkaround rescue truck is listed as an antique.

Between the full-time fire chief and approximately 27 volunteers, the Dawson City Fire Department takes care of all manner of crises within the city and throughout the Klondike Valley — house, vehicle, and business establishment fires, all the way to school visits and being a major part of Dawson City parades. They are visible and a strong part of the community.

When Dawson was so much smaller, and basically everyone lived in the downtown core, the fire hall was beside what is now KIAC. The fire station was downstairs, and the fire chief whom I knew, Mr. Elmer Gondreau, and his wife, Margretta, lived upstairs. Mrs. Gondreau and her sister Martha Cameron — née Ballentine — were born Dawsonites, and as we know from history, they were all active members of our community and the Yukon.

As with many buildings in Dawson, the fire hall was moved and today houses the Ray of Sunshine store. Dawson put much value in repurposing and recycling as material was not that easy to acquire.

On September 29, 2023, a formal gala was held at the Palace Grand Theatre to honour the firefighters of the century and a quarter, to the many who gave their service and dedication helping the people of the Klondike. They were active in prevention as well, and they fundraise for others. In fact, the recent gala funds were donated to the Humane Society Dawson. They have a barbecue truck that caters events throughout the summer, and much of the funds are used for the museum or to help their fellow members should they need financial support.

We commend all firefighters for ensuring that our villages, towns, and cities are there for us when we are in danger and angst. Words are never enough. To all the Dawson City Fire Department members, past and present, thank you.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to add our congratulations to the Dawson City Fire Department.

The world has changed a lot in the last 125 years. Building codes have been established; firefighting tactics have evolved. Those first Dawson firefighters would probably barely recognize the firefighting equipment of today. But what hasn't changed is that when we're in trouble, when our lives and homes and buildings are threatened, firefighters drop what they are doing and run toward the danger, and we are so grateful.

I very much enjoyed the stories told by Dawson fire chief, Mike Masserey, about the history of the department. His obvious pride in the institution is well-deserved. I was particularly struck by the story from just a few years ago when firefighters in Dawson put out a fire and avoided a chemical explosion by seconds. It's a sobering reminder of the risks that firefighters take to keep us all safe.

Congratulations to all of the staff and volunteers of the Dawson City Fire Department, past and present, on this remarkable anniversary. We appreciate everything you do to keep us safe, and here's to another 125 years.

Applause

In recognition of Team Yukon at the North American Indigenous Games

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I rise today to pay tribute to Team Yukon's North American Indigenous Games contingent. From July 15 to 23, Team Yukon travelled to Halifax for the North American Indigenous Games.

The games assembled more than 5,000 athletes, coaches, cultural performers, and team staff from more than 756 Indigenous nations across North America to celebrate, share, and reconnect through sport and culture. It was the 10th edition of the games and the first time they were held since 2017 in Toronto.

Team Yukon was made up of more than 130 individuals, including a cultural contingent and Yukon First Nation elders who shared their stories. I was lucky enough to watch the team launch from the waterfront this summer, and it was so great seeing the excitement and the anticipation of all of these athletes and cultural performers on the cusp of their great adventure. There was representation from across the territory, including Watson Lake, Dawson, Mayo, Teslin, Carmacks, Haines Junction, Ross River, Pelly Crossing, and Whitehorse.

Team Yukon has competed at the North American Indigenous Games since their inception in 1990, and it's exciting to say that Team Yukon had their most successful games in the medal standings ever in 2023. Yukon earned 20 gold, 10 silver, and 9 bronze medals in swimming, rifle shooting, beach volleyball, canoe/kayak, and 3D archery. It is not just medalling that our athletes should be proud of, however; many received personal bests or achieved goals that they set for themselves before heading to the games.

This is a testament to the hard work, dedication, and perseverance of the Yukon's athletes and coaches. Sport grows leaders both on the field and in life. We are proud of what Team Yukon achieved in Halifax and how they represented us all so very well on this important sporting stage. For some athletes, this is the end of their athletic journey. For others, there are even greater sporting goals ahead to tackle. Regardless of where team members find themselves, we are excited for what Team Yukon gets up to next. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to congratulate Team Yukon on their incredible accomplishments as they represented us at the 2023 North American Indigenous Games this past July. This year, the games took place in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on the traditional and ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq people. They saw over 3,000 participants from 756 Indigenous nations across North America. Team Yukon made up 130 of that group, a small but very mighty team made up of youth from across the territory

participating in 11 sports and their coaches and mission staff. Thirty-nine metals came home with those athletes, earned in canoe/kayak, archery, beach volleyball, swimming, and rifle shooting. Congratulations to all who participated in the games this year. It is amazing that our youth have so many opportunities to compete in the sports they love in such a large-scale event.

Not only are competitions like the North American Indigenous Games a way for youth to compete, but they are also a way to learn about different cultures and travel to places that they may not have otherwise had a chance to see in their lives.

Each day, the Halifax Common opened to provide cultural village events to participants. A marketplace, various cultural demonstrations, and a main stage set up for a number of performances kept everyone busy and entertained each day. Other performances, festivals, demonstrations, and activities took place throughout the city, and I understand that the residents of Halifax were absolutely thrilled to host such an incredible event.

I would like to say thank you to all those who helped our Team Yukon athletes prepare and train, as it's no easy feat to be selected and to compete. Congratulations, once again, to Team Yukon.

Applause

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to the North American Indigenous Games and the Yukon team.

The North American Indigenous Games bring together Indigenous athletes, coaches, and cultural performers from nations across Canada and the United States to connect, build relationships, and share their love and passion for sports and culture.

The North American Indigenous Games highlight the resilience, strength, and dedication that bring together Indigenous youth from all of North America, youth who have overcome much adversity in their individual journeys through the power of sport and connection to culture.

All the athletes push themselves to try out for their desired sport, competing against some of the top Indigenous athletes across the country. It is in this arena of competition that you see youth give more than 100 percent to not only make the team and compete, but to also represent their home community and nation.

The Indigenous games also create a respectful, supportive, and encouraging space for these athletes and artists to come together in a healthy way to honour their hard work, dedication, and perseverance while their families and support systems cheer them on. All Indigenous athletes are a primary example of the good that will come when there is true investment in sports for Indigenous youth. This importance is also reflected in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action 87, 88, 89, 90, and 91.

This year, the games brought Indigenous athletes to Halifax on the unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people. First-time Indigenous athletes gathered and built connections

while veterans of the games reconnected with friends or even returned as coaches to mentor the next generation.

There are many ways that the games contribute to improving the quality of life for youth. We witness youth returning from Indigenous games with enhanced independence, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-connection, a sense of belonging, and mastery, all of which are important factors that amplify even more inner growth for youth people.

Congratulations to all the Yukon Indigenous athletes and coaches and elders. You make us all so proud.

Mahsi' cho.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling today the Yukon Minerals Advisory Board 2022 annual report.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 34: *Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 34, entitled *Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 34, entitled *Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 34 agreed to

Speaker: Are there any further bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to take action to improve safety on Takhini River Road by:

(1) promptly repairing the damage caused by recent precipitation and traffic; and

(2) including the project to improve the roadbed, surface, and drainage in the government's 2024-25 capital budget.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to address the increasing numbers of cases of syphilis and sexually transmitted infections in the Yukon by:

(1) implementing a public awareness campaign encouraging people to be tested; and

(2) ensuring access to immediate testing, results, and treatment.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Child Development Centre

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, our government cares deeply about ensuring that every child in the Yukon has the right supports and opportunities to build a strong foundation for when they begin school. Over the years, we have continued to make investments to ensure that children are set up to thrive from their earliest years. This includes the Yukon's universal, affordable, childcare program, investing in early childhood educators, and investing in bright, modern, and safe learning spaces.

Today, I'm honoured to share more about one such space in this ministerial statement that will provide insights and serve as a valuable resource for future generations.

Earlier this year, the vibrant Child Development Centre welcomed staff to its new, permanent location at 206 Hanson Street in Whitehorse. I had the opportunity to tour the space at their recent open house and I was very impressed. Our government is extremely proud to provide the Child Development Centre with dedicated funding and to see young children in every Yukon community set up to thrive with the centre's child-centred programming.

This year, we are providing approximately \$4.6 million in funding; last year, we provided operational funding of \$3.4 million along with another \$2.68 million for renovations and furnishings for the centre's stunning new space. This year's increased annual funding allows the Child Development Centre to move forward with their renewal plans, which will address the waiting list and provide additional support for Yukon families.

This funding also supports the lease for their beautiful new space. We know how important the Child Development Centre's location is for supporting not only Whitehorse, but Yukon families and children in all communities who can benefit from speech, language, and developmental therapies as well as additional supports.

Following many months of collaborative work and careful planning, I am grateful to know that, for years to come, the new space can accommodate all CDC programs and staff, including the much-loved therapeutic preschool.

I want to take a moment to hold up the entire Child Development Centre team. I know that each of them has remained flexible, found innovative ways to carry out their work, and have continued to go above and beyond to consistently provide exceptional services, and they did this throughout the centre's five moves in two years, operating at times out of three locations simultaneously.

I would also like to recognize the hard work of the Early Learning and Child Care branch at the Department of Education. They have worked so closely with the Child Development Centre for the past two years to support the organization during their transitions between spaces, all while making preparations for arriving in their new home.

I know the Early Learning and Child Care branch will continue to collaborate to identify future needs for our communities and the needs for future generations, as they grow and evolve. I look forward to many, many more years of the Child Development Centre team serving Yukon families, communities, and children.

Mr. Dixon: I'm pleased to rise in response to this ministerial statement on the Child Development Centre. I want to begin by offering my sincere congratulations to the CDC on the completion of their new space. Like many of my colleagues, I had the opportunity to join the CDC staff, client families, partner agencies and organizations, and other supporters of the CDC at its grand opening just a few weeks ago. For me, Mr. Speaker, it was a touching reminder of the importance of the work that the CDC does for our communities and Yukon families.

During the remarks at the opening, we heard from the minister of the longstanding support that the Yukon government has provided to the CDC. We also heard from a representative of the staff, who spoke about the challenges that the dislocation has created for them over the past few years, and we heard some very touching words from a parent, who spoke about the impact that the CDC has had on their family and their children. What was absolutely unanimous at the time was the sense of relief and happiness at finally being home in a permanent location.

I know that the past several years have not been easy for the CDC. Since the discovery of mould in their old building, they have been bounced around, spread apart, and dislocated. Staff have been working from a variety of offices and spaces since then. There were some at Copper Ridge Place at one point; some in Waterfront Station; I understand some were working from home. I think it was last year that I attended at least one meeting with CDC staff at a rather spartan building in the industrial area. As the minister said, five moves in two years — wow.

I know from the remarks of the staff at the reception, as well as hearing directly from various staff, that all of the moves and the dislocation and the fact that their teams were so spread apart made it very difficult for them. I'm very happy to see that their patience and resilience has paid off, and they are now comfortably in a new, beautiful, functional space that will allow them to deliver the best possible services and programs that they can. For that, my colleagues and I, and many other families across the territory, are thankful. Congratulations to the CDC.

Turning to the minister's statement, I wonder if, in her response, the minister can provide us with an update on the organizational review that is being conducted by the CDC. Her department has certainly been involved in those discussions, so it would be helpful if the minister could provide an update. As well, could she also provide an update on the funding for the CDC? Has the minister been able to provide the multi-year funding agreement to the organization so that they can pair the certainty of their new location with the certainty of multi-year funding? Also, can she let us know what steps have been taken by her department to reduce the wait times for CDC services

that have previously been identified in the organization's annual reports?

With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

MLA Tredger: I am delighted, on behalf of the Yukon NDP, to congratulate the Child Development Centre on their new building. It's a particular treat for me to say this, because I have been hanging around their old building since I was about eight, which is when my mom started working there. Folks might not know, but my previous career was as a speech language pathologist, and as soon as I graduated from university, I started keeping an eye on the Child Development Centre's hiring page, because I knew it was where I wanted to work. After a few years, a job opened up, and I was lucky enough to move back home and take it.

I can say from personal experience that the Child Development Centre is a leader in the way it delivers family- and child-centred services. They have put a huge amount of work into making sure that families and children get the support they need in a personalized way that works for them. They have an amazing team, from health professionals to bus drivers to board members to administrators — that's not an exhaustive list; they are all fantastic. They walk with families in some of their hardest moments but also in their successes and joys.

Since their old building was unexpectedly closed a few years ago, they have had a pretty challenging run of it. Being spread out across multiple buildings and having to pack and unpack their offices as they moved and pivoted, the staff have faced the challenges with patience and good humour, and they have gone the extra mile to make sure families and children still had exceptional service.

I also want to commend the families and children for being so flexible as they adjusted to the many changes and the less-than-ideal circumstances. Now, they have a beautiful new building — the modern, accessible, purpose-built space they all deserve. We are so happy for you. We are so happy for all the children and families who come to your space. Thank you so much for all your work, and congratulations.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you to my colleagues today for providing comments and their congratulations to the Child Development Centre. I think it is very much deserved. Our government certainly has made historic investments in early learning for all Yukon children. We are very committed to doing all that we can to ensure children are supported in high-quality learning environments and are ready for school. We know that these are the leaders of tomorrow, and it is absolutely crucial that they are provided with the right tools to grow and flourish.

For almost 45 years, the Child Development Centre has helped families and young children access inclusive, early learning, and specialized therapeutic services. It is profound to think that the centre started operating from a small trailer behind Selkirk Street school with only two employees.

Today, we can just look across the way and see their new, beautiful home, busy with families coming in and out. It is definitely heartwarming. It is certainly one of the initiatives that

I am very, very proud of. I know that this is an important investment for the generations of children to come in the Yukon.

We know there are families across the Yukon still waiting to access the Child Development Centre, and the increased funding we are providing this year will help the centre address the waiting list.

Again, we are proud to support the Child Development Centre, along with the Department of Highways and Public Works, which worked very closely on this project as well. They were able to help the centre with a private sector partner to provide the new long-term space. Not only is it a freshly renovated building, but the space is also very energy efficient, comfortable, and well-suited for the centre's needs, now and into the future. We know that we must always be looking forward as we invest.

I will turn a little bit to some of the questions that were posed today by the Leader of the Official Opposition. In 2021-22, the department funded the CDC to undertake a review of services. They have since shared two reports — The Yukon Child Development Centre New Strategic Plan and Structural Renewal Plan, which is what I am talking about in terms of the funding that we are providing to ensure that they are able to move forward with their plan. The Early Learning and Child Care unit continues to work with and support the CDC, as I said earlier, in identifying their future needs. The structural renewal recognizes the need for a new approach to service delivery that addresses the increasing numbers and complexities of children waiting for services. Again, this new approach is dependent on strengthening organizational support and shifting administrative duties away from specialized therapist services.

I personally have met with the board, and I understand their vision. I am working closely with them as a priority area for our Department of Education to ensure that they are supported in their future plans.

We are investing in continuing education for educators as well. We are investing in the right places with an upstream approach in mind. We care deeply about creating successful learning outcomes for all learners and ensuring that our littlest Yukoners have a strong foundation to begin their school journey.

Thank you so much for allowing me this time.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Mental health services in schools

Mr. Kent: Last spring, during budget debate, I asked the Minister of Education about the confidence and supply agreement commitment to the Third Party regarding wellness counsellors across the territory for Yukon youth. Section 2.f. of the CASA permits the government to "create dedicated wellness counsellors or similar positions in all schools specifically dedicated to addressing the need for comprehensive mental health and wellness." The minister indicated that the government was doing so, saying — I'll quote again, "My hope is to have this work that we are working on

now implemented into the fall school year.” So, can the minister indicate if any wellness counsellors were in place in any Yukon schools for this fall, and whether or not any schools were specifically requesting that support from the department?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I spoke a little bit about the confidence and supply agreement yesterday, and I am happy to speak about it again today. The 2023 agreement sets out a new relationship between the Yukon Liberal caucus and the Yukon NDP caucus, founded in principles, really, of good faith, and we share a number of priority areas when it comes to education.

What was really important to me, as this agreement was being negotiated and as we came up with the areas around education, is that our Department of Education has been working toward renewal and reshaping of education, and so, it was very easy for me to see the positions that were proposed in the confidence and supply agreement for school wellness specialist-type positions. What’s really important for Yukoners to know is that Yukon government has committed to 81 new positions over the next three years, including wellness counsellors, educational assistants, and learning assistant teachers.

I will continue to build on the answers around the wellness specialist positions, as we move forward.

Mr. Kent: Despite the minister’s statement last spring, it appears that there were no wellness counsellor positions in schools this fall.

On August 4, mere weeks before the first day of school, the deputy minister wrote to the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education, and in reference to wellness counsellor positions, indicating that — and I quote: “The department is still working on the job description for this new position...” So, of course, it would be very difficult for those positions to be in Yukon schools when they were still in development in early August. We have seen the Liberals fail to staff critical positions across the government, and now the minister has failed to meet her own target of this fall for wellness counsellors in schools.

Can the minister provide a timeline for when recruitment will start for these positions and when we can expect to see them in all Yukon schools?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The Yukon government has made some significant commitments, all aligning, of course, with the reshaping and revisioning of education, and ensuring that we’re getting this right. We have created a school wellness specialist position. These positions will have two specific roles with each school having access to both. The school wellness specialist, with a minimum requirement of a bachelor of social work, and our First Nation wellness support, which will be an elder, traditional knowledge-keeper, or traditional healer — the role of the school wellness specialist will be to provide a variety of direct supports to students, families, educators, and the community, which is really important, and may range from assessments, counselling, consultation and programming, case management, and education, depending on the specific needs of the individual schools or community.

We will post the job ads for the school wellness specialist the week of October 16, 2023. Further, the role of the First Nation wellness support will be to provide culturally

appropriate supports that meet the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and academic needs of students.

Mr. Kent: I don’t believe I received an answer to my question. My questions were specific to whether or not the wellness counsellor positions were in place in schools this fall. As I mentioned, on August 4, the department indicated to the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education that they were still working on the job descriptions for these new positions, and I also mentioned that it would be very difficult, obviously, for those positions to be in Yukon schools when they are still in development.

So, I’m going to ask the minister again: Can she provide this House with a timeline for when recruitment will start for these positions and when we can expect to see wellness counsellors, wellness specialists, or wellness coordinators, which she referred to in the spring, in all Yukon schools?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I believe that I said that those positions will be posted on October 16, 2023.

I will further continue with the answers around these specialized supports. The First Nation wellness support role is another really important role, and we have allocated an additional \$1 million in funding, which can be used for other types of services and supports for students. Part of these funds will be used to work with First Nation governments to hire these roles. We are currently working with the superintendents and the school board executive directors to prioritize the implementation of both of these positions over the next two years. We are also working with school board executive directors and the superintendents on additional EAs and LATs supports in schools. This is, in part, dependent on the success of the recruitment efforts of these positions.

I think that what is really important to note, Mr. Speaker, is that we are really working closely with all of our authorities — the Department of Education and our two school boards. Things have changed in education and we have to work with all of our —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Women’s organizations funding

Ms. Clarke: Earlier this year, the Yukon Women’s Coalition made up of eight individual equity-seeking groups wrote to the minister asking for additional core funding for women’s organizations. The minister responded to the group on April 13. In that letter, the minister said — and I quote: “It is also our intention, once we have finalized a negotiation with...” — the Women and Gender Equity Directorate — “... on the broad implementation plan, to add money through the supplementary budget process to flow to organizations towards stabilizing the sector in the Yukon.”

So, how much new money is being provided as core funding to women’s groups in the supplementary budget?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. I am happy to rise to talk about the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*. I gave a ministerial statement yesterday. The bilateral negotiations on the national action plan are complete now. We have a signed agreement with Canada. We certainly are looking forward to

continuing to work with our partners in the NGO sector and other departments within government and First Nations as we move forward.

I think what's really important to note is that the new dollars being introduced through this important agreement — \$16.397 million over the next four years. And, as I stated yesterday, the Government of Yukon is very committed to ending gender-based violence. We are looking forward to implementing Yukon's agreement. We are thankful for Yukoners' contributions, including all of the equity-seeking groups.

The first round of funding for 2023-24 and 2024-25 — and I will continue to build on the answer here in terms of the program that we will be —

Speaker: Order, please.

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, the minister was clear in both her letter and her words in the Legislature. Women's groups should expect to see an increase in the supplementary budget this fall once the negotiations are done with Canada. The supplementary budget includes additional funding to the department of over \$2 million. How much of that is going to the groups that make up the Yukon Women's Coalition in the form of core funding?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, we have a number of very important NGOs that are providing good services to Yukoners. The Yukon implementation plan determines where the funding is allocated over the next two years. The budget for the first two years is \$8,161,000 and what we determined is that 49 percent of that will go directly to NGOs.

The main organizations that will be in receipt of these funds — and, of course, I talked a little bit about this yesterday in terms of the three shelters in the territory that will receive direct funding. It will be done through Health and Social Services. In terms of the organizations that will be eligible, they will be the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle, Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council, the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society, Yukon Status of Women Council, Yukon Women's Transition Home Society, les Essentielles, Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, Yukon Women in Trades, Queer Yukon, Skookum Jim, and Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition for the first round.

Ms. Clarke: In their letter to the minister in February, the Yukon Women's Coalition requested a formal relationship with the Yukon government in the form of an MOU that gives them a role in prioritizing how the funding should roll out. In her ministerial statement yesterday, the minister said — and I quote: "... our government worked with stakeholders to develop a comprehensive Yukon implementation plan..."

So, can the minister tell us whether or not the Yukon Women's Coalition was involved in the creation of the implementation plan?

Hon. Ms. McLean: We are very thankful for the contributions of Yukoners to the plan's development and believe that future collaboration with Yukon not-for-profit women and gender-equity-seeking organizations is very integral to achieving real change. We are also thankful for the opportunity to have met with the Yukon Women's Coalition

before the start of the negotiations. We are mindful, of course, of their request. I just spoke to the amount of funding that will go to the organizations within these next two years. We will continue to work closely with them to determine where dollars will be allocated in out-years.

I also indicated that we have to consider our relationship and partnership with Yukon First Nations and, of course, departments within government as well. One of the key priority areas is also our missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit+ strategy. I'm really looking forward to continuing the work with the not-for-profit groups and seeing —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Nurse recruitment and retention

Ms. Blake: In this year's budget, the Liberal government is on track to spend \$10 million on agency nurses in Yukon hospitals. In comparison, this amount is more than what the Toronto University Health Network spends on their agency nurses to staff a network of large-scale hospitals that serve more than three times the number of patients compared to Yukon hospitals.

Hiring an agency nurse currently costs this government three times as much as a public nurse yet we rely heavily on them every day for essential care. This is not sustainable, practical, or good government spending.

What is this government doing to move our health care system away from being dependent on private health companies?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question. It's always great to have the opportunity to speak to Yukoners about health care. Front-line health care staff here in the territory continue to work tirelessly to provide Yukoners with health care services and play an integral role in our ongoing response to public health needs of Yukoners, the substance use health emergency, as well as acute care and preventive care.

We recognize that health care provider burnout is a real and pressing issue in Yukon communities, and we support all health care providers who have sacrificed much of their personal lives and time to their jobs over the past few years. Agency nurses, of course, help us allow others to have some personal time or some much-needed rest.

We continue to mitigate the increased pressures resulting from local, national, and global shortages of health care providers. Nurses, in particular, play a critical role in the delivery of health care services in the territory. The Department of Health and Social Services has undertaken several actions to attract and to retain nurse practitioners, registered nurses, and licensed practical nurses.

Ms. Blake: We continue to hear from nurses who express feeling undervalued, ignored, and unsupported by this government. Nurses continue to respond to crisis situations daily, often working overtime and under pressure. In contrast, agency nurses get flexible working hours and three times the pay of a public nurse.

Many public nurses have asked for more flexibility in their hours, and they are often denied because of shortages and rigid

work structures. Yukon nurses deserve to work in a health care system where they are valued for their sacrifices, their time, and their expertise.

When will this government start listening to public nurses and give them the flexibility and scheduling they deserve?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think I addressed many of the concerns that were noted in the second question in my first response, in which I expressed clearly that we support health care providers. We understand burnout to be a very real and pressing issue in the communities as well as here in Whitehorse. We support all health care providers who have sacrificed much of their personal lives and time to their jobs.

You don't have to look very far back — the spring of this year — when bonuses were introduced for our Yukon nurses — retention and recruitment bonuses. They have resulted in Community Nursing experiencing a vacancy rate now of approximately 19 percent in primary health care nurses. Of course, that's still not the goal. We are working hard to make sure those positions are full and recruited for throughout the territory, but that's an improvement of approximately 29 percent since the fall of 2022. We work every day to make sure that Yukon nurses are recruited, properly paid for and remunerated in a way that is to their benefit.

Ms. Blake: Some provinces in Canada are working to limit or even ban the use of private nursing agencies. They have realized that using private companies for short-term contracts pulls nurses out of the public health system, takes money away from public funds, and puts it in the private pockets. We can't keep operating our health care system in a state of emergency.

Overworked nurses are feeling demoralized every day, having worse working conditions and lower pay compared to their agency colleagues. The longer we wait, the more we drive public nurses away.

What is this government's timeline to move us away from their dependency on private agencies and into a sustainable health care system?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The use of agency nurses across the country, and perhaps across the world, is a delicate balance, of course. Our goal is to use agency nurses only when necessary, in situations where coverage is needed to either support where there is a vacancy or to support our own nurses and health professionals for much-needed rest and respite.

The Department of Health and Social Services has undertaken several actions to recruit nurses to the Community Nursing branch, including widespread job advertisements across websites and social media platforms, and targeted outreach to organizations and individuals. As I've noted, there are significant recruitment and retention bonuses in place. We have worked to shift scheduling structures to allow many nursing positions to operate on a part-time or rotational basis, which is supported by Yukon nurses. In addition, materials have been developed for all branches to support recruitment initiatives at job fairs and others. The International Council of Nurses Congress met with over 6,000 nurses in Montréal in July; Yukon was present.

Question re: School staff shortage

Ms. Van Bibber: We have heard from a number of school councils about staffing challenges that their schools are facing this year. One council told us that their school has a 15- to 20-percent staffing deficit each day and that the list of teachers on call is not translating into answered phone calls each morning. This means that the learning assistant teachers and education assistants are often taken away from their normal duties with vulnerable students to teach classes. If this sounds familiar to the minister, it is because many schools faced the same issues last year.

What is the minister doing to recruit and retain substitute teachers?

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

We know that effective teachers are one of the most important factors in a student's success in school, and we work to attract and retain the best educators. In terms of teachers on call, I think that I gave these numbers last week, but I will give them again, because these are the most current numbers that I have from September 26. We have registered teachers on call — they continue to rise; I want to note that first. Right now, we have 159 registered teachers on call — 129 of those are in Whitehorse; 30 in rural; with an additional 19 applications. I believe that many of those applications may have been completed.

We continue to recruit TOCs and recognize that demand for coverage continues to be a challenge. We continue to evolve our recruitment efforts to attract candidates for the teachers-on-call roles and to support the staff in accepting assignments as they are available. We recognize also that the renegotiation of our collective agreement at the end of the current term — June 2024 — is a joint opportunity to collaborate with the union through a negotiation process as well.

Speaker: Order, please.

Ms. Van Bibber: One of the councils said that working in a deficit model on a daily basis is creating a toxic work environment at the school, according to the administration and staff. They are worried about losing staff, as stress and fatigue affects the morale of the educators. As the TOCs are not available, or it seems they are not answering calls, what steps can be taken to address the shortage of the TOCs and the substitute teachers in the Yukon schools?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, in terms of operational management of schools, this routinely requires regular adjustment by administrators. While I'm on my feet, I really want to commend the administration teams for their ability to effectively make adjustments where there are temporary vacancies and to mitigate the increased demands on staffing resources. Schools have several options available to help them manage should they have a need. These include, but are not limited to, temporary adjustments, adjusting staff teaching assignments, adjustments to student learning groups, and the use of teachers on call, which is the main part of this question. If a school indicates it may be unable to operate due to a shortage of staff, temporary deployment of central administration staff to schools or regrouping students will be

considered before a shift at all to any kind of remote learning, which is not something we've seen this year.

I think that things are improving. We have been able to attract more TOCs earlier this year and we will continue to work on recruitment.

Ms. Van Bibber: In August, the minister committed to 81 new positions over the next three years in Yukon schools. This includes school wellness counsellors, educational assistants, and learning assistant teachers. Forty of those positions are for this school year.

Can the minister update us on how many of those 40 positions have been hired so far and which schools have they been deployed to?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I believe that I had spoken to this a few moments ago during another question. These are very important positions that we are deploying into our schools. The student wellness specialist positions, as I described earlier today, will be posted on October 16. They are a very important part of the 81 new positions. We will be hiring them, and, as I indicated earlier, we will be working closely with all of our Yukon education partners and authorities. We now have two school boards that we work closely with. There are a lot of other aspects of the supports we are putting in schools. I also indicated that the First Nation wellness support roles will provide a really unique opportunity to work with First Nations around ensuring that we have culturally appropriate supports that meet the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and academic needs of students. We have allocated \$1 million toward that initiative.

Question re: School replacement

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, this summer the government released a tender for the consultant services on the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary School. The specifications of that tender caught the eye of many people in the school community. In particular, the tender contemplates the demolition of the Takhini Elementary School. To date, the minister has never indicated that there were plans to demolish Takhini Elementary.

Can the minister confirm that Takhini Elementary may need to be demolished to accommodate the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I think I want to start by saying that our government is really proud of investing in school infrastructure. École Whitehorse Elementary has been identified for replacement with a new modern facility that will meet the needs of the community for years to come. Of course, folks know that this is one of our oldest schools and we have made the decision to go ahead and start planning for a new school.

The Takhini education land reserve is a central location that can accommodate this size of a school. It's one of our largest education reserves. In August 2023, Kobayashi and Zedda Architects Ltd. was awarded the prime consultant contract for the École Whitehorse Elementary replacement project through a public tender. A preliminary site assessment is currently underway.

Moving Whitehorse Elementary School to the Takhini education land reserve does not preclude having a school downtown. We have lots of debate around that and we are looking forward to releasing a "what we heard" on Whitehorse school infrastructure later this fall.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, my question was with respect to the potential demolition of Takhini Elementary School that is contained in that RFP, and hopefully the minister gets a chance to address that in this next response. The RFP that was released this summer, and ultimately resulted in the contract awarded that the minister mentioned back in August, also includes a request for the consultant to conduct an analysis of other potential sites if it is deemed that the Takhini lot is inadequate. However, to date, the minister has insisted that this is the only acceptable lot and the only location that the government would consider. So, why would the minister instruct their consultant to conduct an analysis of other sites if they don't think that any other sites are appropriate?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to saying that this is a really important project in terms of new infrastructure for Whitehorse. As everyone knows, our population is growing. We have experienced growth that we haven't seen in probably decades. Since 2016, I believe, we have had a 12.1-percent increase from 2016 to 2021, and we are working to catch up — that's what we are doing, Mr. Speaker. We did not have any elementary schools built during the last whole mandate of the Yukon Party.

We are investing in schools and this school is one of our oldest schools. As I have indicated, we have hired a very capable prime consultant to do the assessment work and we want to be as broad as we possible can and do our due diligence, Mr. Speaker. I believe that, in ensuring that we are making the best decisions that we can based on evidence, this contractor will do a very good job for Yukoners.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, I will give the minister another chance to answer the specific questions that I asked and they are related to the contract that was awarded back in August to the consultant to look at the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary School. The first one is that — and the minister has never mentioned this before — they have asked the consultant to consider whether or not Takhini Elementary School needs to be demolished as part of this school redevelopment. The second one is that they actually asked the contractor to look at other potential sites if the Takhini site is not deemed to be appropriate. I know that the minister has never said anything publicly about either of those issues, so I will give her the chance on the floor of the Legislature here today to tell us whether or not they are considering demolishing Takhini Elementary School and whether or not the government is considering other sites for this project.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, again, this is an important infrastructure. Replacing École Whitehorse Elementary School is an important project for the Government of Yukon. We have awarded the contract as the prime consultant to Kobayashi and Zedda. There is certainly a scope of work. They are hired to provide a plan for the entire design of the replacement school. The first phase of the project is site

analysis and test fit for this particular build. We, of course, want to do our full due diligence, but I will go back to say that the site selection, as it stands right now, on the Takhini education reserve — the Takhini education land reserve is one of the largest in Whitehorse and has enough room for potentially two schools. There are not a lot of other sites that are centrally located and would meet the needs of a new school such as this.

I'm really looking forward to the results of the prime consultant, and I'll be able to give more information then.

Speaker: Order, please.

The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 744

Clerk: Motion No. 744, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

Speaker: It is moved by the Government House Leader:

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*.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Following COVID, and since we have come back as an Assembly, we have had this motion and two other motions that we brought forward each time for each sitting of the House. Recently at House Leaders, I was asked to please take this up with the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges to try to seek a more permanent solution around this, rather than bringing this set of motions back each time.

I can say that I have raised this with the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges, but the committee has not yet reached agreement to bring back a report to us as an Assembly. I indicated that I would bring these motions back. I have heard from some colleagues in the House that they remain concerned about this motion, and I agree that we should find a permanent solution. That is why I raised it at the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges.

Maybe we will get into a debate about it today, but this is the first of three motions, which we have had since the House returned after COVID. It is about making sure that people can participate in this House, do their work, and contribute, while not putting others at risk. I look forward to debate on the motion, and I will continue to try to seek a solution at the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges.

Mr. Cathers: I just have to remind the Government House Leader that he is also a member of that committee and has the opportunity to propose solutions there.

Our caucus has been clear for quite some time about our position that we recognized that something was necessary during the pandemic, but we don't think this is the right model — especially as an ongoing model.

Most legislative assemblies in Canada adopted temporary measures for virtual participation in sittings during the pandemic. As of August 2023, most have moved away from those measures and do not allow for virtual participation in sittings. Only four other provinces and territories allow for either virtual attendance under a hybrid model, or attendance that way under exceptional circumstances.

We have proposed an alternative model for discussion at the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges, and we believe that or something similar would be a better approach. We also asked that the chair convene a meeting as soon as possible to discuss this issue and other items. However, we don't see it as productive to spend much time debating these motions today in the interest of the House's time, and we will reluctantly vote in favour, while noting that the model should change before the next sitting.

MLA Tredger: This motion has been really important for this Assembly over the last three years. It has allowed us to keep each other safe while still doing our jobs. We have heard over and over from medical professionals how critical it is to stay home when you are sick. We have amplified that message here in the Legislature. When we, as MLAs, choose to stay home when we're sick, we keep all the people who work in this building safe — from the security staff to the department officials who come to help brief us, to the clerks and the pages. We keep their families safe. We protect all the people who come in contact with them when they finish their work day and head out into the territory and run into people at the grocery store, or while picking up their kids from school, or while joining their friends at a sports game. There are an exponential number of people who avoid exposure when we stay home when we are sick.

This motion has allowed us to do that while still doing our jobs. We can keep people safe and still vote. We can pass a budget and keep the wheels of government turning. We can make sure that the voices of our constituents are heard without compromising the safety of the people around us. It just makes sense.

But COVID-19 is not the only illness of concern that we face. Right now, we are coming into flu season. Influenza is an unpleasant and disruptive disease for anyone, but for people

who are young, or elderly, or who have compromised immune systems, it can be deadly. Besides that, there are a whole host of gastrointestinal and respiratory and other illnesses that I wouldn't wish on anyone.

So, I am going to move an amendment to this motion.

Amendment proposed

MLA Tredger: I move:

THAT Motion No. 744 be amended by deleting the phrases "COVID-19 symptoms," and "or protocols".

Speaker: The amendment is in order.

It has been moved by the Member for Whitehorse Centre:

THAT Motion No. 744 be amended by deleting the phrase "COVID-19 symptoms," and "or protocols".

The motion, if amended, would then read:

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 illness 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*.

The member has 18 minutes and 12 seconds remaining to speak to the amendment.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, I want to apologize for my off-mic comment of surprise when I realized that I had not signed the motion properly, and I appreciate the Clerks helping me get that corrected.

This amendment expands the motion to cover all illness. As I have said, there are many illnesses besides COVID-19 that we do not want to be spreading to each other or to any of the people who work in this building, or any of the other community members who they will be on contact with. I know that this issue is going forward to SCREP, but I believe that this is a critical issue of safety that warrants input from the entire Legislative Assembly, so I have brought it forward here today.

One of the concerns that comes up when we discuss remote participation is: Is the technology adequate? Well, we have invested in these beautiful, new screens here in the Legislative Assembly, and cameras, to make sure that we can. People are working remotely all over the world, and after three years of Zoom meetings, I hope that we are all proficient enough to manage a video call. One of the advantages of a small Assembly, like we have here, is that we can avoid some of the

complexities faced by places like the House of Commons, who have needed face recognition software to vote. For us, it's pretty straightforward. Of course, there may be hiccups and learning curves along the way, but I am confident that we can make it work.

As I've mentioned, staying home when we're sick helps everyone, but it especially protects the people who are immunocompromised, including people with a variety of chronic illnesses and disabilities. If we want this Assembly to be accessible to everyone so that everyone in the Yukon can be represented here, it means making sure that it's safe for everyone, and that includes people who are particularly vulnerable to infection.

Everyone in this Assembly takes their job very seriously and understands the weight of the responsibility we have. I know that many of us have shown up for work despite being ill because it was critical that we could participate in debate and votes. If the choice before us is letting the government fall or coming in sick, well, it doesn't feel like much of a choice. But, at the same time, we have said to the public over and over to stay home when you're sick, so it would be hypocritical of us not to set up a system that allows us to do the same.

With that in mind, I hope that all of my colleagues will join me in supporting this amendment.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I just want to speak to the amendment.

First of all, I thank the Member for Whitehorse Centre for bringing the amendment. This is exactly the point that I had raised at the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections, and Privileges. What we do here in Canada — but let's talk about in the Yukon — is that we say to workers to please stay home if you are feeling sick. What we are talking about is if you have cold- or flu-like symptoms. That is what we have been advising Yukoners to do. That's coming from our health care professionals — our chief medical officer of health — and it's about making our workplaces safe.

We talk about making sure to cough into your elbow, making sure to have great hand hygiene, and to just being better at trying to make sure that we don't spread illness. This is exactly what we're talking about. It's about making sure that our workplaces are safe and it's about making sure that we are reflecting what we are asking our citizens to do — that we, as an Assembly, hold up the same advice that we're giving to all Yukoners.

When I think back to how this motion, as a COVID motion, has been used, it has been used several times in this Assembly. It has never been abused. It's for when people have had COVID — or even COVID-like symptoms, and when they had those symptoms, we weren't sure whether or not they had COVID in that moment — they could participate.

I remembered doing it once before we had the new technology, the screens, and the cameras. I was thankful that I had the opportunity to continue to do my job representing members of Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes and to take on the role as a minister. That's trying to do work.

One of the questions that I can imagine is: Where is the line? I always think that the people who are here serving Yukoners do so honourably and do so in a way where they don't, in any way, for example, feign sickness.

There have been times I have noted here — that's just a gravelly voice, by the way, not an illness — when I have seen people come in and, to me, it feels like they are under the weather and I would prefer if we had a motion like this. I note that the amendment, as it stands, will be for this Sitting, and I still commit to taking this back to the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges to try to work across all parties to come up with a more permanent solution.

One last thing that I will just point out — when I heard the Member for Lake Laberge speaking earlier, he talked about four Canadian jurisdictions. It is true that it is four provinces and territories but there is also the federal government, so it's five, I think, that allow for this type of approach. I recognize that it is not the majority; however, I have also not heard of problems from those jurisdictions. This is about health and about leading in the way that we are asking of our citizens in their workplaces.

Mr. Kent: The Official Opposition will be voting against this amendment for a couple of reasons. Obviously, we have spoken on the floor here today about House Leaders in the spring and the fact that there we had discussed adopting the COVID motions in the spring but referring that to SCREP over the summer. It is my understanding that SCREP — I am not a member of that standing committee — met twice over the summer and, as was mentioned, they weren't able to come to any sort of an agreement on what this would look like.

I guess the more disappointing thing for me is that I am seeing this for the first time here rather than it coming to House Leaders for any discussion, and then we could have potentially gone back to our caucuses and had further discussion about what this means.

Again, we were prepared to vote in favour of extending the motions that we have had for the past number of Sittings during the pandemic and as we emerged from the pandemic but, that said, we believe that the proper place for this discussion is at the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges, or SCREP, so that they can have those discussions. They can come back with something that has been presented and potentially voted on, or concurred with by all three parties, rather than just asking us here on the floor of the House to support this today with no prior warning and no prior discussion at House Leaders.

So, for that reason, we will be voting against this amendment brought forward by the Member for Whitehorse Centre.

Ms. White: I am actually — this is probably no surprise to anyone — going to be speaking in favour of the amendment. In the time that I have been here, I have come in before with a flu because, at the time, I had to come to work. I came in with a flu. Liz Hanson and I had gone to a house where the small infant projectile vomited, like in the movie *Poltergeist*, and I

was sick for days after, but I had to come to work because I needed to be here. I didn't have an option; I couldn't not come to work.

People may remember the horse cough that I think I had in the fall of 2021. That sounded awful, and I am sure that Hansard remembers because it was probably awful for them every time I did not move away from my microphone in time before I coughed. It wasn't COVID; it was some kind of horrible infection that the doctor told me I was just going to have to muscle through it. But I didn't have the option of staying home. We tell people that they should stay home when they are sick. We have just implemented paid sick days because we think it is so important.

As a business owner, when people were sick, I didn't want them in my business. I didn't want them to get their co-workers sick because then I would have no staff. It is a matter of making sure that we are mirroring what we are asking people. I can tell you that when I had the flu, I would rather have been home, and I did participate remotely when I had COVID prior to the investments that we made in this Chamber. It was a pretty awful experience, I am sure, for whichever minister — I can't remember — I tried to ask questions for. It didn't go well.

We put the money in. I think it's important that we have, but it's making sure that not only do we respect the people in the territory to whom we are saying to stay home when sick, but it's also respecting each other. It's recognizing that no matter how much we like to pretend that we're not quite human and that we can muscle through it, the truth of the matter is that sometimes it would be better off if we didn't. I can tell you distinctly that there were two times when I wish I hadn't been here or had to come in, but I did because there wasn't an option. Really, the amendment to this motion says that you can participate remotely while you are ill. I think that is important.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question on the amendment?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Dixon: Disagree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Ms. Clarke: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 10 yeas, seven nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the amendment carried.

Amendment agreed to

Speaker: Is there any debate on the main motion as amended?

If the member now speaks, he will close debate.

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I just will respond to a few things here. The first one is that there have been conversations that have been going on. Even today, the Member for Lake Laberge wrote to me, talking about this issue. I replied back. I used the similar reply that I had given about a week ago or so, talking about that this was about creating a healthy workplace. So, this motion, or the amendment to the motion, while it wasn't discussed at House Leaders, it has been discussed by our various political parties.

Another thing that I just want to talk about is that this is about providing an opportunity for people to continue to do their jobs. Say that someone did have an illness like COVID-19, or whatever the illness is, and that they were not able to be in this House, this is a way that allows us to continue to represent citizens, to continue to do our work, whether it is as an opposition critic, or whether it is as a minister — I think that all of us strive to do our best to represent Yukoners in this House, and this provides an additional option for that representation.

I don't know, at this point, whether the Official Opposition, now having voted against the amendment, is also in support of the motion as amended or not. It is my hope that they are. I just will reiterate that, regardless of what the vote is today on this, I will continue to bring this to the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges for us to try to work through what will be a long-term solution for us as an Assembly.

Of course, whatever the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges agrees to bring forward, it will still come to the floor of the Assembly for us to debate and decide on the rules that govern us here in this House. This is about creating safe workplaces, it's about allowing people to continue to do the jobs that they were elected to do, and it's reflecting what we are asking Yukoners to do across all of our workplaces.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Dixon: Disagree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Ms. Clarke: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 10 yeas, seven nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion as amended carried.

Motion No. 744, as amended, agreed to

Motion No. 745

Clerk: Motion No. 745, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

Speaker: It is moved by the Government House Leader:

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.

Motion No. 745 agreed to

Motion No. 746

Clerk: Motion No. 746, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

Speaker: It is moved by the Government House Leader:

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 entered on the list of paired members for that date shall be printed in Hansard and the Votes and Proceedings.

Motion No. 746 agreed to

GOVERNMENT BILLS**Bill No. 28: Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)
— Second Reading**

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 28, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Clarke.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*, be now read a second time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Environment that Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce Bill No. 28, *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*, for the Legislative Assembly's consideration.

This bill includes several small but important amendments to the *Environment Act* that are necessary to enable the implementation of a fully modern, extended producer responsibility system in the Yukon. The extended producer responsibility is a waste management approach in which producers of products and packaging are legally obligated to ensure those products and packaging are responsibly managed at the end of their lives.

This represents a departure from the current waste management approach, which is heavily subsidized by Yukon taxpayers through government administration and transfers to recycling and waste management processors. Extended producer responsibility will provide a long-lasting solution to the underlying structural issues facing the Yukon's recycling and waste management system and will reduce the cost of these services to the Yukon taxpayer. It will also set the stage for innovation and improvement in the Yukon's waste management systems and will support the shift to a circular economy that generates less overall waste. The changes we are discussing today will have an impact on the Yukon's future extended producer responsibility regulation. We intend to advance these changes later this winter, after the Legislative Assembly considers this bill and the Assembly rises.

Firstly, these amendments are necessary to ensure that the Yukon government has the authority to establish a comprehensive producer hierarchy and assign producer responsibility to classes of stewards. Additionally, the amendments allow for exemptions of small producers who met revenue- and weight-based thresholds identified in the regulation. Lastly, they capture producers conducting transactions outside of the Yukon under the regulation, such as online sales.

Mr. Speaker, for an extended producer responsibility system to be effective, the responsibility for the collection and recovery of materials is assigned to the producer most responsible for the creation and introduction of that material. In extended producer responsibility systems, producer hierarchies are created with the responsibility for collecting and recovering materials cascading from national chains and brand owners down to importers and, ultimately, local businesses. Placing responsibility as high as possible in the hierarchy is most

desirable as those groups have the most control over how things are packaged and distributed.

The *Environment Act* currently does not enable the Yukon to place producer responsibility on producers at the highest levels of the hierarchy, like brand owners, product designers, or franchisers. Updating the definition in the act will allow the Yukon government to assign responsibility for waste management in the Yukon to those large national chains. Not updating the legislation could create a scenario where Yukon businesses are made responsible for the collection and recovery of materials when there are national businesses above them in the hierarchy that should instead be responsible.

The amendments contained in Bill No. 28 also clarify that the definition of "producer" captures producers from outside of the Yukon who supply designated materials into the Yukon, even if the financial transaction takes place outside of the Yukon. This will avoid a scenario where producers outside of the Yukon, like Amazon, can argue that they are not bound by the regulation because their transactions are not occurring in the Yukon.

Bill No. 28 will also pluralize the word "steward" in the act to ensure that producer responsibility can be assigned to a class of stewards rather than to an individual steward, avoiding a scenario where the Yukon government must list each steward individually in the regulation. This amendment is administrative and will not impact stewards or members of the Yukon public.

Lastly, Bill No. 28 will provide broader language to allow the Yukon government to exempt certain classes of stewards from their responsibility under an extended producer responsibility system. The current list of exemptions may appear exhaustive, but there is the potential for future small producers to not be captured by the groups currently listed in the act. Adding the word "stewards" to the list of groups that can be exempted from the regulation will eliminate this risk. Mr. Speaker, the Yukon government has made it a priority to ensure that the concerns and interests of the Yukon public and Yukon businesses are understood and considered during the development of an extended producer responsibility system.

The Department of Environment carried out public engagement that occurred from November 2022 to February 2023 on an extended producer responsibility system and included questions that inform the proposed amendments contained in Bill No. 28. The feedback from the engagement indicated a desire for a strong and clear definition of "steward" that aligns the Yukon's producer hierarchy with other Canadian jurisdictions. Officials with the Department of Environment have also had ongoing dialog with recycling stakeholders, municipalities, and members of the business community since January 2022. The Yukon government values the certainty and reassurance that this open dialog can bring so we have committed to ongoing discussions that will carry into the extended producer responsibility implementation phase that will culminate in 2025.

We are excited for the potential that an extended producer responsibility system will bring to the Yukon and the immediate certainty that it will provide to our recycling and

waste management system to setting the stage for a circular economy in the long term. I look forward to hearing the thoughts of my colleagues in the House this afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill No. 28 at second reading.

Mr. Dixon: I am pleased to rise today and speak to this bill that is before the House to amend the *Environment Act*. From what we can tell, the changes proposed to the *Environment Act* are relatively small but take the Yukon in the direction of going toward the establishment of an EPR model. Of course, this is not new to the Legislature; we have discussed this issue previously.

We will be voting in favour of the legislation, but I do want to say a few things about the concerns that I have about the potential establishment of an EPR system as envisioned by this current government.

Over the past year, we have been hearing significant concerns being raised by the business community about the implications of this system on their businesses. The consultation that occurred over the last year or so heightened the discussion and the level of awareness that a lot of Yukon businesses had about this. Our office was certainly contacted by numerous businesses in a variety of sectors that were expressing concern about what it would mean.

Earlier this year, in January, my colleague, the Member for Copperbelt South and I were in Vancouver for other meetings and had the opportunity to sit down for a meeting with the Retail Council of Canada. The Retail Council of Canada is the main business organization in Canada that deals with extended producer responsibility programs across the country. We had a very enlightening conversation with their policy staff there. The Retail Council of Canada, I know, submitted a significant document to the Yukon government in regard to their consultation that happened earlier this year or last year.

I won't rehash the entirety of what they said but I will say that I did leave that meeting with the Retail Council of Canada concerned. They expressed significant surprise to us that a jurisdiction of our size, with our population size, and the size of our economy would consider establishing an EPR model all on our own as a stand-alone model. They thought that was surprising, for sure. They expressed concerns about what that would mean for cost and efficiency, and they recommended that we proceed very much with caution.

Following that meeting, I have been approached by a number of business leaders in this community. I won't get into individual businesses, but I would say that they span across a variety of sectors and had real concerns about what they saw in the document that was presented by Environment Yukon for consultation. It led them to raise serious concerns about what the impact on the cost of doing business would be as a result of the proposed implementation of this program.

I had heard from some businesses that attended some of the consultation meetings that were hosted by Environment Yukon, and it was remarked upon by officials that local businesses wouldn't have to worry about this because the cost of this entire program would simply be borne by large, multi-national

corporations or big chain businesses. That was something that I think raised the concern of a lot of businesses as well because that certainly sounds like it's too good to be true. The idea that local, small businesses just won't be impacted by the cost and that the big companies will simply just fork over all this money and pay for the whole system, I think, is naïve and I think it is something that the government needs to be very careful about — working under that assumption.

I have heard from a number of businesses that do operate chains here in Yukon. Again, I won't get into the specifics, but they are in the food service business. Large retailers — in some cases, the largest retailers in our community — expressed directly to us a high level of concern about the possibility of what the Yukon government was proposing — what they interpreted as the imposition of significant new costs on their businesses.

Mr. Speaker, like I said, we will vote in favour of the legislation proceeding today. We will have some questions in Committee, but I think we all know that the devil will be in the details of the regulations. The regulations will be what brings the system into effect. The regulations will be where businesses can get a sense of whether or not this is going to work for them. My request at this stage — I realize that we are only at second reading of this bill — will be that the government make the regulations public before they come into effect so that businesses can know exactly what they are dealing with, exactly what's coming, and then they can have their say about how it is going to affect them.

Previously, we have seen governments consult on regulations, wait a few years, and then release regulations that then immediately come into effect, and businesses, stakeholders, and everyone else are caught off guard as to how the implementation of those regulations will work.

My request is for the government to take seriously the concerns of the business community, to draft the regulations with care and thought, and then to share those regulations in draft form with the business community before they come into effect.

I will conclude my comments there, Mr. Speaker. Like I said, we will vote in favour of the legislation today. There's nothing in the bill before us that is of immediate concern, but the longer term implications of the imposition of a new system are concerning to us. What ends up in the regulations is concerning to us, and we will have significant questions about those regulations, once those regulations come out.

MLA Tredger: The Yukon NDP is very happy to see this movement forward on extended producer responsibility in the Yukon. Most jurisdictions in Canada have started doing this, and we are happy to be catching up and leading the territories in doing this.

Like most good ideas, it can be done in a way that checks a box and doesn't achieve much, or it can be done in a way that makes real change and has a real environmental impact. So, as my colleague said, the devil is in the details, and I have a bunch of questions for Committee of the Whole.

In particular, some of the things that I am interested in are what the minimum recovery percentage will be for the different material categories. I am interested in how we are going to make sure that the recycled materials make it all the way back to re-manufacturing and don't just leave the Yukon, where they are out of mind and out of sight but nothing consequential happens. I will save my questions for Committee of the Whole where we can get into the details, and we are really pleased to see this moving forward.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I am going to take a few moments this afternoon to talk about extended producer responsibility here in the territory, and I want to begin by thanking my colleague for bringing this very important piece of legislation to the House this afternoon. Make no mistake; it really is important.

For a while now, we have been talking in this House about how much garbage we have been producing, how much it costs, and how much it costs each one of us, and how we have to deal with it. In 2016, the Association of Yukon Communities passed a resolution asking for improvements in how our society handles our garbage, organic waste, and recycling. In 2018, as a result of that resolution, and the report that we received, the Association of Yukon Communities participated with the Yukon government in Whitehorse in a Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste. We have been working on the recommendations from that committee ever since, tying it into the nation-leading *Our Clean Future* document, which again, our government took pains to draft to make sure that we are held accountable and actually take action on climate change.

One focus of the report of the Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste was improving our landfills — creating supervised and controlled regional landfills and closing transfer stations in Braeburn, Johnsons Crossing, Keno, and Silver City. I don't have to go over this at all; we have been talking about this for at least years now.

As a matter of fact, at the time of our action on the Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste, we had a press release from the Yukon government, Whitehorse, and the Association of Yukon Communities that said — and I quote: “Changing the way in which we deal with solid waste takes time, but we must persevere to achieve a system that works in Yukon, as the cost of solid waste and recycling to our governments continues to rise.” The Association of Yukon Communities “... is encouraged to see the recommendations moving forward, through the efforts of Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste.”

That was a quote from the president at the time of the Association of Yukon Communities, Tara Wheeler.

Mr. Speaker, what we are talking about today is really central in managing our garbage better. It is about taking better care of our environment, and very important to me — something I've been working on for most of my professional career — it is about taking action on climate change. Better managing our landfills, separating organics from garbage, and recycling will go some distance in reducing methane in the territory, which is a very pernicious cause of global warming. It is one of the reasons that this is important to me.

We have declared a climate emergency in this territory, and in the face of such a declaration, we must take action — as many actions as possible — to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Improving our management of our landfills is one action that we can take to do this. We also have to reduce the amount of garbage we produce as a society. I have been quite vocal on this of late. Recycling is very important for that: to achieve less garbage. This is where extended producer responsibility comes in.

The amendments tabled today to the *Environment Act* give us the ability to place the responsibility of waste management collection and processing on large national corporations, rather than on Yukon small businesses. Extended producer responsibility is a waste management framework that provides a long-lasting solution to the underlying structural issues facing the Yukon's recycling system and reduces the cost of recycling to the Yukon taxpayer. We have all noticed the impact to recycling services over the last year.

Most recently, processors announced that they would no longer be accepting soft plastics. This sent a ripple throughout the entire community, and I can't believe — now that is going into the garbage — how much plastic we are actually producing as a society. I know that others — I'm sure that many of our constituents have noticed the very same thing. Under an extended producer responsibility system, the government can obligate producers to collect products like soft plastics that are currently going into our garbage cans and currently going into our landfills. Glass — which is also going into our garbage and also going into our landfill — and other hard-to-recycle materials — we can obligate producers to ensure that they are designed out of the system, reused, or recycled. That's what we are talking about this afternoon.

Now, while we have heard widespread support for an extended producer responsibility system during our public engagement period, respondents did raise concerns about potential cost impacts to residents and Yukon businesses. Because extended producer responsibility systems are already in place across Canada, we are not reinventing the wheel here. These are systems that are well-developed in the rest of the country.

National chains have already incorporated the cost of funding these systems into their prices. We are paying for this already, and we are getting nothing in the territory back. A recent economic analysis estimated that, collectively, Yukoners are already paying an estimated \$1.3 million to \$2.9 million — as much as \$2.9 million a year — for extended producer responsibility services that we are not receiving, that we are not taking advantage of. That is a \$3-million swing in the territory, and I am going to talk about how much this is costing us already that we are getting nothing back for.

This is incredibly important legislation that we are talking about this afternoon. I want to highlight that. So, to ensure concerned Yukon businesses and recycling stakeholders have the certainty they need, the Yukon government has maintained an ongoing dialog. We are talking to address concerns and inform the development and implementation of our system. My good colleague has been doing that great work. We are

committed to continuing this dialog up to and beyond the implementation of an extended producer responsibility system in the Yukon, and the Yukon's extended producer responsibility system will assign responsibility for recycling starting at the national brand-owner level.

We are going to try to recover the up to \$3 million that we are losing every year, in addition to paying almost \$2 million. We are talking a \$5-million swing to the territory's finances just by implementing this policy properly. As a result, we anticipate direct impacts on local Yukon businesses to be limited.

All right, I have a few more things to say, and then I'll cede the floor.

Amendments to the *Environment Act* that enable an extended producer responsibility system in the Yukon is a continuation of the work this government is doing, as I said, to modernize waste management services in the Yukon. The implementation of extended producer responsibility was recommended by the Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste back in 2018. The committee was a joint working group, comprising Yukon government and Association of Yukon Communities representatives tasked with providing recommendations and priorities to improve waste management systems in the territory — want to make things better — but this committee was also building on a history of work that demonstrates the need to modernize and improve waste management in the Yukon.

As I have said, introducing extended producer responsibility is an important feature in our approach to develop a standardized waste management system for the Yukon that is based on a shared responsibility for waste management and waste reduction. Financially sustainable, collaborative environmental health and economic benefits will be seen in the territory through this change.

The work to establish a modern approach to waste management is a standing agenda item for most meetings between staff and elected officials of both the territorial government and municipalities. We talk about it all the time in community meetings. It's one of the things we talk about a lot.

A sustainable solution to funding solid-waste operations requires a combination of approaches, and extended producer responsibility is a part of that strategy. It's a very important part of that strategy, Mr. Speaker. This extended producer responsibility legally obliges producers of products and packaging to deal with those products and packaging at the end of their life. Until now, non-refundable recycling in the Yukon has been managed primarily through a mixture of municipal and Yukon government funding with organizations like Raven ReCentre, Whitehorse Blue Bin, and P&M playing a role in collection and processing. It has been sort of a hodgepodge — government, not-for-profits, and businesses.

Every community, every Yukoner wants a better waste management system. We understand that recycling, diversion, and reuse are important parts of meeting our climate change objectives. It supports *Our Clean Future*, our nation-leading plan. It is important that we implement these recommendations for that plan. If we are going to hit the targets that we have said we're going to meet, we have to take every action, and some of

those involve making very, very hard choices when it comes to dealing with our waste.

I am committed to making those hard decisions and making those moves that will make things better for all Yukoners into the future. As a matter of fact, the whole country — the whole planet — is what is at stake.

Some of Yukon's recycling is refundable through legislative fees, like the beverage container regulation, which sets the surcharges on beverage containers and the amount that is refunded when an item is taken to a licensed recycling depot in the Yukon; or the designated materials regulation, which establishes a surcharge collected on tires and electronic waste at the time of purchase to pay for recovery of those items at the end of their lives. Both fees are deposited into the recycling fund to help ship and recycle these products to recycling centres out of the territory; and both programs will continue to operate when the extended producer responsibility comes into force.

For items not captured by the beverage container and designated material programs, the Yukon government is already spending up to \$2 million in diversion credits to processors in 2023 for what we call "non-refundables". That's money that Yukon is paying, and we are not getting any money from the south on this. We are paying out of our pocket and not getting any recoverables, and we have to change that. Diversion credits are a per-tonne contribution that offsets the cost of handling and processing material that otherwise would end up in our municipal and unincorporated landfills — filling up our landfills, which are expensive to build, expensive to use, and expensive to decommission, adding to the environmental liability and contributing to greenhouse gases.

The cost of diversion credits has increased dramatically in recent years, from approximately \$500,000 in 2018, when that committee first made its report, to approximately \$1 million in 2022. This year, it has nearly doubled to \$2 million. We have to get a handle on the cost of dealing with our garbage, Mr. Speaker. This \$2 million is in addition to the City of Whitehorse providing \$150,000 in diversion credits to Raven ReCentre and P&M each year.

I want to note, that Dawson City and Watson Lake annually contribute \$200,000 and \$180,000 respectively to their local recycling initiatives. Those two communities are spending \$380,000 on their recycling initiatives; Whitehorse is paying \$150,000; the Yukon government is paying \$2 million toward those recycling efforts. We have to start making that money back.

The extended producer responsibility, which is a system in place for recycling paper and packaging across Canada, ensures that producers and large retailers pay for the cost of recycling those non-refundables. We want the larger corporations in Canada to start paying their share of the garbage that they are putting in our landfills.

Extended producer responsibility regulations have now been adopted by all provinces in Canada. Alberta expects to have their program operational by April 2025. Our homegrown northern extended producer responsibility program goes some distance in addressing the Association of Yukon Communities resolution from their 2016 annual general meeting that asked

for a territory-wide solution for waste management, recycling, and other diversion programs that reduce waste and illegal dumping, and the subsequent actions that the Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste made in 2018. It will also be welcomed by professionals and recycling operations involved across this sector throughout the Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, since Raven ReCentre announced earlier this year that they would close the free public drop-off service, officials from the City of Whitehorse, the Yukon government, and the recycling industry have been exploring how we can support sustainable solutions for recycling programs in the City of Whitehorse and across the territory. That action was taken at the behest of myself at a meeting with Raven ReCentre and officials. This is the first time that we have ever seen such a committee working on this project together, and I really commend them all for stepping up and making this a reality.

The working group has developed options for a recycling system that will ensure the continuation of recycling system services within Whitehorse beyond the end of 2023. That is the goal. Our officials have been working in partnership with the City of Whitehorse and local recycling stakeholders to find solutions. This important work, as I say, is ongoing.

The one stumbling block the group encounters is the cost of dealing with this material. Extended producer responsibility addresses the shortcoming for most material by shifting the cost of managing post-consumer packaging to producers — these national producers. We are going to start pulling money from them and not having to pay out of our own pocket. It is very important; I can't say that enough.

One might argue that this change will ultimately be paid for by the consumer, but there are three things to keep in mind: number one, Yukoners already pay for much of the extended producer responsibility fees that are embedded by manufacturers in the price of the products they are buying today; we are just not getting that money back into the territory. Extended producer responsibility will also reduce the need for diversion credits paid for by government — taxpayers in the territory, the businesses here, will not have to pay and lose the revenue that they are getting from these national producers. Third, extended producer responsibility will drive innovation with producers seeking to reduce costs, and we can all rightly expect less packaging in the future.

We all see how much plastic, glass, and other material is going into our garbage cans. We want to make that less so that we have longer lifespans in our landfills and we're actually putting less of a strain on our planet, and by separating out our garbage properly, we can have less methane and other nasties in our environment.

This is a huge step. I really do appreciate all the work that my good colleague has done — the work that Community Services has done — in supporting all of this work as well. We are excited to be taking this step after years of discussion with our community partners and colleagues at Environment. Thank you for the time this afternoon. I will now cede the floor.

Mr. Hassard: I hadn't intended to speak to this today, but a couple of things have come to my attention as I have been

listening. I guess the first one is probably the Minister of Community Services — I don't know what to call it — his willingness or constant desire to bring up his shortcomings in dealing with solid-waste transfer stations in the Yukon — four, in particular, of course, that we talk a lot about. Today, in talking about his shortcomings, he brought up AYC again. Of course, we all know that he continually places the blame on AYC with what is going on with this fiasco and these four particular solid-waste transfer stations, but the one thing he mentioned today was the past president, Tara Wheeler. He used a quote of hers, and in that quote, it talked about finding solutions that work for Yukoners. That's great. It's very true, and I don't think you will find anybody who would disagree with that. The part that the minister is missing is the working with Yukoners to find solutions, instead of this "father knows best" routine that the minister keeps forcing on Yukoners.

The other comment I have is that I'm hoping, when the Minister of Environment is on his feet again — we know that EPR was a commitment coming from *Our Clean Future*. We know that, last year, the report was brought forward and delivered to Yukoners in September; so, I'm wondering if the minister can provide an update on when a 2023 report will be coming forward.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will cede the floor, and hopefully we can get some answers from the minister.

Speaker: If the member now speaks, he will close debate.

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the members opposite for their comments and questions relating to extended producer responsibility and Bill No. 28. I also thank my colleague, the Minister of Community Services, for his comments in support of these amendments. I will work with my staff to provide responses to some of the concerns raised.

As we all know, the Yukon's recycling system is in a precarious position. Non-governmental organizations and businesses, like Raven ReCentre and P&M Recycling, have done a tremendous job building and operating Yukon's recycling and waste management infrastructure. However, it is time that we provide them and Yukoners with a system that guarantees the long-term sustainability of these services.

Yukon government is working to establish an extended producer responsibility framework in the Yukon by 2025. We are on track to become the first territory to adopt such a framework, which will ensure that Yukoners continue to recycle and responsibly manage a variety of materials. This act in the second reading here gives us the ability to place the responsibility of waste management collection and processing on large, national corporations rather than on Yukon small businesses.

Extended producer responsibility is a waste management framework that produces a long-lasting solution to the underlying structural issues facing Yukon's recycling system and to reduce the cost of recycling to the Yukon taxpayer. We

have all noticed, Mr. Speaker, the impact of recycling services over the last year. Most recently, processors announced that they could no longer accept soft plastics as there is no viable market for soft plastics right now. Under an extended producer responsibility system, the government can obligate producers to collect products like soft plastics and other hard-to-recycle materials to ensure that they are designed out of the system, reused, or recycled.

As my friend the Minister of Community Services indicated, one of the intended consequences of extended producer responsibility across the provinces is that there is innovation so that the big retailers and big companies that produce the preponderant percentage of the — at least theoretically — recyclable materials will continue to innovate, because there will, of course, be a profit incentive to innovate packaging but also to eliminate as much packaging as possible.

While we heard widespread support for an extended producer responsibility system during our public engagement period, respondents did raise concerns about potential cost impacts to residents and Yukon businesses. I heard that loud and clear from the Leader of the Official Opposition and I have heard it loud and clear with some of the meetings that I have had with some of the Yukon retailers and Whitehorse retailers. But, as indicated, extended producer responsibility systems are already in place across Canada. National chains have already incorporated the cost of funding these systems into their prices.

As we have heard a few times, a recent economic analysis estimated that, collectively, Yukoners are already paying between \$1.3 million and \$2.9 million annually for extended producer responsibility services that the territory is not receiving. In order to ensure that concerned Yukon businesses and recycling stakeholders have the certainty that they need, the Yukon government has maintained an ongoing dialogue to address concerns and inform the development and implementation of our system. We are committing to continuing this dialogue up to and beyond the implementation of an extended producer responsibility system in the territory. The Yukon's extended producer responsibility system will assign responsibility for recycling starting at the national brand-owner level. As a result, we anticipate direct impacts on local Yukon businesses to be limited.

However, Mr. Speaker, I have heard the Leader of the Official Opposition and I have heard from business, and that is why, after we go into the stewardship phase, there is in excess of one year to continue the process of consultation to get this right.

We are also actively liaising with British Columbia and with Alberta, which have active and functioning extended producer responsibility systems in place. So, wherever possible, we certainly do not wish to reinvent the wheel in the Yukon.

As the House has heard — I don't have the statistics here exactly but I recall that the numbers are still something like — we are generating around 450 kilograms for every man, woman, and child — for every Yukoner — and that is too much. We can do better. Obviously extended producer responsibility isn't the only measure that is going to positively

impact behaviours, but it is certainly a step in the right direction.

I know that my colleague the Minister of Community Services is having active discussions with the City of Whitehorse, with Raven ReCentre, P&M Recycling, and a large group of other interested persons in order to ensure that the recycling system that will exist between now and the anticipated implementation of the extended producer responsibility is still occurring, still viable, and still meeting the needs of all Yukoners — but certainly all Whitehorse residents because that is what Whitehorse residents would expect of us and of all the organizations that have helped in this process over the years.

As indicated, Mr. Speaker, the Yukon government, the City of Whitehorse, the City of Dawson, the Town of Watson Lake, and other communities are all contributing to the recycling stream — sometimes at great expense — but we are gaining no benefit from existing extended producer responsibility models that exist in southern Canada.

The Yukon is on track to meet the *Our Clean Future* commitment to have an extended producer responsibility system in place by 2025. We are on track to become the first territory in Canada to adopt an extended producer responsibility system.

I am proud of the work that the Department of Environment, Department of Community Services, and other important team players in this endeavour are engaged in and what we have accomplished to date. Recognizing what I heard from the Member for Whitehorse Centre, the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin, and the Leader of the Official Opposition with respect to the devil being in the details, I don't disagree with the Leader of the Official Opposition or with the Member for Whitehorse Centre.

Finally, the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin asked a question about when the *Our Clean Future* annual report — which will be up to the end of the calendar year 2022. We do anticipate that it will be released before the end of this calendar year, but I can hopefully be in a position to provide greater detail to the member opposite.

This is exciting work that we're doing. I concur with my colleague to my right, the Minister of Community Services, and I know that he is actively engaged, either directly or peripherally, on this file as well.

On a very personal note, I have memories of — since I have been in the Yukon — dropping off recycling either at Raven ReCentre or at P&M Recycling with my children, who, at the time, were probably two or two and a half years old. My eldest is now 25 years old. Ultimately, yes, there is absolutely an expectation among Yukoners that we're going to get this right. Parenthetically, sometimes with the very cold weather with the wind blowing, as we know that it does at Raven ReCentre, hopefully my sons had frozen smiles on their faces while they were dropping off the recycling.

In any event, there is a new generation of Yukoners who absolutely expect us to get this right and want us to move bravely forward with this. So, with that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments with respect to the second reading on

Bill No. 28 and look forward to further discussion in Committee of the Whole in future days of this Sitting.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 16 yeas, nil nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Second reading of Bill No. 28 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

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

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Economic Development

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: As the Minister of Economic Development, I rise to speak to the *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* for the 2023-24 fiscal year. I would like to welcome the officials to the Assembly today, our Deputy Minister Michael Prochazka — welcome — and also Jamie McAllister, who is now with us as our Director of Finance. This is his first visit to the Assembly in this new role. Good to see you as well.

At the Department of Economic Development, our work is focused on building a prosperous Yukon by working with partners to create and foster economic opportunities; pursuing economic initiatives focused on prosperity, partnerships, and innovation; and forging, maintaining, and expanding partnerships with First Nation governments to meet our mutual economic goals.

This supplementary budget request includes additional funding in response to increased staffing costs, as well as funding for the Skagway Marine Service Platform, and a new program to assist landlords. First, we are asking for \$496,000 to cover increased staff wages following the ratification of the most recent collective bargaining agreement. This breaks down as \$181,000 for Corporate Services staff and \$315,000 for Operations staff. The staff at the Department of Economic Development are critical to the continued success of our territory and this budget item is a priority.

Next, the temporary landlord assistance program at a cost of \$1,014,000: the next item in our supplementary budget ask is for this program. The new program is in response to the recent change in regulation capping the 2023 rent increase at five percent. Since 2021, the rent cap has been set at the rate of inflation of the previous calendar year. Landlords were expected to be able to raise rent to a maximum of 6.8 percent in 2023. This change has resulted in an unexpected difference in their rental income. The rebate will help address this difference and ease costs, as landlords plan for the future, so they may be more likely, again, to remain in the residential market. Our supplementary budget ask to administer this program is \$1,014,000.

We also have a transfer with Health and Social Services. We are asking for an additional \$300,000 related to the transfer of employment and training service programming from the Department of Health and Social Services to Economic Development. So, that is, of course, a net increase.

The Skagway Marine Service Platform is the last item in our supplementary budget. We are asking for \$21,361,000. This is to ensure that the port of Skagway remains accessible as an export option for the Yukon mining industry. These funds will support potential financial expenditures in the current fiscal year. The platform is planned to be a 227-foot fixed, concrete, T-shaped dock. It would be capable of supporting multiple

ore-loading methods, as well as the loading and unloading of other heavy goods.

The agreement with the municipality of Skagway will include approval rights for the Yukon and continuing consultation during the construction process to help ensure that money is properly spent and the project meets the Yukon's needs. Maintaining an ore export option in the Yukon's nearest deep-water port supports mine development, mineral exploration, and investment. So, Mr. Speaker, in closing, we are asking for a supplementary budget increase of \$22,271,000 for the Department of Economic Development.

Before we begin question and answer, I want to thank folks at Economic Development. Again, some of the new concepts and ideas that have been delivered over 2023 have been nation-leading, and I want to thank them for their work over the last number of years, keeping our economy strong and vibrant, and for preparing for this supplementary budget. It is always a lot of work getting this ready for today. Thank you, and I will hand it over to questions.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you to the staff who are appearing today to help the Premier; also, thank you for the briefing given earlier this week. I am going to get right into questions. I had a bit of a preamble, but seeing as we are later in the day, I am going to start hammering on a few notes.

Under operations, there is the new program listed, temporary landlord assistance program. That brings many questions. We were told during the briefing that this is coming soon with details — and that it's still in development — possibly by October 31. Can the minister give us a firm date on the opening of this program?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Right now, we are looking at having more public information available next week. That will give us a chance to probably give a bit more detail to the opposition members. I will just check with our officials what the potential time lag is from our public conversation to being able to accept applications.

We are still on point to have a bigger conversation publicly next week, and then we are looking at about 10 business days in order to be able to start accepting applications for this program.

Ms. Van Bibber: Indirectly, to having this program brought forward — who wanted this program? Was it a request from the landlord association, and that caused the government to respond to this action?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: There were conversations with a number of individuals. The landlord association did meet with the Minister of Community Services, and there was a conversation about some of the challenges that they saw with a rent cap. We had individuals within our community who had rental properties and also reached out.

I know that I was at a chamber lunch last year, and I signalled that we were looking at having a program in place to be able to help folks who were in the rental market. I think, overall, what we heard was that there were some challenges with the cost that folks had to carry because of the rent cap. I had asked officials to start to work on — with both the Department of Economic Development, and then later, in

concert, of course, with Finance — to take a look at some different options.

We did, you know, have conversations through the process with some folks who, you know, work with the landlords, as well as with chambers, and had a sense of different things that were happening across the country — or different models that we could potentially look at. You know, one of the conversations was around a tax rebate. We had heard from folks that was something that they believed wouldn't be as helpful as actually having sort of a direct grant option — something along those lines.

So, again, not just the landlords, but I think there were a number of folks. It was a very live conversation in our community at the time that we rolled out our CASA agreement, and then subsequent to that, the focus on rent caps.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you for that answer. So, that is a direct result of the rent control and no-cause evictions that was agreed to with CASA and the NDP. So, is this not defeating the purpose of this agreement? It's sort of like taking money from one spot and putting it into another. Can the minister say why this is now the rational way to go?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, I think that, of course, this was part of the dialogue, but what we're doing in this particular scenario is we're — first, we're supporting renters, and my belief in the rent cap has become even stronger, as we have watched across this country. I think, for the member opposite, even if you have seen in the last week the amount of protests, and people in some jurisdictions where there is no rent cap, specifically Ontario right now, where they are trying to do a renters' union. Actually, in some cases now, they are actually stopping paying rent altogether. They're taking on that legal challenge because of the displacement that is happening.

I do think that the rent cap is an important tool right now, but I also think that some folks have — many folks have — not just corporations, but individual folks — have invested in rental assets, and there is a bit of a delta here between the five-point percent and the seven percent, or 6.8 percent, that we have seen in the consumer price index.

I would say that I think that there will be individuals who will speak and say that this isn't enough. It is public policy; it will not make all residents of the Yukon happy — who will use the program — but I think that it is an appropriate way for us, at this point in time, while the new legislation is being created. We are counting on the fact that our 2025 spring session will give us the opportunity to bring forward a modernized version of that legislation. People at Community Services, the teams there, are working very hard to get that work done, and so, in the interim, we are looking at this year, making sure that we can monitor how this works. I can't pre-determine next year's budget because that hasn't been built yet, but, at this time, we think that this is a proper solution.

Again, the government is intervening — yes, we understand that. The government has — on being able to provide the difference within that rent piece. It is a bit different than, I think, the preamble stated, but yes, this is a bit innovative. Others would challenge it, where we are playing a role that may affect the free market, but I think that it is fair to

say that folks are under a tremendous amount of pressure where rental incomes have come. We see some folks who have actually put rental incomes up to a place that has displaced individuals. We understand what our vacancy rates are here in the Yukon right now. There are not a whole bunch of other options.

I sat with a group of elders not too long ago in Watson Lake, and they said to me, look, you have to understand that there are not a whole bunch of different options here for us. We are in the places we are in. Some of them own their own places, but others rent, so it is a unique situation, as we continue to support the build-out of more rental accommodation. I think that greater supply will be able to build a more appropriate ecosystem for the renter, but, at this time, we think that this is something that is worth trying, and we think that this also respects the fact that renters have invested in these assets, and it is important to many of them — lifeblood to their quality of life.

Ms. Van Bibber: When the program is actually launched, is this a one-time application? Who qualifies? And is there a cap per unit?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Madam Chair, I am going to commit to the House that we can bring back a legislative return next week going through a series of details for this. As folks know, we want to have a public conversation next week. I think it's important to ensure that the details of that public conversation are controlled by our department. Not to take anything away from the good work of the opposition, but I would rather us be able to provide those key details and then respect the questions here in the House and bring back that legislative return that has full details.

If there are more questions, I will sit and we can get all of those questions on the record today, and then we can work to respond in detail to all of those items.

Ms. Van Bibber: There is also \$300,000 for employment and training service programs that were previously delivered by Health and Social Services. Can the minister elaborate on what programs were transferred and the reasoning behind the move?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The programs that were being delivered under that \$300,000 included the Head Start program, which was a wage subsidy that was targeted at persons with disabilities. The Department of Health and Social Services, in conversation with the Department of Economic Development, felt that it was more about employment outcomes than it was about health outcomes and it seemed to be better suited within our labour market programs under the work that we're doing. That was the reason for moving it; it was really just about having it in the most optimal spot within the Yukon government where we could do the best work for those clients.

Ms. Van Bibber: I believe it was last year when the department took on the training from the Department of Tourism and Culture as well. Will this continue to happen with other departments — moving their training programs to Economic Development — and does the staff move departments when they are moving the programs?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I apologize to the House. We are a bit perplexed by that preamble. If we could get a bit more detail on Tourism moving training programs over to Economic Development — I apologize. I try to be aware of all operations and I think we are, but if there could be a little more dialogue on that, maybe we can understand exactly what that question is focused on, Madam Chair.

Ms. Van Bibber: I don't have the exact program handy, but I do remember because I also have the Tourism and Culture file and it is just eluding me, but there was a program that was moved over to Economic Development. We can leave that.

Do the staff move as well when you take over those programs?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: On the \$300,000, we are not moving any staff. It is just the actual financial capacity that is moving over.

We will check on the Tourism piece. Maybe that was also referring to the work that we did. Labour Market was in Education and we did it move over.

To be open to the House, I think that the tough conversations that were happening within our business community were really about the need for better labour access. I know that the member opposite had asked me a series of questions. Certainly, when I had the Tourism portfolio, we heard a lot of concern about a lack of capacity. I know that, going into the 2021 season, one of the focuses I had was to ensure that we were optimizing the work off the Labour Market team and having those folks work with us, which, I think, has been a good success — having them be part of the Economic Development team. I also want to say that, when you look out, I am happy to see the fact that, as of last Friday, we still have the lowest unemployment rate in the country, but with that, we are seeing our businesses being open for full hours. There is one operation — I will leave it unnamed, but a well-branded coffee shop — that now is open until, I think, 12:00 at night and it reopens at 5:00 in the morning — something along those lines, or maybe even later. Maybe 2:00 — something along those lines.

We saw two years ago that we were in real need, and it was taking away the full ability for those businesses to operate — from our standpoint. I know that I went around and took some time to speak directly with business owners in this area — a great business just across the street such as The Kind Café and some of the coffee shops — just trying to get a sense from folks — part of that was, as well, to be open. We saw that there were some workers who have made decisions to leave other parts of Canada to come and work, especially in our hospitality and retail sectors. This is something that we wanted to try to see if we could help solve. I think that the teams have done a really good job of ensuring that we have capacity in some of those tourism-based, hospitality-based, retail-based jobs. Of course, when you have an unemployment rate as low as ours, it is still difficult. I think that anybody would say they are still looking for workers.

Again, we are not moving anybody with that \$300,000. As well, the team just mentioned to me that there was a bit of NGO funding that we had moved from Tourism and Culture but I

think it was probably pertaining to that other piece. And no, we are not, at this time, contemplating any other training-style programs moving from other departments to Economic Development.

Ms. Van Bibber: On to the Skagway platform — it was budgeted in the supplementary for \$20.461 million for the Skagway marine services platform. I know that we discussed the total cost projected to be \$17 million during the Spring Sitting, which was about \$24 million CAD. The minister indicates that this was the initial investment for the platform work.

Can the minister tell us if the amount now in the supplementary — \$20.461 million — is the actual total, and does this cover the complete budget?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The project being the marine services platform — we are looking at a total cost right now, on the high mark, of up to \$40 million CAD. Now, the reason that I'm saying "on the high mark" is because what we're trying to do is get a good sense of where we think currency exchanges will be. This is for payments over multiple years, so the money that we're looking for this fall is our first tranche of funding toward this project and we would have further payments for the project. We think it could be between — officials are saying between \$36 million and \$40 million based on where we think the fluctuation of currency prices can be for the project.

Ms. Van Bibber: Can the minister tell us the status of any negotiations or agreements that have been signed to date?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I'm just going to share a bit of information to put into the record and then I will also touch on the specifics of the question from the member opposite.

The Government of Yukon is negotiating for secure tidewater access in the port of Skagway for the Yukon mining industry as well as for further opportunities for export. Our objective is to secure waterfront space to ensure that Skagway remains an export option for Yukon industry in the future.

Maintaining an ore export option in Yukon's nearest deep-water port supports mine development, mineral exploration, and investment in the Yukon, and Yukon and Skagway both benefit from a port that supports both tourism and industry use. We're seeking a solution that works for industry and the community of Skagway.

I think it's important to note that, as a government and through the work of the Premier's office, we also have had significant discussions with the US Ambassador to Canada, the previous consul general who has now moved on, the new consul general in Vancouver now as well — we have only met virtually to date. But I'm just highlighting the importance — that would be, of course, the consul general of the US to Canada in Vancouver.

We have talked to industry associations. We have talked to groups that finance globally. We have talked to organizations in our time in Japan a couple of weeks ago. There are a number of organizations that we had a chance to meet with that have investments in the Yukon already — some that are looking to invest in the Yukon — and we shared with them the fact that we believe it's important to continue to have the tidewater access for Canadian and Yukon companies.

Skagway has launched a port redevelopment project to expand its cruise ship capacity. Again, this will eliminate its ore export capability. The ore loader will be demolished. This is, of course, what we have been dealing with as part of Skagway's project.

Yukon is proposing that a marine services platform capable of supporting ore-loading equipment be included in its port redevelopment project in Skagway's redevelopment project. We welcomed the decision by the Skagway assembly in March 2023 to approve proceeding with an export cooperation agreement.

We were asked already — Yukon had funded the design of the platform. The total cost that we have put in already — it was \$739,266. Skagway, of course, then put this project out to tender, which included the proposed marine services platform as an optional addition contingent on a final agreement being reached. There was one bidder on the project. Skagway has accepted the bid for its main project and we are working together in response to that.

I want to make sure for the record — the potential high mark on the project is \$44 million, not \$40 million. I want to make sure that officials in the Opposition have a chance to make note of that. That includes our contingency for the project as well.

We signed a non-binding term sheet on September 7 that outlines the general terms of an export cooperation agreement between Yukon and Skagway. We are working toward finalizing the export cooperation agreement under which Yukon will fund the construction of a marine services platform — the project I'm speaking to — in exchange for preferential access and fee discounts for Yukon mining companies using a future ore terminal.

Concerning the negotiations, negotiations toward the draft term sheet have concluded, but, at this particular time, we will re-engage with them quite soon and that is really the focus — the contract and cooperation agreement — that work has to continue on.

Ms. Van Bibber: When we discussed the port in the spring, the minister indicated that he would ask the Municipality of Skagway about any bilateral agreements for TPAs between the state and the municipality regarding investment from the Government of Alaska.

Could he now share how much the State of Alaska is contributing to this project, and also, has the Government of Canada agreed to contribute?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: There are no contracts in place to date with the State of Alaska on this project or with Canada, but those conversations are ongoing.

Ms. Van Bibber: During the briefing, we were told that the business incentive program was underutilized and had limited demand; therefore, \$900,000 was moved. Previously, the minister had indicated that changes to the BIP, or the business incentive program, were being considered. Has that work now been shelved, or is there still work ongoing to consider changes to the program?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, there is work — it is an early stage of the work, officials are sharing with me — but there is work

that will be ongoing, and the member opposite is correct: over the last two fiscal years, we have seen the program significantly underutilized.

Ms. Van Bibber: In 2022, the department utilized its full allocation of 300 spaces for the Yukon nominee program. Were there any applications that came in above 300? If there is a greater demand, and spots are available, how does the department choose who comes? Is it a first come, first served, or is there a prioritization?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Madam Chair, I do want to get just a bit of background on — I missed that — the 300 allocation — to which year? I will say, yes, it is first come, first served on folks coming through the door for their applications, but I do want to get a sense of which year, because we are in dialogue right now on our allocation from IRCC in Canada.

Ms. Van Bibber: It was year 2022.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, that is correct.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you. Earlier this year, the department indicated that Yukon is advocating for additional allocations for future years. Can the minister update on whether that advocacy has worked, and will we receive additional spaces from the 430 we have coming for 2023?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I guess I would say to the House that I think that the advocacy has worked, in the sense that we did go from 300 to the 430. So, we have seen an increase. We have asked for more, and right now, we haven't heard for this fiscal year if we are going to get a bigger allocation. What they tend to do is go through all of the provinces and territories, and they take a look to see if there are any unused allotments within other jurisdictions, and then they will recalibrate that and provide to other jurisdictions. I met with the new minister, Minister Miller, and did request that they continue to look at that, and we usually follow up those requests with a letter just summarizing the meeting, which I know I signed that off just the other day. So, that has happened.

I do want to just say for the House — I think what's important to note — because we are having real conversations about housing pressures. We are also having real conversations about labour needs. I think, as folks know, our program is an economic immigration program. That's the strategy that has been deployed over the last decade, and I think it's important to note that we believe that our focus should be going forward, that we ensure that folks have the right supports. We have to think about that, and that's part of the work that we're doing.

We have this first come, first served, but we also — all folks in the Legislative Assembly know that we have a very vibrant Filipino community that has great supports — probably more than any community. In many cases, it is probably important to note that the Filipino diaspora can do a great job of supporting more people coming into the country — family members and others — and they have the ability to support them through, maybe, additional room in their homes. We have to think about those things. We voiced that at the national level, and we contemplated that as well.

That's something we have to think about. It's the same thing when it comes to the recruitment we want to do around

health care. In some cases, we are seeing segments of our community —

We haven't discussed it, but I assume we will at some point — we were in south India two or three weeks ago, and we were really focused on recruiting nurses in that jurisdiction. The reason why is because there are a lot of nurses, and the state government supports those nurses going off to work in other countries.

What we are hearing now, in certain fields, which we have heard from the Philippines, is when it comes to nurses, there is a strain on the health system in the Philippines. We have seen western provinces do big recruitment. That doesn't mean that there aren't other amazing opportunities for people from the Philippines in different types of work. We are trying to figure out places where the home country supports us recruiting and that there are ample folks who can come.

When we think about that, why would you look at south India? Because there is a vibrant community here, and there are lots of people who have made it their home. There are nurses available, and there are supports. The Leader of the Official Opposition and I attended an event in August — which was well-attended — from that home state. We know there are people here, so our goal would be, can we recruit nurses? Do they have family members they can live with that is not going to put extra strain on our housing system? That is some of the thinking we are trying to do. We have to be strategic. There has been an ask at the table.

I work closely with Jeremy Harrison, who is the Economic Development minister from Saskatchewan, to ensure that both of us pushed IRCC Canada to take the data from CMHC and ensure that we had good data coming in. That was work that we did in Saint John, New Brunswick, two years ago. That is some of the thinking that is being done.

Ms. Van Bibber: We have heard from some businesses about the challenges with the application process and with wait times. Can the minister provide an update on this and information about steps that have been taken to improve the application process?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Our time period is about 61 days for the work that is done inside our department. It has been communicated to me from our officials that is probably one of the fastest that you will see in the country, but then we have another step, and the other step is that we work in conjunction with Canada and IRCC to finish that work. You are right, there have definitely been some challenges in timing. We get our work done very quickly, and then we are waiting for IRCC to do their work.

What I would say is that I think that the federal government — I think that the situation is improving, partially because there were so many individuals who were hired to complement that work. It was not going well, and I think that we have all heard that publicly, and we have seen that. IRCC had lots of strain, and I think that the disruption of two years of real pandemic problems and challenges exacerbated the problem that was already there. We see things getting improved. I think that the minister's focus on ensuring that it improves will continue to do work quickly here.

A couple things that the officials have shared with me, which I will share with the House — there is a new database and an online application portal, and there is a soft launch on that. We think that is something that is good, and it is going to make things a bit smoother. Also, the Yukon community program pilot is extended to 2025 for rural businesses, and there is flexibility there. I have to say that there were business folks in both Carmacks and Dawson who really were the ones who directed us to come up with something, and then our officials worked directly with them, because you have the businesses in smaller communities that may not have the full 40 hours. We have talked about this a lot, but there has been — just about the fact that, can we ensure that the person is respected and looked after in these roles. Of course, we have an agreement with the employers that we can monitor to ensure that, but also, programs like that do give us a bit more flexibility to support multiple businesses.

Ms. Van Bibber: Madam Chair, I would like to thank the minister and the staff for providing the answers today.

Ms. White: I thank my colleague for sharing the floor and, of course, echo the welcome to the officials, especially the first time — how exciting. It gets old after awhile, I'm not going to lie.

I actually want to jump right into the Skagway marine service and questions around that. During the briefing, we were told that partly it was an expectation that Casino, Kudz Ze Kayah, and Fireweed Zinc — because, of course, Minto is closed and is not using that port anymore — were prospective mines that could access that. They had indicated that they were maybe interested, but we were told that there was no specific commitment from those prospective operators.

I went online, because I was curious about what kind of timeline we might be thinking about. Of course, we know that Casino is quite a ways out. They anticipate their submission to YESAB in 2023. Kudz Ze Kayah, according to the website, is currently undergoing the executive committee screening assessment with YESAB; and Fireweed Zinc, in Macmillan Pass, doesn't talk about it. Right now, it's a drilling program. It's not talking about when they operate.

Knowing that we were told that these were three projects that would potentially be looking at this in the future, but we were also told that there was no specific commitment from them as prospective operators, what kind of timeline are we expecting, as far as possible mines to access this many-million dollar investment from Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: It's a good point. I am not going to predetermine the outcomes of any processes that the projects that were stated before will go through. What I will say is that I think that we're getting probably into both a question about our return on investment and the timing of that. We are also getting into a conversation — probably a bigger philosophical conversation — about this asset.

The thinking on this side of the House is that it is extremely important to get access to tidewater. I think that the member opposite can hearken back to the days of another government that was here, which was the government of, I believe, Piers McDonald, and there was some very exceptional thinking that

was done at that point, where Economic Development and the Premier's office looked to acquire property in Skagway and for the Yukon to own that property, so that we would always have access to tidewater.

Probably members on the other side of the floor in the other party would know better than me, but I know that it didn't end up coming to fruition, but I have to say that, when I look at it now, I wish it had. I think that was a really forward-thinking opportunity that the NDP government of the day put in place, because they knew we would need to have this for decades to come.

Now we're in a position where this 50-year agreement has come to an end, and we — it's a moment in time. It's a moment in time, where the officials have done really exceptional work. It's not normal for a subnational government to be doing an international infrastructure deal, and we probably — for the House I'll say, and for the record for Hansard, I would say that we, you know — we would have easily have vacated the space for a federal conversation between Canada and the US on this subject, but we have very unique governing structures in both countries. You know, I have sat with the Ambassador in the US, who is really hands-off in the discussions of dealing with things at the state level. I've had discussions with Governor Dunleavy, even in the last two weeks, on this subject, and they want to defer to the municipal level. So, the municipal government in Skagway is the lead on the conversation.

Here, we have, over the last number of years, had conversations with multiple ministers, and I think my predecessor would even have had this discussion, I think — I go back on the records — with the Prime Minister's Office. These are important discussions.

We are left in a scenario where it's the Yukon government, in my mind, stepping up for this country, not just for this territory, because the conversation about critical minerals has been so important. We have 25 of the 31 listed critical minerals that we hear are listed. Countries sort of have different lists that they add to, you know, and over the last number of years — whether it's Indonesia or US or Canada — as we would say, 25 of the 31 critical minerals.

There are some very interesting opportunities for companies that are looking in the Yukon. Even more interesting is the potential, innovative partnerships they're looking at with First Nation governments — I think that is substantial — and the opportunities between those First Nations and those companies. So, I think, now it's important to say that we have done a lot of work, and will there be a lag time between the completion of the infrastructure and the use of the infrastructure? That is a possibility. That is absolutely a possibility, but my fear would be that we would get to a situation where we don't build this, we don't take this opportunity, and then, all of a sudden, there is substantial opportunity for export, and we don't have tidewater.

The other thing is, from a standpoint of — a lot of the planning gets done in long periods of time. So, when you are doing advanced exploration, and then you are going out and looking for people to start to fund that work — I will give you an example. You have a situation right now where some of our

companies have good, friendly, foreign direct investment from corporations — “foreign direct” meaning not from a government entity but from an international company — and they are asking: “Down the road, if this does ever — the decision is made to get it permitted — and it does get permitted — will there be a way to actually export that ore?” So, that is part of it. It is, in many ways, it is a “build it and they will come”, or “you have to build it or they are not going to come” — whichever way you want to look at it, but it is important to have that in place for this territory and this country really, if you look at our overall mineral strategy.

There is a process that is happening around the Minto mine. I will leave it to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources to speak to when there could be a conclusion in that work. If the outcome of that work is positive — what I mean is, is there somebody looking to take over that site, to stabilize it, to focus on remediation — but also to focus on future operation — then that would be a client in the short term that would look at it, but I don’t know. Somebody may look to acquire, stabilize, do further exploration, and then reopen — I don’t know enough about the access to the ore that is there — so, there is that opportunity.

We also know that Hecla, which is a significant mining company in North America, has done the acquisition of Keno, and there are operations ongoing, and there could be — they could look to move toward those spots. I can’t — it would be — it is theoretical for me to come out and say that it is going to be 36 months or 48 months, but I do think that it is really important, and it is a hard decision for politicians to make to build something that may not be needed right away, but we can also look at things that we didn’t build in different sectors, and I think that we would have hoped that we build it once the pressure comes. So, that is our mindset on this side of the floor.

Ms. White: I appreciate the response from the minister, but it comes down to the fact that if this is a Canada building project, has there been a request to Canada, and if so, what has been the response? Right now, the minister has just indicated that Yukon could be spending up to \$44 million on this project that is 100 percent in not only just a different jurisdiction but a different country altogether. It’s not like it’s in British Columbia where we are governed under the same laws. It is literally in a different country altogether. So, if it’s a Canada building project, what request has gone to Canada and what has the response been for funding this project?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We have had a series of conversations with Canada over the last number of years and, yes, absolutely we have voiced to the federal government that we think this is extremely important to the Yukon and it’s important to Canada. There is a bilateral agreement between Canada and the US when it comes to critical minerals. I have highlighted in a series of meetings that it would be difficult to undertake and successfully execute that agreement without access to tidewater in Skagway. We have talked to the minister in charge of Export Development Canada, ministers in charge of economic development — and we had Minister Champagne here in the Yukon. He really has been the lead on the critical minerals conversation in Canada and on innovation. We have talked to

Minister Wilkinson, we have flagged it to the Prime Minister’s Office, the Deputy Prime Minister’s Office — most in Cabinet. What we have heard is that Canada normally does not deploy capital to build in other jurisdictions. I challenged that, I will say. I think that the Canadian government funds aid relief. The Canadian government funds the Department of National Defence spending in other countries. The Canadian government looks at a number of different ways to deploy from its budget, but on this one — that’s why I said earlier when the Official Opposition was asking me questions — do we have anything in place from Canada yet? No. Is that conversation ongoing? Yes, it is, because I still think there is a need. We have also tried to speak to private sector interests, one being Blackstone.

Blackstone is the largest infrastructure asset holder in the world. They have acquired Carrix. Carrix owns White Pass, so they have a bit of a foothold in Skagway, at least when it comes to the rail line and the easement there. We have also said to them that this is something that maybe the private sector, in the future, will want to look at. But right now — I’m being very transparent with the House — there is ongoing dialogue but we find ourselves in a moment in time when we think this is important — when mining is our largest private sector contributor to our economy.

Ms. White: Understanding that the dock isn’t being used right now — and my understanding is that they are actually still — well, they may not be shipping out.

I will use this example. The wind turbines that were just brought in for the Eagle Hill wind project on Haeckel Hill. It came to a tidewater port — Stewart, British Columbia. It’s just over 1,000 kilometres. It’s just under 1,200 kilometres away. They are not saying that it’s as close as Skagway, but there is access to a deep-water port in Canada as opposed to the Yukon government paying \$44 million.

The reason why I keep coming back to this is — and I appreciate the minister’s points, but it’s going to be an asset that’s fully funded by Yukon in a completely other jurisdiction that we have no control over. I have an apprehension similar to the way I felt when we were talking about redundant fibre. Initially, it was suggested that we could go to Juneau, Alaska. There were concerns there. We would be putting it out in another jurisdiction, we would be paying for it, but we would not own it, I guess, because we are not in the right spot. So, I have those questions and I think they are valid. I put in a motion saying that if we go forward with the port, is it going to be big enough to receive wind turbine parts? Are we going to make sure that what we are paying for will benefit us in different ways?

One of the conversations that was had in the briefing — the question was: What happens if there aren’t any mines? We were told that it could be used for exports — exports like lumber or prefab houses — but how often is it going to be used for lumber? Again, I pointed out in the briefing that we have a hard time supplying firewood for personal use at this point, let alone exports of wood. It would be great if Walker Home Construction was able to export houses through a Skagway port, but I’m not sure if they are there yet.

What else will this dock be used for? The minister isn't going to have a guess as to when Casino, Kudz Ze Kayah, or Fireweed Zinc will come online and want to access it. Again, although we were told that they showed an interest, there was no commitment or signed documents saying that they are going to use it. What are the other possibilities for this \$44-million investment?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: There were a number of questions there. First, let's start with the ecosystem of the mining sector. It's investment attraction. I'm going to beg for the flexibility of the House without going back to grab a briefing note — and say that, you know, you're getting a quarter of a billion dollars spent on exploration and advanced exploration sort of on an annual basis. I think that's a fair number. Officials can check, but let's say it's \$225 million on an annual basis. First of all, if people are going to look for something in the early stages and they know that there's nowhere at the end of that cycle to actually extract it and ship it in a feasible manner, you are probably going to see the front end of the investment into the sector really begin to retract. That would be one thing. That's the first piece.

I think that we are doing work on dual use. Are your questions valid? Yes, they are valid questions. They are good questions from both parties today because, yes, it's up to \$44 million. It is a unique situation in another country. I think that there should be lots of questions and there will be lots of questions on this subject.

Just to give you a sense at the front end — what we would have some real challenges with right away? We have the beginning of the ecosystem, which is the money going into exploration and advanced exploration and deposit appraisal. That's a very significant amount of money that gets spent throughout the Yukon every year. Then you have operations or mining projects that are then moving toward production. It's one thing to take a wind turbine, build it — and I spoke with the principals on that project. I mean, we have been close to that project that you speak about on Haeckel Hill.

I want to take a moment to thank the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources and Yukon Energy because that happened because — we actually used that project as an ability to figure out our modelling on costing and the IPP policy work. It was that project — because we tried to figure out how we could still be able to make it feasible and reduce the cap ex through the purchase of power. We thought a lot about: What does the infrastructure look like? What does the modelling look like? What does the hardware look like?

As you spoke about, that wind turbine came, I think, through the Panama Canal — down and then through the Panama Canal and back up to Stewart, BC.

We are looking at dual use and we are looking to answer your question about wind turbines. But I think the bigger challenge for a wind turbine — we might be able to get it in the port. It's going to be getting it up that hill and around those corners, which is a real challenge, so we have to figure that out. But we are looking at dual use.

I think, as members would know, it's really difficult to be in a position to — it's one thing to do one trip. If you have to

do trips every 30 minutes from the Yukon all the way to Stewart, BC, that's a totally different story — and then try to figure out how it is feasible, and is it even worth doing a project? Because you are still competing. It's about energy; it's about the type of energy you have. That's why we're talking about a grid connection to British Columbia. The people who finance projects are going to look at how you are fuelling your mining project; they're going to look at where your port is — a number of things. That's why we had the early discussion around rail as well. We had representatives here. I was in those discussions, and we talked to the new owner of the rail into Skagway and said: Are you open to partnering with us on a feasibility to look at industrial use, not just tourism use? Because that makes sense in the future — for us to be able to look — so I think that, in the future, you need to think about probably electrifying your supply chain, figuring out how to do that — sorry, your transfer of ore. "Supply chain" is, I believe, the right terminology for that. You are going to have to figure out if you are going to use electric truck or rail. You want to reduce your emissions. You have to have access to the closest tidewater and then you also have to be in a position where you are fuelling all of that with your cleanest energy source.

I think that Stewart, BC — from what we have heard in discussions — would be a real challenge for the feasibility of projects if they had to do that. You are right — I think that there have been some longer exports by truck right now with some concentrate — that has happened. But that is what we are aware of now.

I think that you have flagged questions and we have an obligation to come back, because you are right that they are valid questions and I think it is important for us to talk and share with you what the difference would be. Also, industry as well as previous governments have contemplated the use of Haines, Alaska, and we have contemplated that the same way but, again, there doesn't seem to be a feasible opportunity to work there. Skagway seems to be the appropriate option.

Ms. White: I thank the minister. I am not concerned about the validity of my questions. They are valid and that is why I am asking them, but I do appreciate the assurance.

The fact that the minister has just indicated that Haines has been looked at — and that gives another whole question because I don't know enough about the dock situation in Haines, but does Haines, Alaska, right now have the industrial dock for tidewater there?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: No, Madam Chair, it does not.

Ms. White: That is unfortunate because I could have just saved us \$44 million right there, easily. We could have really just made a big change.

Knowing that Yukon right now is going — I am not even going to say "lion's share". Let's be honest; they are paying the entirety. Yukon is putting all the money to it. What is the borough of Skagway doing? What are they contributing?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The borough of Skagway is providing the project management and engineering management on the project.

It's important to say that it has been the Yukon that has come to the table to say that we need this as part of the

redevelopment of the port. If we had not requested that and worked to ensure that this was integrated in, it was not part of the vision for their port. It's also partially the reason, as you can imagine, why they are not contributing to the capital expenditure of the asset. It is not something that they were looking to build. We think it's important for us to build, as well as their management and procurement, and they are providing the land to build the asset.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. We have a couple of people who will be doing project management. I'm not even going to go into how many people and how much do we think they are being paid, because I think it really already shows that there is a significant difference between what Yukon is paying and Skagway.

When someone would access that port — so, for example, we were importing, someone was coming in — do they pay a fee to access that port? As an exporter, do you pay a fee to access that dock?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: What I am going to ask is that I will bring back more details based on our cooperation, the agreement that we are still in the middle of negotiating, which will have a fee breakdown and give a sense to the House of what it would look like for the folks who would potentially use that. The Alaska marine services dock right now, I believe, is used — not this dock — when you have imports coming in, but I want to be able to give accurate information. To get to the heart of the question, which I understand is, yes, there is technical advice and oversight being provided. That is a fact. There is land being provided.

The conversation that happened with the community — our officials have done an eloquent job of being able to go in and talk to folks in the community and talk to leaders in the community — has been this: There are 1.2 million to 1.4 million tourists coming to Skagway. There is a very significant industry happening when it comes to tourism. Many people in Skagway don't have an understanding of the ties between the Yukon and Skagway. We have, on a number of occasions, talked about how the mining and mineral sector helps our territory and our economy to be very vibrant, and we have seen that over a long period of time. When some people from Skagway, as many people do, come up over the Skagway pass and they come and want to go to a restaurant or go to a store or go to a dentist or get a haircut or whatever they want to do, what we have tried to say is that part of our economy is really important for the Yukon so that we can continue to be the place they know right now.

There are a lot of individuals in Skagway who are focused on tourism, and whether there is a marine services platform there or not is not something that they are supporting being built by their municipality. They know that it is a small borough; it's a municipal government, and they are redeveloping their entire port. It's a big step for that council, because for 50 years, they didn't control it, but now they do. They are redeveloping and paying for all of that. For them to now come to the table and say, "Now we are going to go out and potentially spend another \$44 million Canadian on this asset", which is really something

that is going to benefit Canada and the Yukon in the end, is going to be a tough conversation.

I understand where you are going. Yes, it is an asset that will be of advantage, I think, to both the borough of Skagway, but more importantly, to the Yukon and Canada. At this point in time, through a series of negotiations, we have knocked on the doors of Canada and the State of Alaska for money. We have flagged this in many ways. This is the state of play that we are in. We think that this is something that we have to do for the future of the economy of the Yukon and Canada. It is a challenging undertaking. I agree. It's not the norm. Like I stated, a former NDP government that was here, they were willing to buy land and they were willing, I would assume, to develop that land to have a port. It's something that people have thought about before. I think it probably goes back to 2000. Here we are 23 years later and that land isn't owned by the Yukon government. Now, we are in a position where the land is owned by the borough of Skagway, and we now have an obligation to have a different type of negotiation with them, because we don't own the land, and we are in a position where we have to invest.

As I said, Canada has said to us that they are normally not deploying Canadian government capital into these areas; we think that there must be an opportunity for them to do that. We want to continue to have that discussion. We have gone to the infrastructure bank as well. The infrastructure bank of Canada will provide funds for activities that happen within the country, or primarily in the country. We have tried to look through that to see if there is an option as well but, again, that is debt that we are not looking to take on. We are trying to work within our means to ensure that there is access to tidewater for future generations of folks in the Yukon and companies that operate in the Yukon.

Ms. White: The reason why I was asking the question as to whether or not there was a fee that was paid, I want to know where the fees go. So, is the borough of Skagway collecting the fees? Is Yukon government collecting the fees? I want to know who is going to manage the port. Does Yukon government manage the port? Does the borough of Skagway manage the port? Who pays the employees? Are they paid by Yukon government or are they paid by Skagway? Those are some of the questions I have.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The borough of Skagway operates the port. The fee distribution, the distribution of salaries toward the employees who are there — those details I have committed to bringing back to the House. I don't want to pre-determine the outcome of a negotiation on the cooperation agreement, and I want us to ensure that we have the accurate information coming back to the House — meaning, is the borough of Skagway having a direct relationship with the employees, or are they going to — I am not sure. An option, potentially, would be that they have a corporation that is owned by the borough, and then that corporation, in turn, pays — those are detailed modelling and structure that I want to get the right answers to the House for. I will bring that back.

If the question is — we are not looking at this time for the borough of Skagway to be providing us with any revenue

source — no. I will cut right to it, if that's what we getting at. We are not looking — there is no revenue source from the borough of Skagway coming to us in the activity that is there. We are paying for the capital, and we are building out the oversight and management of it. I think that is fair.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. I guess the question that I have then is knowing that, typically, in cases like this — so, for example, Air North has to pay the Vancouver airport to use the airport, right? They have to pay the airport here to use the airport. So, if a company is taking shipments to this dock in Skagway and they're paying to be able to load it onto ships there and all the rest of it, what is the cost recovery model from Yukon government? Are we in some kind of agreement with mines, where they are paying Yukon government to be able to access the dock that we paid, or is this just one of those things where we're paying the \$44 million so we're that much more attractive as a place to do business?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: It's not that we're — I think, what was the term that was just used? — “more attractive”. I think that we're not in the game at all if we don't have access to tidewater. It's 211 percent more expensive for ore for Minto to go to Stewart versus Skagway, so that's to give you a sense of sort of where we're at on cost to be able to ship.

We are looking at a reduced rate for companies coming from the Yukon to use that infrastructure, because, of course, there is still the operational piece for it. There is a reduced rate for those companies from Canada and the Yukon to use it. I'm going to hold there. I hear the points; I'm committed to being accountable to the Assembly; I'll bring back the details, but I think, at this point, we're in the midst of these discussions with the borough, and it's probably prudent to hold there on details.

Ms. White: I will have so many more questions as we go forward. One thing that we were told in the briefing is that the reason why this was not put in the actual budget is because bids were received in early July and the costs refined later in the summer. It's interesting, because I'm sure my colleagues here from the Yukon Party will remember — but one of the things — an accounting practice is, for example, if you know that you were going to be budgeting money for something later, you put a placeholder in; it's a dollar. It doesn't mean that it's going to cost a dollar; it means that this is an indication that, in the future, you're going to be putting money into this.

When I go through the budget document from 2023-24, there is no placeholder for this, right? So, then, you know, I can look at the budget — I can look at the supplementary budget that we just got, and I can go through it, and I can say that, you know, there was a \$6-million cut from Community Services; \$157,000 from health; \$7.4 almost \$7.5 out of Highways and Public Works; \$200,000 out of tourism; \$380,000 out of Yukon Development Corporation; and \$6 million out of housing, and interestingly enough, if I add all that up together and then I add the \$900,000 decrease from the business incentive program, it equals \$21,361,000.

Did the minister request that other departments find that money? Did the minister say that we need to pay the \$21,361,000 now for this project? Was it requested of other departments to find that money?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am going to put one point on the record concerning the conversation about revenue. In our due diligence on this project, we hired a law firm both in Canada and in the US because we were working internationally. In the advice that we received, if we were receiving — I will be open to the House again — any revenue from the asset in Skagway, it also was going to expose us to any potential liability that was occurring on that project, so part of our decision has been to ensure that we safeguard the Yukon government in the activities that are happening there and that we're not operating a project Outside. That has been the advice that we have received.

Secondly, I think I understand the question. Why do we put in a placeholder? I am going to do my best to answer this question. I can go back and have further discussion with officials. In the springtime, a couple of things happened. We weren't sure, first of all, if we were going to get a bid. Even going through this, it has been a sensitive conversation. There are folks who have lots of different feelings inside the borough. I think that's a fair public statement. We are in a position where, as we have seen clarity from the borough, we have made decisions based on that clarity. We have not predetermined the outcome of anything. I am just going to say that.

When it comes to the project, we have worked toward being able to fund this project now that we see a pathway to do it on the first tranche of funding.

We have worked with officials across government, led by our Finance department and our officials at Economic Development, to be able to see where we have an opportunity to fund this at this time. I hope that if there is extra detail required, I am open to gathering that detail and bringing it to the House.

Ms. White: Thank you, Deputy Chair, and I thank the minister for that. I am just going to ask for a little bit more clarity. Am I right in understanding that the Department of Economic Development then requested that this money be found across government departments?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Just a note on the placeholder — we have not done that for some years. It is usually, typically, for reoccurring costs as well, so I just wanted to say that.

No, we didn't — we requested the funds through submission. That's what we did as a department. The department then responds to that. Finance is the coordinator of our budgets, and we have been able to fund this project on our first tranche of funding. That's what we have done.

Ms. White: It's going to sound very repetitive because I'm still just trying to figure it out. So, the Department of Economic Development through the Department of Finance asked if there was \$21 million within Yukon government that could go toward this project, and is that what we are seeing in this supplementary budget?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: As with any expenditure — and I can go back and I can confer with other colleagues and departments — what happens is that in order to get the right to make that expenditure, we put in a submission to Management Board. It is analyzed by the Department of Finance. We then look to figure out where we can identify the resources, if approved, to

make that expenditure. Of course, two things have to happen. We have to have the actual funds to be able to deploy toward that expenditure, and we also have to have the right within the vote of this House to be able to work within the funding caps that have been approved through our budgeting exercises. We are looking to expend more than we have planned in the mains; therefore, we are coming today to request the ability to spend more in our department. We have worked within the resources of the Government of Yukon to be able to do that.

I don't know if there is something I am missing, but that is my understanding of the process and I think I have an accurate sense. If there is something I have missed, we can go back and do that. That is the work that has been undertaken.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. I am going to put out that I am at a disadvantage in this Assembly as the only person asking questions on the Opposition side — well, not the only person, but the only party — and I have not been in government so I haven't gone through the Management Board process.

The question is: Did the request go in for the \$21 million before, for example, you, as the Minister responsible for Yukon Housing, made the decision to defer \$4 million for the northern carve-out and \$2 million for the developer build loan program? What went first? Did the request go out for money and then departments looked at being able to defer projects until a later point, or were departments already making decisions to defer projects and it just so happened that it added up to the \$21,361,000?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I can come back with a legislative return. All I know is that I signed a Management Board submission — and we then go through a process. That process is confidential within Management Board. We make a decision. There are conversations that happen. Then we look at the resources that we have. I think what normally happens within government is that you go through the resources or the programs you have. You make sure that the funds that need to be available to execute that work are there, and if you are in a position where you are not using those resources, I believe, Madam Chair, that you would allocate them somewhere else. So, if you had an expenditure that you planned for the year and it has been delayed for another year, then you may look at that. Maybe there is a program that has been undersubscribed; maybe you have made a decision to defer work. That is the normal series of things that I think are contemplated. The central agency, being the Department of Finance, would then work with directors of other departments to see where there are funds available. That is something that would be taking place during the supplementary budget process across government.

Ms. White: Again, I'm at a disadvantage. I haven't been in government, I haven't been part of Management Board, but my understanding is that it's a Cabinet committee so I'm trying to figure out if it is a chicken and an egg. What came first: the request for the funding for the dock or the decision within departments to defer projects? Maybe the minister can't answer but really, right here, it's a chicken and an egg situation. What came first: the request for the money to fund an ore dock or the decision to defer projects — for example, the \$6 million out of

Yukon Housing and \$7 million out of Highways and Public Works?

I think that I have probably talked myself into knots at this point in time so I'm going to move on to immigration, which is one of my favourite things. Although I appreciate that the minister has referred to a nominee program as an economic program, for me, it has always been the idea of immigration. It's the idea of people being able to leave whatever country they are coming from to come to Canada to re-establish and they will do almost anything to do that, including whatever jobs that they get, so for me, it has always been an immigration program and not an economic program.

As we heard my colleague from the Yukon Party ask about timelines, applications, and how it goes, one of the things that I indicated in the briefing process was that I wanted to know if it had ever been audited — whether or not we had gone through policies within programs and application processes, or whether we interviewed, for example, business owners or people who had gone through the application process themselves, because one of the things that people have said is that it is unfair. They have said that they have done what they were told to do and that things have been really hard. Of course, a business feels responsible for the people who they are sponsoring to bring over. If you get a person over and they can't actually work because the process hasn't gone through yet, all of a sudden, you have a person who is in a foreign jurisdiction and unable to work.

I am going to have more questions on that, but seeing the time, Deputy Chair, I move that you report progress.

Deputy Chair (MLA Tredger): It has been moved by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:24 p.m.

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2022 Annual Report Yukon Minerals Advisory Board

(Streicker)