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HANSARD

Monday, October 16, 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

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

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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
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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Monday, October 16, 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. Pillai: There are a number of visitors who are here with us today for Small Business Week tributes. I would like to welcome to the Assembly — and have my colleagues welcome — Mr. Ben Pereira, who is a director with the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce; Mellisa Murray, executive director of the Yukon First Nation chamber and also a well-known city councillor; and Stuart Murray, entrepreneur and director of the Yukon Chamber of Mines. Also here today is Lucas Brown.

Thank you all for coming.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Small Business Week

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Small Business Week, which is being recognized across Canada from October 15 to 21. For 44 years, the Business Development Bank of Canada has coordinated this national celebration of entrepreneurship, acknowledging the significant contributions that small businesses provide to the economy. There are over 1.2 million small businesses across the country. Small- and medium-sized businesses together contribute more than 50 percent of the country's GDP.

The Yukon is home to over 3,100 small- and medium-sized businesses, and it's impossible to overstate the positive impacts of these businesses on our community. In 2022, small businesses in the Yukon contributed to retail sales exceeding \$1 billion for the first time. Mr. Speaker, it takes an extraordinary brand of determination to transform an initial business concept into a living, thriving reality.

Entrepreneurs stand as trailblazers. They are leaders who have dedicated themselves to their passion projects despite the obstacles. As we move through the transition to a post-pandemic economy, we continue to face the difficulties of labour shortages and supply-chain disruptions. This has resulted in Canadian entrepreneurs channelling their efforts toward innovation and sustainability, ensuring their continued growth in the face of the challenges. They are also pioneering inclusive and environmentally conscious business practices while driving the Canadian economy.

As a northern jurisdiction with a small population, we face unique challenges that require entrepreneurs to be creative and resourceful. It is imperative to support local options. These businesses and the incredible people behind them not only support the economic prosperity of our territory but also contribute to the social well-being. They provide community spaces, support, and sponsorship to local events and causes and so much more.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to thank Yukon entrepreneurs, once again, for their resilience and for their work to innovate and adapt to changing circumstances. Small Business Week is about recognizing these efforts and, as always, I encourage Yukoners to shop local.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the chamber of commerce and other industry associations for their Yukon businesses. They play an invaluable role in representing the interests of our business community.

The Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce is recognizing Small Business Week by profiling the entrepreneurs in small businesses who participated in Yukon University's Innovation and Entrepreneurship PIVOT program. I also invite Yukon entrepreneurs to join the variety of online events this week, hosted by the Business Development Bank of Canada, by visiting their Small Business Week website.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to Small Business Week. Each year, we rise to praise all the small businesses who support and make our communities the wonderful and interesting places to live. Each time you support a general store, a coffee shop, a restaurant, or a clothing or hardware store, you help those who provide a local service. The entrepreneurs who take on the challenge and joy of having their own small business are to be applauded. They go through a rigorous system to ensure that all of the necessary permits and regulations are in place before they even begin to hire employees and open the doors.

Having done this routine for many years on a seasonal basis, I know that it is not for the faint of heart — the wonder and worry of it all. You want to ensure that your customer base has a great experience at your business or shop, so one does not expound on the trials and tribulations — behind-the-scene work — of taxes and permits.

The world has changed quickly in the retail world and many shop online, which has its benefits. However, never forget to check locally first, as the item might be handy today and in line with the cost posted online. We want to get to know the names of the local owners or the people who work the front line, and this is part of the beauty of personal interactions, as a small business will also back their products should they not work out as planned.

We hope that you will support your community business economy, as most of the dollars will most likely return to the community through wages, sponsorships, gifts, and assistance for various charities. Take time to thank an employee. They, in

turn, need support for their service, and it only takes a minute. As customer appreciation days approach in early November along with the Christmas holiday season, we encourage you to shop local. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate Small Business Week. Every October, Small Business Week pays tribute to the entrepreneurs who continue to contribute so much to our communities. Small businesses provide well-paying local jobs within our communities, and they bring energy, vibrancy, and uniqueness to our streets.

Being a small business isn't for the faint of heart; it's for the brave, the patient, and the persistent. Small business owners are doers and problem-solvers. They are invested in our communities and the people around them.

Our small business community is dynamic and responsive. It is the small businesses that sponsor our sports teams and art events and they are the organizations that donate all sorts of things to fundraisers. Small business owners are our friends and they are our neighbours, and we can all agree that it's important to support the local businesses around us but never more so than now.

Small businesses still aren't through the uncertainty that was created by the pandemic and, in a post-pandemic world, the normal challenges for businesses are even more daunting.

So, before ordering from a huge online retailer, look closer to home. Buying from the people in our community who continue to invest so much in the Yukon is a great show of support.

Businesses were grateful for the government's support during the pandemic, but now it's important that this support not be their undoing. Small businesses are still recovering from the loss of earnings during COVID and they're trying to pay off debt while keeping their doors open. Any business that closes due to the pandemic is one business too many. So, we want to thank every business owner who has persevered during these challenging times, and we want to thank every Yukoner who has and continues to support our local small businesses.

Applause

In recognition of Poverty and Homelessness Action Week

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I'm here today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to Poverty and Homelessness Action Week, which takes place from October 16 to 20. This week was created to raise awareness and promote action to end poverty and homelessness in the Yukon.

Since 2005, Poverty and Homelessness Action Week has drawn attention to these imperative community concerns. We know that income and access to housing are two of the social determinants of health, meaning that they are inseparably linked with our overall health and well-being. Living in poverty or having poor access to housing can intensify health inequities. We also know that having a safe home is a necessity for

everyone to move forward out of poverty and be able to achieve their life goals.

The Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition and other community partners put together an amazing week of events and discussions, including the popular Whitehorse Connects events. This year's events are being organized around the theme, "What's on the Line: Actions to End Poverty and Homelessness in the Yukon".

We encourage everyone to participate in this free programming sponsored by community organizations throughout the week and learn more about our community's inspiring work to end and prevent poverty and homelessness in the territory. Volunteering for one of these organizations is also a powerful way to have an impact and be part of the solution. Thank you to the many non-profit organizations and the individuals behind those organizations. You are making a difference.

Supporting Yukoners in need is an action that must always be centred on collaboration and the involvement of the broader community reinforced by the foundational elements of cultural safety and humility. We remain committed to ending and preventing homelessness through community collaboration initiatives such as the housing action plan for Yukon, Safe at Home, housing and homelessness task force, and the federal Yukon Reaching Home program. We must always be learning together, so we continue to work in partnership with Yukon First Nations, other governments, and the non-government sector to address homelessness in the territory and to help people access the services that they need. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize October 16 to 20 as Poverty and Homelessness Action Week, which was started in 2005 by the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition to bring attention to these issues and bring the community together to help address them. The work that this organization does is so important for our community and for those who have dealt with poverty in their lives.

This campaign helps to get the word out about poverty and homelessness. The campaign is being led by grads of the Voices Influencing Change program — another one of the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition's important initiatives. This program offers training, support, and opportunities to those who have experienced poverty and homelessness. True understanding comes from lived experience. So much good has come from this program and through the great work put into Poverty and Homelessness Action Week by these grads. Each day this week, there will be a different event taking place in the community — lunches, workshops, forums. Each important discussion is open to the public and more information is available on the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition's Facebook page and website. Thank you to all those organizing this week's events and to those who make the effort to get involved in discussions and events. Salamat po.

Applause

Ms. Blake: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to Poverty and Homelessness Action Week. I want to thank the staff and many volunteers at the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition who put together an information-packed week based on the theme, “What’s on the Line”. As we all know, it’s Yukoners’ lives that are on the line. Every year, the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition holds a week of activities so that Yukoners can be heard and share their lived experiences while also bringing attention to poverty and homelessness in the Yukon.

Our hope is that, at the end of this week, each of us will show a renewed commitment to ending poverty and homelessness. We need to take action.

Mahsi’.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT the membership of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees, as established by Motion No. 12, be amended by:

- (1) rescinding the appointment of the Hon. Ranj Pillai; and
- (2) appointing the Hon. Jeanie McLean to the committee.

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to ensure the financial and long-term sustainability of Yukon communities by amending the comprehensive municipal grant in response to the analysis and report conducted by the Association of Yukon Communities in July 2023.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to commit to meeting the treatment needs of Yukoners abusing substances such as hand sanitizer, hairspray, and mouthwash in a timely manner, including:

- (1) access to medically supported detox; and
- (2) treatment options in the Yukon or outside of the territory.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Missing Persons Act and regulation

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to announce that the *Missing Persons Act* and regulation came

into force today. Our government is, and always will be, committed to increasing public safety across the territory. The *Missing Persons Act* represents a significant milestone for all Yukoners. Using this legislation, the RCMP can now apply to the Yukon Territorial Court for orders providing the timely access to records needed to locate a missing person, such as their telecommunications, financial, and/or health records.

Under the act, the RCMP can request a person’s records with an emergency demand for records or a records access order once a person is established as missing. If the person is a minor or a vulnerable person who is believed to be at risk of imminent harm, a search warrant may also be issued by the court. The act includes provisions that: set out criteria for certain orders to be granted by the court; outline specific rules about how information and records are managed and used; place limits on what information can be disclosed when and to whom; provide reporting requirements so that use of the orders under the act can be tracked; and supply forms and methods of service for orders granted to the RCMP.

Best practices from other jurisdictions and feedback received during engagements have guided the design of the legislation. We have worked closely with other jurisdictions to ensure alignment on key aspects of the legislative framework. This is important to support investigations of missing persons that may cross provincial or territorial borders. I am grateful to all of the governments, organizations, and individuals who provided feedback and to all those who worked with us to complete this important piece of legislation.

The act and regulation carefully balanced the needs of the RCMP to have access to information with the rights of affected individuals to have their privacy protected. It includes clear, specific rules setting out how information records can be obtained, managed, and used and sets strict limits on what may be shared and with whom. Orders granting access to personal information may only be granted if the RCMP can satisfy a judge that it will help to locate a missing person. Information gathered in an investigation must also be kept confidential. It may only be used to locate a person and it may only be shared with the police or individuals responsible for protecting the missing person’s safety.

The legislation also includes accountability measures such as requirements for the RCMP to report annually on their use of orders granted under the act.

Before this legislation was proclaimed, the RCMP could not compel people or organizations to release personal information about a missing person, which might have resulted in the loss of valuable time in locating someone or the stalling or halting of an investigation. Bringing the act into force fulfills call for justice 5.8 of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which urges the provincial and territorial governments to enact missing persons legislation.

The act also supports the implementation of *Changing the Story to Upholding Dignity and Justice — Yukon’s Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-spirit+ People strategy*.

Mr. Speaker, our government is pleased to bring this important piece of legislation into force so that it may be used to support the safety of all Yukoners.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to this ministerial statement on an issue that is important to many Yukoners. I would note for the record that since the regulations associated with this were only shared with us about half an hour ago, we are not in a position to comment on the details of those regulations right now but do support the original legislation and bringing it into force.

The *Missing Persons Act* was tabled and passed in the Legislature back in the Fall Sitting of 2017 and has not been brought into force until today. I note that the act passed with the unanimous support of all members. In 2017, in speaking to this legislation, I noted that we had received a request from the RCMP at the tail-end of our last term in government to bring in missing persons legislation similar to that in place in Alberta and British Columbia, and we are supportive of the government acting on that request from the RCMP.

Despite what the minister just implied, this legislation was passed by the Yukon Legislative Assembly before the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls issued its final report several years ago, including the recommendation urging provincial and territorial governments to enact missing persons legislation. When the Minister of Justice tabled this legislation, her comments implied a real sense of urgency for bringing this law into force. At second reading on October 5, 2017, she said — and I quote: “In many cases, the safety of the missing person may be at risk. It is crucially important that the RCMP have the ability to conduct timely, robust investigations to locate the missing person as quickly as possible.” She also said that — quote: “With this legislation, Yukon will join much of the rest of Canada in recognizing the need to provide this tool for our police services to locate missing persons as quickly and efficiently as possible.”

In speaking to the bill, the Minister of Justice used the word “quickly” and the phrase “as quickly as possible” multiple times.

I think it is only fair to ask why it has taken six years to bring this act into force. The minister was clear in 2017 that there was urgency to this issue, but that urgency does not seem to be reflected in a six-year wait, so can the minister explain why it has taken so long? What work was being done on this and why did it take six years?

I look forward to the minister’s response and her explanation of the timing for bringing this act into force.

Ms. Blake: I find the timing of this ministerial statement to be disrespectful to the community of Old Crow, the citizens, residents, and search teams, as the continuing search for our elder in our traditional territory is ongoing.

We know that there are open cases of missing persons in Whitehorse and across rural communities — some being open for decades. Despite the Yukon’s *Missing Persons Act* not being implemented since being passed in 2017, the Yukon’s

volunteer responders for search and rescues such as the RCMP, the Canadian Rangers, and numerous volunteer agencies and citizens have continued to show their great ability and determination to work collaboratively, to deploy resources, and to actively respond to emergency situations of missing persons.

What the Yukon needs is a clear process on what steps to take when a person goes missing. Do they call the RCMP? Do they reach out to the media on their own? How do First Nations determine what supports they can provide for a search mission? How are First Nations and communities supported by this government when there is an active search happening? What decisions has this government made to ensure that there is government support to families, agencies, and volunteers during a missing persons search?

I want to thank all the people conducting this search for our elder in Old Crow. My deepest gratitude goes to citizens, the RCMP, and search organizations for their immediate help. Like many, I continue to hold onto hope that our elder will be found safe and sound and returned back to our community and to his family.

I think another time or a press release later to announce steps that can be taken to assist those involved in search and rescue missions would be better timed, rather than today.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Time is of the essence when a loved one is missing and every piece of information counts. With the *Missing Persons Act* and regulation now coming into force, we are helping to address delays experienced by the RCMP when investigating cases of missing persons — in particular, where there is no evidence of criminal activity.

Unlike the former Yukon Party — which received requests, as noted by the member opposite, in 2015 to take action on this matter — they also received such requests from the RCMP as early as 2012 — we have taken action to move forward.

Missing persons legislation is a direct response to the call for justice 5.8 of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Yukon’s MMIWG2S+ strategy. In late 2017, the *Missing Persons Act* received royal assent. Since then, we have been working hard to assess options, to explore community needs, and to work toward a regulation that balances the need for help to find missing people with privacy protections.

Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the importance of getting this done. All Yukoners suffer when someone is lost or missing and the absence of answers only increases anxiety and stress. We have worked to carefully balance this new law with privacy rights and to ensure that it meets the needs of the territory. It is our goal to provide the RCMP with the tools and the means to locate missing loved ones as quickly as possible while balancing the privacy rights of individuals. This is a serious responsibility that we carry as legislators, and I truly appreciate the support that my colleagues have shown, albeit somewhat begrudgingly, today and will show for this important new piece of legislation.

Our government has always pursued system reforms and significant transformations, but we have always been careful to

consider the concerns, input, and rights of individuals in that process. It takes time, resources, effort, consultation, and research, but it is crucial to ensure effectiveness and legality. Our timeline was also impacted, of course, by the COVID-19 pandemic, the technical nature of the regulation, the time needed to properly engage with First Nation governments, manage the issues, and for the RCMP engagement, the Territorial Court of the Yukon, and stakeholder groups, including women's advocacy groups.

The *Missing Persons Act* allowing the RCMP to access protected information for missing persons investigations where no crime is as yet suspected is a significant step toward addressing a crucial gap in our current system.

One of the provisions of this legislation is that when a missing person is located, the first question the RCMP must ask that person is if they wish to be located — if they wish their whereabouts to be known. This helps to protect individuals — women, men, and all people — who might be fleeing or choosing to remove themselves from their regular lives and work for whatever reason, including their own safety.

Our government is committed to completing this new law and its protections. We are implementing our MMIWG2S+ strategy, we're promoting gender equality, and we're strengthening community safety. Today, we have taken a step forward and done so. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Health care services in rural communities

Mr. Cathers: Over the last year, the Yukon has seen an unprecedented number of gaps in rural health services. Health care centres in rural communities have been closed for weeks at a time, leaving residents of those communities without access to basic health care services. This Liberal government and the Minister of Health and Social Services have been asleep at the wheel, ignoring calls from the Yukon Party and from health professionals to develop a new health human resources strategy for years.

These closures come after the Minister of Health and Social Services revealed that the vacancy rate for rural nurses soared to as high as almost 50 percent under her watch.

Why did it take so long for this Liberal government to pay attention to the growing health care crisis in rural Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think the member opposite should get the facts straight with respect to — I believe what was said was: closed for weeks on end. We are very concerned about shortages that occur as a result of nurses being absent or shortages that might occur in health centres across the territory.

Like the rest of Canada and around the world, Yukon has been impacted by a health and human resource shortage. To mitigate the impact on Yukoners, the Yukon government continues to work to recruit and retain health care providers. We know that, in order to have fully staffed health centres ready to serve Yukoners when and where they need it, we need to continue investing in our health care professionals and in

affordable housing. We must also continue to support our health care workers who are working in such health centres, because they too have issues of burnout and are required to have some time off. Some of the shortages that we've had this summer in some health centres across the territory have been a result of us supporting our essential front-line health care workers.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, this problem did not happen overnight. Rural nurses have been expressing concern about burnout for a long time, and the Liberal government was repeatedly told that the Yukon needed an updated health human resources strategy.

This Liberal government is again neglecting the needs of rural Yukon and ignored this developing rural health care coverage crisis until almost 50 percent of rural nursing positions were vacant. The minister has belatedly taken some action, but the current gaps in rural health care coverage are serious, and we have yet to see a plan from the government to fix the problem.

When can Yukoners expect to see a plan from the Minister of Health and Social Services to end the ongoing closures of rural health centres and provide reliable health coverage to all Yukon communities?

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Minister of Health and Social Services, you are on mute.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize.

In March of this year, we launched a health and human resources steering committee led jointly by the Government of Yukon and the Yukon Hospital Corporation, which represents many, many Yukon decision-makers here in the territory. There are representatives from the Yukon Medical Association, the Yukon Registered Nurses Association, the Yukon Medical Council, the Yukon Employees' Union, the Yukon University, the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, and the Council of Yukon First Nations.

In addition to this, we are always eager to work with the communities directly and have done so on many occasions over the summer, which is the period of time being asked about here — including being directly in touch with Yukon First Nation governments and communities, as well as working diligently to make sure that any of the shortages in a community are continually trying to be met.

I have reached out directly to chiefs on many occasions during the summer, and we have been working together to make sure that this important opportunity exists for us to provide service to those in the communities that might otherwise be feeling the concerns here.

The Yukon communities and the nursing —

Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Cathers: This Liberal government is developing a reputation for ignoring the needs of rural Yukoners. Whether it is shutting down garbage facilities, cutting road maintenance, failing to increase resources for the RCMP, or neglecting

essential services like health coverage, this Whitehorse-focused Liberal government repeatedly shows they are completely out of touch.

Multiple community leaders spoke up about concerns with ongoing closures of rural health centres. The Chief of the Ross River Dena Council said that it left his community in a vulnerable state and negatively impacted citizens. The Chief of the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun said that the cuts were incomprehensible and wrote a letter to the minister to express concern. The Association of Yukon Communities noted that there was a lack of action from the Liberal government and that concerns being raised by Yukon communities seemed to be falling on deaf ears.

Why do community leaders need to criticize this government publicly in order to get any action, and when can Yukoners expect to see a plan from the Minister of Health and Social Services to resolve ongoing gaps in rural health care services?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am very pleased to be able to speak to Yukoners about the important work that is being done by the Health Human Resources Steering Committee. We expect them to report to us with the development of a strategy to address these very important issues in Yukon communities during this fall, and I'm expecting it at any time.

Again, the facts are not exactly correct with respect to the member opposite. Community nursing has been experiencing a vacancy rate, more recently, of approximately 19 percent for primary health care nurses, which is an improvement of approximately 29 percent since the fall of 2022. I have been in touch with the communities about this important issue throughout the summer. I have reached out directly to Chief Loblaw from Ross River to discuss ways in which we can better work with communities in advance of any service centre reductions — to minimize the impacts of service reductions and to find solutions that eliminate service reductions entirely.

I have also committed to working with the chiefs, mayors, and community leaders to do the same for each of their communities, should such a service reduction occur there. We have worked most recently — up until the last minute, including during the period of time when there might be an announced slowdown — and have filled a vacancy more recently in one of the communities during the period of time when they thought —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: City of Whitehorse drinking water

Ms. McLeod: Last Friday, the *Whitehorse Star* reported on a letter that the Minister of Community Services sent to the City of Whitehorse regarding drinking water supply that was — and I quote: "... scolding the council for not taking action quickly enough."

According to the *Whitehorse Star*, the letter said — and I quote: "... city council appeared to be second-guessing expert recommendations on technical information."

We know that the Minister of Community Services has had a tense relationship with the biggest municipality in the Yukon for number of reasons, but now it seems that the minister has

taken to publicly scolding the municipality and accusing their council of second-guessing experts.

Why did the minister send this letter to the City of Whitehorse?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I want to correct the record for the member opposite. First of all, I did not send a public letter to the City of Whitehorse. I sent a private letter to the Mayor of Whitehorse expressing my concern and offering help to get the city's water treatment plant underway.

I think that water is a very important issue to the citizens of Whitehorse. Recognizing the importance of our water system to the residents of Whitehorse, seeing that city council had previously voted against actually proceeding with planning for a new water treatment plant for the City of Whitehorse, and in light of some new results coming out, I wrote to the city mayor underlining the importance of the issue in a private manner and then asking how we can help.

Ms. McLeod: Last week, the minister blamed the lack of attention to emergency planning on the municipalities. This was despite the fact that it was his government that promised to have emergency plans in place for every single community by 2022. That wasn't the first time that we've seen the City of Whitehorse and this minister disagree publicly. We saw a similar situation when the minister unilaterally announced the cancellation of the bid to host the Canada Games without letting the city know. Now we see the minister publicly scolding the City of Whitehorse for their plans to address the city's drinking water.

Why is the minister antagonizing the largest municipality in the Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Once again, despite being corrected by me, the member opposite continually repeats information in this House that is incorrect. I did not write a public letter to the City of Whitehorse. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, if I want to write a public letter or an op-ed, I will do so. I'm fully capable of doing that and know the procedures very, very well. But no, I wrote a private letter to the City of Whitehorse, to the Mayor of Whitehorse, appreciating the concern that I have heard from constituents and others about the water system in Whitehorse and pledging the territorial government's help in addressing this problem.

We have, in the letter — and I know the member opposite does not have the letter because I have been told that the Leader of the Official Opposition has asked for it, and I am happy to provide it.

What I told the mayor was that this was a concerning issue. We have planning and engineering expertise that we are willing to share with the City of Whitehorse. If they want to speak with me about this issue, please reach out. That's what we're doing — working very closely with the City of Whitehorse to address needs within municipalities.

Ms. McLeod: According to the *Whitehorse Star* article on Friday, the minister is reported to have said that he expects the City of Whitehorse to fund a new water treatment facility on their own without the support of the Yukon government. It has been reported that a new water treatment plant could cost between \$40 million and \$55 million.

Can the minister confirm that this government is unwilling to provide any funding to the City of Whitehorse to build a new drinking water treatment facility if it is needed?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: As I have said to the mayor — even this morning when we had another conversation — I speak with the Mayor of Whitehorse on a regular basis and I consider our relationship to be cordial. We work well together, Mr. Speaker.

As I said to the mayor this morning — at the moment, the city has reserves, but the federal government is going to be launching a new infrastructure program. We don't know the criteria for that new infrastructure funding or how it will be allocated and what sort of process will be used to access that money. I did tell the Mayor of Whitehorse that a plant such as the one that the city is now considering would more than likely fall under the federal criteria, but we don't know yet. Once we know that, we will work with the City of Whitehorse to secure the funds from Ottawa.

Question re: Skagway marine services

Ms. White: Last Thursday, I asked the Premier a series of questions about the \$44 million that this government is planning to spend on building an ore dock in Skagway, Alaska. One of my questions to him went unanswered. What was heard instead was that it is confidential, but Yukoners want to know.

Can the Premier confirm that other government departments were asked to cut their own budgets in order to finance this fall's \$21 million for an ore dock in Alaska?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I will go back and look at the Blues; I don't remember saying that something was confidential.

I said that the process is that, when there is a project that needs to be funded, we go through a submission to Management Board. That process of deliberating and analyzing the package is something that is confidential — that part of it. Then, as a government, the decision is made to see if the funds are available to be used.

Every year, when it comes to our capital budget, for instance, we will go through and will identify what is in the mains in the springtime budget for the capital budget. If projects have some cost overruns, which we have seen in the last couple of years because of challenges with the supply chain, sometimes there are changes that have to be made or, if projects are delayed, sometimes we would reallocate the funds to another part of the project.

Again, for this project, we have a terms sheet that is non-binding in place. We have submitted a proposal to Management Board. That was approved and now we are in the position, if supported, that we would then use resources that are approved by the Legislative Assembly to do that work.

Ms. White: Just to clarify, Management Board is made up of Cabinet ministers, so elected politicians.

Whether the Premier wants to confirm it or not, numbers don't lie. In this year's supplementary budget, when you add up all the cuts from various departments, they add up exactly to this year's budget for the ore dock. There is no pretending that those cuts are not financing this government's new project.

At a time when the housing crisis is hurting Yukoners everywhere, this government is cutting \$6 million out of the

Yukon Housing Corporation's budget. That money could build badly needed units to house teachers in communities or cover the costs of new bedbug ovens and literally do all of the renovations that Yukon Housing Corporation tenants have been waiting for.

Why is this government cutting critical housing funding to build an ore dock that no mining company in the Yukon will use for years to come?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: It is a good spin from the Leader of the Third Party. I would say that, every year, we rebalance and then look at our priorities. The areas where there have been reallocation are areas where there have either been programs that have been undersubscribed — and I'm happy to speak to these in the House at any point in time — or projects that have been moved ahead. What we're actually talking about is the authority to spend the money. In some cases — we have a program called the northern carve-out. We will take that housing money, which we have received from the federal government, and we will be looking to use it in the next fiscal when we have a project ready for which that money can be used. But we need the authority to spend within our budget, and so that's why we have come to the table. We are moving money forward and we are looking at areas that are under-subscribed.

So — not really doing justice here in the narrative from the Third Party — really giving poor information to Yukoners. I would say to go back and take a look at the budget. I am happy to have a conversation offline if there is more information required.

Ms. White: So, this rebalance will see this government spend \$21 million this year and another \$23 million next year on a facility that will be outside of our country and that will be of no use to anyone for at least several years.

I am going to continue with the cuts. The Yukon Housing Corporation is not the only one on the chopping block to finance the Premier's new project. Community Services also got cut by over \$6 million, and this money was originally earmarked for fire protection, infrastructure, and home retrofits — all here in the Yukon.

Highways and Public Works is also losing \$7.5 million — money that could pay for badly needed repairs to roads and bridges and other infrastructure throughout — again — the Yukon. So, these millions of dollars could support Yukoners by keeping transfer stations open in rural Yukon for years to come, or they could jump-start a new school in downtown Whitehorse.

So, why did the government — the Cabinet ministers — decide to cut from so many important projects instead of putting Yukoners' needs and interests first?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Just looking at new capital builds and partnerships, the Yukon Housing Corporation continues to expand its stock of housing — 60 new housing units in the last two years. There are 24 currently underway and 128 more units are in planning. The latest intake for the housing initiatives fund — construction of 159 new, affordable, energy-efficient homes. Yukon Housing Corporation, of course, has supported 470 new housing completions since 2020.

We will continue to invest in housing, but my question back is — we clearly have defined that the NDP does not support mining. If you do not have access to tidewater, you might as well just look at all your exploration going away. The \$185 million that has been spent in the territory that supports programs, supports volunteerism, and actually provides quality of life to people — and all the other mining projects — again, would then look to end.

I guess we have heard it very clearly today that the NDP does not support mining, they don't support exploration, and they feel it is that simplistic — that we should just not support tidewater access and that we should just close up shop. If that is their understanding of the economy — my lord.

Question re: Addictions treatment

Ms. Blake: People from rural communities and here in Whitehorse have repeatedly shared with us their struggles with consuming hand sanitizer, hairspray, and mouthwash.

These substances are just as addictive and even more harmful than regulated alcohol. However, they are often overlooked. Too often, Yukoners looking for help with these addictions are falling through the cracks. It may be that their local nursing station is closed, there are no detox beds available in Whitehorse, or there's no funding to access treatment out of the territory.

Can the minister tell Yukoners why addiction treatments are so often unavailable when people living with different types of addictions reach out for help?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think the work that's being done, pursuant to the substance use health emergency as well as through the Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services unit at the Department of Health and Social Services, is increasing the availability of services for Yukoners. It is the number one goal in the ability to respond to the substance use health emergency, which, as everyone likely still knows, was intentionally declared back in January 2022 and intentionally named the "substance use health emergency" in order to take into account the use and abuse of all substances, including alcohol — which is a serious issue here in the territory — and including suicide.

The work that is being done pursuant to that is to expand services to make sure that we have community outreach and to make sure that services are available to Yukoners here in the territory or Outside, when necessary.

Ms. Blake: Regardless of the addiction and no matter how hard staff are working to support users seeking treatment options, there are still wait-lists for detox beds, counselling, and for available treatment options.

When Yukoners who use drugs or other substances make a decision to seek help and ask for treatment, too often they are told that they will have to wait — sometimes waiting for months. It's even harder in rural communities where Yukoners continue to face health centre closures and where there is no access to medical support for addictions and mental illness. Without access to supports, users, their families, and their communities are caught in the cycle of addiction.

What immediate solutions can the minister provide to Yukoners who continue to struggle so hard with addictions?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think it's critical for Yukoners to know that services as described by the member opposite are in fact available in the territory and are available on an emergency basis.

We encourage individuals who are having difficulty to reach out to their health centre, to their primary health care provider, to the Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services unit at the Department of Health and Social Services — we have, on many occasions, intervened and worked with an individual who has contacted us to make sure that, if they are in crisis, their crisis is responded to in the most appropriate way. We appreciate that individuals in communities might need to travel farther or be in touch with individuals in Whitehorse if they are looking for emergency mental health services and others. There are services available and I am happy to speak about those, but we also encourage individuals to call the nurses line — which is 811 — or 911, if necessary, in an emergency. We look forward to working with individuals as best we can to connect them to the services that they need. That is the goal.

Ms. Blake: I think that it is important for us to remember that there are citizens across the Yukon Territory who have been struggling with the consumption of sanitizer and other forms of alcohol substances since before pandemic. Struggling Yukoners turn to this government for support and help. The confidence and supply agreement with the NDP stipulates that this government will make funding available to Yukoners to seek out-of-territory treatment when all other government agencies are at capacity. This is good news for many Yukoners, yet this funding isn't reaching everyone who needs it.

Can the minister confirm that all Yukoners seeking mental health and addictions treatment that isn't available locally will receive funding for out-of-territory treatment?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I can indicate that the reason that this was supported as a CASA commitment by our government was because it is also a goal for our government and the Department of Health and Social Services. I can also indicate that individuals who have managed to get support through any of the places that I have noted — through the 811 nurses line, through their own health centres in communities, through outreach to individuals, at the Referred Care Clinic, at the safe consumption site, at Sarah Steele services, at the Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services unit at the Department of Health and Social Services — are being provided with the care that they need.

We do have funding available. We are working on an individual, case-by-case basis to make sure that barriers are removed and that individuals who need care here in the territory or outside of the territory are being supported.

Question re: School busing

Mr. Kent: We have been hearing a number of complaints from families about school bus cancellations. In fact, there are only a few days so far this school year that haven't seen bus cancellations in the Whitehorse area. One of the problems that we have been hearing about is around

communications. Often the notices are at the last minute and students are already at the bus stop. Parents are then forced to adjust their schedules to ensure that their kids can get to school. So, what work is the minister doing with the contractor to improve communications around bus cancellations to make them more timely and more accessible?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am happy to rise today to talk about busing services. It is certainly a very important aspect of day-to-day education for our students. The Department of Education provides school busing, city transit passes, and transportation subsidies to families to support students travelling safely and effectively to and from school — certainly very live to the issues that are being raised today on the floor of the Legislature. Standard Bus is responsible for notifying schools and families when there are bus route cancellations. We are working with Standard Bus to ensure that notifications are sent out as early as possible. In some instances, routes may be cancelled for the day due to extreme weather conditions, unsafe road conditions, or driver shortages. We acknowledge the impact that cancelled bus routes can have on families and we are working with Standard Bus to find solutions wherever possible.

Like may other jurisdictions, Mr. Speaker, the Yukon is facing driver shortages and we are working with the contractor — which is, again, Standard Bus — to support them in their recruitment efforts.

Mr. Kent: As the minister mentioned, one of the factors contributing to the cancellations is the recruitment and retention of school bus drivers. The contractor has been advertising for additional drivers using social media and more traditional means of advertising. So, can the minister tell us how many school bus driver positions are currently vacant in Whitehorse and rural communities? Exactly what assistance is her department giving to the contractor to recruit new drivers?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, as I have stated already today, many jurisdictions are facing driver shortages. We are working with the contractor to support them in their recruitment efforts. All Whitehorse routes were staffed for the start of the 2023-24 school year, while the two routes in Dawson City were combined and the route in Mayo was not operational due to lack of drivers. Both Dawson and Mayo routes are now staffed and operational. The month of September saw many cancellations in Whitehorse as Standard experienced unforeseen driver shortages. Standard Bus continues to recruit and is optimistic that they will be entering a period that is more conducive to retaining and recruiting staff. Efforts will be made to limit any service disruptions in Whitehorse. We will continue to work with Standard Bus to develop contingency plans, which may include bringing in out-of-territory drivers and combining routes where possible.

In terms of how many, there are 41 active bus routes in Whitehorse and 12 in the communities, including Ross River.

Mr. Kent: When there are cancellations, some students, as the minister has mentioned, can use Whitehorse city transit. Secondary school students are provided with a city transit pass as an alternative to the school bus. However, officials from the Department of Education informed one family that students cannot have both a city transit pass and a school bus pass at the

same time. This, of course, presents challenges when school buses are cancelled with little or no warning.

Can the minister confirm that this is the case and please explain the reasoning for this policy?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I will just start by talking a little bit about the transportation subsidy. If families live more than 3.2 kilometres from the nearest school bus stop and the student goes to the catchment area school, they may apply for a transportation subsidy to offset the cost of driving. We will be reviewing the student transportation program to ensure that it supports the needs of families and those eligible for transportation allowances. We recognize that students with exceptional needs may need additional support. We make best efforts to accommodate students' transportation needs.

Safe, reliable transportation is a key aspect of any student's educational experience. Right now, in the 2023-24 school year, there are 2,102 registered riders for school buses in Whitehorse, and as I stated, there are 41 active bus routes in Whitehorse and 12 in the communities. We certainly did see a really good uptake in registrations and we will continue to work with Standard Bus and our policies to make sure that they meet Yukoners' needs.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Government House Leader's report on length of Sitting

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 75(4) to inform the House that the House Leaders have met for the purpose of achieving agreement on the maximum number of sitting days for the current Sitting. I am informing the House that the results are that there shall be a maximum of 28 sitting days, with the 28th sitting day being Thursday, November 23, 2023.

Speaker: Accordingly, I declare that the current Sitting shall be a maximum of 28 sitting days, with the 28th sitting day being Thursday, November 23, 2023.

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

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

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 29, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Pillai.

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

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

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege and honour to rise today at second reading of Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*. The amendments proposed in this bill will enable an electoral district boundaries

commission to be appointed prior to the next scheduled territorial election. In the 2023 Spring Sitting of the Assembly, this government moved that an electoral district boundaries commission be established to review and make recommendations on electoral boundaries in advance of the next territorial general election.

In reports delivered to the Speaker and tabled in the Legislative Assembly in 2019 and 2021, the Chief Electoral Officer recommended that a commission be established prior to the next election to ensure effective representation in the Legislative Assembly. The bill amends the *Elections Act* to ensure that the commission can be appointed by January 2024. This date was chosen to give each political party the allotted 60-day time frame to provide a nominee for appointment to the commission, should the proposed bill be proclaimed toward the end of this Sitting. However, if the bill is proclaimed early in this Sitting, the commission and its work could commence sooner. This ensures that amendments to electoral district boundaries could be made on or before April 2, 2025, which is the latest date under the *Elections Act* for proceeding with the November 3, 2025 election with new boundaries.

Once appointed, the commission will commence its work to review the electoral district boundaries and deliver its recommendations in time for implementation ahead of the next election. The recommendations of the commission will be put before the Legislative Assembly in the form of amendments to the *Electoral District Boundaries Act*. The *Elections Act* provides for the appointment of commissions after every second territorial election. The last commission was appointed in 2017, following the 2016 territorial election. With only one election since that time, the next commission would otherwise not be appointed until after the 2025 election.

Mr. Speaker, there has been significant growth and movement in the Yukon's population since the last adjustment to the electoral district boundaries in 2008. As the Chief Electoral Officer pointed out in his reports, a commission should be established prior to the next election to ensure that there is effective representation in the Legislative Assembly. The role of the Electoral District Boundaries Commission is to make proposals to the Legislative Assembly as to the boundaries, number, and names of electoral districts.

As the Yukon's population grows or shifts, regular electoral boundary adjustments protect the principle that voters are entitled to fair and effective representation in the Legislative Assembly. Fair and effective representation is part and parcel of the right to vote, set out in section 3 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Our government is committed to ensuring that the principle of effective representation is reflected in the context of the next election. Yukoners, whether in urban or rural settings or in new or existing neighbourhoods, need to know that their voice is being heard and their interests are being represented. Without this change, Yukoners would be going to the polls for a fourth time since 2009 under the same electoral district boundaries.

Yukon of today is quite different from the Yukon of nearly a decade and a half ago. As part of its work, the commission takes into account relevant considerations as set out in the act

— for example, the density and rate of growth of the population of any area, the boundaries of municipalities and First Nation governments, and public input obtained, to name a few.

Guided by the relevant considerations contained in the act, each commission makes its own decisions about how it wishes to receive input and submissions from the public and others.

The bill before us also corrects two technical deficiencies in the act regarding the time frames for appointing commissions and for implementing amendments to electoral district boundaries. These technical errors were identified in working with the Legal Services branch while drafting the bill. The act provides for a six-month period after the *Electoral District Boundaries Act* is amended to allow the Chief Electoral Officer to prepare for an election with new boundaries that may be established. However, the act incorrectly states that this six-month readiness period begins on the date that the election is called. Since the election period is much shorter than six months, the act renders it impossible to use any newly enacted electoral district boundaries for the upcoming election. Unless this error is corrected, any new district boundaries established by the 2024 commission would not be used in the 2025 election; they could only be used in the election following four years later.

The bill would correct the error by specifying that the six-month readiness period provided to the Chief Electoral Officer begins on the date that the amendments to the *Electoral District Boundaries Act* receive assent rather than the date the writ is dropped.

The second technical deficiency relates to the timing to establish an Electoral District Boundaries Commission when elections occur less than six years apart. The act prohibits a commission from being established less than six years after the last commission was appointed. It does not, however, specify when a commission should be appointed if two elections occur less than six years apart. The bill would clarify this in the circumstance a commission must be appointed no later than six months after the six-year period following the appointment of the last commission has elapsed.

The overarching aim of the bill is to ensure that we have the legislation in place to protect the principle that Yukon citizens have the fair and effective representation that they are entitled to as the territory grows. I thank officials from the Executive Council Office and the Department of Justice for their help in preparing this bill.

Ms. White: I thank the Premier for his opening remarks. It's really important to note that when we talk about electoral boundaries, we're really talking about the reflection of Yukoners. When we talk about the review of electoral districts, it's designed to ensure that electors have effective representation in electoral districts reflecting changes in communities across the territory and that the review is conducted independent of government. I don't think that any of us disagree on all of those factors. As a matter of fact, there have been quite a few conversations recently around the need for a boundaries commission and what that would look like.

One of the things of note — and I'm not sure how far I can or cannot go, but this has been a conversation within Members' Services Board and we have actually had conversations with the Chief Electoral Officer around the issue.

During the briefing on November 4, the question was asked: Was there consultation with the Chief Electoral Officer? One thing we were told is that there was an exchange of letters — that the Chief Electoral Officer wasn't able to see the draft ahead of it being tabled and didn't see it until the rest of us, for example, saw it once it was tabled.

In response to the tabling of the amendments to the *Elections Act*, the Chief Electoral Officer did send the Premier and the chair of the Members' Services Board a letter indicating some suggestions or thoughts on things that should change. The reason why I bring this up is that there is not an opportunity for us here in this Assembly to hear directly from the Chief Electoral Officer on the issue, and I do think that's important.

There has been another time in discussion around amendments to the *Elections Act* — that a different course has been taken or was taken.

I apologize, Mr. Speaker. After printing it out — I don't have the dates on it. I can tell you the page number, but I can't tell you what date it is from, so that's not very helpful. I can guess. It's between 2011 and 2016, based on the members that are here.

In the 33rd Legislative Assembly, my colleague Elizabeth Hanson, who was the Member for Whitehorse Centre, moved an *Act to Amend the Elections Act with Respect to Political Contributions*. There was a debate in the House; there were conversations in the House, and ultimately, it was decided by all members of the House that it should go to Members' Services Board. We know that at the time, because of the makeup of the Members' Services Board and what it was, it didn't go past there.

But there is good news. Since 2021, things have changed. We are able to have more conversations more openly in boards of this House because the makeup has changed. No one holds that balance of power anymore. There is a precedent — it has been set before — of legislation being referred to a board for further discussion. I think that is important, because, I can tell you, as an elected member who has been here for a while, I would actually like to have a conversation with the Chief Electoral Officer on the issue — and more than just in a casual way by knocking on his office door; I would like to hear more in, for example, that board setting.

With that in mind, I do actually have an amendment that I would like to move right now.

Amendment proposed

Ms. White: I move:

THAT the motion for second reading of Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, be amended by adding immediately after the phrase “be now read a second time” the phrase “and referred to the Members' Services Board; and

THAT the Members' Services Board report the bill to the Legislative Assembly no later than October 26, 2023.”

Speaker: The amendment is in order.

The Leader of the Third Party has moved:

THAT the motion for second reading of Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, be amended by adding immediately after the phrase “be now read a second time” the phrase “and referred to the Members' Services Board; and

THAT the Members' Services Board report the bill to the Legislative Assembly no later than October 26, 2023.”

The motion for second reading of Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, if amended, would read:

THAT Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, be now read a second time and referred to the Members' Services Board; and

THAT the Members' Services Board report the bill to the Legislative Assembly no later than October 26, 2023.

Is there any debate on the amendment?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: Government House Leader, on a point of order.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I am reading the annotated Standing Orders — I think it's the most recent one — of 2021, and under section 57(3), it says: “Notwithstanding Standing Order 57(1), a bill may be committed to a Select Committee after First Reading.” In the annotated section, it says: “This would be done by way of a stand-alone substantive motion. See Standing Order 27(1)(f). The motion would have to be moved after the bill has received First Reading and before it receives Second Reading.”

What I'm trying to understand is that this sounds like an amendment to second reading and that it would then come at the end of second reading, not before second reading. I am trying to understand how this is being interpreted and I'm just looking for your clarification, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: The amendment is in order.

I will be bringing clarification for tomorrow's discussion.

Ms. White: I do always appreciate my colleague from Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes in his reading of things. It is always impressive.

The reason why I am bringing this amendment forward and the reason why it has a timeline — that it would go to Members' Services Board but would have to come back next week — is that I have no interest in delaying this legislation. I have no interest in delaying the legislation, but what I do have a real interest in — and I believe that it is both reasonable and responsible — is having the representatives of the three parties — so all of us who sit on the Members' Services Board — be able to hear directly from the Chief Electoral Officer and consider the input that he put down in his letter. I very clearly understand that nothing can change this legislation that is outside the scope of what these amendments are. There are

some things in the letter that the Chief Electoral Officer sent that are outside of the scope of what could be looked at, but I do think that it would be responsible and reasonable to look at it together.

This amendment is not aimed at delaying the legislation. I, like all others, understand that the amendments to the *Elections Act* right now for this specific thing around electoral boundaries are critically important, which is why I included the timeline for when the Members' Services Board would have to get back. So, really, the reason I am bringing it forward is that I believe the three political parties in this Assembly should hear directly from the Chief Electoral Officer on the proposed amendments and that we will get back to the House next week with our thoughts on it.

Mr. Dixon: We will be agreeing with this amendment. I think that it's appropriate that we refer this bill to the Members' Services Board. I am of the view that the *Elections Act* is something that should be changed only with the support of all parties. The way that this should be done is through an all-party committee like Members' Services Board. That has previously been the approach that we have taken and that's what we want to see taken here today.

Now, with regard to the substance of the timing, I agree with the Member for Takhini-Kopper King. We've expressed an interest in seeing things expedited in a report back to the Legislature in very short order. I'm aware that we have a meeting booked on Friday for the Members' Services Board, and we'll be able to address this at that meeting.

So, we will support the amendment that was brought forward by my colleague today.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: On the amendment, I just want to put on the record that we will not be supporting the amendment because we feel that we've put together a good piece of legislation. It's quite simplistic, really. It's the nine elements that we've seen previously and really just getting the authority to do it out of the normal cycle that we would do it in. I think that all parties have had an opportunity to review the letter that was presented from the Chief Electoral Officer. There are a number of things, as stated by the Leader of the NDP, that are out of scope. We know that this won't be considered.

Taking into consideration the legislation that we have tabled, you'll see that there is ample opportunity to take good advice from the electoral officer. I believe that the electoral officer sits with the commission in a non-voting fashion. I also know that every Member of the Legislative Assembly has an opportunity to provide an intervention in the process and therefore would be able to take the letter that we have access to and to put that forward to be contemplated, which, I think, is another good reason.

When we get into committee, we'll go through a number of interactions that did occur between the Chief Electoral Officer and our folks from the Executive Council Office and Legal Services branch as we were preparing the bill.

But again, we will not be supporting the amendment because we feel that there has been good work done to put this in place, but we support the conversation that will happen.

I hope that our colleagues do have a chance to bring this back right away. I will say today — I was going to share this in Committee — that I think that, Mr. Speaker, what normally happens is that each political party identifies an individual who then has the opportunity to sit on that commission. I think that — for all of us, let's get those three individuals identified so we can move very quickly. This does stretch it out a bit — only about until the 26th, I think, is what the time period was. But again, we could be through Committee this week and we could be looking for this bill to be signed off and we could be starting this work next week. I also respect the comments that have been made today.

Hopefully, we can move quickly on it. I will say this now and I will say it within Committee: This work does not have to wait to be completed until the spring of 2025. We can have individuals chosen; we can be ready to get this work done. We have to make sure that we have the drafting capacity, but there is no reason that we can't have an interim report completed in a shorter period of time. We can potentially have this legislation coming back in the fall of 2024, which is what the Chief Electoral Officer identifies when he talks about a more efficient process.

I fully support that and my colleagues fully support that, so we just need to make sure that we get this work started and that we have an opportunity to support the work of the commission, and hopefully they can be as nimble and efficient as possible.

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: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Disagree.

Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are nine yea, seven nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it. I declare the amendment carried.

Amendment to motion for second reading of Bill No. 29 agreed to

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

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. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 16 yea, nil nay.

Speaker: I declare the motion as amended carried.

Motion for second reading of Bill No. 29, as amended, agreed to

Speaker: Bill No. 29 now stands referred to the Members' Services Board.

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 continuing general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

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

Chair: The matter now 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 — continued

Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Ms. White: Last week, on October 12, we were having a conversation and the minister said that next week — so this week — the landlord support program would be announced. Can I just get more information about what day that's expected to be released?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We are tracking for the end of this week.

I also want to just welcome our officials who are here with us today: Deputy Minister Prochazka and our director of finance, Jamie McAllister. Thank you for coming in to support me today.

Mr. Dixon: Madam Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to rise today to speak to the budget for Economic Development. I will jump right in. A number of questions that build off of things that were raised either by my colleague the Member for Porter Creek North or the Member for Takhini-Kopper King, both of whom have asked questions already.

I will start on that question of the landlord assistance program or whatever it is currently called. The Premier indicated that they are tracking for that to be complete this week. Does that mean that it will be released publicly this week or that the program has been completed already and that they will be sharing it with stakeholders for consultation later this week?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: No, that we would be sharing the public details for the program this week.

Mr. Dixon: What are the goals of the program?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The goal for the program is to provide some support to the landlords who are currently part of the rental market.

Mr. Dixon: So, it is available to all landlords who are part of the rental market — okay. And is the intent of the program to address the negative implications that have come as a result of the changes that the government has made to the regulations related to rent caps and the ban on no-cause evictions?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: No, I think that there is a misunderstanding by the member opposite when speaking to no-cause evictions. I don't think that it has anything to do with no-cause evictions. What I would state, as I did last week, is

that I think that having a rent cap in place is something that has been valuable. We are hearing, even this morning across this country, about skyrocketing rental rates. We are seeing individuals leaving provinces to find other areas where they can find rental space if they are not in a position of ownership. We are cognizant of the fact that there is a rent cap of five percent and inflation came in at 6.8 percent. We have looked at that delta between the five percent and 6.8 percent and feel that it would be appropriate to be able to provide a grant to landlords to make up some of the difference. It is, again, public policy; it won't be a perfect science, but we think it is something that can support landlords who are in our rental ecosystem.

Mr. Dixon: Normally, if a landlord were to face rising costs as a result of inflation or anything else, they could simply increase the rent, as they are required to do, but they are limited in the Yukon now by, of course, the rent cap. From what I can tell, Madam Chair, this is a case where the government is intervening from a policy perspective in the market, recognizing that the interventions to the market have been negative, and then turning around and subsidizing the negatively affected parties for their policy failures, which I think seems counterintuitive to a lot of Yukoners, but it's something that we have seen before from this government. We have seen them intervene in the firewood market and fail to provide an adequate amount of firewood, and so they respond by offering subsidies to firewood producers and consumers. In this case, they have intervened in the rental market and caused a market disruption that is, in their view, negative — so much so that they need to replace that negative impact with a subsidy to landlords.

I think that what Yukoners will be looking for when they see this program is whether or not this is simply a subsidy for landlords.

So, I'll skip ahead though, Madam Chair. Can the Premier tell us if the NDP was consulted on the creation of this program?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I'm good with giving a bit of room on some of this, but I think that was quite a soliloquy and more of a bit of pondering and thoughts by the member opposite. Sure, I think maybe — not in a position to be paying any rent — if the experience was that the member opposite was in a position to pay rent and saw the escalating cost, then he might be a bit more understanding or empathetic to the situation. At the same time, I also understand that we are looking at a rewrite of a piece of legislation that was flawed. The member opposite, I think, was at one point the Minister of Community Services overseeing that piece of legislation and didn't take an opportunity to correct it and the situation that was occurring, and now we have committed to making sure that the legislation over the next 24 months is modernized.

This is work that we have been doing. Our program has been built based on what we have heard from people in the rental market, as well as landlords and organizations that have spoken very publicly about some of the challenges they have had over the past year.

Mr. Dixon: My question was whether or not the Premier consulted the NDP on the creation of this program.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: No, we didn't consult the Yukon Party or the NDP on the creation of this program.

Mr. Dixon: I would note for the Premier that he is not in a confidence and supply agreement with the Yukon Party, so there is no obligation to consult with us; however, there is an obligation to consult with the NDP, as per section 2 of the confidence and supply agreement, which states that events and policy changes with territorial or budgetary implications would be a matter of consultation between the two parties. It would seem that, since this has a budgetary implication and the Premier has admitted that he has not consulted with the NDP, it is clearly a violation of the confidence and supply agreement.

But I will move on. Is the program intended to apply to all landlords in the residential market?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: As I stated last week, the details of the program will be coming out later this week. At that point in time, the member opposite will have an opportunity to hear those details and we will share them with the public. I am not going to be sharing any other details of the program at this particular time.

Mr. Dixon: So, the budget contains a line item for this program, but the Premier is refusing to answer questions about it — am I am understanding that correctly?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: No, there are some details that we would like to roll out later this week. I am willing to speak to any other part of the Economic Development budget that the member would like at this time. Certainly, we don't have to clear Economic Development today; we can come back and have further questions later this week.

Mr. Dixon: Then I will ask a few different questions on different policy issues and then, toward the end of this debate, move that we adjourn on this department so as not to clear it today, because we clearly do not have the information available to us today or willingness from the Premier to answer questions about this.

I will move on to another comment that the Premier made earlier in debate in this Sitting. He said that we were in the early stages of making changes or considering changes to the business incentive program. Can the Premier explain what changes he is considering to the BIP?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The business incentive program has been undersubscribed significantly for the last two fiscal years. The department has chatted with me, and the discussions in briefings have been that they would like to go back and take a look at the program to see if it could be better utilized. I think I can bring back — probably in a legislative return — the scope of the review. There have been multiple program reviews concerning the business incentive program. I am not sure how much different the scope of this review will be.

I will share a little bit of background for Yukoners. The business incentive program supports local economic activity by providing rebates to businesses working on eligible Government of Yukon contracts. Rebates are available for hiring Yukon youth, apprentices, adults, and also for Yukon-made goods and services. Since April 1, 2023, the business incentive program — “BIP”, as it is sometimes called — has processed three applications totalling \$62,776 in rebates.

Again, the business incentive program must comply with Yukon's domestic and international free-trade procedure thresholds. The department is exploring options to modernize BIP in response to changing labour market conditions and low unemployment. Any changes to BIP would have to comply with the rules and spirit of trade agreements, as the member opposite knows full well from previous work.

The department is taking a look at it. I can come back, as I stated, with a bit of scope on the work they are doing, but what we are trying to do is understand: Could it be better utilized? Is there a way that we could stay within the scope of our trade agreements but still be able to provide this incentive that was used previously over the years? It seems that there is not as much interest now — or at least over the last two fiscal years.

Mr. Dixon: I will just remind the Premier that Yukon actually sought an exemption for BIP under the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement*, so it doesn't need to follow the rules and intent of the agreement, as he said; it can operate outside of the normal rules, which it does, of course.

The proposed amendments to it would simply have to keep with the original intent of the program, and you will see that in the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement* under the footnote for that program.

I will move on because it sounds like we don't have a lot of detail around what is being contemplated at this stage for changes to the business incentive program.

I will move on to the port. The Leader of the NDP has asked this a few times. We had a few questions from the Member for Porter Creek North about it. The Premier said a few things that caught the attention of some folks.

The first is that he indicated that we had paid for the design of the MSP already, so some money has been spent on this. I would like to ask: How much we have spent on the design for the MSP so far?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am going to ask the member opposite just to repeat that question.

I do just want to make a clarification. In that quick response or advice from the member opposite and having spent time on the trade file — just missed the fact that we do have CETA, and so BIP is affected by CETA. Yes, we did have an exception. Most of the exceptions, I think, came to me, and then I signed off when we were looking for the exceptions in the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement*. But, again, with the Canada-EU comprehensive agreement, there are other thresholds that we have to watch. That's what I'm getting at. There are some other pieces — but again, if the member opposite could just stand again and share that question with me around the port.

Mr. Dixon: Earlier in this Sitting, the Premier indicated that we had paid some amount of money already for the design of the MSP. Can he tell me how much we have spent so far to date on the design for the MSP in Skagway?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Sorry to the member opposite — I didn't catch it the first time. It's \$739,266.

Mr. Dixon: So, what did we get for that \$700,000-plus? Did we get input on the design? Did we get to lead the design? Did we get to be consulted about what the design would look

like? What is the status of the design? Is it complete or is it still underway?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: So, with our funding of the \$739,000 — I'm going to do my best to talk a little bit about the scope and the work that we've had an opportunity to have undertaken. Skagway — of course, we worked with the engineering firm that was hired by the borough of Skagway to do some of the early conceptual works and drawings. We have had input through that process from our department around the design.

We do have a full package that was completed, which is the actual early work right through to the finalized drawings, with the borough of Skagway for the marine services platform. I think what I've just asked our team — one of the things that I think would be fair, based on that level of detail that is being requested, is that we would come back with a legislative return. I can give a bit of chronology on how we have provided input and then the finished product that we have had. That can be cross-referenced first — the \$739,000. I think that is what the member opposite is looking for: What value have we received for that money, what is the input, and what is the finalized piece of work that we have? So, again, we can pull that together and can provide that to the Assembly.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the offer to come back with detail. At this point, I would be satisfied even with a high-level explanation of what it is we received for the \$739,000 that we spent. Was it a completed design? If so, is that design available publicly?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, it was the completed design.

Mr. Dixon: Did the government consult the industry in any way about the design that they paid for?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I will share with the House that it's actually available on the borough of Skagway website as well.

Mr. Dixon: Indeed, it is. I have it available here to me, but my question was: Did the government consult industry about the design?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We have been in dialog with industry as we have gone through the last number of years with this work. The bigger conversation has been really about how to move ore. The marine services platform, which is the initial piece of work, gives us access through our agreement to tidewater. As stated, it is the platform where we can then add additional infrastructure that would then help us with actually moving ore. That's, again, part of the discussions. As well, we have talked to industry as of late and have committed to continue to have a constant conversation with industry.

I can tell you that in the work that we have done, there have been our chambers here but also some of the bigger organizations that are looking for significant investment in the Yukon. We have sat down and requested input and conversation with organizations such as Western Copper but, moreover, with organizations such as Rio Tinto. We have sat down with their team and their specialists. We have also had discussions with some of the other junior miners who are looking to go to production.

I would say that, out of the bigger players who are looking to build projects, it would be Rio Tinto. Then, when Minto was in operation, there was a constant dialogue happening with

Minto and, of course, we have, in our discussions with Hecla as we have gone through, talked to them. They are still using other supply chain — but at this point in time, we also would like to see potentially some congruency between what they want to see and the port of Skagway with Hecla.

Mr. Dixon: I would just like to seek some further clarity from the Premier. He said that he has consulted with Rio Tinto, Western Copper, and Minto about the design of the marine services platform; is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: What I am stating is that there has been a constant dialogue between the Department of Economic Development — primarily, the conduit that is used is the joint transportation and infrastructure committee. That is one place.

Also, as we have moved to make decisions, we have had discussions with Western Copper and we have had discussions with Rio Tinto. When Minto was in operation, we were having constant dialogue with Minto and it was about some of the work that we were doing through the department.

I will clarify. I think that the marine services platform was part of our discussions — but making sure to future-proof the infrastructure that is in place and looking at the different ways to ensure the efficient movement of their commodities.

Mr. Dixon: So, was the expenditure of \$739,000 made to the borough of Skagway?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes.

Mr. Dixon: So, we gave \$739,000 to the borough of Skagway for the design of the marine services platform, but as far as I can tell from the Premier's comments, we haven't consulted industry specifically about what that design would be. Can he clarify? Has he consulted with industry about the specific design of the MSP?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Madam Chair, I just want to clarify, as the officials are here. The officials are confirming that we have had those discussions and we have had consultation on the marine services platform. I want to say that, from the dialogue I have been part of, I know that when we have had discussions where potential investors in the Yukon, such as Rio Tinto, have sat down, we have been very open about requesting their expertise, as they are looking at investment in the Yukon. We have had discussions with Minto while in operation; we have had discussions with Western Copper around this discussion — not just the early works that we have been doing but also ensuring that we have a good sense of what infrastructure would look like into the future, depending on the magnitude of activity that's happening in the Yukon.

Mr. Dixon: So, ultimately, from what we can tell, the Yukon will be spending somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$30 million to \$44 million for a marine services platform that will come with no additional infrastructure for ore loading; is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes.

Mr. Dixon: The concern I have is that what we are paying for may not indeed ultimately be what meets the needs of industry. I guess I'm asking for the Premier to perhaps reassure me or reassure Yukoners that us spending up to \$44 million will result in a piece of infrastructure that can

actually be used by the mining industry here in Yukon to export their ore.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I guess I would want a further explanation on that particular question, because we have access to tidewater as part of our goal, Madam Chair. The second would be a platform where you would have the ability to use a number of different types of infrastructure that you would be able to use and that are available within the mining sector. I think that having access to tidewater — a 227-foot marine services platform that is adaptable to multiple infrastructure that could be used in modernized movement of ore — would be appropriate. Maybe I have missed something. I will just wait to get further clarity from the member opposite.

Mr. Dixon: For anyone who is familiar with the port, they know that currently there is an ore-loading facility on the site. There is a conveyor that transports the concentrate from the storage shed up into where it can drop into a large ship, which will then send it off to market.

That loader will be removed and Skagway will construct a new marine services platform that, as far as I can tell, is essentially a blank slate. The actual ore-loading infrastructure that will ultimately need to be built in order for a prospective client to load ore with it is not included in this platform.

That is my question: What further infrastructure would be needed on the platform in order to allow a mining company to ship out with it, and is that infrastructure going to be included in the project?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I appreciate the clarity from the member opposite. Absolutely, there is currently a conveyor system that is in place that would be removed. It would be hypothetical for me to say that I am defining or understanding exactly what an operator will want to see on that platform. It is a clean, open slate, as the member opposite said — sorry if I am paraphrasing — but what we are going to have the opportunity to see is: What is the most appropriate infrastructure that could then be placed on that 227-foot marine services platform? I think that, at this point in time, the key piece is that we need to have access to tidewater. Having an agreement in place that gives us 35 years of access to tidewater and an additional 15-year extension is a good thing.

I think that having a modern, appropriately built marine services platform — when we come back, we can provide — we have gone out to use the best in class when it comes to the organization that we've worked with to design that — an organization that builds industrial ports across the globe and has experience working in a number of different sectors. It has experience working with a number of different mining companies with different types, from my memory, of infrastructure that could be additionally added. So, we are in a position where that platform is very adaptable. Our whole goal is to ensure that we would be able to move the concentrate that is coming from a multitude of different projects and be able to future-proof it.

I have to add, though, that, depending on the magnitude of mining development in the Yukon — that will define a number of pathways. One is that we are still looking at a really

significant increase in Skagway throughout the summer when it comes to the tourism sector.

I think they are moving between 1.2 million to 1.4 million customers. Anybody who goes to Skagway in the summertime knows that there is a tremendous amount of traffic coming in and out of Skagway. That's why we feel that it is prudent to have that discussion, which we started last year, around dual-purpose rail. Inevitably, having multiple projects in the future is going to lead to potential congestion. There is already concern within the community around both industries moving at the same time. Of course, then you have the marine services platform and you will have to understand how that fits into the potential of moving concentrate, not only by truck but potentially a different way in the future.

I think a number of things have to be contemplated to ensure that Skagway and that tidewater are going to be used to the full potential. Of course, on the back end of this, it depends on what projects will be moving forward. Inevitably, there will be conversations with the individuals moving concentrate, the borough of Skagway, the mine operator — understanding how they want to move the concentrate. Right now, to be open with the House, we are in a position where we believe that we have a marine services platform that is a great foundation for us to be able to work in Skagway. With the magnitude of the dock, we think that the ability to bring in other types of other infrastructure to work off of it makes sense, and locking down that tidewater is important.

In Question Period today, there was a little back-and-forth about our decision to do that. I have to give kudos. In a break today, I had former members of the NDP reach out and say that there was a reason that the McDonald government of the day purchased land in Skagway, knowing that it was important to look into the future. Things have changed now with the NDP, but at that point in time, it was important to do that. They knew that they wouldn't be moving ore at the time, but it was important to lock that down.

I think it's important to make this commitment now. The member opposite knows — especially from his time in Economic Development — that it's important. Debate aside, it's important when you are going out and having conversations nationally and internationally that you will be able to provide clear solutions for the sector but also for investors — where they are going to be looking at policy, they are going to be looking at the port, and they are going to be looking at people. They are going to be looking at those key things. It's really important for us in the Yukon to ensure that the port piece is in place.

I will say — it may be a bit of a controversial comment, but I would like to see an approach more from a national perspective from Canada on this type of work. I think it's important for the whole country; it's not just important for the Yukon. That's why we continue to have those discussions with both the infrastructure bank and with federal officials.

Mr. Dixon: Recently, the borough of Skagway passed an ordinance at the municipal level banning the shipment of open bulk ore and instead requiring that ore be containerized in order to ship out.

This, of course, would prevent the kind of shipping that we saw with Minto over the past number of years where ore concentrate was shipped on the conveyor that I referenced earlier.

Was the Yukon government consulted on this ordinance, and did they support it?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: There have been discussions back and forth with officials from both the borough of Skagway and the Department of Economic Development.

This ordinance that's in place right now, as the member opposite has stated, does really lead to a direction of looking at a particular type of infrastructure that would be required on that dock. That's why I wanted a bit more clarity from the member opposite when the member was talking about the previous system that was in place. Basically, it was a conveyor system not unlike — for anybody who is listening, if you haven't seen it in action, it's not unlike a baler conveyor system that you would see on a farm. It is essentially something that was used for many years.

To be open, there is a tremendous amount of concern about that system in Skagway. There has been a conversation that the Yukon government has been witness to, but it has really been around the conversation — many people in Skagway feel there is a tremendous amount of contamination in their community, in their harbour. A lot of that, they feel, is directly connected to Faro mine operations. There have been overtures that there is other contamination that has occurred. So, there are many in the community of Skagway who feel that there needs to be a new type of system in place.

One of the systems that is starting to be used across the world is really — I will just speak to it as a bulk container, but it's really a container system where you would be moving concentrate in a container and then you would use a mobile system on top of a marine services platform to lift that container and pour the contents into a ship, with the same destination as a conveyor system would be used.

The ordinances in place right now — I think what we would like to do is continue to work with industry to understand if there are significant limitations to the container system. We also know that, across the world — I shouldn't say "know"; we have been made aware — and the officials have briefed me that there are more modern, environmentally safe conveyor systems that are being used. My understanding is that they are being used in both Nordic countries and in South America.

So, we want to continue to have that conversation, but the first steps right now will be — there was an election that just concluded in the borough of Skagway. A new mayor and council have been elected. I think it's prudent to be able to sit down with them and talk to them about what their vision is moving forward; we haven't had that opportunity yet. I believe that this ordinance was in place previous to the election that just occurred. I think that is probably our next step, but I want to be open to the House that we have heard mixed reviews from industry on this, with many in industry wanting to see a conveyor system, feeling that is the most appropriate, that is the most feasible, and that is what they're comfortable with. Then we've seen other industry leaders who are used to larger capital

investments and who are comfortable with the container bulkhaul. I have only seen one of them in action, in British Columbia. It is copper concentrate that is moving to a port that is run by DP World in British Columbia. The system seems to be moving well in other areas. I believe there is interest in moving to the system. This, of course, from my understanding or briefing, is that, from an environmentally responsible standpoint, this seems to be the best way to contain any spillage. Also, we have been told that many companies are looking to invest in this. We have a marine services platform that could use and be adaptable to a number of different methods for loading. Again, it is the 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, which we have talked about.

We have advocated to the Municipality of Skagway to remain open to the widest range of ore-loading technologies possible. We may have to work with industry to ensure that officials from Skagway have a chance to see a multitude of different methods that are in a modern context before any final decisions are made. Right now, it seems like there is a strong push through this ordinance, of course, toward not having a conveyor system in place. We believe, through our research, that there are some systems that are being used globally that are very safe and wouldn't have the same outcomes as the ore transfer did during the days of Faro's operation.

Mr. Dixon: Madam Chair, in a newspaper article from the KHNS Radio Station in Skagway discussing the ore-shipping ordinance, there is a quote from then-councillor Orion Hansen, who said — and I quote: “I had a phone conversation yesterday with a member of the Yukon government who said that they are in favor of this ordinance, and have reached out to the mining industry who said that they generally are in favor of it as well.”

Can the Premier confirm that Skagway consulted with the Yukon government on that bulk or containerization ordinance and that the Yukon government did indeed consult industry and that industry was supportive of it?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Madam Chair, we did have an official in that conversation and I spoke to that official shortly after that media comment. I think that there has been an ongoing dialogue, I would say, versus a consultation, and I would also state for the House that the official went back and had a detailed conversation and felt that the comments from the councillor misrepresented that conversation.

We have continued to advocate for a number of different methods. For the House, here is where we are. We can go back and forth on this one. Here is the state of play: We have a very significant tourism industry that is continuing to grow. From the start, as officials, we have walked in and sat with Skagway officials, and there is a huge interest to continue to increase the amount of cruise ships that are coming into that harbour and the amount of people coming through. There are many folks in Skagway who truly see the value of having a diverse economy. Many long-time residents of Skagway do understand the history between both the Yukon and Skagway when it comes to mining, not just tourism. There are people who live in

Skagway who love using our services and like the opportunity to come here, whether it is to go out to eat, see a dentist, or go to a store — whatever it may be — and many of those folks understand that a vibrant mining sector contributes to what we have here significantly.

We are in a position where the first thing we had to do was make sure we got access to tidewater. I think that this was really important. I am not going to shy away from the fact that this is a significant investment. This first tranche of over \$20 million is a significant investment, with more to come, as the member opposite said — I believe up to \$44 million at the high mark for this piece of infrastructure.

I would love to have a clear path in front of us when it comes to a technology that we know right now can be used on that platform. I think that, as members know, this makes for good debate, but it's a sensitive subject. We are trying to make sure that we are highly respectful of the people of Skagway and we are highly respectful of the officials who are elected there. When you go to Skagway, you can see from the conversations you have with people that there is a lot of angst around the fact that the harbour has a lot of cleanup that needs to be done. The Canadian government's responsibility that they took on in Faro has not crossed over the US border, so that's an inevitable conversation between White Pass and the borough. Again, that is another sensitive subject.

We feel that it is important and prudent to get the marine services platform designed so that it can be used for a multitude of different types of ore movement. We feel that the professionals that we have engaged to do that design and scope of work are appropriate, and we also have the opportunity to move other materials across that port.

There were some questions in the House around: Are you taking any revenue from it? We've engaged both lawyers in Canada and the US to make sure that we're doing our proper due diligence. What we've come to understand is, if we invest in this and we reduce the fees for Yukon companies that are exporting, we think that's going to be an incentive for the companies.

Before we get into a question of about what that looks like per tonne load, that's part of our cooperation agreement which is still being negotiated. When it comes to the actual work that's there or the actual the business model, the legal advice we have is that, if we're not in a position where we're drawing a revenue from it, we're also not going to be connected to that liability. We're trying to make sure that we're protecting Yukoners in that sense because, yes, we are a subnational government, but engaging in a revenue-generating activity in another country where there's an organization running that is, from our mindset, too much liability for us to take on. We think a reduced fee for Yukon or Canadian companies exporting is a good thing. Grabbing the tidewater and making sure that we have that opportunity is the next thing.

Again, I'll be open to the House: Yes, we have an ordinance in place, but we still feel that we will continue our conversations and hopefully see an openness toward different types of technology that can be used to transport ore. Hopefully, that will fit with the companies.

The companies right now — we've had a lot of companies that are junior miners that are more in advanced exploration that are looking for bigger players to either partner with them or to buy those projects. What we're seeing from the projects that are moving toward production or that are in production is an openness to work with us on the technology that would be deployed to move ore through the Skagway port.

Mr. Dixon: Madam Chair, I'll move on to the negotiations that will ultimately result in an agreement.

The Premier said that the negotiations are underway, although he did reference that something that the Yukon will be seeking would be a commitment to a reduced fee structure for Yukon companies. I would like to understand that a little bit better, because I'm not sure that I do understand it.

The fees that a mining company pays to export their ore through a facility like this are a matter of commercial negotiation. They're not drawn off of a menu. So, there's no menu price and therefore no ability for a simple 25-percent reduction to be applied. Earlier this spring, the Premier noted that he had hoped that Yukon companies would be eligible for a 25-percent reduction, and so I would like him to comment on that. Is that still the position of the Yukon government, and what is the status of the agreement?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Madam Chair, we signed a non-binding term sheet on September 7, 2023 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 in exchange for preferential access and fee discounts for Yukon mining companies using a future ore terminal.

Speaking of the last topic on the technology we used, we respect the priorities and responsibilities of the Municipality of Skagway as they plan for future off the ore peninsula post-2023, again, including the need to modernize the port for cruise ship traffic, which we talked about.

Reliable access to Skagway's port helps attract investment — which I have shared with the House over the last number of days in this discussion — supports mine development, and encourages mineral exploration in the Yukon. We believe that we are working toward a solution that will secure long-term tidewater access for Yukon's industry and work for the community of Skagway. Specifically, the agreement's negotiations toward the draft term sheet took longer than we had hoped, but, really, because of some of the work — it's definitely more detailed than initially anticipated. That's why we're still working through it. Most of the most challenging issues have resolved in developing the non-binding text, which will greatly help us work through the binding agreement that we are talking about. We are pleased that we have that opportunity to get that work done to date. Some of the work the term sheet proposes — and I will go back to the comments from last year: In exchange for the work that we are doing and contributing to, we would have preferential access to the ore facility for 35 years and an option to extend for an additional 15, including upland space for preferential use by industry.

So, there is an area where we have looked to get access to have operations in place and there are a multitude of activities that could happen on that, along with a 25-percent discount on all the fees associated with using the platform for 20 years. That is the work we are looking at.

The designation process is procedural and it would not be discriminatory. The process would confirm that the port of Skagway — that these companies are operating in Yukon. It is for Yukon companies that are working through.

We are looking at the municipality to be able to define what their operation is going to look like. They now have the responsibility to put that team — that model — together as well. We will continue to have the discussions on the cooperation agreement. That's what we are looking at. It is the same number as last year.

I want to be able to share with the House, but I also don't want to negatively impact the negotiation that's ongoing. I know that folks in the House understand that. We are trying to get to the right spot, and we are trying to make sure we have the right technology that will support —

I think that at least most of us in the House support this. From the tone of the questions, I think that the Official Opposition wants to ensure that industry have an opportunity to feed in. Of course, I feel the same way. I have talked to our officials. We continue to have conversations with operators who are going to come into the sector — but also to ensure that we are having an ongoing dialogue with industry — not just on this infrastructure but on all infrastructure. That was the commitment that I wanted our officials to make. Whether it is going to be roads or port, our grid connection — all those things are going to be important to continue to update industry on — in this particular case, if we can have a bit of time still to go out and get this cooperation agreement and the details of it finalized.

Mr. Dixon: So, what is the status of the binding contract, and what are the milestones that we should look at over the course of the next few months, weeks, or maybe years? I'm not sure as to when it could be concluded.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Just conferring with officials, I think that we should be able to come back early in the new year — even before we come back to the House — with more details on the binding agreement. Those conversations are ongoing right now. We do have a brand new assembly. I haven't had a chance to meet with any of their members. Some of them are returning as elected officials in the borough. The mayor is in a brand new position. I think that, as we go through the next number of months, I want to be realistic in that time frame and to sit down and have a discussion to make sure that we have a clear understanding of their vision and how that's going to feed into the negotiations with our officials. We are in mid-October now, so we are probably looking at the remainder of the calendar year to try to get to some finality on the binding in the new year.

I think what I can do is twofold. One is that we come back to the House through the fall, and even if there is something substantial, I can at least table a document. I believe that our discussions will be ongoing with industry as well. I think that

this will be a significant topic, based on the cycle going into Roundup in Vancouver, which tends to be a time when you are meeting with investors and operators to find out and share the biggest and newest updates.

Again, we are in a sensitive conversation on negotiation. I don't want to predetermine a timeline for an elected official who I've never met in person. I have asked my officials to reach out and set meetings up, so we are going to engage. The commitment is that I would like to bring anything back to the House before the end of the session and ensure that if there is anything that I can share into the new calendar year, I would certainly do that with officials, even if it's outside of the normal cycle of the Legislative Assembly's sessions and Sittings.

Mr. Dixon: Just so I understand the series of events here, the Yukon government won't expend any of the \$20-odd million in the supplementary budget until after the contract is assigned; is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: That is correct.

Mr. Dixon: I just have another question about the detail because the Premier has alluded to it. He has indicated that part of the negotiation would include the Yukon having preferential access to the marine services platform. I'm just looking for some clarity on that. If we own the marine services platform and it belongs to us or we pay \$44 million for it, would we not naturally get that anyway?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: For clarity, we do not own it. We do not own it. We are paying to build it; we are paying to lock down access to tidewater. We do not own it. The operations that are being undertaken are developed and overseen by the borough of Skagway and what we're looking at is preferential use. There could be other areas of Canada that would potentially use a Skagway port. What we're saying is that we have preferential use over other activities that would happen. Again, these are details that we will be finalizing within the cooperation agreement.

Mr. Dixon: The Premier said that there were other Canadian users of the port for export. Is the Premier aware of what that might look like or against whom we are getting preferential access?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I'm just trying to give a hypothetical example of what could happen. It could be activity — somebody who is undertaking activity from Skagway who would want to use the port — because you can use it for more than just ore loading. The example I was giving is that maybe you would have somebody else from northern British Columbia, as an example, who would want to transport. I don't know of anybody; nobody has come and talked to us; I'm not sure if that would ever happen. I'm just saying that this could be an example of a Yukon versus a BC operation. But again, we are saying that we would have preferential use of the marine services platform.

Mr. Dixon: Other than shipping ore, what other uses might the marine services platform have?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Because of the magnitude of it, it could be used for heavy freight; it could be used for the moving of materials. A number of different commercial uses can be used

on the marine services platform, so you could have import or potentially export through that port.

Mr. Dixon: I will move on. I think that we have exercised the Skagway port sufficiently today, but I do look forward to hearing more about the contract negotiations and what those details will look like once they are signed.

I will move on to some questions I have about the Premier's trip to India. My understanding is that this was led by Economic Development or at least portions of it were. I will start with confirmation of that. Did Economic Development lead the planning of the trip to India, or was that done through ECO IGR?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Our international trade missions play an important role in the development of Yukon's economy and its businesses. The 2023 Asia trade mission was focusing on attracting foreign direct investment, promoting economic immigration, and addressing Yukon's health and human resources challenges. The business delegation of the trade mission was looking to support Yukon's burgeoning tourism, film and media, and technology innovation sectors while also bolstering the territory's established mining sector.

The mission to Japan — the Tokyo portion — was from September 11 to 13, and the India portion from Trivandrum and Delhi, India, was from September 13 to 19. Most of the early work was led by the Executive Council Office — in particular, some of the early planning work to communicate with Global Affairs Canada in preparation for the trip.

Mr. Dixon: Who went on the advance trip to India that occurred some time before the actual main trip?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am going to ensure that I go back and check, but I think it was just one individual from our Executive Council Office team who was on the advance stint. I will add that they were visiting Japan and India but also the Philippines because we were still waiting to hear from the Philippines' federal officials about our agreement. Of course, in the interim, what happened on that trip was that the lead federal official passed on, and so I think that they were waiting to have somebody else in that place and had asked us to hold off, but those were the three destinations — three countries — that the individual from the Executive Council Office travelled to.

Mr. Dixon: So, the Premier has said that there was an individual from the Executive Council Office who travelled to those three places. When did that trip occur?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I don't have the exact dates. In a discussion around Executive Council, I can — because it was led by Executive Council. I'll give a little bit of room on this for now.

It occurred in July. Just for clarification, on the India portion, there was one other individual from the Yukon government who was helping to guide through the India portion with our official from Executive Council Office.

Mr. Dixon: Is the Premier able to tell us how many people went on the trade mission, as a whole?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I just want to clarify that the advance trip was July 30 to August 4.

The total numbers on the Yukon delegation included me and Minister Streicker. There were 11 Yukon government staff

over the total of the trip and five Yukon industry association and business delegates. Those business delegates came from the Tourism Industry Association of Yukon, TechYukon, Screen Production Yukon Association, and the Yukon First Nation Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Dixon: Just so I'm clear, there were 11 government officials, two ministers, and five representatives of the private sector; is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, they were from industry associations and business delegates.

Mr. Dixon: So, following the trip — there are a few questions I have. My understanding is that the Premier invited a delegation from India to visit the Yukon and assured the government's full cooperation for an Indian delegation to come to explore investment opportunities and the acquisition of minerals. When is that trip planned?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: It was really about scientist to scientist as a first step. It was inviting the geological survey, at the time, from India to meet with the geological survey members from the Yukon.

Of course, we have seen some real challenges in the relationship. That conversation was had on Monday. By 12:00 that night, the climate had certainly become quite different from that afternoon. It was about having geological survey staff from India.

Just for clarity, we have met with the delegation from India on a number of occasions — usually at the PDAC conference in Toronto. Of course, there are Yukon companies that have done work in India — I think through the geological survey as well. It was always good to have a Yukon company with us that was able to access business in India previously. There has been a bit of a working relationship there on the service sector side, but as soon as we sat down in that discussion that afternoon with the support of one minister and the senior public servants, the Western Copper project was brought up very quickly before we talked about any of the bigger opportunities here.

It was not unlike the meetings in Japan. There are a number of projects in the Yukon that are now starting to be looked at globally. Inevitably, it is up to Western Copper; it's up to Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation; it's up to the Selkirk First Nation and others, but we try to share some of those opportunities and ideas when we are doing investment attraction.

Mr. Dixon: Madam Chair, who picked India? Who decided that Yukon should send a delegation to India?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Well, part of what we were doing is focusing on health care attraction. What we are seeing right now is that it is a primary destination to look for health care attraction. Newfoundland was just about to send a delegation. We are seeing a lot of interest coming out of Saskatchewan. We are seeing interest from British Columbia. We are seeing interest from Ontario. We are seeing partnerships that are being built with other provinces. When you think about health care, what we are hearing right now, especially when it comes to nurses, is that it is a key destination.

We have looked at other areas, which I have touched on a little bit, such as the Philippines. We are hearing from some

Philippines officials that they are having a real challenge with the number of nurses who are leaving the Philippines while still trying to sustain their own health care system.

The meetings that we had in both southern Indian and in New Delhi were very positive meetings about being able to identify different pathways to bring nurses, even to the point where our health officials, in their discussions, had the opportunity to look at engaging with some of the best health care providers in India and actually defining exactly what types of nursing expertise they could work with those organizations to attract.

When we look at it, we have had a tremendous amount of interest from officials over the years. When we think about where we have been as government — and the member opposite could probably think back to his time in Economic Development — whether it has been officials from Japan, India, Indonesia, South Korea, or Taiwan, there has always been some interest. What we were looking for on this mission was first to look at how we could bolster tourism. We know that there are some companies right now from Japan that are doing some significant investment in the Yukon, so that would be part of it. From the health human resources side of things, it was: Where is a destination that we can find great expertise when it comes to health human resources and plus have an opportunity to look at other investment attractions, such as film? We had very good conversations and meetings with our film industry folks. Again, there is potential in geoscience as well. That's why, when you look at India, it makes sense when it comes to recruiting for health care human resources. There were discussions that my office had, because our Economic Development team gets invitations all the time, as well as our health officials through some of their work looking at what is happening across the country.

Mr. Dixon: Was it the Department of Health and Social Services that recommended targeting India for health human resources?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: No, I think that we pulled our team together, which was everything from my office to the Department of Economic Development to Health and Social Services. I know that, right now, part of what they had seen there was another partnership with the University of New Brunswick, which has also gone and built a strategic partnership in India. So, Health and Social Services was also looking at some of these affected programs. So, collectively, it seemed like a good location, which I would say we have come to understand is a great location for recruiting nurses. What we hope is that some of the geopolitical challenges that are happening right now subside. I hope that there is still an opportunity for us to be able to recruit nurses from India. I think that the current community here can support that. There are some nurses here already from India, specifically from south India. The State of Kerala has the highest literacy rate in the country of India. It has phenomenal training programs in the health fields for both nurses and doctors and there are a number of nurses who have moved from Kerala and have now lived in Yukon for a number of years. That's part of the work we are trying to focus on when it comes to bridging credentials.

Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

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

Is there any further general debate?

Mr. Dixon: Madam Chair, I move that you report progress.

Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Copperbelt North that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Committee of the Whole will recess for two minutes to bring in officials.

Recess

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

The matter now before Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Education

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to the Department of Education Supplementary No. 1 budget for 2023-24. I would like to welcome our officials from the Department of Education: our deputy minister, Mary Cameron, and our director of finance, Andrea McIntyre. Thank you very much for being here today to assist in the debate in Committee of the Whole.

The Yukon Department of Education is on a mission to reshape our education system to better serve all Yukoners. Working in collaboration with Yukon First Nations and our education partners, our primary goal is to enhance our schools, making them more inclusive, safe, and attuned to our diverse communities.

This school year, our focus is on our ongoing commitment to safer schools and our broadened vision for inclusive and special education. For us, “safety” and “inclusion” aren’t just words; they are foundational elements of the work we do every day. We believe that student and staff safety within schools is crucial and that everyone should experience an environment free from fear or abuse. Our dedication to this is evident in our actions.

The Yukon government recently implemented all 23 actions from the safer schools action plan focusing on safe

environments, transparency, and collaboration. The plan emphasizes victim-centred approaches and promotes reconciliation in schools. Though safety is an ongoing mission, the plan marks significant progress on reinforcing trust and partnership. Our goal remains to provide an education system where safety is assured and where everyone feels secure and respected.

Regarding inclusive and special education, we’re working to ensure that every student feels valued and empowered. Reimagining inclusive and special education, or RISE, is our lead initiative that encapsulates this ethos. RISE is — and you’ll hear me talk about it a lot — a collaboration with the First Nations Education Commission and the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education.

The key component of RISE is the Ready-to-Learn Schools initiative, which was formally introduced in 2022. Ready-to-Learn aims to foster an environment of safety and calm so students can absorb knowledge more effectively. We are training educators to recognize how trauma and stress can affect a student’s learning so we can meet all students where they are at.

As of this school year, 14 schools have adopted this approach, enabling teachers to better address individual student needs. We’re making tangible strides with RISE and we’ll continue to focus our resources on expanding it.

Over the next three years, 81 new full-time roles — including school wellness specialists, education assistants, and learning assistance teachers — will be introduced. The hiring schedule for these positions is: 40 positions in 2023-24; 21 positions in 2024-25; and 20 positions in 2025-26.

Note that we have added these 40 FTEs, or full-time equivalents, to the department’s FTE count, but we have not yet included this funding in our 2023-24 budget request. This will come in a later budget exercise for the related dollars as the positions are hired.

I want to highlight the addition of school wellness specialists and First Nation wellness support positions. The role of the school wellness specialist will be to provide a range of direct supports to students, families, educators, and community. These supports may include assessments, counselling, consultation, programming, case management, and education, depending on the specific needs of the individual schools and communities.

The First Nation wellness support role will be to provide culturally appropriate supports that meet the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and academic needs of students. It is essential that our fiscal planning aligns with our vision and values. This ensures the continued success and vitality of our education system.

The Department of Education’s commitment to safety, inclusivity, and progress can only be realized with appropriate and necessary funding resources. In the supplementary budget, the Department of Education is requesting a net increase of \$3.57 million. This increase will be allocated in its entirety to operation and maintenance expenditures, with no net increase to capital spending.

The most significant change in expenditures requested for 2023-24 reflects a newly ratified collective agreement, which includes a 10.5-percent wage increase to Yukon Employees' Union members over three years. This wage increase recognizes the valuable contribution that our employees make to improve outcomes for all learners in Yukon from kindergarten through to grade 12, college, university, and training programs. The collective agreement increase requests are as follows — and I will go over this in more detail. The majority of our request, which is a total of \$1,879,000, is for wage increases resulting from the collective agreement. I will break down the department divisions. This represents: \$289,000 for educational support services; \$526,000 for administration and support; \$441,000 for school authorities; \$551,000 for policy and partnership; and \$72,000 for First Nation initiatives.

While these figures shed light on the distribution of funds across our department divisions, it is crucial to understand that our staff are not just numbers on a balance sheet; they are the engine powering the whole transformative change in our education system. Their unwavering commitment and expertise are the backbone to every initiative that we embark upon. By ensuring that they are justly compensated, we are not only recognizing their invaluable contributions but also investing in the future of Yukon's education.

The remainder of the request — a total of \$1,691,000 — will go toward enhancing French language education across the territory. The Department of Education works collaboratively with the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon to support the learning needs of French first language students and the path for the administration of French first language education in the territory. I am happy to report that in this school year, French first language students enrolled in elementary grade levels have access to in-person French language program instruction in Dawson City. With approval of the supplementary budget, we will be providing CSFY with \$764,000 to support the programming. We are also requesting \$927,000 to enhance French second language immersion programs and to further support the Explore program. The Department of Education offers excellent French second language programs to students and we continue to work with our partners and the school communities to address the long-term needs of these programs. We have committed long-term planning for French second language programs. In the spring of this year, I approved a vision statement created in collaboration with the French second language advisory committee that will enable graduates to be inspired, proud, and confident to live, learn, and work in French. The French second language advisory committee includes representatives from the Department of Education, school councils, Canadian Parents for French, school administrators, and teachers. French immersion is a popular program in Whitehorse and is offered in Whitehorse Elementary School, Selkirk Elementary School, and F.H. Collins Secondary School. The Explore program is for students aged 13-15. This three-week French immersion program takes place in different locations during the summer.

The Supplementary No. 1 budget for 2023-24 demonstrates our unwavering dedication to cultivating an education environment that values safety, inclusion, and growth. With this supplementary budget, we are reinforcing our commitment to our students, educators, and partners by investing in the people who drive change and in the programs that support our shared vision for the future of Yukon education.

From the wage increase for our invaluable employees to the bolstering of our French programming and the continuous expansion of the RISE initiative, each dollar requested represents a step toward a stronger, more inclusive education future. Together in collaboration with Yukon First Nations, our education partners, and our school communities, we are shaping an education system that is responsive to the needs of every learner and that prepares them for a world that values diversity, empathy, and understanding.

Thank you for your support and for joining us on this journey to evaluate Yukon's education experience for all. I will end there and am happy to take questions from members opposite.

Mr. Kent: I thank the officials for coming here today to provide support to the minister. I also wanted to thank them for the briefing that they provided the week before last. As I mentioned during the Energy, Mines and Resources debate, I was out of the territory for personal reasons and was unable to attend, but my colleague the Member for Lake Laberge and staff from our office attended, so we appreciate the information as well as the documents provided by the department. It was very helpful for us.

I do want to ask a couple of questions with respect to the supplementary budget. The minister mentioned, under the school authorities, a total increase of \$1.548 million — that there is an increase of \$764,000 for CSFY programming in Dawson City. I'm wondering if the minister can tell us if that programming is being offered within Robert Service School or if it's stand-alone, and how many French first language students are in Dawson City?

Hon. Ms. McLean: This is an important initiative that we are undertaking within the Department of Justice and working with the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon to support the learning needs of French first language students in the path for the administration of French first language education in the territory.

As I stated in my opening remarks, we were very happy to report that, this year, French first language students have access to in-person French language programs of instruction in Dawson. This is a priority for the CSFY school board. We are continuing, always, to work with CSFY and the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in as they move toward this programming.

I think that the specific question was about where the location is for the CSFY French first language, and it is at 486 King Street in Dawson City. There were seven students enrolled back in August. There was an indication that there would be 12 students, but as of October 11, we have seven students enrolled now. I believe that those were the questions that were asked.

Mr. Kent: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the minister. Yes, that addressed the questions that I had with respect to how many students. So, seven students as of October 11 — and it is not within the existing envelope at Robert Service School. It sounds like it is on King Street and so it is a stand-alone school.

I have just a couple of questions, then. Is any of the \$764,000 increase recoverable from Canada? Perhaps the minister could just give us a breakdown of that specific line item — the \$764,000 — and how much is for personnel and how much is for space — that type of a breakdown, if she has that with her.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, this is a very important initiative for the Department of Education. We are still working out some of the details and we will return to the House with those details through a legislative return.

Mr. Kent: Just jumping down — I know the minister referenced it under policy and partnerships — there is the total increase of just over \$1.3 million. Included in that is an increase of \$927,000 for additional French language programs.

The briefing material that we received from the department said that there was an increase in bilateral agreements of \$899,000 and an increase from the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada — \$28,000 for the Explore program. It says it is 100-percent recoverable — so a net-zero impact on the government. I just wanted to clarify that, first of all, this is French immersion we are talking about with respect to this funding and that the 100-percent recoverable amount is for the entire amount of \$927,000.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, this is an enhancement to our Yukon schools. As members of the House will know, we follow the BC curriculum with adaptations to include Yukon content and Yukon First Nation ways of knowing, doing, and being in the curriculum. Schools administrated under the Department of Education offer three different types of French second language programming: French immersion for K to 12; intensive French, grades 5 and 6 to 12; and core French. I believe that the question was whether these dollars are fully recoverable, and they are. This is a net zero for Government of Yukon.

In addition to the classroom teachers, other French qualified education staff support French second language programs in schools. The question is always: How many there are? We have a variety of educational staff that support students in French second language programming at 15 schools administered by the Department of Education.

As I already stated in part of my answers today, there is French immersion at École Whitehorse Elementary, F.H. Collins Secondary School, Selkirk school, and Wood Street.

Then, we have intensive French at Christ the King Elementary School, Holy Family Elementary School, Selkirk Elementary School, St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Secondary School, and Robert Service School in Dawson.

We have core French at Elijah Smith Elementary School, Golden Horn Elementary School, Hidden Valley Elementary School, Jack Hulland Elementary School, Porter Creek Secondary School, Del Van Gorder School in Faro, and J. V. Clark School in Mayo.

As I've stated, these dollars are fully recoverable from Canada. I'm excited about the enhancements.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate that update from the minister with respect to that spending line.

Just a question about French immersion in general — École Whitehorse Elementary and Selkirk are the two elementary schools that offer that programming and then, from there, the students will go into F.H. Collins Secondary School to continue their French immersion through to grade 12.

I'm just wondering if there are any plans at this point to expand that program beyond those three schools in Whitehorse and if there are any expansion plans for community or rural schools with respect to French immersion.

Hon. Ms. McLean: The Department of Education offers excellent French second language programs to students, and we're working with our partners and school communities to address the long-term needs of these programs.

Currently, the overall student demand for French immersion programming is being met. The Government of Yukon plans to continue with École Selkirk Elementary School as a dual-track English program/French immersion program. We have committed to long-term planning for French as a second language programs.

In spring 2023, I approved a vision statement — as I've already spoken to today, but I'll repeat that — in collaboration with the French second language advisory committee that will enable graduates to be inspired, proud, and confident to live, learn, and work in French. The French second language advisory committee includes representatives from the Department of Education, school councils, Canadian Parents for French, school administrators, and teachers. I think that was the gist of the question today. If I have missed anything, please let me know and I will address that.

Mr. Kent: Before I come back to the 40 additional FTEs as part of RISE and CASA, I do just have a couple of quick questions with respect to capital. I know that an older play structure was removed from Hidden Valley Elementary School and then there was some back-and-forth on a replacement. I'm just curious if the minister can give us an update on where we're at with respect to the play structures at Hidden Valley Elementary School since the older wooden ones were removed, I believe, toward the end of last school year.

Hon. Ms. McLean: We certainly continue to work with school communities on planning for their short-, medium-, and long-term facility needs. Of significant importance to me is ensuring that all of those who support the school community are working well together and that there are great learning environments for students and staff and that facility and outdoor needs are addressed. It is a priority of Yukon government to continue to invest in school infrastructure and ensure that our schools meet the demands of the unique school communities they serve.

The Department of Education is committed to installing new playground equipment, and the new structures were installed at the Hidden Valley Elementary School over the Thanksgiving long weekend. Planning is underway for purchase and installation of a larger playground structure at

Hidden Valley for the 2024-25 school year. Safe outdoor learning and play is an integral component of a child's education, and we are certainly committed to ensuring that these opportunities are available for students. I am happy to share photos — we do have those on file — of the newly installed equipment. I would be happy to share that with the members opposite if they wish to see that.

Mr. Kent: Madam Chair, yes, that would be great, and then we can perhaps follow up with the minister, if necessary, on that play structure.

In the documents shared by the department at the budget briefing, when it comes to capital, there is a decrease in the school van replacement of \$500,000 and then that amount was reallocated to \$200,000 for experiential learning spaces and \$300,000 to the Selkirk parking lot. It says that the reallocation of the school van replacement related to supply chain issues for electric vehicles and anticipated increased costs related to experiential learning spaces and the Selkirk parking lot.

I just have a couple of questions here. The experiential learning spaces — can the minister tell us which schools those spaces are being built or adjusted at? That \$200,000 increase — what does that bring that total budget to for the experiential learning spaces?

Then, with respect to the additional \$300,000 for the Selkirk parking lot, can the minister give us an update on that project, where we are at, when it is expected to be completed, and what the total cost will be upon completion?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Madam Chair, there is a huge focus within the Department of Education to be responsive to the needs of inclusive and special education. Again, our initiative is changing a whole culture within the education system. The acronym we use — and you will hear it often — is “RISE”.

We continue to work closely with our partners and stakeholders to reimagine and create schools that are safe and inclusive and that build on student strengths to ensure that every child feels connected and supported to thrive. This includes developing — and I have had some chance to talk about this — the comprehensive mental health and well-being approach that aligns with the Yukon mental health strategy.

The specific question, I believe, is just about the actual dollars that are being allocated. The experiential learning spaces will see an additional \$200,000, which will bring it up to \$1 million. The current schools that we are working with are Jack Hulland, J.V. Clark, St. Elias, and Tantalus schools. I can bring back further details on exactly those projects through a legislative return.

Mr. Kent: Just the second part of that question — sorry if the minister responded to it — I am looking for timelines around the Selkirk school parking lot, the total budget, and when that work is expected to be completed.

I am going to jump back to the increase of 40 FTEs. This was part of the confidence and supply agreement, or the CASA, that the Liberals signed with the New Democrats. On August 4, a news release went out talking about 81 new full-time student support positions over the next three years and a \$1-million investment in student support initiatives. The minister

mentioned — and her budget documents mention as well — that 40 of those 81 positions will be added for this school year.

Can the minister give us a breakdown of those 40 new positions? How many will be educational assistants? How many will be learning assistance teachers, and how many will be the wellness counsellors who were promised?

Could I just get a breakdown of what those 40 new positions will look like? Does the minister have information as to what schools they will be deployed to and when the recruiting will be completed? I know that, last week during Question Period, the minister mentioned that the recruiting would start this week — the week of October 16. I am just looking to get a sense for when those 40 new positions will be in place.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I'll just go back to the Selkirk parking lot. Again, the Government of Yukon is committed to providing safe learning environments for all students during the 2023-24 school year. Construction of a new staff parking lot area located behind Selkirk Elementary School will be underway and is expected to be completed in the summer of 2024, for the start of the 2024-25 school year. This project is part of the overall plan for the Riverdale education campus that will help improve traffic flow, reduce traffic congestion during peak times, and make school drop-off safer for students and families. To help ensure student safety, the alternative drop-off zone established for parents last year will again be used this year. Additionally, drivers will be redirected to Nisutlin Drive after using the drop-off zone. During construction, the existing front parking lot will also remain open with limited traffic disruptions. Hopefully, that will be the result of that. We have worked collaboratively with the school council throughout the design process of this project to reflect the needs of the Selkirk community. I believe that covers the last part of that other question.

In terms of the new positions that we are introducing, these are important additions to our staffing for schools to again support our educators and our school communities and to meet our commitments in the new confidence and supply agreement that we entered into, which is known as the “2023 confidence and supply agreement”, that really sets out the relationship between the Yukon Liberal caucus and the NDP caucus. The opposition NDP shares the Yukon government's desire to improve the Yukon's education system. To this end, the 2023 confidence and supply agreement contains many areas of focus in education. We are working very hard to meet those.

I have spoken a few times this Sitting about the work that we have done on reimagining inclusive and special education and the reshaping of our education system. When we were entering into this confidence and supply agreement, we shared a lot of the desire to improve the Yukon education system. We were on track with our communities of inquiry to really dig into each area in inclusive and special education and this was certainly one of them. We were definitely on track to work toward additional positions to meet school needs.

Of the 40 additional positions, 15 FTEs in the learning assistance teacher roles have been hired and six educational assistants have been hired. We have seven more that we're

continuing to recruit. As I stated late last week, we are starting the recruitment on the school wellness specialists, so those positions are now being recruited for and we will continue to seek the best educational professionals that we can to meet our needs in our schools.

Mr. Kent: I caught a little bit of what the minister said there with respect to the numbers. It sounded like there were six EAs already recruited and that there are seven more to go, and I think the minister mentioned 15 learning assistance teachers, but she can correct me and let me know if there are any additional ones who still need to be hired of the 40. The minister did then mention the wellness counsellors — that the recruiting is starting this week. I think it was early August, around August 4, when the deputy minister sent a letter to the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education mentioning that the job description for those wellness counsellors had not been completed yet.

I will just ask the minister if the job description is complete and if it's available publicly anywhere or if it has been shared with the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education or some of the other partners in education.

Hon. Ms. McLean: These are brand new positions. The wellness specialist — as I stated last week, the recruitment and all of the requirements that are required through the Public Service Commission are now met, which is why we are able to now begin the recruitment for these brand new positions. That includes everything from job descriptions to classification, and we have multiple postings out now. These positions will work closely with executive directors of the school boards; they will work closely with the superintendents, the administration of schools, and the community at large to ensure that they are meeting the specific needs of that education community but also of the community that they live in.

Mr. Kent: Just to clarify then, the postings are out for some of the wellness counsellor positions. Are the job descriptions available publicly with the postings? Is that how it works with Education?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, they are publicly available through the postings.

Mr. Kent: We will take a look at those and reach out to some of the organizations that we have been talking to about what input they had to the job descriptions prior to them being finalized. Perhaps we can have an opportunity to come back and ask the minister follow-up questions on that.

I know that the minister, others, and I were sent a letter from the Holy Family Elementary School Council with a request to attend a meeting to talk about the situation that they have with teachers on call or substitute teachers. You know, they are having some significant challenges with getting their TOCs to answer the calls in the morning. They are juggling staff around like many of the other schools, particularly like the smaller schools have to do — moving EAs and LATs into substitute roles for the day or having them teach classes where the teacher is not there. They mentioned, I think, that 15 percent to 20 percent was the staffing absentee rate that some were facing on a daily basis — as high as 20 percent. They have asked a number of stakeholders, including the minister and me,

to attend a meeting on October 23 to talk about the situation that they are facing, so I am just curious if the minister is planning to attend that meeting or not.

Hon. Ms. McLean: We've already had some debate about this during this session — certainly something in terms of our teachers on call. I'm very aware of the challenges that school councils are expressing to us, particularly Holy Family.

I've had some chance to talk about the numbers of teachers on call whom we currently have registered. The majority of them are in Whitehorse, with that being 129. I'm not sure if we have updated numbers because this was as of September 26. Then we have 30 in rural communities.

We continue always to recruit teachers on call and recognize that demand for coverage continues to be a challenge. I'm very alive to that issue. We continue to evolve our recruitment efforts to attract candidates for teachers-on-call roles and to support staff in accepting assignments as they are available.

We definitely know that there are some things that we can do differently, and we're going to continue working with our education partners to look toward some solutions in this regard. Some of this, I think, flows over from during the pandemic. We are certainly hearing from other jurisdictions about similar issues around recruitment, retention, and also the acceptance of assignments within schools.

So, certainly, I'm aware of the request from Holy Family for my attendance at their upcoming council meeting. I'm still considering my availability, but we will absolutely have senior folks available at that meeting to work directly with them, including our deputy minister.

Mr. Kent: So, hopefully, the minister will be available to attend as well, because I know that this specific request was for a number of individuals to attend to try to assist the school community in the challenges they're facing with respect to substitute teachers.

I do want to jump into the CASA, section 2, which is on education. It is: "to allocate an additional \$1 million in each of the next three budgets to enhance recruitment and retention of new rural education professionals across the Yukon. This may include a program aimed at supporting Yukon students pursuing studies in educational fields who commit to working in the Yukon after graduation."

So, just from a budgetary standpoint, I'm curious about: Of the \$1 million that has been allocated in this current budget, how much of it has been spent so far, and what are the results for recruitment and retention of new rural education professionals?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Part of our confidence and supply agreement does include additional resources for recruitment and retention. I have had some chance to speak about some of the various actions that we have taken to date through enhanced marketing and recruitment, posting jobs earlier, participating more widely in job fairs, providing supplementary funds for rural teachers where housing is not available, enhanced onboarding and training for staff, and examining the potential, right now, for bursary incentives for Yukon students to attend educational professional post-secondary programs.

From the 2023 CASA to improve the Yukon's educational system, the Government of Yukon has committed to allocating an additional \$1 million in each of the next three budgets to enhance recruitment and retention of new rural education professionals across the Yukon. This may include a program aimed at supporting Yukon students pursuing studies in educational fields who will commit to working in the Yukon after graduation.

We are currently working through some of the details around that commitment. I will be happy to bring forward more information as I am able to. These are commitments that we made in the new 2023 CASA, with a large focus on education. They were commitments through the work that we were already doing to reshape education within the Yukon. These commitments all very much align with the path that we were on and that we will continue to work toward in reshaping our education system.

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

Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Mountainview that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

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

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 Chair of Committee of the Whole?

Chair's report

Ms. Blake: 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 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. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 5:26 p.m.