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Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall Sitting

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

CABINET MINISTERS

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

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
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Speaker: I will now call the House to order.
 We will proceed at this time with prayers.

Prayers

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Yesterday, under the rubric “Tabling Returns and Documents”, the Minister of Tourism and Culture and the Minister of Community Services each tabled documents related to their portfolios. As far as this goes, this is an appropriate use for that rubric and is a common occurrence.

However, while the documents were each described by each minister as “a statement in my capacity as Minister of Tourism and Culture” and “a statement in my capacity as Minister of Community Services” respectively, the document titles were not as described. For the Minister of Tourism and Culture, the title of the document begins with the minister’s name and then says “Ministerial Statement”. The body of the statement began with the bullet point: “Thank you, Honourable Speaker.”

As for the document tabled by the Minister of Community Services, it is entitled “Ministerial Statement”, followed by the minister’s name. The body of the statement began with the bullet point: “Thank you, Honourable Speaker...”.

These are clearly ministerial statements that the two ministers did not receive the agreement of at least one other House Leader to deliver during the rubric “Ministerial Statement”. I would also note that the rubric “Ministerial Statement” is, in any case, limited to a maximum of one ministerial statement per day.

The Chair does not want to prohibit ministers from sharing information with the House. The Chair is also very aware that members cannot do indirectly that which they are prohibited from doing directly. Members have chosen to change the Standing Orders in this regard and I am going to enforce the rules.

I would ask that, if ministers wish to table information that they think is important to this House, it not be in the format of a ministerial statement speech that they would deliver during the rubric “Ministerial Statement”. It should be in another format so that the two are distinguishable, such as a report from a minister.

Any documents tabled in the form of a ministerial statement will not be held in the working records of the Assembly but will be considered to be for information only. Documents which are distinguishable will be held as working papers and assigned a filed document number. The two documents discussed here today will be considered “for information only” and will not be retained after the 2023 Fall Sitting.

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of a change made to the Order Paper. Motion No. 812, notice of which was provided yesterday by the Member for Lake Laberge, was not placed on today’s Notice Paper as the motion is outdated.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, today we are going to be tributing the Canucks and they are here with us. I would like to ask all of us, please, to welcome Ray Park, Red Lewis, and Ed Isaak. We also have, from the Isaak family, Donna, Chris, and Tara. We have, from the Lewis family, Danny, Sunniva, Shaun, and Kaysa. We also have friends of the Canucks: Dave Brekke, Dodie Lewis, Judy Douglas, and Missy Folwell. From the MacBride Museum, which recently released *The Canucks — Over the Years* book, which we are going to table later today, we have the chair, Andy Williams, and we have Rika Matsunami Ferbey, Ali Nordahl, Abby Kohut, and Laker Cunning.

Could we welcome them all, please?

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of the Canucks

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the Yukon’s beloved musical institution, the Canucks. Made up of Ray Park on piano, Red Lewis on drums, and Ed Isaak on bass, for over six decades the Canucks have been a bedrock of the Yukon’s music scene — a longevity that puts them in the same league as the Rolling Stones.

Like the Yukon itself, their repertoire is a mix of everything. Folk, blues, country, rock, jazz — you name it — they put a classic Canucks spin on it. Over the years, they have been the soundtrack for many raucous Yukon nights. I was at their recent book launch at MacBride and it was packed with folks dancing and smiling — a lot of women, too, I will just note.

I wonder if part of the reason they have been playing this long is to pay off their debts for all the wear and tear they have caused to the territory’s dance floors. Touring throughout Canada and the US and playing with musical luminaries like Waylon Jennings and Loretta Lynn, the Canucks have also been Yukon ambassadors, giving the outside world a little glimpse of the magic of the north.

Beyond the stage, they influenced countless aspiring musicians to tell their own stories and share the spirit of the Yukon through music. With their memorable collaborations alongside other Yukon recording artists, the Canucks are an

indelible through-line in Yukon musical output dating back to the 1960s.

A Canucks show has also come to represent the sense of community for which the Yukon is known. They have played countless special performances, often for charitable causes or to celebrate milestones in our history, bringing together fans of all generations.

With their performing days mostly behind them, their incredible career is immortalized through their numerous albums and the launch of their new book last month. I encourage Yukoners to seek out a copy of this wonderful collection of stories, memories, and photographs chronicling the captivating history of a band that carved its name into the rugged terrain of the territory and a few bar stools in between.

To Ed, Ray, and Red, on behalf of Yukoners, congratulations and sincere thanks for so very many good times and the melodies that you have woven into the fabric of our lives. From the Rainbow Room to Music@MacBride, the Canucks leave behind a legacy and a lot of happy feet.

I ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating the Canucks for their incredible contribution to the Yukon over the six-plus decades or, as I noted at their book launch, half of the time that the Yukon has existed as a territory. We will forever remember how the north danced to their beat.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the Canucks — Ed Isaak, Red Lewis, and Ray Park — Yukon treasures. Many of us grew up listening and dancing to this awesome group.

But to the start of their story — Vancouver, 1955 — Red Lewis, drummer, met Ray Park, accordion/keyboard player, both 17 and on top of the world, and decided to form a band. The Rocketoons was born and became well known around the Lower Mainland.

One evening, playing at the premier Vancouver Cave Supper Club, they were noticed and signed by an agent. A whirlwind tour began through the US. It was suggested that a Canadian name was needed, and what better than “the Canucks”?

One of their songs, with Red Lewis on vocals, *Never Before*, was the top song on *Your Hit Parade* in 1958, so check it out; it is so good. On their return to Canada, Ray met Ed Isaak and encouraged him to form a new band, and they kept the name “Canucks”. Red was still in Vegas, but his story was quickly going to change.

In 1963, they were invited up to a northern town called Whitehorse for a several-month gig. Red said: Sure, I will come and join you for one more.

Well, minus 42 and a true Yukon adventure hooked them all. Ed met Donna, Red met Dodie, and the families grew.

They played at the Whitehorse Inn Rainbow Room — matching suits, dance steps, and entertainment such as Yukoners had never seen before. They had found a home.

Through the years, the Canucks played and managed several drinking establishments in town and I know there is a

whole set of stories there. They continued to tour. At Yukon communities, bonspiels, and local dances, they were there. No rural community was too far or too cold to visit — Clinton Creek, Mayo, Elsa, Watson Lake. Weddings and social functions kept them very busy, let alone their charity work. They shared their stage with many musicians, especially their younger friend, Hank Karr. The jokes never stopped. Hank said he was the one who brought the age factor down when he was on the stage. They tease and they care for each other, and I think that’s the reason for their longevity. Learning latest tunes — and they all did vocals — performing, and juggling life. I would also like to thank the wives and families who shared them.

On October 12, at the McBride Museum, a book release — *The Canucks — Over the Years* — with special guest Hank Karr and Ed’s son Brandon Isaak — a talented blues artist in his own right — played and guests danced and sang along.

Thank you, Canucks, for all the joy you have given us through the years.

Applause

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for their tributes. I knew they were going to be fantastic. I have the great pleasure to rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP caucus to tribute the legends themselves: the Canucks.

This is truly a Yukon band that all Yukoners love. I’ll note that our Canucks, founded in the 1950s, predate the other Canucks — a minor hockey team franchise — by at least 15 years.

So, they came into their own in a time of big flashy cars and matching suits and, like wine, they have only gotten better with age. Playing music, travelling, growing, and raising families together means that this trio shares a lifetime of stories. What I wouldn’t do to be a fly on the wall at their get-togethers and story-sharing.

For anyone wanting more colour, look up the article entitled “Rock ’N’ Roll, Caesar Salads, and a Missed Date with Royalty.” It is truly an excellent read.

There aren’t enough minutes in the day to tell this trio and their families about all the influence and memories that they have helped make for music lovers here and across the land. Instead, I’ll just say thank you for being Yukon’s soundtrack.

Applause

In recognition of Lung Cancer Awareness Month and Radon Action Month

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, that’s a tough act to follow, but I will try, as I rise today on behalf of the Liberal government to pay tribute to Lung Cancer Awareness Month and Radon Action Month.

November is Lung Cancer Awareness Month. According to Canadian cancer statistics, lung cancer is among the top four most commonly diagnosed cancers in Canada and is the leading cause of death from cancer for both men and women in Canada. This year, the Yukon government has partnered with the Yukon Lung Association to raise awareness on social media urging the public to take action on radon. Again, each November, governments and organizations across Canada urge citizens to

test their homes for radon gas and to take action to protect themselves if their home test results are high.

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that can collect in houses. It is colourless, odourless and can only be detected through testing. Long exposure to radon may cause lung cancer, and non-smokers exposed to high levels of radon over a lifetime have a one in 20 chance of developing lung cancer. This risk increases to one in three for people who smoke. Radon can be present anywhere and the Yukon has some of the highest naturally occurring levels of radon in Canada.

Testing for radon in your home is quite simple. Radon kits are easily available for a minimal cost at your local hardware store or can also be ordered online at takeactiononradon.ca. Kits purchased at the Whitehorse Home Hardware location are subsidized by the Yukon Lung Association. The Yukon Housing Corporation's home repair program offers funding for eligible homeowners to reduce radon levels. Information on that program can be found on yukon.ca by searching "home repair program".

Remember, the only way to know that there is radon or what the levels are in your home is to test for it. Radon levels can vary widely from one home to another and even in the same neighbourhood or area. All Yukon schools, childcare centres, and Yukon Housing Corporation housing units have been tested for radon, and if required, remediation was done. Being exposed to high levels of radon can have serious health impacts and an increased risk of developing lung cancer, which is even worse if you smoke.

We encourage any Yukoners who smoke and who want to quit to reach out to the Yukon government's QuitPath smoking cessation program. This program includes counselling and free nicotine replacement therapy. QuitPath is easily reached online or by phone.

Thank you to all Yukoners who work to help promote lung cancer awareness and radon action.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize November as Lung Cancer Awareness Month.

According to Lung Cancer Canada, this type of cancer is one of the most commonly diagnosed in Canada, accounting for approximately 13 percent of all new cancer cases.

In our country, the net five-year survival rate is only 19 percent, due in part to inadequate screening options leading to later diagnosis. With most cases being diagnosed at stage 3 or 4, the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care currently recommends screening in high-risk individuals with a CT scan to attempt to catch the disease more often at an earlier, more treatable stage.

Radon Action Month is also observed in November. Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer in non-smokers. This month is observed as an awareness campaign to help engage people on the importance of testing radon levels in their homes.

There is radon in every community of the Yukon. In Whitehorse, data from testing during the last 15 years or so has

shown a number of subdivisions have higher levels of radon, due in part to the geology of the area and local environmental conditions. Subdivisions around the Whitehorse Copper area have reported higher levels than other areas of Whitehorse on average.

The best time to test your home is over the three coldest months of winter when you are not opening windows. Buy a kit and follow the instructions carefully. If necessary, contact a certified professional to help reduce radon levels in your home.

Salamat po.

Applause

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to acknowledge Lung Cancer Awareness Month and Radon Action Month.

I will start by thanking the many people working to support those with lung cancer. From medical professionals to family to friends, we thank everyone who provides care and help and kindness to people at a very difficult time in their lives. Thank you also for those doing the preventive work, such as helping people avoid, manage, or treat nicotine addictions.

It's also Radon Action Month, and radon is a leading cause of lung cancer. Because it is colourless and odourless, we rely on testing kits to detect it in places like our basements. It's fairly easy to remediate the presence of radon but only if you know it's there. We join our colleagues in urging everyone to test their homes for radon. The kits are subsidized by the Yukon Lung Association and we thank the association for working to make them more accessible. Two years ago, I tabled a motion asking this government to make testing kits free for Yukoners and I repeat that request today. The personal, social, and financial costs of even one person developing lung cancer are far greater than the cost of prevention.

I will finish by offering our sympathy to all those who have been affected by lung cancer, whether directly or indirectly. I would like to take a moment to remember those we have lost to lung cancer. They are missed, they are mourned, and they are celebrated.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to table a copy of the book *The Canucks — Over the Years*, which is signed by the members of the Canucks. It will be available for members of this House to take a look.

Speaker: Are there any further 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?

Is there a statement by a minister?

This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Diesel energy generation costs

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, as we enter November and the coldest and darkest months of the year, Yukoners will recall the power outages that swept across the territory last winter. For the past several years, we have been critical of the Yukon Liberals' decision to rely heavily on rented diesel generators to address our peak demand for electricity.

According to the minister earlier this year, the Yukon will need up to 22 rented diesel generators this winter to keep the lights on. One of the many challenges with renting diesel generators is reliability. We have heard that all 22 rentals are not yet in place in either Whitehorse or Faro, and in the case of Mayo, the decision document for the YESAA process for the new units was only issued last week.

So, can the minister commit that the full fleet of rented diesels will be in place in those three communities this winter, and if so, when will they be in place?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I note that the member opposite started talking about outages. Of course, we had proposed to do a ministerial statement about Operation Nanook, which did a review and a test of that for this Assembly, but the opposition members declined to have that ministerial statement.

I will look into the question about timing of the diesel generators. I will remind Yukoners that — at the last look that I had — 92 percent of our electricity is from our hydroelectric facilities. I know that we have been increasing the output over the years — in recent years — so making them more efficient and getting more hydroelectric power so that we rely as little as possible on diesels, but we need to make sure that we have diesels and the LNG in place to ensure that we have a reliable system for Yukoners when it is cold outside.

I will endeavour to get the information about the timing of the diesels.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, last year, the Yukon Utilities Board was extremely critical of the Liberals' decision to rely on rented diesel generators. Here is what they said in October last year — and I quote: “YEC has not shown the rentals to be a least-cost solution on a short-term or long-term basis. Although these costs were accepted in the 2021 GRA, YEC will need to show the least cost thermal alternative of rentals versus permanent thermal at the time of its next GRA or risk finding that those diesel rental costs were imprudently incurred.”

So far, the Liberals have relied on year-by-year rentals. However, we have heard that the Liberal government is considering a long-term, multi-year rental of diesel generators to meet the gap in dependable capacity that has been created by the Liberals' failed energy strategy.

So, can the minister confirm if they are planning to rent diesels long term and, if so, for how long?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, that sounds like diligence. That sounds like the work that the utility will do to ensure whether it is better to do short-term rentals or long-term rentals. We will always, as an islanded grid, require thermal backup, which includes diesel and LNG, so that is important.

Our plan has always been to move off of fossil fuels. I know that the opposition party has stood in this Assembly and said that they support a dependence on fossil fuels. That is where costs are going up for Yukoners. That is why it is better for us to move off of fossil fuels, and we will continue to do that work.

In this House, the Yukon Energy Corporation and the Yukon Development Corporation have stood and stated that the levelized cost of energy has been cheaper for rental diesels than permanent diesels, but I have asked them at all times to go back and review those numbers. I have said that in this House and I will continue to say it. We will do what is best for Yukoners to make sure that our system is clean, reliable, and affordable.

Mr. Kent: For the past several years, the Liberals have been telling Yukoners that we will need to rent diesel generators but only on a short-term basis. That was even what they told the YUB in 2021, but here is what the YUB said about that argument last year — and I will quote again: “Although the Board agreed with the rental of diesel-generation units on an urgent short-term basis for YEC's 2021 GRA, the evidence of YEC in this proceeding is that the diesel rentals are not a good solution and that the need for additional capacity is for more than the near term.”

We know from what the minister said this spring that we will be renting diesels well into the 2030s, and he has just told us that he is considering much longer term rental agreements.

At what point will the minister admit that renting diesel generators for more than a decade does not make sense, and when will he start considering a more permanent and more cost-effective option?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Well, I think that I have always said that we should look at these options. In fact, in my last response, although the member maybe didn't hear it, I said that the utility should always look at the cost-effectiveness of rental versus permanent, and that is just the prudent thing to do. That is diligence.

By the way, when the members opposite stand and talk about the diesel generators, I just want to say to Yukoners, first of all, that we have largely a renewable system with hydroelectricity — so important. Thank you to Yukoners in the past who invested in that direction — so important. We are in re-licensing mode right now with those.

Second of all, we are not connected to an Outside grid; therefore, we will need backup. Even when we become connected, it could be the connection itself that drops, so we will always need some backup somewhere.

Third of all, we have been bringing on new renewables all of the time through our independent power producer policy and energy purchase agreements with First Nations that are bringing on brand new renewables to the system. That is what we are focusing on.

The Yukon Party is focusing on the diesels because I think they are in favour of not dealing with climate change. I heard a great interview this morning with the director of the Energy branch and he talked about the importance of renewable electricity to our system.

Question re: Energy strategy effect on electricity rates

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, we have been raising concerns about the failure of the Liberals' energy strategy and their plan to rely on rented diesel generators to meet Yukon's growing electricity demand for the foreseeable future. Earlier this year, the Yukon Energy Corporation filed its rate application to increase Yukoners' power rates by a total of 14.11 percent by August of next year. This was the first time that Yukoners got a glimpse of what the Liberal government's decision to rely on rented diesels is going to cost them.

In the GRA, the YEC discloses that the major rate-increase drivers include the diesel rental cost increases. Mr. Speaker, 21 percent of the rate increase is directly attributable to the Liberals' decision to rely on rented diesels.

Will the minister admit that his failed energy strategy is driving Yukoners' power rates up?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: No, Mr. Speaker; what I will admit is that the Yukon Party is interested only in moving toward fossil fuels. That's what I see from them.

First of all, they talked about what's happening with the rate application. They said that 20 percent is for diesels. It's not for rental diesels; it's for diesels. Second of all, that means that 80 percent of that rate application is not for that.

If you just look at our rates here for electricity, they are the lowest in Canada's north, across all of the territories. We're comparable to Alberta's rates, and we are investing in renewables. Here's an example: Haeckel Hill wind. Here's another example: the battery project. Here's another example: we have committed to supporting Atlin. Those are examples of where we are investing in electricity. In every one of our off-grid communities, we are supporting an energy project there through our independent power producer program.

Yes, we will have to go to rates from time to time. What the Yukon Party is doing is having us continue a dependency on fossil fuels, which is not a good choice for the future of Canada, the Yukon, or the world.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the minister, he is absolutely wrong about the GRA. The GRA is absolutely clear that the increased number of rental units and higher rental prices being charged are one of the main factors driving the need for the rate hike.

According to the GRA, rates will increase by a total of 14.11 percent by August 1 of next year. Over 20 percent of that increase is directly attributable to the increased costs of rental diesels. The decision to rely so heavily on rented diesels was a political decision driven by the failure of the Liberal government's energy strategy.

Will the Liberal government finally acknowledge that their failed energy strategy is causing Yukoners' power rates to go up?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I was here in the Assembly with the members opposite when we brought in the Yukon Energy Corporation and the Yukon Development Corporation twice where they told us about the difference in cost between the two of them — that paying for a diesel plant

was 20 percent higher than paying for rental diesels. They heard that.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Streicker: No, it was the levelized cost of energy, Mr. Speaker. That is what I heard.

But I also stood up and said that we would continue to monitor those prices and continue to look at them so that we could get the best deal for Yukoners. We will work to make sure that our electricity in the territory is clean, reliable, and affordable. That's not to say that prices won't go up over time, but it is to say that we have the lowest prices for energy across the northern territories, comparable with the rates of Alberta.

Mr. Dixon: Well, Yukoners' rates are going up and they are going up because of the Liberals' decision to rent diesel generators. That is what the GRA makes absolutely clear.

The GRA that is before the Yukon Utilities Board right now is only for rates in 2023 and 2024. We know that the growth of peak electricity demand has been increasing far more quickly than any of the government's projections predicted. In all likelihood, the 22 diesel generators that we will need to rent this year won't be enough going forward. Without a doubt, the minister is going to have to add to his fleet of rented diesels. After all, the Liberal plan is to rely on rented diesels well into the 2030s.

How much more do power rates have to go up before the Liberals will admit that Yukoners can't afford their failed energy strategy?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, the first thing I want to remind members opposite and say to Yukoners is that 92 percent of our energy on the grid is coming from renewables. The biggest investment that we are making is in renewables. What we are doing is encouraging First Nation governments across the territory to invest in those renewable projects and then we will buy the power back from them. That is where our big investment is.

Yes, we do have to have diesels for backup for those times when it is too cold or for those times when there are outages. We do need backup; that is correct.

When we run those, we will use the best approach for whether to purchase or rent. It is about what the smart choice is for Yukoners. I have heard the utilities tell the members opposite that; I have heard the Yukon Utilities Board say that they will need to continue to show that analysis. I agree with that; we should continue to show that analysis, but it is not really where the question is. In fact, it wasn't a Liberal decision; it was a decision based on the dollars. That is what the decision was based on, and we will continue to do that prudently for Yukoners, but the part that is missing here is that the Yukon Party is looking to be dependent on fossil fuels; we are not.

Question re: Skagway marine services

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, when we asked the Premier if his ministers were asked to make cuts to their budgets to pay for the ore dock in Skagway, the Premier ducked the question and came back with political clichés, but maybe he forgot to tell the rest of his caucus to hold the line, or maybe some ministers didn't get the memo, because the Minister of

Highways and Public Works clearly confirmed that his department was asked to cut funds in this budget. During his supplementary budget speech, the minister said — and I quote: “... the Department of Highways and Public Works has identified several initiatives where funding can be reallocated in order to support the ore export opportunity.”

Will the Premier confirm that other departments — such as Yukon Housing, Community Services, and Health and Social Services, in addition to Highways and Public Works — were asked to cut their budgets to finance the Skagway ore dock?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, look, we have said over and over again — it is quite simple. We walk into a process of supplementary budget; we submit new requests. Other departments look at where they are on their particular projects; they look at the time frame and when they will be executed. If they don't believe that those projects are going to be done in the time frame that they previously thought, they will then be able to provide funds back into the process for the supplementary budget — quite simple.

We had a submission; we went forward with a couple of different asks — some of it was the collection agreement; on this one, it was the ore dock — which we believe are important. I still haven't heard. I know that we have spoken with industry, as well, and I would like to hear specifically from the Yukon Party leader who said that it is a bad project, although the entire industry said: Please do it.

We know where the NDP sit on this particular project. So, we will use the funds that are necessary to be used within the fiscal year — that is standard budgeting process.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, we could say that was a duck and weave.

So, the Premier is ready to spend \$44 million of taxpayers' money on the Skagway ore dock, but this government is the only government willing to chip in. The Government of Alaska isn't chipping in, the American government isn't paying a dime, and the Canadian government won't touch the project either.

The Municipality of Skagway is providing some project management but no capital for the project, even though Skagway stands to gain several permanent year-round jobs and maybe even the revenue that comes out of the dock.

Despite the Yukon Liberals' frequent talk about strategic partnerships, they appear not to have engaged with one of the key economic drivers in the Yukon, and that's Yukon First Nation development corporations. Did the Premier try to partner with any First Nation development corporations on the Skagway ore project, and if so, why weren't they interested?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, to date, what we have done is we have focused on making sure that we work with the municipality in Skagway. We believe that there is an opportunity for development corporations pending on what the solution is to actually move the concentrate. There possibly could be work that could be available on financing a conveyor. There could be work that is with the containers. There are a number of different options that could be used, but no, at this particular time, we did not look to ask for a debt instrument in the US from First Nation corporations. We have focused most

of our work with corporations on housing projects and energy projects over the last number of years.

Ms. White: Not only is the Premier willing to let the Yukon be the sole funder of this project, he has also made zero provisions to recoup Yukon's multi-million-dollar investment. The Premier likes to lecture us about economics, but Economics 101 would teach him that spending \$40 million for nothing in return is a bad deal.

The Premier told this House that Yukon generating any revenue from a new dock would expose the Yukon government to potential liability. However, they have no problem continuing to accept environmental and economic liability for abandoned mines. Yukoners deserve to know more about the Premier's legal advice when following that advice would mean that Yukon can't recoup any of the money that this government is willing to risk.

What work has been done so far to come up with an approach that would recoup Yukon's massive investment in the port of Skagway?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Well, I think it's an interesting economic lesson. I would say first that the exploration budget that we see on an annual basis — that \$150 million to \$200 million to \$225 million — the exploration that is done, outside of gold exploration, in the Yukon would be attributable to the fact that we have access to tidewater.

I would say that the many service sector industries that work in this sector and that do either expediting, selling supplies — all of those companies that are part of our economy — it is because we have access to tidewater.

I would say that the job that the Leader of the Third Party so fondly reflects on when the leader was working out on a mine site and talks about the experience of it — that was because we actually had access, I believe — I think — to tidewater — at least having a mining sector. So, all of these types of things, I believe, are because we have access to tidewater.

Now, quite simply, I think the question is: Do we build this or not? We have spoken with all levels of government; we have spoken with corporations within Alaska; we have spoken with the Canada Infrastructure Bank. Where we are left is to build it or not. We believe it is important to build it, and we believe it is key toward this industry going forward.

Question re: School busing

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, we have been asking about the cancellation of school buses several times during this current Sitting. Again today, two school buses in Whitehorse were cancelled, leaving parents scrambling to find alternative ways to get their children to class. Last week, we heard that the contractor has two drivers trained and ready to go, but they can't get the required test from Motor Vehicles until early December. I asked then, and the minister's response was — quote: “Much of it has been due to a shortage of bus drivers and we are working hard to assist and mitigate this issue.”

Why isn't the Yukon government fast-tracking drivers' tests for school bus drivers so that we can limit the disruption

for families who have been impacted by the constant disruptions of bus routes?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, again, I hold up the work that the department has done to work with our contractor, Standard Bus, in terms of mitigating issues that arise when it comes to transporting children to and from school. It is a very important aspect of our education system to provide reliable transportation.

In terms of driver testing, testing delays continue to be around six weeks. The new driver examiner has been hired and trained since last session. Another examiner has left the territory temporarily to receive advanced training in driver examination and to improve the testing capacity. Additionally, Highways and Public Works is actively seeking another examiner to minimize delays.

They continue to expedite testing for commercial clients that identify as needing testing for work purposes, including tourism, bus driving, and emergency medical services, and, on a case-by-case basis, time slots become available through cancellations.

Question re: Rural emergency medical responder honoraria

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, in late 2007, EMS volunteers began receiving an honorarium of \$2.50 per hour for standby pay to increase retention of volunteers and avoid gaps in coverage. By 2016, this rate had increased to \$3.71 per hour but has not changed since then.

In light of the low EMS volunteer numbers in many rural Yukon communities, will this government consider increasing those people's honoraria?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak about the important work that is done here in the territory by our Emergency Medical Services. The opportunity to hold them up is one that I appreciate. The Yukon Emergency Medical Services staff and community responders are truly dedicated to providing Yukoners with timely and high-quality health care services across the territory. Increased pressures have resulted, of course, from the local, national, and global shortage of health care providers, and that continues to be mitigated through a variety of approaches that we use to reduce patient and staff impacts and to prioritize critical care, which almost always comes from the Yukon Emergency Medical Services.

We budgeted, in 2022-23, \$12.3 million for EMS, and this is a net-zero transfer between the Department of Community Services and the Department of Health and Social Services, as we have moved the responsibilities there.

I look forward to further questions. I agree that we should be looking at the amounts that are available for volunteers.

Mr. Hassard: This government's struggles to recruit and retain health care workers resulted in retention bonuses being paid to nurses and many health care staff. However, EMS volunteers have not seen any bonuses or increases to their standby honorarium since 2016. That's seven years, Mr. Speaker.

One rural EMS worker estimated that there are 50 less rural EMS volunteer members than 13 years ago, and 20 of those departures happened in the last couple of years. So, Mr. Speaker, what initiatives has the government taken to retain EMS volunteers, and again, will they please consider an increase to the standby honorarium?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, again, I think we have seen another example today of good questions coming on behalf of Yukoners — so the Yukon Party says — and then they completely disregard or ignore the answers that are coming.

I did agree with the member opposite that this is something that we are looking into. The EMS coverage is supported by a number of community responders in each community. I want to take this opportunity to recognize them. I have a list of communities and how many community responders there are: Beaver Creek has seven community responders; Carcross has seven community responders and two recruits; Carmacks, as an example, has eight community responders; and Dawson City has six community responders, one recruit, and two full-time and four AOC employees. Every single one of them — I don't have time to go through the entire list — has the care and benefits of their position and their dedication to providing great care to Yukoners, and we thank them for that.

Mr. Hassard: So, a very simple question for the minister: When will we see these honoraria increased?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate that the Emergency Medical Services transfer to the Department of Health and Social Services has increased the stability and the availability of smooth services between other parts of the Department of Health and Social Services. EMS experiences shortages of community responders in all Yukon communities from time to time, but EMS continues to recruit and increase the number of responders in Whitehorse and in all communities.

The coverage figures and the dedication of these workers is quite amazing. I appreciate that in the 2022-23 — 2024 — budget, we provided \$628,000 to support other equipment needed by these individuals. We will continue to review the costs and the honoraria that are available. I, too, agree that they need to be addressed.

Question re: Recycling program in Whitehorse

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, earlier this year, Raven ReCentre in Whitehorse announced that they would be ceasing the operation of their drop-in bins for recycling materials on December 31 of this year. When I asked about this last week, the minister told the Legislature that there is a committee made up of the Yukon government, City of Whitehorse, and Raven looking at potential solutions and that something would be in place — quote: "... in the coming months."

Can the minister tell us what stage those discussions are at? Can citizens in Whitehorse expect a blue bin program to be in place after Raven's drop-off closes on December 31? If not, what options will folks from Whitehorse have for their recycling?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I am really happy to be able to stand this afternoon and talk about all the work we are

doing to improve the way we handle the waste that we generate in this society.

The member opposite just talked about the work we are doing on recycling. She is absolutely correct; we have struck a committee with the City of Whitehorse, Raven ReCentre, and the good folks at Community Services. We are working diligently on a solution to the recycling issue within Whitehorse, and the issue there is that Raven itself has decided that it would suspend operations of its public drop-off for recyclables as of December 31 unless they saw concrete action on the part of the City of Whitehorse to implement a blue bin system. We are working with those three partners — ourselves, the City of Whitehorse, and Raven — to come up with solutions for the city's recycling to make sure that we all recycle more. That's really the goal here: to make sure that the City of Whitehorse recycles more of the material that can be recycled in the city. It's a laudable goal and we are working very hard to make that happen.

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, in September, CBC Yukon reported that the City of Whitehorse and the Yukon government were in talks to develop a curbside recycling program for the capital city. Last week when I asked the minister about this, he told the Legislature that the Yukon government had received a letter from the City of Whitehorse about this issue.

Can the minister provide some clarity about what this program would look like? Who will operate it and who will pay for it? How much funding has the City of Whitehorse requested and how much has the minister committed to provide?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: All very good questions, Mr. Speaker — and I am heartened to hear the members opposite so interested in recycling. It warms my soul to see them starting to embrace the good work that has to be done on the way we are dealing with waste in this territory.

It really is a turnaround because, in 2016, they were asked to improve waste in the territory and they didn't do it, but now they seem to be interested and I am so glad to hear that. We are working very, very hard. No spoilers, Mr. Speaker — we are currently working with the City of Whitehorse, we are working with Raven ReCentre, and we are working with other recycling agencies in the town — there is blue bin and there is P&M. We are working with them all to come up with a solution for recycling that will serve the territory better and the City of Whitehorse better, and we will make sure that we get more of our recyclables out of the landfill and into places where they can be used again.

Ms. McLeod: How much funding has the City of Whitehorse requested and how much has this minister committed to provide?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, again, I think that is great that the Member for Watson Lake is interested in this subject; I know that Yukoners are as well. Recycling is very, very important to the citizens of Whitehorse. I am happy to talk about it this afternoon.

We are working on citizens' behalf to come up with a solution for recycling in Whitehorse and, of course, across the territory, but right now, we are talking about Raven ReCentre and the work that they do at their public drop-off. It has been

announced that there is a deadline, at which time they will stop collecting recycling at their depot unless there is concrete work on a successor to that public drop-off. We are working with Raven, with the City of Whitehorse, and with YG to come up with a solution to that. I am not going to negotiate terms on the floor of the Legislative Assembly.

Just know, Mr. Speaker and citizens of Whitehorse, that we are doing the work to make sure that recycling continues for the public in Whitehorse.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Notice to call motion respecting committee report

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I give notice, pursuant to Standing Order 13(3), that Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 8, the motion for concurrence in the *Final Report of the Special Committee on the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform*, presented to the House on October 31, 2023, shall be called as government designated business.

Speaker: We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 32: *Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)* — Third Reading

Clerk: Third reading, Bill No. 32, standing in the name of the Hon. Ms. McPhee.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 32, entitled *Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 32, entitled *Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to speak again today on the important amendments proposed in Bill No. 32, or the *Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)*. This legislation will provide enhanced protection for victim privacy and safety by protecting information that is shared in confidence with service providers at the Victim Services branch of the Department of Justice. The provisions that protect victim records are narrow in scope and only pertain to access requests made under the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Access requests will continue to be received by the Victim Services branch, and existing legislation will continue to apply to any request that is outside the scope of these changes.

By limiting access to victims' records and information contained in those records, victims who are seeking support have greater assurance that they can safely and confidentially access the services that they need. The protection of privacy and confidentiality is essential for the Victim Services branch to foster the trust required to serve victims of crime.

It is also important that the public is assured that the Government of Yukon continues to improve processes to better serve the needs of clients who require assistance.

It is worth noting today that these changes will not impact existing legislation with respect to the collection of information and the responsibility of service providers to protect that information from a privacy breach. The Department of Justice continues to enhance the supports for victims of crime and is committed to improving processes to better serve the public. These changes are one more step in that direction.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the questions that we had about this bill in Committee of the Whole and the opportunity to provide those answers and more clarity to Yukoners and to the members opposite. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this today. I look forward to support from the members opposite so that this bill can pass.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, in rising to speak to this as the Official Opposition critic for Justice, I would note that we do support this legislation, as I indicated previously and as my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition indicated when he asked questions yesterday while I was doing media, but I just want to thank officials for their work on this.

I would note that this is a narrow amendment related to the protection of personal privacy intended to ensure the safety of someone who contacts Victim Services. The *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* does speak to protection of personal privacy, and there is no situation where that is more important than when a disclosure of information by government could reasonably be expected to create a possible risk to someone's physical safety.

We do support this narrow amendment. While we will watch to see how it is implemented to ensure that it doesn't lose its sense of balance in that implementation, we do agree with the intent of it and agree that it is necessary to make changes in this area.

With that, I will thank officials for their work on this and for the briefing on it, and we will be supporting passage of this legislation.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, this bill is so important to improving the safety and privacy of victims of crime. The Yukon NDP is pleased to see that this government has considered the situations of victims, especially victims of domestic violence, and is addressing gaps in the existing legislation that were impacting their safety.

I thank the minister for the time she spent answering my questions yesterday and the officials who were here to provide support. I would like to ask further that the protection and privacy rights of witnesses of crimes be considered in future work, either through amendments to this bill or other appropriate legislation.

We will be supporting this bill.

Mahsi'.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I take the opportunity to thank the officials who have worked on this matter coming forward. We have a new drafter. This is her first bill. She was here with us yesterday, is pleased to see it proceeding, and was happy to help support me in answering the questions. I'm happy to recognize that work today, as well as others who worked with her. I would also like to thank the members opposite for their indication of support. I appreciate this opportunity.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 18 yeas, nil nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for third reading of Bill No. 32 agreed to

Speaker: I declare that Bill No. 32 has passed this House.

We are now prepared to receive the Commissioner, in her capacity as Lieutenant Governor, to grant assent to the bill which has passed this House.

Commissioner Webber enters the Chamber accompanied by her Aide-de-Camp

ASSENT TO BILLS

Commissioner: Please be seated.

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

Clerk: *Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023).*

Commissioner: I hereby assent to the bill as enumerated by the Clerk.

Commissioner leaves the Chamber

Speaker: I will now call the House to order. Please be seated.

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 2, Executive Council Office, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

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

Chair: The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 2, Executive Council Office, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Executive Council Office — *continued*

Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Madam Chair, I just want to again welcome the officials into the House — our Deputy Minister, Justin Ferbey, and Assistant Deputy Minister Kate Durand. Thank you to the department for the preparation of materials, and thanks to the folks for putting stuff together. I think that probably some of the work that we committed to is in progress on legislative returns. With that, I will hand it over for questions.

Mr. Dixon: Thanks to the minister for his opening remarks. I will jump right in with questions.

We understand that a number of appointments to the YESA board are coming due this weekend, so unless something happens between now and Monday, YESAB will find itself in the position where it won't have quorum. Can the minister comment about the appointments to the YESA board right now and whether or not steps are being taken to ensure that

appointments are renewed or altered so that YESAB has quorum next week?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: This has been a topic for us in all conversations with Minister Vandal at the federal level, who has the responsibility for this. The last discussions directly with him were when he was in town a couple of weeks back, but also, our officials have continued. I will just say for the record that we understand here at the territorial level the importance of the federal government getting their appointments processed efficiently. The work has been done by the Executive Council Office and submissions, I believe, are in place. We have been made aware of that, but we are in a position where we are waiting on the federal government.

I think that there was an analysis done not too long ago on appointments across Canada but with responsibility to the federal government and actually pertaining to northern Canada. There seems to be a great need right now for the federal government to ensure that they get their appointments in place.

I know that we have had officials reach out and have flagged the fact that it is imperative that these appointments are in place in order for this tripartite environmental assessment structure to work appropriately. So, I will bring back to the House if we have any information over the next number of days, but right now, we are still waiting. We have voiced our significant concerns and have identified the fact that there is expiry of a number of positions but also the fact that there are other boards that don't fall under Minister Vandal, and we are also waiting to see appointments there as well.

Mr. Dixon: What would it mean for projects that are currently before YESAB if, on Monday all of a sudden, YESAB doesn't have a quorum? Is there a stall? Is the Yukon government aware of proponents who are currently before YESAB who have expressed this concern, as well, and what steps can the government take to mitigate the concerns that they have on this?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: What I can share is that the officials, as early as today, have been in touch — from the Executive Council Office — with federal officials here in Whitehorse, outside of the YESAB executive team — not appointed members, but the leadership within their administration.

What we know for next week is that we would be in a holding pattern, because they would not have quorum, and that has been voiced to the federal minister and our displeasure that we could be put in that position.

What we know is that the appointments, as pertaining to the federal officials, is that they are in front of the minister. We will be continuing to dialogue, as we have been, to communicate the fact that this is a very significant challenge and that it needs to be rectified. That's what we know at this particular time.

If there is any further information on operational challenges next week, we will bring it back, but again, I want to know if we're going to see these appointments done over the next number of days before we get into the hypothetical for next week.

As we know right now — and we'll get more clarity, which I've requested, just from executive decisions versus decisions

at the DO level. I want to know how that can affect operations next week.

Mr. Dixon: That was actually my next question, so I'll just ask again to be sure I'm clear. Does this impact projects that are at the DO level as well?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: In discussion here, my belief is that work would happen, but I again want to give accurate and clear information back to the House. I will endeavour to get that information and get it back to the House to ensure that it's not just a portion of the activity at the executive level that is being affected but also what's happening at our DO-level offices.

Mr. Dixon: Could the Premier provide the Legislature with the correspondence between him and Minister Vandal about this?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I will endeavour to see what we have from the Executive Council Office. In many cases, it was done, as well, at the — our chief of staff has been reaching out at the political level, and I have — in numerous meetings, this has been a priority in our discussions. In many cases, it would have been something on an agenda where I would have had discussion with Minister Vandal throughout this summer and into the fall.

We will endeavour to see what correspondence that we have and to see if it is available for tabling.

Mr. Dixon: I'll conclude on this subject line. I'll simply note that, as far as I can tell, come Monday, YESAB will be down to two members out of seven, and that's obviously deeply concerning to all of us, especially to proponents who have projects before YESAB right now. I do encourage the Premier to convey, in the strongest possible terms, to Canada our concerns about this.

I will move on to a separate issue. I would like to ask the Premier for an update on the Taku River Tlingit land transfer that was discussed throughout the last year. Obviously, the primary source of information that Yukoners have had on this has come from the public bulletins that the Taku River Tlingit First Nation released to the public.

In those documents, we have seen the claims that the Yukon government has been in negotiations with the Taku River Tlingit for what they describe as the largest land transfer in Yukon's history. We understand that the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and the Carcross/Tagish First Nation are in discussions about this, but we would like to ask the Premier for an update. What is the status of what the Taku River Tlingit call the largest land transfer in Yukon's history?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The process right now is actually on hold from our work. The Carcross/Tagish First Nation and the Taku River Tlingit have requested a bilateral discussion — a consultation between both First Nations — before any more work is done through our department. We think that's a good thing. Of course, that would have been a consultation that we would be undertaking before there was any disposition of land.

At this particular time, the two nations are meeting together. Between the Teslin Tlingit Council, the Taku River Tlingit, and Carcross/Tagish — Dakh-Ka — it's basically the trilateral discussions that happen between those nations. Two

of the nations have requested that there's time between them to speak on this subject.

We are waiting now to see what that bilateral consultation leads to, and then we can re-engage and see what the findings are.

At this particular time, we're holding to see, and both nations have requested that and seem to be looking at this as the priority for next steps.

Mr. Dixon: To many of those who own third-party interests in the affected area, this was certainly a large surprise over the last year to see that these discussions were ongoing. During the negotiations of land claims in Yukon and under the *Umbrella Final Agreement*, there was a recognized and understood process for dealing with third-party interests in land claims. This process seems to be much different from that.

Can the Premier address the concerns that have been raised about those who own private property or have third-party interests in the affected area — including those who use publicly accessible trail networks?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I have received correspondence directly from at least one of the private landholders in this particular case, and it was pertaining to access to trails. I think that is what has been flagged to me. I think this is unique in the fact that there have been some challenges, I believe, with the relationship between Taku River Tlingit and the Yukon government. I know that the member opposite well knows sort of some of the more challenging parts of this discussion — really, around some of the work that was done, I believe, around the start of the sort of challenges with the relationship around a proposed campground. There have also been conversations around mining interests, and the Taku River Tlingit, as a transboundary nation, had some concerns, and that was really about early exploration staking. Then, of course, there was a legal challenge that, I believe, came from some of the work as well.

This conversation is really about some of the interests by the nation, and of course, it really has to do — again, when we talk about private landowners, which I believe the question was really focused on — as I remember from the correspondence, and I would have to go back to see what I got from private landowners — was really around trail access.

Again, the Yukon government, Madam Chair, as you know, is committed to advancing reconciliation with all First Nations, including the Taku River Tlingit. We are advancing bilateral discussions with the Taku River Tlingit on a number of matters, including the land interests in the Yukon. These discussions, again, do not involve the Government of Canada, although the Yukon government is engaging with the federal government and the Taku River Tlingit on other matters, and that would be a shared interest in things such as energy projects.

As part of our bilateral discussions with the Taku River Tlingit, we are considering a land transfer, which we have talked about a lot in the House, and a government-to-government agreement that would address other matters of mutual interest.

These discussions, as stated by the member opposite, are not treaty or self-government agreement negotiations, but

rather, they are intended to address the decision of the Supreme Court of Yukon in the litigation brought by the First Nation against the Yukon government in 2014.

That is the proposed campground — when the member opposite was Minister of Environment, so he knows the file well — and so we are trying to have negotiations based on that Supreme Court decision in 2014. The potential land transfer relates to an 11.5-square-kilometre area known as the Aashú Lands. It is located 120 kilometres from Whitehorse, off the Atlin Road, within the Taku River Tlingit First Nation's asserted traditional territory and Carcross/Tagish First Nation traditional territory, which leads to that request for the nations to sit together and try to work through some of the expectations that they both have, and, of course, it will give us better clarity and, I think, will lead to significant consultation between them before there is any land looking to be transferred.

So, to be clear, the decision from the Supreme Court is that the case does not require the Yukon government to transfer the land — so I will say that is not it — but the transfer is being contemplated as a means of ensuring that the Yukon government can abide by the court's direction.

Mr. Dixon: So, just to be clear, the court at no point ever directed Yukon government to enter into these negotiations with TRTFN; is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I would have to go back to see if the interpretation is that we were — as the question stated was: Did they direct us to have conversations? — I would have to go back to see if there was a direction for conversations or for dialogue.

What I am stating is that the option of the land transfer was not a directive out of the court decision, although that particular action — as we understand it or as I understand it, with the help of our technical experts and our legal expert — would meet the requirements of the decision of the court action.

Mr. Dixon: Yes, indeed, we are very familiar with the court decision and what the court has said about this. That is why we were surprised when the Premier noted that these discussions were resultant from that court case, given the fact that the court was silent on whether or not a massive land transfer should be conducted with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation.

However, I will move on. Yesterday, the Carcross/Tagish First Nation made a public statement about a range of issues. They made it very clear that they had some concerns with a number of the projects that are occurring in its traditional territories. I will quote briefly from the public statement dated October 31, yesterday: "C/TFN has in good faith attempted to constructively respond to these development pressures in a measured way which represents the constitutional rights of C/TFN and at the same time responds to the numerous filing requests for projects, such as..."

I won't list the projects that they list, as it is a lengthy list, but it concludes with: "... the possibility of resolving asserted s.35 rights of other Indigenous groups within C/TFN's Traditional Territory through both the transboundary provisions of the Final Agreement but also outside of those provisions. The claimed overlapping rights, titles and interests

of other Indigenous Nations and the limited resources of C/TFN makes our good faith efforts fall short of meeting the constitutional safeguards imposed on C/TFN to protect our rights, titles, and interests."

The statement goes on to say — and I will quote again: "Therefore, C/TFN will not continue to participate and agree to projects within the transboundary areas of our traditional territory until there is a definitive solution by way of agreed transboundary delineations and clear and agreed upon mitigation of impacts."

It's clear that the Carcross/Tagish First Nation is apparently dissatisfied with the state of the discussions, so can the Premier respond to the concerns that have been raised by the Carcross/Tagish First Nation and whether or not the proposal that they have had to delineate the transboundary area in some way is being contemplated by the Yukon government?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am waiting to get more information from Aboriginal Relations, because I want to understand if it's pertaining to some of the conversations that have happened with the Taku River Tlingit or if it is to do with some of the conversations that are happening through the BC treaty table, which also includes multiple other self-governing First Nations and some of those transboundary issues.

There are a number of items that have come up. Some of it is the assertion that we've seen from nations that have their core traditional territory in British Columbia — if I can use that term. Also, there is that overlap. There have been some challenging discussions concerning things such as the opportunity to build transmission and areas where both, in some cases, Carcross/Tagish and another nation are at the table.

All I can tell Yukoners today is that our work over the last number of years has been about going in and working in good faith, honouring the Crown, and going to do the work that we need to do with the Carcross/Tagish First Nation. Whether that was the early conversations where there were concerns around spot land applications or where there were concerns around some of the work that needed to be done on land planning — all of those things are things that we have made best efforts to support.

I think that today I want to get a better understanding, and I also want to understand if there has been any correspondence from their lands department to Energy, Mines and Resources before speaking specifically to the prerogative here around the section 35 comments in their letter.

Mr. Dixon: I think the public statement is pretty notable given the discussion that we have had as recently as today and continue to have about Yukon's energy future. The list of projects cited by the Carcross/Tagish First Nation in their public statement includes the Atlin hydro project, the ATCO transmission line upgrade, the Whitehorse Rapids generating station re-licensing, the proposed BC Hydro interconnect, and the proposed Moon Lake hydro storage as well as the proposed Southern Lakes enhanced storage project.

All of those are obviously key components of the government's energy strategy. The statement by the CTFN concludes — quote: "This is required first and foremost, otherwise these projects and the relationships will be

challenged at every stage of review, and ultimately will be challenged through the courts, and this is not in the best interests of any party nor our preferred outcome.”

It seems quite clear that the CTFN intends to resist all of these projects that are coming before them in their traditional territory. Unless their concerns are addressed, each and every one of those projects is jeopardized — at least the timelines of those projects are jeopardized.

Can the Premier comment on how he intends to respond to that statement?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think that what is important — and the approach on this — is to have a very clear understanding of what the expectations are at the table in detail from the Carcross/Tagish First Nation. It would be difficult today to talk about exactly how I would respond until I have a clear understanding of scope. We know that there are a number of projects that are important to the Yukon but are also important to the Carcross/Tagish First Nation, also important to the Taku River Tlingit, also important to the work that is being done and important to all Yukoners, and also important to the work that we focused on when it comes to *Our Clean Future*, which was signed off by all nations here in the Yukon.

What we believe to be good opportunities and what we believe to be good partnerships are all key items that we want to continue to talk about.

I just want to make sure — before I talk about the response from Executive Council Office or from my office on this particular topic — that I have a very clear understanding of what things in particular they are looking for within the relationship. As well, there are other things that are ongoing. The re-licensing of Whitehorse dam and some of those conversations are moving at a different pace than some of the longer term outlooked renewable projects.

I know there has also been discussion that has happened between the Taku River Tlingit and Carcross/Tagish First Nation, which I believe to be positive on a couple of other projects. We will be looking to get a review on that and then I'll have an opportunity to give a more substantial answer to the approach between the Yukon government and the Carcross/Tagish First Nation on this question.

Mr. Dixon: The Carcross/Tagish First Nation conveyed this through a public statement posted yesterday and dated yesterday. Did this statement come as a surprise to the Premier? Did he have discourse or correspondence with the CTFN of a similar nature to this prior to yesterday?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I would state that there has been an ongoing dialogue over the last number of years with Carcross/Tagish First Nation on a number of areas of priority for them, and there are multiple levels of government. There has been a long conversation that has happened with the Yukon Energy Corporation directly, from a technical level, and the Carcross/Tagish First Nation. I would say that, within those discussions, there have been positive discussions, but I think that you would also say that there has been a difference of opinion, especially when you think about some of the projects that have been in place and also support. There is a dialogue that happens between the Executive Council Office, primarily

led by Aboriginal Relations. That has been around the reconciliation piece that focuses, as well, on re-licensing.

There have also been discussions directly with the Yukon Development Corporation on potential projects and work that is underway. There was a legal challenge, when I was Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, around a particular land area. I think that some of the legal pieces have looked at different ways to reconcile that matter, so I would say that they would be potentially positive in tone.

There has been a lot of dialogue between ministers; there is a lot of dialogue between partners, and I can say that, from leader to leader, it has been very positive — my discussions either with the Chief of Carcross/Tagish First Nation or, in the last couple meetings, with the deputy chief, who has been taking a lead in some of the public conversations and the bilateral dialogues that I have had with the Carcross/Tagish First Nation.

Mr. Dixon: Just so I am clear, the Premier said that his dialogue at the leader-to-leader level has been very positive. His statement seems less so. Can the minister just explain? Did this come as a surprise, or has the CTFN been raising these concerns previously? It seems inconsistent between what the Premier just said — that he has been having positive conversations — and his public statement that seems much to the contrary to that. Can the Premier explain that?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think that, in this world, there are never any surprises. I think that it is a situation where, from leader to leader, you can have a very positive relationship, I think, when there are particular elements of negotiation. Sometimes they are highlighted publicly; sometimes the technical teams will use one or two ways to communicate their position on something.

When I get the further briefing, what I want to take a look at is what role the land management board is playing, which, of course, would be populated by clan representation and would be a bit outside of some of the executive branch of Carcross/Tagish — although, in this particular case, it is also some of the work that has been done by other areas.

So, no, I am not surprised; I am never surprised. I think that there are always vigorous conversations. Leaders, whether at the municipal level or at the First Nation level, are always doing their best to represent the interest of their constituents. What I have quickly learned is that sometimes, publicly, relationships can look to be quite strained, but then actually, as you move forward and work together, you get to a very good place of common ground.

I think that the key to this is that, whether it is the dialogue here that we are having today in Committee of the Whole or public dialogue, the important thing is to always be respectful, understand that people are always doing the best for their constituents, and not to take a quick and sudden reaction to a press release or to a letter but to understand that you should dig in and understand exactly the details of that and then reach out with all of the information and continue to have an appropriate, respectful dialogue so that you can avert some of the challenges that can come if you take a different avenue in your approach.

Mr. Dixon: I thank the Premier for those answers and cede the floor to my colleague.

Ms. White: Madam Chair, I am happy to be here in this conversation. I actually want to ask questions about the ore dock and the fact that it is intergovernmental relations, I would guess, between Yukon and Skagway, Alaska. I just have some questions.

It is interesting, because one would suggest that the timeline to access — or knowing that the lease running out isn't new, so what I want to know is: When did work begin on the government's side to find alternatives or a solution to seeking long-term access to tidewater?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I will widen the scope today for a bit on this one. It's not actually something that has been handled through Executive Council Office. It is actually something that has been worked on through Economic Development. It hasn't really been anything that our intergovernmental folks have worked on, but even from a standpoint of cross-border work, there has probably been a tiny bit of support. Anyway, we will crack the door open.

Concerning our relations, what I will say is that the Yukon and the United States — particularly Alaska — share many common interests and challenges. Of course, the future of Yukon and Alaska are linked. Our interests in many topics, including robust transportation infrastructure and access to tidewater, serve both our jurisdictions, as investment and geopolitical focus remains in the north. We regularly engage with our American and Alaskan counterparts as part of our long-standing positive relations. I know that, just in the short term, we have had conversations with our new Consul General Jim DeHart and as well with Governor Dunleavy in September.

What I can share is that the conversation around the access to tidewater and the Skagway ore terminal — I could look to Economic Development, but I would say that it has been a significant part of discussions between the borough the ambassador — so, before taking on this role, in my role as — but also previously with officials who represent the federal US government's interests; AIDEA, which is the Crown corporation owned by Alaska; officials at AIDEA; the Lieutenant Governor of Alaska; the Canadian minister in charge of intergovernmental — so, Ng, Leblanc, Minister Joly, Minister Champagne — and it has been flagged at the Prime Minister's Office.

So, I guess if we are getting into a discussion around: Has the Yukon government taken — gone down and spoken with all significant and connected stakeholders on this discussion? Yes, we have. I am going to say that the dialogue goes back to probably 2017, 2018. I could go back to Economic Development — or I will be back with Economic Development in the House, and I can definitely answer the question at that time, but this has been years of conversation in different iterations.

Both the Chamber of Mines and the producers' group, as well as industry organizations, also were in dialogue. At one point, there was even a discussion focused around Haines and if there was an opportunity in Haines, Alaska, to do this work. So, yes, there has been substantial conversation over a long

period of time with many different individuals to look at models for funding, looking at partnership — a number of different things.

I think that even going down with previous — at the time, our previous premier and deputy ministers and me — to a meeting in Skagway that was hosted by mayor and council — we did that particular meeting with a number of individuals from — representing mining companies, as well, from the Yukon.

Ms. White: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the minister for that.

I will ask for confirmation: So, opposition has no control over which departments come forward for debate at any point in time, and so, if there is an assurance that, in the next 22 days, Economic Development will come back up and having not just the deputy minister, who is both ECO — I am prepared to ask questions again with Economic Development but understanding, of course, that opposition has no control over departments that come back up. And so, if the minister is happy to give me the assurance right now on the floor that Economic Development will be back, I am happy to wait to ask questions for that debate.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am going to get in trouble with the principal secretary and chief of staff, probably, but I would say yes, for all intents and purposes, I want to come back with Economic Development. I am more than happy — more than happy to say: Look, Question Period is a good time to go back and forth on our positions, but I'm more than happy to have a very detailed discussion on this topic.

I caught myself at the very end today when I also talked to the point about trucking. You'll see in Hansard tomorrow where the comment was "I believe so". It was really around the fact that, when I was talking about the Wolverine mine and the fact that — I actually went back and looked at an article from 2010 that quotes Premier Fentie, and he talks about how he was getting pressured at that time to ensure that the actual Wolverine ore was shipped to Skagway instead — the reason was because it was twice the trucking costs.

I think the other thing you can think about that is substantial — and timing to get ore to Asia to smelter. Inevitably, they made that decision to take the more expensive, I guess, route or they had maybe some sort of financial model that worked for them, but they were trucking long, long distances. Although, at that time, Governor Parnell spoke to the fact and was pressuring the Yukon government for the Skagway ore dock to be used for Wolverine.

Anyway, we can talk more about that during the Economic Development discussions. But yeah, I think it's important. I can commit. I will get in trouble again with my team for doing that on the floor, but I do want to come back and talk about Economic Development. I think that will be important.

I'll pass it back to go into other questions for Executive Council Office outside of that.

Ms. White: I do thank the minister for those assertions that Economic Development will be called back. I'm actually — questions in Question Period — it's not answer period. There is no ability to have a conversation, and ultimately, I

would say that I don't know that I would use Wolverine as an example or a glowing light of a successful mining company, even based on my experience on the ground.

I actually don't have further questions for ECO, but I will look forward to the conversation with Economic Development.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 2, Executive Council Office?

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

Ms. White: Madam Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 2, Executive Council Office, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 2, Executive Council Office, cleared or carried

Chair: The Member for Takhini-Kopper King has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 2, Executive Council Office, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$2,148,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of nil agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$2,148,000 agreed to

Executive Council Office agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Health and Social Services

Deputy Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you, Deputy Chair, and thank you to the officials who are just joining me here today to speak about the first supplementary budget for 2023-24 for the Department of Health and Social Services. I would like to welcome the department officials here with me today. I am joined by deputy ministers Tiffany Boyd and Ed van Randen

and the ADM of Corporate Services, Paul Payne. Thank you for being here.

I would also like to thank them and their entire teams for developing this supplementary budget to support the health and well-being of Yukoners. I am very pleased to provide this important update on the steps that we are taking to enhance our health and social care system and respond to the issues and priorities of Yukoners. I would also like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the tremendous work by everyone at the Department of Health and Social Services, from Continuing Care, Insured Health Services, Social Supports, Family and Children's Services, the Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services, our nurses, our care providers, our social workers, our EMS teams, our custodial teams, policy and communications, Finance, HR, IT analysts — I want to thank each and every one of them for everything that they do to support Yukoners. Each day, our efforts are ensuring that Yukoners have access to essential services and programs.

The Department of Health and Social Services first supplementary budget reflects the important day-to-day efforts of our team across the Yukon. This supplementary budget includes important funding in our response to the challenges presented by a growing demand for health care services and to the substance use health emergency. Since releasing the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy* on August 23, 2023, this supplementary budget represents a significant step toward implementing the 43 recommendations in the strategy, along with our partners.

Designed as a living document, this strategy provides us with a road map for responding to the substance use health emergency for years to come. This work will take time and cannot be done by one government or one organization alone. It will include developing targeted programming and supports based on the unique needs and cultural contexts of communities. This supplementary budget also provides funding to ensure that our legislated programs are appropriately funded to meet current levels of demand and to strengthen our health care system.

Even as we work to respond to the substance use health emergency and the global pressures on our health care system and staffing, we are moving forward with a clear vision to ensure that Yukoners have access to a person-centred and sustainable health and social care system. As we advance this important work, I would once again like to thank everyone across the health and social care system for all that they do to support Yukoners each day. It's really about how Yukoners interact with those face-to-face services — those front-line services — and the support that they receive each day in doing so.

The Department of Health and Social Services first supplementary operation and maintenance budget for 2023-24 is \$565.1 million. This represents an increase of 10.3 percent over the 2023-24 mains. The number of FTEs within the department is 1,584.2 FTEs for the 2023-24 fiscal year. This includes an increase of 10.8 FTEs over the 2023-24 main estimates. We're also presenting a revised capital estimate of

\$15.78 million, which is a decrease of \$157,000 compared to the 2023-24 main estimates.

Changes in this supplementary budget are connected to the collective agreement increases and adjustments to meet the funding needs of our legislative programs. Increases are also connected to our work to begin implementing the recommendations in the substance use health emergency strategy and to meet the identified funding needs of the Yukon Hospital Corporation.

The increase of \$52.8 million in operation and maintenance funding will support the department to meet growing costs associated with the delivery of health and social care and ensure that the needs of Yukoners are met.

I'm pleased to speak about some of these important highlights. There is an increase of \$17.5 million across the department for negotiated collective agreement increases for the 2023-24 fiscal year. We are providing an additional \$1.26 million within the Department of Health and Social Services to begin implementing some initial actions in the substance use health emergency strategy. This work will continue to be done in collaboration with Yukon First Nations, other governments, and other community partners.

While this living document will serve as a guide in the years ahead as we respond to the substance use health emergency, this increase in the first supplementary estimates will allow us to begin implementing 14 of the strategy's 43 initiatives. Through this additional funding, we will work to expand access to services, build awareness, and collaborate with Yukon First Nations and communities to develop unique culturally specific programming. We're also providing an additional \$645,000 for the supervised consumption site to support Blood Ties Four Directions to expand the hours of operation at the site to seven days per week.

This important facility, which recently marked its second anniversary, continues to provide life-saving services to Yukoners. As of September 2023, the supervised consumption site has been visited 6,312 times, and 47 overdoses have been successfully attended to since opening in September 2021.

After a difficult wildfire season across Canada, I would like to thank the incredible efforts of Yukoners, local organizations, and the department's emergency support services team. This team quickly responded to the needs of evacuees from across the territory and the north in response to wildfires. That is a responsibility of emergency support services, which is located within the Department of Health and Social Services.

This supplementary estimate includes an increase of \$1.203 million to address unanticipated costs associated with supporting evacuees to access food, accommodation, and other supports — all free of charge to them. This supplementary estimate also includes additional funding to ensure that our legislative programs meet the needs of Yukoners. There is an increase of \$230,000 for the pioneer utility grant and a \$200,000 increase for the Yukon seniors income supplement to meet anticipated uptake during the 2023-24 fiscal year.

Our government is also responding to growth within Insured Health Services in areas such as hospital and physician

claims and the delivery of pharmaceutical programs. As our population grows past the age of 65 and the Yukon's population rises — we heard about that yesterday, I think breaching the 45,000-person mark — and the costs of accessing health care increase with inflation — like everything has here in Canada and truly across the world — we are providing additional funding to meet growing costs for insured health services. We are providing an additional \$9.85 million for Insured Health Services in this supplementary budget. This includes an increase of \$2 million for rising costs to deliver our pharmacare programs, as well as \$6 million for costs associated with out-of-territory hospital claims.

With rising growth in physician claims, this \$9.85-million increase also includes \$1.85 million for physician claims.

With respect to the Yukon Hospital Corporation, since the 2017-18 fiscal year, our government has increased the Yukon hospital services O&M budget by 32.64 percent. We are pleased to continue our partnership with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to advance our shared priorities and ensure that Yukoners have access to the services and the programs that they require.

In the first supplementary estimates for 2023-24, we are providing an increase of \$17.11 million for Yukon hospital services. This increase will support the Yukon Hospital Corporation to respond to unanticipated costs incurred as a result of the global shortage of health care providers and growth in the use of agency nurses, as well as growth in the population of the Yukon and inflationary costs. This is done to ensure access to care for Yukoners. This increase will also support the Yukon Hospital Corporation to meet growth in costs and the use of hospital and surgical services.

I would like to thank, once again, everyone at the Department of Health and Social Services and the Yukon Hospital Corporation and all of our health and social care system partners for the work that they do each and every day to support Yukoners.

While we continue to face challenges, we are also working together to meet those challenges, to implement new programs, and to deliver important services across the Yukon Territory. The first supplementary estimates for 2022-23 reflect our government's commitment to the continued support of our health and social care system in the interest of its success.

From implementing initiatives in the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy*, to ensuring that our legislative programs meet uptake levels, to meeting the funding needs of the Yukon Hospital Corporation, we are all taking important steps and advancing work that will impact Yukoners each day.

I look forward to answering questions about this first supplementary estimate for the Department of Health and Social Services. I thank you for the opportunity to review this 2023-24 supplementary budget for the department.

Mr. Cathers: I would also like to welcome the officials here today. It should come as no surprise to the minister that my first question is about cost pressures at Yukon hospitals and the chronic underfunding of hospitals by the current government. I would remind the minister as well that, in rising, she cited numbers from a previous budget year, which I believe

she would find is actually prior to the emergency department opening. We have had this conversation as recently as the Spring Sitting when I reminded the minister that pointing to previous years before the addition of the new emergency department that has significant O&M implications on other programs does not paint an accurate picture.

What does provide an accurate picture, Deputy Chair, is what we have heard from the CEO and chair of the Hospital Corporation. Last week, the CEO of the Yukon Hospital Corporation told attendees at the board of trustees public meeting that, for the last fiscal year, expenses grew much more than revenues. He noted that, excluding a pension adjustment, expenses for the year grew by 10.7 percent. In contrast, revenues grew by just 2.5 percent. The minister attended that meeting, as did I, and she asked him to repeat that information, which suggested that she may not have been aware of it, despite the fact that she should have been. So, I know that she did hear those numbers from the CEO.

The hospital's report and audited financial statements for the last fiscal year show that they had yet another year where expenses exceeded revenues by millions of dollars. Again, Deputy Chair, this is according to the hospital's own report, which the minister herself has tabled here in this Assembly. The total expenses, as shown on page 7 of Yukon Hospital Corporation's 2022-23 year-end review, were \$114 million. Total revenues, on the other hand, were just \$112 million. This follows two recent years of major funding shortfalls for our hospitals where hospital expenses exceeded revenues for the fiscal year by millions of dollars. In both of those recent years, hospital expenses were higher than revenues by about \$4 million.

Yukon Hospital Corporation's year-end review for 2020-21 shows financial highlights, as of March 31, 2021, and indicates that, for that fiscal year, total revenue was \$99.6 million, while total expenses were \$103.6 million. For the year prior to that, Yukon Hospital Corporation's own report shows that, for that fiscal year ending March 31, 2020, they had \$92.6 million in total revenue and \$96.5 million in expenses — three years of multi-million-dollar shortfalls as shown by Yukon Hospital Corporation's own reports. Again, the financial statements that those reports are based on are audited by the Auditor General and the minister herself has tabled those reports, so she should be aware of the contents.

This April, under questioning from me about the fact that the hospitals are budgeted to receive about \$10 million less in O&M funding than the CEO told us they needed for the previous fiscal year, the minister finally did admit that some of what the hospital had requested for this year had not actually been approved by Management Board yet. This current situation and lack of funding is placing enormous pressures on our hospitals, which is affecting Yukoners across the territory.

Again, I will refer to what the hospital chair and CEO have said publicly. Last week, the chair and CEO did an interview with CBC Radio. The CEO told CBC that there are — quote: "... significant pressures that we're seeing in the hospital and it's due to a number of factors." He then listed factors including health human resources costs, inflation, rising costs, supply

chain issues, demographic changes, and a significant growing population and aging population.

The hospital CEO then told CBC — quote: "... these in particular are causing increased demand for services that we provide and are far exceeding what we anticipated." Again, the latter part of what he said was very significant. He said that they were far exceeding what they had anticipated.

The chair of the Yukon Hospital Corporation then told CBC a bit about the budgeting process and said this — again, I quote: "We were not expecting what we have seen in the totality of it, particularly our largest expenditure, which is health human resources, particularly nursing."

We know that this supplementary budget does contain part of the core funding that Yukon hospitals had requested many months ago for the current fiscal year and we are relieved to see that. The additional amount that is in here on top of the \$10-million obvious shortfall that I mentioned in the spring seems to directly reflect the rate of inflation. In this case, I'm basing it on the minister's own comments in the spring when she told this House that the inflation rate was 6.9 percent. What we don't know is how, if at all, the current government is responding to the higher than expected cost pressures that the chair and CEO both told CBC about. Again, it is important to note that they were talking about cost pressures that they are facing in the current fiscal year.

Both of them made it clear that those cost growths were beyond what they had anticipated. In fact, the hospital CEO specifically said that they are — and I quote: "... far exceeding what we anticipated..."

My question for the minister is this: How much money have Yukon hospitals asked for to cover costs in the current fiscal year that are not included in the supplementary budget?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am going to start by quoting some information from a notification that was sent out from the CEO of the Yukon Hospital Corporation about this very topic to his staff and to provide this information, as I understand it, not only to the staff but ultimately to everyone who is working at the hospital, because this is an important topic and everyone is feeling the pressure of not only the budgetary constraints or the changes to the needs of Yukoners and the increased — as the members opposite said themselves — the increase to the population, increase in inflation, aging population, the health human resources challenges that are felt across the world, and how they are impacting the operations here in the territory.

The CEO said — and I quote: "YHC is in ongoing conversations with government about supporting core operations and responding to new pressures. We have been clear about the pressures and what's needed to address them. These discussions have been productive and we've been successful in addressing many of the financial pressures. Our core operation funding has increased year-over-year and our budget reflects these increases. However, the fact remains that growth in service demands, inflationary pressures and human resource constraints continue to far exceed our financial capacity. It is essential to communicate to your teams that funding has increased (it has not been cut), and while this is a step in the right direction, financial pressures have not gone

away. In fact, they continue to grow substantially. The expectation is that this will require continued effort by our leaders and teams.”

The notification memo to staff at the hospital and officials at the hospital goes on and I won't quote any more from it.

This will be seen and should be seen as supporting some of what the member opposite has said in relation to the pressures at the hospital. That is a fact. We are well aware of that. There is \$17.1-plus million in this supplementary budget to provide to the Yukon Hospital Corporation for their operations.

The hospital is funded by the Yukon government solely by virtue of core funding agreements and additional transfer payment agreements for other services and programs. Unfortunately, the member opposite often forgets the additional transfer payment agreements for other services and programs.

There is no dispute that there are significant pressures primarily organized in the categories of inflation, health human resources, and the growth in our population and aging population here in the territory. I don't think there is any dispute with respect to that.

The assistant deputy minister responsible for the finances with respect to the Yukon Hospital Corporation meets weekly with the Yukon Hospital Corporation financial team. The deputy ministers and the CEO of the Yukon Hospital Corporation meet every two weeks, and the financial team and senior management of the Department of Health and Social Services and the Yukon Hospital Corporation meet every month. There is every opportunity for us to work together, which is what we are doing, which is what the CEO has told his senior staff. We will continue to meet — initially in the main budgets for a particular year — the core funding requirements for the Yukon Hospital Corporation and additional requests that they need as those requirements come to light in the run of a year.

I am very happy to be able to talk to Yukoners about this. I am very happy that this information goes on the record, but I am noting that I have explained how the Yukon Hospital Corporation is funded, year over year, on many, many occasions — happy to do so as much as I have to.

The Government of Yukon continues to fully meet the funding needs of the Yukon Hospital Corporation, and year over year, we have provided funding through core and additional transfer payment agreements commensurate with the total identified needs of the Yukon Hospital Corporation. Throughout the 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 fiscal years, we have worked with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to respond to funding requests identified during the main and supplementary budget exercises. This, Deputy Chair, is how it is done. Members opposite might have a better way to do it. The Yukon Hospital Corporation and our Department of Health and Social Services are working together to meet the needs of the Hospital Corporation.

We recognize that there are unprecedented times; we certainly recognize that these are unprecedented times. I am not sure that the members opposite do. But as we emerge from the acute stage of the COVID-19 response, we face inflationary

pressures and address a worldwide health human resources crisis. We maintain an ongoing cooperative and collaborative relationship with the Yukon Hospital Corporation as we respond to new or emerging pressures to assess funding needs. We remember every day that we are spending Yukon taxpayers' money.

During the 2023-24 fiscal year, we budgeted \$93.64 million for the Yukon hospital services O&M as well as \$12.2 million in capital expenditures, for a combined total of \$105.84 million. As part of the first supplementary estimates for 2023-24, which we are now discussing, we have worked with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to identify additional funding needs.

The first supplementary estimates for 2023-24 include an increase of \$17.11 million, which is here in this supplementary budget — the increased response to the growth in the hospital and surgical services costs, higher costs associated with responding to the health human resources crisis and an increased use of agency nurses, as well as for the maintenance capital, which is intended to maintain facilities and replace equipment. This increase also includes funding for the Yukon Hospital Corporation employee pension program to address payments that are required based on the 2022 actuarial report.

I appreciate the opportunity to address this and I'm sure I will have a chance to continue to provide information.

Mr. Cathers: I would note again that the minister likes to use talking points suggesting wonderful collaboration, but we continue to see — when the audited financial statements of the Hospital Corporation — audited by the Auditor General of Canada — and the hospital's own year in review shows a multi-million-dollar hole in the hospital budget at the end of the year with expenses exceeding revenues by millions of dollars. That is a far more reliable picture of the situation than the minister's talking points written by her speech writer. Talking points don't pay the bills.

The \$2.3 million that the minister mentioned — part of the money that she referred to as an increase for the hospital services — is directly due to pension solvency, as the minister acknowledged and as is shown in the handout provided to us by officials. That money, right off the start, is not going to O&M cost pressures; that is simply ensuring that the government meets its legal benefits to employees of the Hospital Corporation.

Three out of the last four years, the hospital, as shown in its own annual report, has finished the year with expenses exceeding revenues by millions of dollars.

In comparison to the growth of government, I would note that the numbers tabled by this government in the Fall Sitting, as shown in their fiscal and economic update on page 5, note that the government's — and I quote: “Gross Operations and Maintenance (O&M) expenditures are up \$132.7 million to \$1.59 billion, reflecting a 9.1 percent increase from Budget 2023-24.”

Government itself has general growth — grew just since the spring by 9.1 percent in expenses. The growth in health care, here and across the country, is typically always higher

than the average growth of government without exception, to the best of my knowledge, Deputy Chair.

The forced growth in out-of-territory hospital claims that we see in the handout from the government identifies \$6 million in forced growth related to out-of-territory hospital claims. Again, that's \$6 million more than they thought that they would need in the spring.

There's a larger portion of hospital services here in the territory. While government itself has grown — its expenses have grown 9.1 percent since the spring, and we see those cost pressures comparatively in out-of-territory hospital claims — we know that there are issues at hand.

The minister herself just confirmed that in quoting an e-mail from the CEO of the Hospital Corporation. I don't have a copy of that, but as I recorded her comments while she was speaking, I believe she quoted it as saying that there were ongoing conversations about core funding and emerging pressures.

So, it is clear from the hospital CEO's recent message to senior managers of the department, which the minister herself quoted, that they have asked for more money that isn't in the supplementary budget to meet cost pressures.

Again, I will ask the question that I asked previously that the minister skirted around. How much money have Yukon hospitals asked for to cover costs in the current fiscal year that is not included in the supplementary budget? There is obviously a funding request out there. What is the value of that funding request?

Since the minister, when she got up last time, just used her time without answering the question, I will add another question. We have received e-mails from patients saying that their doctor has told them that their surgery was either cancelled or not being scheduled due to cuts by the government and reallocation of funding that is being used in Health and Social Services instead of in departments. One of my colleagues just shared with me another e-mail as I came in from a constituent who had reached out after being told that by their physician.

My question for government is — again, we haven't heard that directly from the hospital itself, but we have now heard from multiple Yukoners who have told us that their doctors have told them that services are being cut and surgeries are not being scheduled due to the government reallocating resources to be used in the Department of Health and Social Services instead of at the hospital. Is that accurate, and if the minister believes that it is not accurate, can she explain why multiple Yukon physicians are telling their patients this?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: If I wasn't clear in the first question I stood to answer, we are working, on an ongoing basis — weekly, biweekly, and monthly — with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to determine what their financial constraints are and what their financial issues are and to respond to those. This supplementary budget has more than \$17 million in it to address those.

We meet their funding pressures. I have said this in this Legislature many, many times. We are in the process, with the Yukon Hospital Corporation, of evolving how core funding and additional TPAs will be provided to the Yukon Hospital

Corporation so that we can accurately meet what they assess to be their needs.

As we heard from the CEO and the board chair recently in local media and as the member opposite has spoken about, they didn't anticipate certain costs that were then on their desks. As a result of that, we have set up a system where we are speaking with them so that any of those unanticipated costs can come to their attention and ultimately come to our attention so that we can respond to them. We meet their needs and have done so year over year since 2017 when we came to government and took the responsibilities for this.

I won't wander into why certain doctors might have said certain things. I understood initially that the member opposite said that there was one person, but then all of a sudden, there was more than one person. You would need to speak to them about that and their misunderstanding of how hospital funding exists and is supported by this government.

In fact, I will turn briefly to the issue of surgeries and OR capacity. The Yukon Hospital Corporation continues to plan for the future of surgical services at Whitehorse General Hospital. They don't occur in any significance in the community hospitals. The Yukon Hospital Corporation resources and funding support up to 3,200 surgeries per year, including planned and unplanned surgeries. At the end of the 2022-23 fiscal year, 3,841 surgeries were completed. During the first quarter — which is all we can report on at the moment — of 2023-24, a total of 1,141 surgeries were completed. Between February 13 and March 31, 2023, Whitehorse General Hospital did temporarily reduce the number of scheduled elective surgeries due to staffing shortages, and these surgeries were rescheduled.

We continue to work with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to address the widespread pressures associated with the local, national, and global health human resources issues. Whitehorse General Hospital currently has 58 inpatient beds. Of these, 17 are designated for surgical care.

With respect to orthopaedic surgeries, the Yukon is currently supported by two resident orthopaedic surgeons, with additional coverage provided by locums. The first resident orthopaedic surgeon was introduced here in 2017, a program we are very proud to support. The second resident orthopaedic surgeon was introduced in 2019, and back in 2017-18, a total of 28 joint replacement surgeries were completed in-territory, so they are scheduled joint replacements for the orthopaedic team, although of course, the orthopaedic team also supports unplanned surgeries on a regular basis if they are needed to assist Yukoners.

I have a number of other stats that I am happy to provide, but I do want to take this opportunity to support the surgical services, orthopaedic and otherwise — general surgeons here in the territory. We hear nothing but amazing accolades for the work that they do. I know that they go above and beyond what their normal tasks are with respect to providing surgical services to Yukoners on a regular basis. There are emergency surgeries; there are people who come into the hospital in very bad shape and lives are saved by our surgical teams and by the work that they do together. The scheduling of surgeries is

incredibly important for Yukoners, particularly if, for whatever reason, they need to be changed. I know, from personal and other experience, that the doctors who work on our surgical teams and their teams do everything possible to make sure that Yukoners, if they need to be rescheduled, are rescheduled in a way that is best supported by the teams that we have.

I can unequivocally say — which isn't very often that I would go there in this Legislative Assembly — that the idea — and I will classify it as an idea rather than a set of facts, because I don't have the facts — put forward by the member opposite that the Yukon Department of Health and Social Services is diverting funds that were allocated to the Yukon Hospital Corporation for services, surgical or otherwise, is absolutely incorrect.

Mr. Cathers: Another area related to the hospital finances include that, in a previous fiscal year, this government — for a reason that I could never fathom — chose, instead of providing cash to the Yukon Hospital Corporation to make whole the pension solvency requirements — as, in fact, the minister is doing in this budget here today and as begun under previous ministers, starting with me — the practice of the government was to provide cash to the hospital to allow it to meet the requirements of the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Instruments, but for some reason, the Liberals chose to not provide hospital funding but instead to loan them funding at just under a four-percent increase, for over \$3 million.

Now they are being charged interest on this every year. I asked, at the public meeting of the board of trustees, if that loan was still in place, and it was confirmed that it was. The financial statements that have been audited by the Auditor General and tabled show that amount both on page 25 and on an earlier page that I seem to have lost for the moment. The amount of that loan is over \$3 million. The interest is 3.95 percent. This jumped out at me, especially in contrast to the Premier's plan to give \$44 million to the municipality of Skagway without receiving interest payments on it or any other revenue in the future.

Since that \$3-million loan is still on the books and since it relates to a pension solvency requirement that isn't about to go away, will the minister commit to simply forgiving that loan to the Hospital Corporation and stopping the practice of charging them almost a four-percent increase on that multi-million-dollar loan?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The pension solvency issue continues to be a challenge for the Yukon government with respect to the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the Yukon University, which requires a similar payment to the federal government, as we continue to work with the federal government to work out alternatives to this responsibility. We will continue to do that. The loan which is noted with respect to paying the pension solvency requirements to the federal government last year was done by way of a loan to manage cashflow. It is the responsibility of the Yukon Hospital Corporation at this time, despite the fact that our government is working as a whole to resolve this responsibility. As a result, the determination of a loan option was made in conjunction with the Yukon Hospital Corporation as a way to manage cashflow. The loan is with the Canadian Imperial Bank of

Commerce. I believe it is correct that the interest is charged, at the moment, at 3.9 percent. The loan is still in place.

The Department of Health and Social Services provides funding to the Yukon Hospital Corporation for the purposes of paying the loan payments and the interest payments at this time. As I have noted, we work with them every week, biweekly, and monthly to look at the financial responsibilities of the Yukon Hospital Corporation and to meet them, on behalf of the government. At this point, as we work toward the implementation of a health authority, we expect that the issues of any outstanding loans will be resolved through that process.

Mr. Cathers: It is just hard to understand why this Liberal government is prepared to give millions of dollars to a municipality in Alaska for a facility where there is no certainty that it will ever actually be used — and there is a question about the suitability of the facility — while they charge our hospitals almost four percent interest on a loan related simply to keeping up the government's legal obligations to employees of the Hospital Corporation for pension solvency.

I will move on to other areas here; I do have a long list of questions. I want to start by talking about the closures of health centres that have impacted this territory. Since May, Pelly Crossing, Destruction Bay, Mayo, Teslin, Beaver Creek, and Ross River health centres have been closed or had services reduced for weeks at a time, in some cases. Additionally, there have been warnings about long wait times at the Dawson City hospital for certain procedures.

Again, the concern here is, of course, that this is having a serious effect on Yukon communities. We have seen a lack of attention by this government repeatedly, especially to rural Yukon. I would remind the minister that a written question that I submitted to her way back in March about physician services coverage in rural communities and which of those communities have coverage and which don't and how that it is provided — she still hasn't bothered to respond to that question. Again, this is emblematic and symptomatic of this Liberal government's lack of attention to rural Yukon.

When we see a situation, by the minister's own admission, where nursing vacancies in rural Yukon hit almost 50 percent, it is very concerning. The question is: What has the government done specifically to respond to this crisis, and what are they going to do to prevent this from happening again and creating a situation where our communities don't have the local health services that they depend on?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the opportunity to address this question in this budget debate. I have answered it several times during Question Period, and unfortunately, it continues to be an issue for the member opposite, as it should be, frankly. These are serious concerns with respect to nursing shortages, which is the reason, ultimately — either a shortage with respect to staff at a particular health centre or, more importantly perhaps, sometimes the opportunity to give nursing staff a much-needed break from their responsibilities in communities — remembering — and I know that Yukoners know this — but remembering that nurses who work in Yukon communities certainly have a vast array of responsibilities.

They are often community nurses, of course — RNs and others — they are a confidante; they are emergency responders; they are members of the community, perhaps in a way like no other. Their responsibilities and what they do in health centres across this territory has to ultimately be respected, and as a result, we have taken very serious attempts to make sure that their mental health and physical health is being looked after. Sometimes, unfortunately, that has resulted in nurses being away from their position and, as a result, some health centre reductions in services.

Almost invariably when there are those reductions in services, there are EMS services available in the community; there are perhaps administrative staff keeping the health centre open; there are itinerant doctors assigned to every community in the territory. On occasion, those appointments continue. I am not sure what the description is — you know, it is easy to throw around a health centre closure, which is almost always not the case. Reduction in services — absolutely, there have been some; absolutely, we never want that to be the case, but the realities of the current health human resources situation in the world means that is sometimes what happens. There are emergency services available; there is 811, which is a nurses line direct to an RN who can provide advice and help over the phone. The federal government is soon launching a phone line that will be across the country for mental health services available when someone may be in crisis or just have a question about something. There is a national response to how this reduction in services is being addressed.

What I can say is that none of this is satisfactory to any of us at the Department of Health and Social Services, but I think we are also mindful of the fact that the Yukon Territory has fared quite well with some of the responses, and that is what is being asked about. Nurses' bonuses have been brought in by this government to address recruitment and retention of nurses in Community Health. That is working. We have reduced the vacancy rate significantly.

It is as low as we want it to be yet? Absolutely not. Are we working to make sure that there are additional nurses available to be registered here in the territory? Absolutely. Are we working with other jurisdictions in Canada, looking at best practices and how we can partner with them to determine how nurses can be registered through other provinces or territories and ultimately then registered here in the territory? Absolutely. Are we looking at internationally educated health professionals? Absolutely.

All of this is being coordinated by a health human resources committee that is second to none.

The Government of Yukon has recognized the seriousness of these shortages. In response, we have established a Health Human Resources Steering Committee. It's jointly led by the Department of Health and Social Services and the Yukon Hospital Corporation, because nursing shortages and the impact of that affects both of these organizations.

The committee is using an intersectoral approach to create a Yukon health human resources strategy. We look forward to introducing that very soon, as I've said previously in the Legislature.

What I also want to note is that the Health Human Resources Steering Committee is comprised of decision-makers of every kind in the territory who deal with human resources and health issues. There are representatives from numerous Government of Yukon departments, as I've said: the Hospital Corporation, Yukon University, the Yukon Medical Council, the Yukon Registered Nurses Association, the Yukon Employees' Union, the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, and First Nation representatives. We have constituted a steering committee here that is the decision-makers and those who have ideas to provide better service on front lines to Yukoners. The committee is looking at all aspects of health human resources, including retention, recruitment, planning, and learning and innovation. They're also working to help coordinate, support, and influence health human resources work that is underway in their respective organizations so that it aligns with the committee's recommendations and priorities.

The work of this committee aligns with the ongoing collaborative efforts of the federal government and the provincial and territorial governments. They are all supported by the recent federal investments which identify the health human resources crisis as a shared priority across the country.

I appreciate that some of the members opposite might be interested in categorizing this as some sort of Yukon-government failure. The truth is that we are working very hard and being successful at meeting these challenges.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Deputy Chair, the problem is that the minister ignored calls for years, as did her predecessor, to develop a health human resources strategy to respond to the emerging pressures. They turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to what they were being asked and what they were being told about this until we were at the situation where the crisis in nursing in the Yukon — in rural nursing — had reached a rate whereby the minister's own admission they had an almost 50-percent vacancy rate. It is interesting that the minister disputed the claim that health care centres were closed, but again, it is not the first time that she has done that, but we are relying on the postings that were shared on Facebook primarily by those health care centres and by the minister's own department about closures and gaps in services.

So, we can debate terminology all day, but the bottom line is that Yukoners in rural communities saw a situation where they were not able to access necessary health services in their community, and this followed the government — for years, frankly — ignoring calls to develop a health human resources strategy. I would note, as well, that I am concerned that the minister has — she has noted that they are now working on a health human resources strategy. I am pleased by that.

What I am concerned about is that, again, there seems to be a lack of urgency on the part of the government that took years to actually heed that call from us and from health professionals. This is the same government and the same minister who, after declaring a substance use health emergency, took 20 months to develop its basic strategy for responding to an emergency that it declared.

So, for Yukoners who don't have a doctor or are seeing their nursing station in their community closed and are seeing

their ability to access necessary health care directly impacted as a result of this — again, we will continue to urge the government to develop a sense of urgency to actually take action, not just talk about action.

I want to talk about the impact of those closures and reduced services at health centres in rural communities on EMS coverage. We have seen increasing gaps in EMS coverage across the territory. My colleague the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin noted earlier today during Question Period what he has heard from volunteer EMS responders about the decline in the number who are providing services and a concern that some of that relates to the fact that standby pay and honoraria have not been increased in at least seven years.

I would remind the minister that I actually raised that issue with her at the beginning of April — almost seven months ago. The minister said she would look into it, but what we are seeing on the ground in these communities — again, Deputy Chair, I remind you, we are seeing an increasing series of gaps in local EMS coverage that have been unprecedented until this Liberal government was in power. Those communities need action, and the amount of money we are talking about that would be required to provide a significant increase to EMS volunteer standby pay and honoraria would comparatively — the amount of money that the government spent on the Premier's failed trip to India could have much better been spent on increasing standby pay and honoraria for EMS volunteers across the territory. That might have had a direct impact on improving EMS coverage instead of simply being taxpayers' money wasted on a junket.

We know that the minister has repeatedly said throughout the summer that, where there were gaps in health services in rural Yukon, EMS was stepping in to cover it. We know, as well, that local EMS coverage has been very strained and has had large gaps in it, and when that is the case, they deploy paramedics from Whitehorse in response to calls.

The question is this: What has the impact of that been on EMS in the Whitehorse area, as well as on the capacity to provide medevacs? We have heard about delays in calls being responded to in rural Yukon, we have heard about a growing number of delays in calls being responded to in the Whitehorse area, and we have heard that this pattern of deploying EMS paramedics from Whitehorse to rural communities has also directly impacted the government's ability to do medevacs in some situations.

So, can the minister tell us what that impact has been? We are looking for numbers, not simply rhetoric.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: In 2023-24, we budgeted \$12.3 million for EMS. This is a net-zero transfer between the Department of Community Services — as I had the opportunity to say earlier today — and Health and Social Services to have more efficient work between EMS and the health care partners that they work with on a regular basis for smoother transfers and services where EMS and community health services work together to serve Yukoners better. There are 87.3 FTEs and 98 community responders providing EMS across the territory. Their current operations include ambulance services, ground operations, the paramedic specialists clinic at 405 Alexander,

and the paramedic response unit — are fully staffed here in Whitehorse.

I note that, in the question — I hesitate to say that it's difficult to hear the member opposite, because then I usually get a response that I am just trying to ignore it and I have been accused of ignoring a bunch of things already.

Today, the truth is that it is difficult to hear the member opposite. I understood the question — and some part of the question — to be with respect to EMS experiencing shortages and, for some reason, the paramedic response unit of EMS — the people who go to communities to provide additional service coverage when there may be reductions in coverage — was something that the member opposite didn't think was valuable, but clearly, EMS does. The opportunity to work and to cover shortages in communities and for community responders and EMS workers in all Yukon communities from time to time is critically important. EMS continues to recruit and increase the number of responders in Whitehorse and in all communities.

In 2022, EMS in Yukon communities had full coverage 68 percent of the time, while EMS in Dawson City had full coverage 86 percent of the time, and Watson Lake had full coverage approximately 95 percent of the time or higher. I could provide other statistics, if appropriate or necessary, going forward.

We are working with the Yukon Medical Association — actually, I will come back to that in a moment.

I will note that, with respect to air ambulance responses that were unavailable — I think there was questioning about that. In 2022, there was one occasion when an air ambulance response was unavailable due to the service available in the community, and in 2023 to date, there has been no such occasion.

We are working with the Yukon Medical Association on an inter-hospital and inter-community EMS transfer protocol and program to ultimately increase the efficiency within the system as to how EMS and hospitals work together and how they can respond better. I note that EMS recently increased the monetary compensation to four hours of non-operational pay per month to encourage community responder attendance and support biweekly training nights. Community responders are reimbursed \$19.08 per hour to attend training and have access to additional funding to attend training programs outside of their home area. This includes an additional offset for meals, incidentals, tuition, books, and accommodation. Community responders receive honoraria pay for the commitment to EMS provided for on-call services, training, and all operational deployment. We are currently exploring opportunities to expand the honoraria for community responders, which I again had the opportunity to say during Question Period today. I expect that the members opposite will understand that this is a positive commitment going forward.

In addition to this funding, community responders receive a retention bonus of \$1,000 upon completion of 250 hours of on-call duties, and EMS provides \$110,000 to the volunteer ambulance society to provide funding for additional education opportunities, awards, recognition, and community engagement.

I will end the answer to this question with one exception, and that is to again express the heartfelt thanks of Yukoners with respect to EMS workers and the services they provide to Yukoners. From personal and other experience — and certainly experience as the minister — I've had a number of fantastic opportunities to work and to recognize the excellent work of Yukon EMS folks. They are amazing members of our community. They meet Yukoners when they are simply not at their best, to be quite frank, and they save lives every day, they provide service to Yukoners when they are in a very stressful situation, and they do so with kindness, compassion, and dedication to their profession. As such, we should recognize them, we should care for them appropriately, and we should thank them for their service to Yukoners.

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

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

Deputy Chair: Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any further general debate?

Mr. Cathers: When the minister responded to my last question, unfortunately, she didn't provide an answer to what I had asked about the numbers related to the coverage gaps in EMS, as well as the number of times that paramedics from Whitehorse were deployed to provide local service in rural communities.

The minister then went on to talk about how much she appreciates what EMS staff and volunteers do. As the minister knows very well — though she seemed to be trying to imply otherwise — my colleagues and I very much appreciate what our EMS staff and volunteers do across the territory, but the problem that I was highlighting is that they are not getting enough support in communities.

As my colleague pointed out earlier today and I pointed out to the minister in April, the standby pay for EMS volunteers, who provide the majority of the coverage in rural Yukon communities, has not been significantly increased in many years. Meanwhile, the cost of everything has gone up. I asked the minister to look at standby pay and honoraria in the spring. She indicated that she would, yet here we are, about seven months later, and there is no sign of action.

My point is, Deputy Chair, that when you have an EMS coverage crisis in rural Yukon communities coinciding with a rural nursing crisis affecting most of those same communities, action is needed. Waiting seven months with no sign of action to increase support for EMS volunteers is not acceptable.

I hope the minister will follow through on her commitment today and actually do something about this issue.

I will also note that the minister seemed to be trying to imply that, as far as EMS management was concerned, deploying from Whitehorse was perfectly fine and there were

no issues with it. Again, what I'm pointing to is that we know the issues that creates for response time in Yukon communities, particularly with urgent responses, which include strokes and heart attacks or responses to a serious motor vehicle incident or other trauma-type injury. There can be a situation where waiting an hour for a response means the difference between life and death of a patient. We have fortunately not been in that situation — despite the growing EMS coverage gaps in Yukon communities — where that seems to have happened in a Yukon community.

The reason I am so emphatic on this issue is that I believe it is simply a matter of time, with growing EMS coverage gaps in Yukon communities, before we have a situation where a delayed response means the difference between life and death, and then we will be talking about what to do in the wake of a coroner's review of the situation. That is something that should be avoided.

I only make that point in the interest of trying to create a sense of urgency on the part of the minister for actually increasing standby pay and honoraria for EMS volunteers across the territory, as well as working with the Volunteer Ambulance Services Society and supervisors to strengthen government support for those volunteers, as well as local training opportunities, to get more volunteers in those communities.

What happens when the deployment from Whitehorse occurs — as I mentioned, the response can be delayed — it also impacts EMS coverage in Whitehorse and the surrounding area. As members may recall, the Leader of the Third Party — previously in this House, I believe it was in the Spring Sitting — asked questions about the number of code red situations when an ambulance is actually not available for response due to a 911 call. This is a serious situation, and it is only a matter of time before we end up with a worse problem than we have had so far, so action is actually needed by the minister. Yukoners shouldn't have to wait another seven months in this area.

Speaking of waiting, Deputy Chair, the minister again, after years of the Yukon Party and health professionals pushing for a new health human resources strategy — in March, the government began the development of a new health human resources strategy, which, although belated, we do appreciate that they finally acted on it. It's now almost eight months since that work began. We have heard that we might hear something tangible soon, but our question is — we're looking for outcomes from this; we're looking for actions even if it's early actions that are followed by later actions that are agreed to by those involved. In a situation where we have a crisis and a shortage of nurses, we have thousands of Yukoners who don't have a family doctor, growing gaps in EMS coverage in rural Yukon, and an unprecedented series of health centres either closing or reducing services in rural communities, the time for action is now. Actually, the time for action should have been a while ago, but all that can be done right now is for the minister to treat this with the sense of urgency it deserves and show us actions as a result of this work.

Since the minister seems to have been making a habit of using her full time in responses, I am going to throw in some other questions just in the interest of maximizing our time.

Deputy Chair, earlier this year, we have asked questions about steps that have been taken by other jurisdictions to fast-track allowing internationally trained doctors and nurses to practise in their jurisdiction in an expedited manner. Again, the approach that has been used by a number of provinces is a shortlist model, which — well, to emphasize again, we have always said that government should consult with the Yukon Medical Association, the Yukon Medical Council, and the Yukon Registered Nurses Association to understand their views and make sure that it is being dealt with in a responsible manner.

The question is whether they are looking at a shortlist approach. The Premier signed an MOU with Nova Scotia regarding collaboration, but we have yet to see any outcome. So, can the minister tell us: Are they going to shortlist and fast-track, allowing doctors and nurses from other countries with a high standard, such as the United States, to practise here in an expedited manner, and if so, which countries?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I'm being criticized for using the time that I have available, but I take very seriously the opportunity to speak to Yukoners and to provide as much thorough information as I can. I have also been accused of making implications when I spoke about my pride in our staff and our service providers for Yukoners. I'm sure the member opposite doesn't need to worry about implications. I say plainly what I need to say. If I have something to say about a topic, I will plainly say so, being mindful of the fact that Yukoners are the ultimate constituents and the people who are looking for this information.

We are working with the Nova Scotia government. The lead-up to the question was about some details about an MOU. I think that it is important, and I plainly know that Yukoners will know that lots of work is happening in the background. We don't just sign an MOU with Nova Scotia and then wander away, never to be dealing with them. The officials at the Department of Health and Social Services work diligently and constantly to move forward our health care services, to improve them for Yukoners, and to continue to evolve and transform our Yukon health care system, pursuant to the recommendations of *Putting People First*.

We are working with the Nova Scotia government, currently, on issues around recruitment, with a focus on rural and underrepresented communities. I will just hit some of the topics with respect to the work that is happening with the Nova Scotia government at the officials level and others: retention of health care workforce, inclusion, equity and reconciliation, and cultural safety, which is something that the Yukon brings to the table, in their background and knowledge. We are working on ethical international recruitment and the impact that will have in bringing folks to Canada and the foreign credentialing program — which we are learning about from Nova Scotia. We are working with them on training and academic partnerships to support the workforce expansion. Another topic is labour mobility, the health workforce data and the collection thereof,

and our responsibilities with the Government of Canada. We are working with them on understanding new models of care and improvement there and the health system transformation — those are the list of 10 topics, I think I have noted, that are currently on the table in our work with the government officials from Nova Scotia.

With respect to the work being done on internationally educated health care providers, it was committed to continuing to explore this initiative, and we are confident that, in the future, we will see a return on the investment and the work that has been done. During the recent trip to India, for instance, representatives met with officials from the Government of Kerala and with NORKA, which is a government emigration agency, with nursing regulators, hospitals, and nursing schools particularly designed for that purpose.

More work will need to be done with prospective partners in India and here in the Yukon before we see any nurses directly recruited, but this work continues. We want to ensure that internationally educated health professionals are well-supported and integrated into our communities, our health care system, and our facilities in order to ensure their personal success and to ensure that Yukoners receive the high-quality care they deserve and expect.

The standard of education of many of our internationally educated professionals is stellar, and Canadians will fare well when we are able to have them become part of our health care system. Our efforts in India, for example, are part of our medium- and long-term approaches to respond to the health human resources crisis. This is not an immediate fix and work is ongoing so that it can be a medium- or long-term approach.

In the coming weeks, we will be releasing the health human resources strategy, as I noted earlier, which will outline an intersectoral approach to addressing these challenges. The India trip is just one element of what will be a multi-faceted approach. Internationally educated professionals have historically played an important role in the delivery of health care in Canada, and we recognize that best leveraging their expertise is a challenge being addressed by all governments across Canada. I have indicated previously, with the opportunity to address the Legislature in response to a question, that this is a top priority on ministers of health and social services' agendas across the country and I expect it will continue to be so. The concept of health human resources issues is the top priority, I would say, at the moment for health care and health and social services ministers. A major part of that is how we can respond to internationally educated health professionals and welcome them here in Canada to our systems.

Mr. Cathers: Again, what my concern is — and the minister referenced the MOU with Nova Scotia. What we're not seeing is any evidence of action by the government.

I would point out in contrast specific examples. Nova Scotia, which they signed the MOU with, is already allowing US board-certified doctors and surgeons to practise in Nova Scotia. They have done that. Indications are that it is working. This is something that this government could consider as an early action — allowing doctors from the US and perhaps the

UK to practise in the Yukon as long as they are in good standing.

Similarly, Nova Scotia has expedited the process for nurses from a short list of countries. Alberta, for example — and I will quote from a CBC article from back in May entitled “Alberta flooded with applications from international nurses as requirements ease”, dated May 1. At that time, that article indicates that, as of May 1, the Alberta college had issued 672 permits since the launch for internationally educated nurses, as it says in the article. These are examples of things that are being done and have been done for months by provinces, but we see no evidence of real action by the government to actually fast-track the recognition of credentials of doctors and nurses from jurisdictions such as the US, United Kingdom, and perhaps others.

I will look forward to seeing more from this. I am sure I am not going to get more information from the minister on that specific topic today.

I would like to move on to a couple of other specific areas that relate to hospital physician coverage after January 1. We understand that there are issues related to that and some uncertainty. Can the minister explain what the situation is? Our understanding is that currently no physicians have confirmed that they will providing those services after the beginning of January. I understand that there has been a request made related to different financial remunerations. I am not asking the minister to negotiate in public on this, but I would appreciate it if she can explain the situation and what is being done to address it. Again, as I have said to media, what we would like to see is all of the involved parties working together to come up with a reasonable solution that provides consistent coverage going forward.

I would also ask the minister if she could provide information, either now or when she next rises, about several wait times that had I asked her about previously as well as the issue of wait times generally if she has other specific information at her fingertips.

Could the minister provide us with an update on what the current wait times are for cardiac care, for ophthalmology and cataract surgery, for non-urgent MRI, for mammography, for joint replacement surgery, and for audiologist services? Those are all issues that I asked the minister about in the spring. Those are all specific areas where we know that the wait times have been too long. I may not have asked the minister about mammography in the spring, but I did ask her about the others, and that has been brought to my attention as well.

Since I expect that it will take a moment for officials to get that specific information for the minister, I will move on to the issue of contracts for physicians, including specialists. We understand that, under the most recent memorandum of understanding signed with the YMA, the government had agreed to provide the option for doctors and specialists to either practise through fee-for-service or through contract. We know that there have been some frustrations from specialists related to that and concerns that some feel that there has not been equal treatment between those on fee-for-service and certain contracts. I know that the department has been contacted by at

least one of those specialists who has reached out to us and has provided us with a comparison to someone else with similar credentials who is receiving a different arrangement than they are.

Could the minister please explain what they are doing or where they are not following through on their commitment to the YMA around that flexibility and equity between the fee-for-service model and the contract model?

Last but not least, I would just ask the minister about the issue of addictions treatment and what is being done in that area. Could the minister indicate — we know that there is some funding allocated in the budget related to this area. We have heard — and the government’s own reports have confirmed — that there has been a lack of action around expanding addictions treatment and that vulnerable people, including those accessing services at the shelter, have been turned away from addictions treatment. Can the minister tell us what, if anything, has actually been done to increase treatment spaces and expand availability now? Have there been any new spaces created, and if not, when will those spaces be created?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: There are a number of questions there. I don’t anticipate being able to answer all of them in the remaining time today, but I will do my very best.

The first question is about some — I want to say “rumours”. But I’m happy to have the opportunity to clear up what is happening with respect to our partnership with the Yukon Hospital Corporation and inpatient care. In partnership with the Hospital Corporation and the hospitalist physicians, who are also known as “doctor of the day”, the Government of Yukon has been working to support a request to formalize the hospitalist program at Whitehorse General Hospital.

Over the last several years, inpatient care has been provided by family physicians who support their own patients and a doctor-of-the-day model or a doctor-of-the-day assigned doctor to provide inpatient care to patients who do not have their own health care provider with hospital privileges.

The doctor-of-the-day program in Whitehorse General Hospital has been in place since 2008. The model of care was developed at a time when growing demand for inpatient services necessitated a shift to that model.

In 2020, one physician undertook a trial of a hospitalist type of model at Whitehorse General Hospital. It has evolved since then into a three-person model, and they support inpatient care, as well as additional family doctors who have now either handed over the care of their patients or they are reducing their availability to do that. The three-person model, currently known as the “doctor of the day” — or some people call it the “hospitalist model” — at Whitehorse General Hospital — we are now working to have that program go forward on a permanent basis. It is shifting in some ways. The changing nature of the ways in which physicians practise and increasing complex needs in health care have necessitated a shift in how inpatient care is provided, and we are supportive of that shift. We are working with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to achieve that.

An expression of interest will be sent out very soon that will seek physicians, both inside and outside of the Yukon, to

fully resource the hospitalist program, and they will be employed full time as hospitalists. I can also indicate that a hospitalist model is something that exists in almost every jurisdiction in Canada and certainly in hospitals everywhere. I don't have the numbers on exactly how many, but I daresay and know that they operate in British Columbia hospitals.

We remain committed to working with physicians, the Yukon Medical Association, and the Yukon Hospital Corporation to ensure that this new model of inpatient care is properly resourced and able to continue to provide stable and high quality inpatient care to Yukoners.

I don't want to delve into the rumour, but I understand it to be said that, as of January, there would not be Yukon or, more likely, Whitehorse family physicians providing care to their own patients. Ideally, that is what is expected. We certainly hope that we can staff this model and have the expression of interest go out very quickly for the purposes of having the hospitalist program up and running. It is the responsibility of Whitehorse General Hospital, and we are working closely with them, as we have this program become more permanent and provide the inpatient care that is needed.

The next question was about wait times, and I am happy to provide numbers. I am not sure if we have numbers that are more up-to-date than those that were provided in the spring, but I certainly am happy to provide what I can about those. I just want to make sure that I have them. Cardiology — so far, in 2023, a total of 439 individuals received services through the program of having visiting cardiologists, who provide six visits a year, and two visiting pediatric cardiologists, who offer two visits per year. Wait times and wait-lists fluctuate based on the frequency of the visits. In 2022, a total of 1,531 services were supported through the program.

Ophthalmology — in 2019, we implemented a two-year plan to successfully reduce the wait times for cataract assessments. The plan was extended to support managing wait times. We are working toward meeting our target of completing cataract surgery within six months and also assessments within four months and then, if surgery is appropriate, that being done within six months. At this time, surgeries are being completed within 12 months — the target being six. Between 2019 and 2020, a combined total of 870 cataract surgeries were completed, and during 2021-22, there were only 450, so we are completing more and more, to the benefit of Yukoners.

I think that I was asked also about — I was going to say — orthopaedics. I don't have that on my list. I think that there is an MRI, pediatricians — and I know that there is an MRI note that I can find with respect to those numbers. I think that I had it earlier, but I don't want to guess at that.

I can move on — yes, I knew I had a page. Thank you very much, deputy minister. Yukon hospitals follow national guidelines and triaging MRI referrals to ensure those with the highest need are supported first. As of June 30, 2023, a total of 614 MRIs were completed during the 2023-24 fiscal year; in 2022-23, a total of 3,198 MRIs were completed. They are categorized into urgent, semi-urgent, and non-urgent. Non-urgent MRI cases aim to be supported as close to 90 days as possible and are close to meeting this target. As of June 30,

2023, most non-urgent were being completed within 122 days. Urgent cases are supported within seven days and are being completed within this target. Semi-urgent cases aim to be supported as close to 30 days as possible and are being completed within this target.

Mr. Cathers: I look forward to hearing more information about the response there.

Just recognizing that our time is drawing short here this afternoon, I am going to touch on several other areas. If the minister could provide an update on the surgical services area — that is something that was brought forward as a priority by the Yukon Medical Association to all three political parties during the last territorial election.

If the minister could provide us with an update on vacancies in home care, as well as rural services. We have heard directly from people who live in rural communities who are qualified to work for home care and would like to provide service in those communities but have found a situation where — despite their attempts to suggest to the government that they make jobs available to provide services in those communities where there actually are clients in need — they have only been offered jobs in Whitehorse. I would ask the minister if she could again comment on the home-care vacancy rate and the rural services issue.

As well, I would ask the minister about how many patients are currently registered on the government's program to find a doctor, how many doctors are registered with it, and what the most recent estimate is of Yukoners who do not have a family doctor — what is the total estimate of the number of Yukoners who do not have a family doctor right now?

I also want to remind the minister of letters that she hasn't responded to from my colleagues and me. I reminded the minister of the written question from the spring that remains outstanding. I sent the minister another letter entitled "Emergency Medical Services dispatch and response issues highlighted by an accident". I will not get into the contents of it. I would urge the minister, in responding, to be respectful of the personal privacy of the person involved. The response issues that I identified in that letter included two 911 calls which were reportedly not responded to by EMS and EMS not having the proper equipment to respond in wilderness areas accessible by trail near Whitehorse.

I would also remind the minister that other correspondence that remains outstanding includes a letter I wrote to her earlier in the summer on behalf of a constituent regarding care of a parent at Whistle Bend Place and family concerns. I would urge the minister to respond to those as well as to other letters that I may not be aware of that the minister has not responded to. There are people who are affected at the heart of the letters and the questions which I mentioned, and they are looking for answers from the minister. I would encourage her to provide a thoughtful response to those issues.

Last but not least, as the time draws to a close here this afternoon, I would ask the minister to provide an update on the Constellation Health Centre. We know that there were concerns in the Yukon Medical Association regarding the way that the government approached it and the lack of working with them

on developing a reasonable model. We understand that the government has had challenges finding a doctor to work there and it is currently a 0.2-physician position. We would like the minister to indicate what their plans are regarding that going forward.

Finally, if she could provide an update on the status of the walk-in clinic that she had initially indicated that she thought would be open last spring — in 2022, to be specific. We know that it is referenced in the CASA with the NDP, but we have yet to hear clear indications of what the government is doing to develop a realistic plan for operating that facility.

With that, I will hand it back to the minister in case she has some answers to the questions I asked here.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am mindful of the time, so I will only take the opportunity to say two things. We have hired a physician to work at the Constellation Health Centre. I look forward to more information being provided on that.

I can also say that I am quite confident that I have responded in some way to every piece of correspondence that I have ever received since I was given the honour of this position in 2016. I'm not sure why the members opposite are laughing. It is very important to me that I respond to individuals, to caseworks, to people who have taken the time to write to me in my responsibilities and provide them with the information that I can, and I do. I understand that there are two outstanding caseworks from the member opposite. I will endeavour to look into those. I appreciate his encouragement that I would answer all my correspondence, but I do.

Deputy Chair, I move that you report progress.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Riverdale South that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-2024*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

The House adjourned at 5:29 p.m.