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HANSARD

Wednesday, November 8, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall Sitting

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

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

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Brad Cathers	Lake Laberge	Patti McLeod	Watson Lake
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THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

Kate White	Leader of the Third Party Takhini-Kopper King
Lane Tredger	Third Party House Leader Whitehorse Centre
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**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, November 8, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

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

Are there any visitors to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly to help me give a warm welcome to a number of leaders in the innovation sector here in the Yukon. There are lots of visitors with us today. I would like to have us welcome: Ziad Sahid, executive director of Tech Yukon; Steve Mooney, CEO of Kluane Dana Shaw LP; Shayna Hammer and Erin Scott, leadership with YuKonstruct; Tiffany Eckert-Maret, with Yukon First Nations chamber, also with Da Daghay Development Corporation; as well as Ben Asquith, with Da Daghay; Dylan Soo, executive director with TIA Yukon; Barrett Horne, with Yukon Venture Angels; Caitlyn MacMaster, with the Yukon University Innovation and Entrepreneurship team; Aiden McRae; Colin Gervais, with Mitacs; and Ben Sanders, with HyperYou.

Let's give a big, warm welcome to everybody here supporting us for our tribute today.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, we are also doing a tribute today on the Yukon Prize. We have several guests. We have Julie Jai, a co-founder of the Yukon Prize, and two of our finalists — and I'm hoping we get a third — Alannah Whachell and Omar Reyna. We also have Mary Bradshaw, from the Yukon Arts Centre and one of the Yukon Prize Committee members. We also have Deputy Minister Sierra Van der Meer here and also a constituent and councillor of the Marsh Lake Local Advisory Council, and I think the new vice-president of the Yukon Employees' Union, Lisa Vollans-Leduc, and if we could also please welcome Kaylyn Baker, the Yukon Prize winner.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Yukon Prize for visual arts

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the Yukon Prize for visual arts and the 2023 recipient, Kaylyn Baker.

The Yukon is teeming with artistic talent. Julie Jai and David Trick wanted to celebrate the Yukon's visual artists and increase opportunities by showcasing their work to audiences across Canada and the world. In 2021, they founded the Yukon Prize for visual arts.

Working together with the Yukon Arts Foundation and the Yukon Arts Centre, this biennial award is a wonderful achievement for both those who create and experience art.

In 2023, approximately 60 Yukon artists applied for the prize. Applicants represented a diverse array of media: beadwork, illustration, sound, and sculptural installations. The intake showcased the breadth of Yukon's creativity.

From these applicants, a jury of esteemed Canadian arts professionals chose six finalists: Kaylyn Baker, Jeffrey Langille, Rebekah Miller, Cole Pauls, Omar Reyna, and Alannah Whachell.

In September, I had the honour of attending the award gala announcing the winner of the 2023 Yukon Prize, Northern Tutchone and Tlingit artist Kaylyn Baker. Kaylyn's work is absolutely stunning. She creates innovative beaded designs using both traditional and contemporary materials. Whether it is jewellery, garments, accessories, or regalia, Kaylyn's beadwork is breathtaking.

Kaylyn is a Selkirk First Nation citizen. She says that beading is a way for her to connect with her ancestors and to tell stories through her creations. I spoke with her mother and her grandmother right after Kaylyn was awarded the Yukon Prize, and they were beaming with pride.

A reminder that the Yukon Arts Centre is exhibiting the Yukon Prize finalists' show until November 18 — new this year is the introduction of the Viewers' Choice Award where the public votes for their favourite. This award is sponsored by Casino Mining. Tomorrow evening at the Yukon Arts Centre, it will be awarded at a Business After Hours. Please come.

The pieces from all six artists are incredible. The creativity and dedication to their craft is remarkable. Best of luck to the six finalists with tomorrow night's award.

I ask this House to join me in congratulating Kaylyn Baker and each of the incredibly talented finalists. We thank them for sharing their gifts. A big thank you to Julie and David for their passion in raising the profile of Yukon visual arts and artists. The diverse forms of art and vibrant culture found here in the Yukon help form our collective identity and are our Yukon story. The creative practices of our artists deserve to be seen on the world stage.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to this year's recipient of the Yukon Prize for visual arts and to recognize all of those responsible for organizing the prize and the first Yukon Prize celebration weekend held September 14 to 16.

The Yukon Prize for visual arts aims to help Yukon artists gain the national and international attention that they deserve. The prize was first offered in 2021 and is held every two years. The Yukon Arts Centre hosted the opening of a show of art by the six Yukon Prize finalists on September 14.

On September 15, there were 19 galleries and venues across downtown Whitehorse that opened their doors for the first Yukon Prize art crawl among the small businesses and not-for-profits that show and sell Yukon art.

During the day on Saturday, September 16, there were large turnouts for talks, tours, and workshops at Yukon University, the Yukon Archives, and the Yukon Arts Centre.

The capstone of the weekend was the Yukon Prize gala on Saturday evening, September 16 — a spectacular show in the Yukon Arts Centre theatre with special performances by well-known Yukon musicians and dancers. It was such a beautiful event and I had a wonderful time chatting with a lot of old and new friends. The show culminated with the awarding of the \$20,000 Yukon Prize for visual arts to Kaylyn Baker, a citizen of Selkirk First Nation, based in Whitehorse.

Kaylyn Baker is an avid beader, using a variety of traditional and contemporary materials and textiles. She draws on the principles of visual art to create her own designs. In addition to making jewellery, Kaylyn's beadwork adorns garments and accessories. Her work has walked the red carpet at the Emmy Awards. She was a featured designer at Vancouver Indigenous Fashion Week 2022, as well as the Adäka art festival fashion show in Whitehorse in 2022.

For Kaylyn, beading is a way to connect with her ancestors through her spontaneous style of what she calls "beaded storytelling". The other five finalists — each who were awarded \$3,000 — included Jeffrey Langille, Rebekah Miller, Cole Pauls, Omar Reyna, and Alannah Whachell.

Six more artists made the long list for this year's prize, including Justin Apperley, Robyn McLeod, Meshell Melvin, Jackie Olson, Nicole Rayburn, and Rosemary Scanlon.

I would like to thank the Yukon Arts Foundation and the Yukon Arts Centre — essential partners for the Yukon Prize. I would also like to give special thanks to the co-founders of the Yukon Prize for visual arts, Julie Jai and David Trick, for what they do for our community.

My congratulations to Kaylyn, to all finalists, and thanks to all 64 artists who applied for this year's prize. It is not easy to put yourself out there, but your art enriches our lives and our communities.

Applause

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Yukon NDP, it is a real honour to congratulate Kaylyn Baker, who has been named the recipient of the 2023 Yukon Prize for visual arts. Kaylyn is a young Northern Tutchone woman who is a citizen of the Selkirk First Nation and is also of Tlingit ancestry. Kaylyn is a mother to three beautiful children and an active member of the Selkirk Spirit Dancers.

It is so good to see the hard work and artistic talent of Kaylyn receive such esteemed recognition. Over the last number of years, the art, hard work, and beauty of First Nation beading is being recognized not only for its cultural significance, but is finally recognized as a true art form. Today, beading is found on both national and international fashion runways and on walls in high-profile art galleries while also being worn by folks such as actors, advocates, and allies.

Kaylyn's beading not only captures the beauty of colour, her creations capture so much imagery from her traditional territory, including landscapes, animals, fish, birds, and so much more. Kaylyn's creations are recognized globally for the

stories that are brought to life while also shedding light on the power of beading and its cultural significance.

It has been a real privilege for me to witness the growth of Kaylyn and her beading. I can recall sitting in a sociology class with Kaylyn in 2015 and watching her learn her techniques of beading while listening to our instructor talk on sociological theories, and here we are today, honouring Kaylyn's hard work, dedication, and beading. The art of beading is held in high regard in Yukon First Nation cultures, as it unifies beaders from across generations, creates spaces for healing and creation, while also building relationships, connection, purpose, belonging, and identity.

In many cultures across Indigenous communities, it is our beading that can tell the story of what family we come from and who we are as a person. Beading creates space for traditional knowledge to be passed on across generations and creates stronger families and communities.

Congratulations to Kaylyn on an incredible accomplishment. Keep on beading and smashing your goals. You are a great example of the good that comes when dreams are achieved and you grow into your full potential. We are so proud of you.

We also want to recognize the other finalists and all the individuals who were nominated for this prize. Thank you so much for sharing your talent with us across the territory. Finally, thanks to Julie Jai and David Trick, the co-founders of the Yukon Prize for visual arts.

Mahsi' cho.

Applause

In recognition of Yukon Innovation Week

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to pay tribute to Yukon Innovation Week 2023. Yukon Innovation Week began on November 6 and will run until November 10. This year's event centres around the theme of "Connecting Innovators".

Hosted by Tech Yukon, Yukonstruct, the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon, and Yukon University, Yukon Innovation Week offers a comprehensive schedule filled with a variety of events and workshops open to all Yukoners. These events provide venues for people to meet, make, and grow transformative ideas. There are engaging workshops where participants discover ways to change our future. There are panels to attend where listeners learn about available supports and where discussion thrives. Participants will develop capacity, skills, knowledge, and a mindset geared toward innovation and entrepreneurship. Whether you want to learn a new skill, cultivate your networks, or overcome your fear of heights through virtual reality, Yukon Innovation Week is a prime opportunity for Yukoners to get inspired.

Our territory is home to many inspirational entrepreneurs, leaders, and passionate community members who are dedicated to making the Yukon a better place to live, work, and play. Innovation has the capacity to create new opportunities, break down barriers, and provide boundless possibilities for our communities. For example, Yukon innovators are working on several practical ways to help mitigate and adapt to climate

change. These initiatives range from new ways to monitor climate events to expedite our response times to empowering homeowners and businesses with the knowledge needed to enhance energy efficiency of our buildings. All of these endeavours are part of our collective commitment to building a more sustainable future.

I strongly believe that it is important to support and celebrate the Yukon's innovative thinkers. On Thursday, November 9, the Yukon Beringia Centre will host the fourth annual Hall of Innovators Award Ceremony. These awards recognize the remarkable achievements of innovators throughout the territory.

In closing, I would like to thank all of the sponsors, guest speakers, volunteers, and organizations that make the week possible. There are still events open to all, and I encourage Yukoners to attend. Visit yukoninnovationweek.com to find the schedule. Your ideas can add to the future innovation ecosystem of our territory and, in small ways and large ways, can truly change the world.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to Yukon Innovation Week, being held from November 6 to 10. The theme for 2023 is "Connecting Innovators". So many special things are going on to celebrate and explore the world of innovation, creativity, and information as Yukon innovators, entrepreneurs, and community organizations get together to meet, make, and grow. Each of these three categories showcase topics to meet, make, and grow and the times to engage for each event. There is something for everyone. Just the names for the workshops should entice you: "Fail Boldly: Breaking the Failure Taboo" or "Early Stage Investing" and many other topics.

There is a daily podcast that takes a deep dive into entrepreneurs who are leading the way in health and wellness. How exciting to hear from locals who are willing to share their experiences. To cap off the week, the fourth annual Hall of Innovators Award gala will be held at the Beringia Centre. It is a sold-out event and I'm sure the attendees will have an evening to remember as they meet, see what has been made, and grow.

Thank you to all the sponsors and hard-working people behind the scenes who make this event successful and fun for all the participants. It's awesome to see so many creative ideas and interest in the world of innovating and building for a better future. We look forward to hearing about the recipients of the awards this coming weekend and we wish all the best to the nominees. Good luck and keep on sharing your ideas with all of Yukon — well done.

Applause

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate the innovators and the outside-the-box thinkers during this year's Yukon Innovation Week. This annual event offers a variety of platforms for local innovators, entrepreneurs, social enterprises, community organizations, and citizens to meet, make, and grow innovative and

transformative ideas. It celebrates those who are leading positive change in the north.

This jam-packed week invites Yukoners across the territory to meet, make, and grow. It also invites those watching to be inspired and follow the lead with their own ideas to make our communities better places for all.

With a variety of events designed to inspire, inform, and empower, there has not been a single slow day or night this week, and to wrap up the week with a bow, tomorrow night is the Hall of Innovators Award Ceremony — 6 p.m. at the Beringia Interpretive Centre. As we heard, it is a sold-out event.

I look forward to celebrating this year's winners, those who make the Yukon a better place to live, those who see the need for change and step forward, and those who take an idea and make it a reality. Congratulations to all of those who were nominated, and the winners, of course, will be announced tomorrow night.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I have an open letter to Canadian premiers from the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions.

Speaker: Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Petitions.

PETITIONS

Petition No. 22 — received

Clerk: Mr. Speaker and honourable members of the Assembly: I have had the honour to review a petition, being Petition No. 22, of the First Session of the 35th Legislative Assembly, as presented by the Member for Whitehorse Centre on November 7, 2023.

The petition presented by the Member for Whitehorse Centre meets the requirements as to form of the Standing Orders of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

Speaker: Accordingly, I declare Petition No. 22 is deemed to be read and received. Pursuant to Standing Order 67, the Executive Council shall provide a response to a petition which has been read and received within eight sitting days of its presentation. Therefore, the Executive Council response to Petition No. 22 shall be provided on or before November 22, 2023.

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT it is the opinion of this House that:

(1) the Yukon's health care system, including our hospitals, is of vital importance to the people of the Yukon and that public transparency regarding the financial situation and cost pressures facing the Yukon Hospital Corporation is essential; and

(2) government secrecy regarding the Ernst & Young Orenda Corporate Finance Inc. report related to financial management of the Yukon Hospital Corporation is contrary to the public interest.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the government to demonstrate transparency and accountability regarding the Yukon's health care system by taking the following actions:

(1) immediately making public the full report done by Ernst & Young Orenda Corporate Finance Inc. regarding the financial management of the Yukon Hospital Corporation, which was done under a sole-source contract approved by the Premier against the advice of government officials; and

(2) ensuring that the chair and chief executive officer of the Yukon Hospital Corporation appear as witnesses in the Legislative Assembly during the 2023 Fall Sitting to answer questions about matters including cost pressures, the current financial situation, and their views regarding the report done by Ernst & Young Orenda Corporate Finance Inc. regarding the financial management of the Yukon Hospital Corporation.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Council of the Federation meeting and health summit

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of starting the week by representing the Yukon at the Council of the Federation meeting and health summit in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The regular gathering offers a platform for all Premiers to connect and discuss shared priorities and matters both of concern and opportunity.

Our continued participation ensures that the Yukon's voice is heard and that our unique needs are considered in the broader Canadian context. Over the two days, we discussed strategic infrastructure, housing affordability and health care, reliable roadways, diverse housing options, hospital wait times and everything in between. These are areas that touch all of our lives. While the challenges look different in each jurisdiction, it was clear from our conversations that these are areas of concern for every province and territory across Canada.

Another outcome from the meeting was our repeated request for the Prime Minister to call a First Ministers' meeting to discuss competitiveness and strategic infrastructure. We also emphasized the need for the federal government to provide funding that is both secure and flexible to help provinces and territories deal with their distinct infrastructure challenges.

Investing in infrastructure improves the well-being of our communities and creates the conditions for long-term economic growth.

When provincial, territorial, and federal governments work together, we can help find solutions that fit different needs and situations across the country. Provinces and territories have the opportunity to share knowledge as we address shared challenges such as housing affordability and supply.

We discussed action to address issues in health care such as wait times, access to primary care, mental health and substance use services, and the recruitment and retention of health care professionals. I emphasized the need for provinces and territories to focus on recruiting health care workers internationally, getting those people their credentials, and streamlining people to the front line. We talked about innovative ways to manage health human resources, expand medical education, and deliver health care services so that our systems are efficient and effective and reach the people who need them. This collaboration helps to ensure that we can attract individuals to live and work in the Yukon. We will also be mindful of not drawing essential workers away from other Canadian regions.

Given the evolving national conversation about the federal carbon tax, we also discussed potential implications of the federal government's most recent announcement regarding home heating oil exemptions. Our government continues to stand by carbon pricing as sound, evidence-based policy on climate change, but we share concerns about equity.

As we continue these discussions, including those related to health care, housing, and infrastructure, I look forward to further collaboration with provincial and territorial counterparts.

As Deputy Premier McLean said in a ministerial statement earlier this week, this type of intergovernmental cooperation is essential for tackling national issues, as well as addressing local challenges effectively.

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Premier for the update from this week's Council of the Federation meetings in Halifax. It's always important that Yukon has a voice at the national table, but now I have a few questions for the Premier.

The release from COF said that the Premiers agreed to explore legislative frameworks to require provincial authorization before municipalities or public agencies enter into agreements with the federal government. Does he plan to implement that restriction in the Yukon, and if so, when?

Regarding health care, we know that Nova Scotia has been fast-tracking nurses for months; Alberta, as well, has been fast-tracking nurses for months, but the Yukon has only been talking about fast-tracking medical professionals for months.

Right before the meeting, Nova Scotia announced that doctors from the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand can now fast-track to get a licence to work in the province. With the Premier's MOU signed this summer, will Yukoners finally see fast-tracked health professionals as well?

However, the main focus at the end-of-the-meeting press conference was the carbon tax and the exemption announced

by the Prime Minister on October 26 on home heating oil. We know this carbon tax exemption for home heating oil was aimed at the Atlantic provinces, but Yukoners welcome the exemption for home heating oil from the carbon tax after experiencing the highest rate of inflation in the country for the better part of 2023. I should remind the Premier that the official communiqué coming from the premiers meeting addressed the exemption.

During the meeting, the premiers unanimously called on the Prime Minister to ensure that federal policies and programs are delivered in a fair and equitable way to all Canadians, particularly in light of the affordability challenges being faced across the country.

I note that the majority of jurisdictions called for the removal of carbon tax on all home heating fuel; however, the Premier's statement just now continues to dodge this issue. Yukoners want to know what the Premier means by "equity". Do the local Liberals want to put the carbon tax back on home heating, which will further place undue financial pressures on Yukoners struggling with the high cost of living? Or do they think that the carbon tax should be removed from all home heating fuels, including propane? It is a very simple question, Mr. Speaker. I hope that the Premier finally clearly addresses it.

Yukoners have dealt with the largest cost-of-living increase in the country for most of this year and are making hard choices. They want to see their government taking action to help them this winter and that starts with taking the carbon tax off all home heating fuels, not just some. The Premier seems to be an outlier on this issue compared to the vast majority of other Canadian premiers who have clearly stated that they want the carbon tax removed from other home heating fuels. So, I think that the Premier should be clear about what his position is on this issue.

Ms. White: It's good to know that the premiers from across the country got together in Halifax for the Council of the Federation meeting and health summit. It's a relief to know, based on a press release, that these leaders recognize that health care workers truly are the backbone to quality, people-centred care. So, I have a few questions about lessons learned and examples shared.

Did the Premier learn how physician assistants are being utilized in Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and New Brunswick, with Nova Scotia and Newfoundland running pilot projects, and how these valuable health professionals are helping to bolster health care in these provinces? Is Yukon moving toward including physician assistants in our health care system? Did he discuss with the Premier of Nova Scotia how that province completed an external quality assurance assessment of their midwifery program to understand the root causes of the collapse of their program and the path forward, to where they now have a fully functioning midwifery program? If not, why not? As it stands, Yukoners cannot currently access midwife-led births.

Did the Premier share with his counterparts the Yukon's dependence on agency nurses and the concerns that come with this situation? The Yukon has become particularly dependent

on agency nurses to fill in the gaps. Prior to last week's premiers meeting, the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions wrote a letter to request swift action to save the health care system from collapse. That includes phasing out the use of private staffing agencies, which — quote: "... misdirect health funding to private for-profit interests..." I hope that strategies were discussed to end this dependency as soon as possible.

A well-known issue with staffing in the Yukon is that scheduling can be so inflexible for nurses working in rural settings that they are leaving their positions — sometimes to join agencies — to return to those very same communities to work for far higher wages and the flexibility that they needed to continue to work as nurses in those very same communities in the first place. Sadly, some have left the profession and the territory altogether because of this lack of flexibility. And, finally, I am hopeful that the Premier isn't taking advice from the Premier of Alberta as they embark on a massive restructuring plan, because — let's be honest — they are talking about privatization of health care in Alberta.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Thank you to the members opposite for their thoughts and questions. I would like to emphasize again the importance of building relationships across the country, as we work together to address challenges that impact all Canadians. As mentioned, the focus of the Council of the Federation meeting and health summit was largely housing, health care, and strategic infrastructure. Premiers had productive conversations about effective ways that we can work together and learn from each other to address shared challenges.

In terms of infrastructure, we agree that provinces and territories need access to adequate, flexible federal funding with secure allocations for each jurisdiction, and I voiced the fact that our municipalities have been speaking strongly about the fact that they want to see a new infrastructure program announced. This includes considerations that reflect the northern operating environment, such as scale, fiscal capacity, remote geography, and short construction seasons.

We did discuss the federal carbon tax, and we agreed, as per the communiqué — which I helped structure and feed into — that Yukoners are unanimous in calling on the Prime Minister to ensure that federal policies and programs are delivered in fair and equitable ways to all Canadians — particularly in the light of the affordability challenge faced across the country. Again, the commitment that we want to see is that there is consultation and there is solid support.

We have not veered away. We support the carbon pricing mechanism. We think that the decision that was made degrades the process that was put in place, and we do stand alone in that conversation with the Province of British Columbia and the Yukon, because as the member opposite said, Yukoners want action — yeah, they do want action. They want action on climate change.

The majority of Yukoners are concerned; they see the bills and the challenges that we have. Some of our Yukoners experienced that this summer when they had to leave their homes, when they were evacuated, and the costs that were

driven by the expenses of climate change and how that affects the expenditures of our government. We do know that there are significant costs that come along with those challenges.

We look at some of the comments from the Yukon Party on this. We also look at some of the notable leaders out there who are still speaking out about this. The former leader of the Conservative Party of Canada; CEOs of Husky Energy, Teck Resources, Suncor, Cenovus; as well as the Business Council of Alberta; the Canadian Chamber of Commerce; the Mining Association of Canada; the Business Council of Canada; the Fraser Institute; the Macdonald-Laurier Institute; the Conservative Thought Leaders' Ken Boessenkool; Andrew Coyne; John Ivison — just some other conservatives who have a different view, compared to the member opposite.

Concerning the questions from the NDP, I will try to quickly go through. Physician assistants were not discussed, but it has been a discussion point, and it's something I have been working on supporting the Minister of Health and Social Services. We have had discussions abroad on what ways we can partner and have training done. I was in discussions just last week with the Governor of Alaska, looking to see if we could procure seats for physician assistants for Yukoners. This is something that is very — there are not a lot of seats in this country. So, a lot of people are talking about it, but the pathway is much tighter than people think on actually having physician assistants throughout the country.

We did not talk about midwives, and there was a very large, significant conversation about agency nurses by all leaders, because we think that it has been a huge pressure on the finances of each government. We want to see a streamlined, consistent process in billing across the country, and we have committed to working on that. I believe that British Columbia will be leading a lot of that work in holding the pen.

Again, I thank my colleagues, and I look forward to the continued work on these important issues for Canadians and Yukoners.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Policing priorities

Ms. Van Bibber: We continue to hear from the Yukon business community that they are concerned about ongoing criminal activity in Whitehorse. Recently, several local businesses spoke to the media describing the rash of break-ins, vandalism, and property crime that has been hurting their businesses and making them feel unsafe. One local business owner said she was born and raised here and has never felt so bad.

Earlier this Sitting, the Liberals voted in favour of a motion that called for more resources to hire front-line RCMP officers for the Yukon. Since they agreed to that motion just under a month ago, what steps has the minister taken to increase the resources available to hire new front-line RCMP officers?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question by the member opposite. I am not sure what process was undertaken with respect to budgeting during the time that

the Yukon Party was forming the government here in the territory, but our work has already begun on the 2024-25 budget overall for the government. The Department of Justice works constantly with the RCMP to deal with their requests and issues regarding resourcing. We work to ensure the provision of a professional, accountable, and appropriately funded territorial police service — I have said so many times. We work with the RCMP to make sure that their service provision is responsive to the priorities of Yukoners and worthy of the public trust.

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

This year, the Government of Yukon approved an overall policing budget increase of 9.79 percent, compared to the previous year, and I look forward to our continued discussions, as we prepare our budget.

Ms. Van Bibber: Every year, the Minister of Justice issues policing priorities to the RCMP, which guide their operation for the year. Earlier this Sitting, I noted that this year's policing priorities, which were provided by the Minister of Justice to the RCMP, did not include any reference to property crime, vandalism, or theft.

Can the minister explain why none of these priorities were included in the policing priorities that she provided to the RCMP this year, and will she commit to amending them to include these concerns?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I think that at least one of the members opposite thinks that is a great question, because it was their question during our budget debate with respect to the Justice discussions regarding the supplementary budget for the Department of Justice, which only involved the YEU increases this year, but we entertained a number of questions with respect to RCMP resources and other topics of interest to Yukoners — policing priorities being one of them.

What I said then is that the policing priorities are prepared — unique in Canada — by the Yukon Police Council, who do so by collecting community perspectives across the territory at different places in different years.

They provide those recommendations to me, as the Minister of Justice, to inform the policing priorities, together with those from the Department of Justice, and to the Yukon RCMP. The policing priorities build year after year. What I also said in response to this question previously was that the specific crimes which are noted in the question are not the kinds of specifics that are included in the policing priorities and that the policing priorities involve building public trust, which includes all of those types of crimes.

Ms. Van Bibber: In their 2022-23 annual report, the Yukon Police Council said that they had met with the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce. According to the Police Council, the chamber raised — and I quote: "... concerns related to shoplifting, break and enters, vandalism of private and public property, and public alcohol and drug use." Despite this, none of these concerns were included in this year's policing priorities. These concerns are very similar to what we continue to hear from local businesses.

Will the minister commit to ensuring that the concerns raised by the business community are reflected in next year's policing priorities?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The council's recommendations were considered when setting policing priorities. There is a note — I believe from this year — that the council met with the chamber of commerce and, as a result, considered their concerns going forward. The Department of Justice monitors trends in criminal activity and continues to engage with the RCMP, who also monitor trends in criminal activity. We work with them to progress toward the goals that are set within the territory's policing priorities.

The role of the Police Council cannot be understated in reaching out to community members, and I am very pleased with the work that they do on behalf of Yukoners and look forward to that, as I have said earlier, unique-in-Canada perspective being brought forward.

Policing priorities build on those from previous years, and this year, there were a number — three in particular — to the RCMP, including strengthening relationships and increasing public trust. Of course, this is a broad policing priority, but as clearly set out in the letter that was sent to the RCMP, there are a number of specifics under that heading.

Question re: RCMP funding and staffing

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, over the past several years, the federal Liberal government has been cutting support for federal policing positions across the country, which has especially impacted jurisdictions like the Yukon. Since the Liberals made that decision, the Yukon has lost the service of at least three federally funded RCMP members. These cuts are hurting the ability of the RCMP in the Yukon to respond to organized crime, the illegal drug trade, and local issues, as they are now spread even thinner.

What steps has the Minister of Justice taken in response to the federal Liberal cuts to policing in the Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, again a question that was brought forward earlier during our budget debate at the time — I am happy to get the transcript with respect to that. There are certainly concerns brought forward on behalf of our government to the federal minister — the former minister and now the new minister — with respect to the issues regarding the restructuring of the federal policing structure and the funding that goes with that.

It is important to recall that, through the territorial policing agreement, the Yukon spends a large percentage — and it is split with the federal government — with respect to the percentage of payment for each of those positions. It is also the same with respect to the federal policing function that occurs under that, as well as with the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program. The Yukon is 100-percent responsible for the 911 service. The others are split with the federal government.

What I can indicate is that we continually work not only with local RCMP but with the federal government as they consider territorial and federal policing across the country.

Mr. Cathers: Well, I would begin by reminding the minister that we are still waiting for good answers from her.

The minister's own briefing notes outlined the extent of the problems that the Liberal cuts have caused for policing in the north. Her briefing notes from the spring said — quote: "Territorial funding for police is already under significant pressure..." And — quote: "Decreasing the number of federal police resources deployed in the Yukon or significantly changing the reporting structure may compromise the capacity of 'M' Division to counteract organized crime, inhibit trans-border drug trafficking and investigate trans-national crime."

Does the minister know why the federal Liberals have cut at least three federally funded policing positions in the Yukon, and can she explain to Yukoners what impact these cuts that the Liberals have made will have in the Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, back in 2018, some time ago now, the RCMP announced that the federal policing mandate would shift from conducting investigations to intelligence gathering. This is something that we have been dealing with, with the federal government, for some five years now. We'll continue to work closely with them to make sure that they understand the impact of decisions that they are making with respect to the federal policing mandate and how they will affect Yukoners.

This change in mandate means that the focus of federally funded RCMP efforts will be rededicated to addressing strategic criminal threats that exist in national and international environments.

I should be very clear with Yukoners — and certainly with the folks opposite here — that the efforts of this mandate will assist in Yukon's policing here in the territory. It is not a matter of withdrawing those services.

The responsibility for investigating crime that impacts the Yukon at the regional level is a transborder issue, in particular with drug trafficking, and we will continue to work with the federal government to make sure that policing in smaller jurisdictions is a priority for them as well.

Mr. Cathers: During the last federal election, the Liberal Party claimed that the mandatory gun buyback program they were planning would cost \$400 million to \$600 million, but recent media reports show that internal government documents reveal the cost to be more than double that and that it could cost nearly \$2 billion.

Spending \$2 billion on this misguided Liberal confiscation plan is obviously a terrible idea, and it's also going to create more problems for the RCMP here in the Yukon. The minister's own briefing note reveals that Yukon RCMP are concerned about this and it says that the federal government's impending firearms buyback program could increase strain on territorial RCMP resources. The National Police Federation and other police organizations also agree that this Liberal plan would divert resources from where they are needed most.

Will the Minister of Justice finally agree to push back against this badly flawed Liberal plan and tell the federal Liberals to cancel Bill C-21 and their plan to confiscate lawfully acquired property from Yukoners?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I believe that the request by the member opposite with respect to Bill C-21 has already been

addressed by our Premier, who, back in January 2023, made a public statement. We have since been having conversations with the federal ministers responsible that Yukoners are very concerned about the proposed amendments to Bill C-21 and the impacts that it would have on law-abiding firearms owners in the territory as lawful gun owners here in the territory.

The Yukon government, representing all Yukoners, has long made it clear to the federal government that Yukoners need to be engaged about legislative changes that would impact them, including those proposed in Bill C-21. The former minister of public safety was present in the Yukon Territory and had several meetings with Yukoners, attended a public forum that I also attended, and then subsequently made changes to Bill C-21 as a result of the engagement that happened here in the territory.

We continue these conversations because they are critically important to Yukoners.

Question re: Vimy Heritage Housing Society funding

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, for 12 years, a group of dedicated seniors has been working on the Vimy Heritage Housing project. Their dream is to build non-profit assisted living for seniors of all income levels. Right now, there isn't much choice for elders and seniors in the territory. There is living at home independently or there is long-term care when they need more support. Except for Normandy Living, there is no in-between, but Normandy Living is private and not everyone can afford the rates. So, Vimy's proposal seems like a godsend, but for 12 years, the volunteer board of Vimy has been jumping through hoop after hoop after hoop. When they asked for funding, they were told to do studies, applications, business plans, governance models, and more. They have done everything that they have been asked to do, and yet this government still won't commit money to build the project.

When will the Premier stop delaying this project year after year and commit the funding that Vimy needs to get shovels in the ground?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I attended the Vimy AGM this last year. The commitment that we made at that point was either to continue to support Vimy to get a feasible plan in place or, understanding that we still need to build more stock at Yukon Housing, we would partner with them and could actually go in and build the project.

I don't know what else to say. If anybody is listening — we would go into the space, have them help us, and we would build the project for seniors. I don't know if there is anything else to say. I think that is about as committed as you can get.

Again, you can try to make political hay out of this and go down a pathway of questions, but I think that this says it all. That is our level of commitment.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, the need for this project is there — 60 percent of the units are already spoken for, and with an aging population, the Yukon will only need more projects like this. Now the government has asked for yet another laundry list of tasks, including a detailed architectural design, before they will commit construction money. They have offered Vimy

\$300,000 to complete them, but the Vimy board has told this government that the actual cost of what they are being asked to deliver would be closer to \$1 million.

Will the Premier commit to giving Vimy the actual amount of money they need to complete the work that he has asked them to do?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I know it's difficult when you are asking a question and you get the answer on the first one and you have to go to the second one, but here's the deal: I just said that we would step in and build the project. So, I don't know what else to say. You either are going to do a bunch of architectural drawings — because we need to see the due diligence done, because everyone in the opposition, including the individual who is asking me the question, is going to ask me if we did the proper due diligence before we give the money. We have to do that.

If the organization is not in a position or does not have the capacity to do it — because we respect the individuals involved, we have said that we will come in and help build the project, and they can define the governance and the programming in that structure to the point where it can be called Vimy, but it has been very difficult on this conversation because the leads on the project do not want to give up the ownership of the project.

So, we're saying that we can come in as Yukon Housing, partner, and build it. So, really, the question is not relevant if it's about support. There is no greater ability to support than to do what we have said we would do.

MLA Tredger: I don't think that taking over the project counts as supporting it, particularly when this government talks about how much they want partnerships outside of the government to work on housing. It's pretty incredible that we have a group of dedicated seniors who have been working over 12 years to get this project going. They saw seniors struggling in houses in crisis. They knew it would only get worse as the population ages. They didn't see any action from governments, whether it was the Yukon Party or the Liberals in power, so this group of seniors took action. They dedicated years of their lives to try to meet this need. At the end of the day, it's this government's responsibility to make sure that seniors and elders have access to supportive housing when they grow old, but they haven't made it happen, and when a group of volunteers has tried to fill the gap for them, they have been strung along by government after government for 12 years.

How much longer does the Premier expect Vimy's board to volunteer their time to fill the gaps that his government has left in seniors housing?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think that everybody who is here in the House has heard my answers and heard the questions — whether it's media or the rest of us here.

If you are going to take on a project, there's going to be significant work that has to be done. After years of funding, there are no proper architectural drawings. There is not a clear understanding of the cost. The funds that the organization had planned to use changed with CMHC. Then the funds, as I answered during Committee of the Whole, were redeployed — or at least the program was.

So, it's either the organization — we have provided funds — is going to come up with the cost and a plan — a cost and a plan — and then we can help fund or, because we respect the individuals involved, we would come in to partner but lead with the capacity that we have on project management, financing, and procurement. I think those are two really good pathways to move forward. We are committed to it, and we respect the work that has been done for a long period of time. We want to see this project built.

Question re: Yukon Housing Corporation policies

Ms. Clarke: Earlier this summer, the Public Accounts Committee completed a report on Yukon housing following a scathing audit from the Auditor General of Canada, which found that little had been done to address long-standing issues affecting housing. One of the recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee was that the Yukon Housing Corporation should consult with stakeholders about their new tenant allocation policy.

One housing advocacy group told the committee that, due to the new policy — and I quote: “The most vulnerable Yukoners (i.e. survivors of violence and individuals who are currently homeless) will receive less access to Yukon Housing units than in the previous model...”

What steps has the Liberal government taken to act on this recommendation of the Public Accounts Committee?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think we had a long discussion during Committee of the Whole on the process that we use to ensure that our most vulnerable individuals are housed first. I am not going to speak to this particular comment, because I don't have it in front of me. What I can say is that we walk through the process — and specifically for folks fleeing violence — and the work that was there.

We have just seen funds, as well, allocated across this country to offset the rent for people who are fleeing violence — \$200, \$400, \$600, and \$800. The challenge for the federal government — when we sat with them, we said that, because we have made this a priority, the funds that you are bringing into this discussion, exactly for the folks the member opposite is speaking about — that has been our focus. We have prioritized those individuals in housing. That's the way we weight the decisions when we allocate, so I would challenge the premise of the question. If it's about vulnerable folks, that is who is at the top of our list when we are looking for allocation, and we will continue to do that.

Look, there was a broad range of things that we committed to doing better from the OAG's report. We are implementing many of those things. There is still significant work to do, and we will continue to do that work.

Ms. Clarke: I should remind the minister that their recommendation that I just asked about was supported unanimously by the committee that includes two of his Cabinet ministers.

The second part of that recommendation was that the Yukon Housing Corporation should consult with stakeholders about any further changes that are planned to the prioritization system and eligibility requirements for accessing housing. I

would note that the Yukon women's transition home stated that they were concerned that — quote: “... any moves to tighten eligibility may negatively affect women and children in need of safe and suitable housing...”

What steps have been taken to act on this recommendation?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: As I listened to the question, I think the question was: If there are any further changes to your structure and system of allocation, you have an obligation to have conversations with stakeholders. The commitment that was made by the Yukon Housing Corporation — the government — was that's what we do.

In my conversations — some briefings — with the Yukon Housing Corporation, we have not made any changes; therefore, we would not have to follow through on any further discussions as committed to, because again, there were no changes made. So, I think the premise of the question is a bit off. There are some things that were critiqued in the work that we are doing, and a lot of that was making sure that there was more housing stock for vulnerable citizens. That is work that we continue to do. Some of that work is difficult. We hear, in some cases, that you need to have partnerships, so we are trying to have partnership. Sometimes, that is challenging work. We know that there are at least one or two projects that we have been trying to support to get built. They are for vulnerable folks. We know that the opposition has come out against those projects and those investments. We think they are good.

We continue to work with the Council of Yukon First Nations on their new centre in Whistle Bend. I hope that the member opposite, the MLA for Whistle Bend, will stand up and support that, as well, if that gets built in the neighbourhood that the individual across from me represents.

Ms. Clarke: Another recommendation that was made by the Public Accounts Committee was that the Yukon Housing Corporation should review the eligibility thresholds, including the new asset cap policy. When I asked about the new asset cap policy in Committee of the Whole, the Premier did not make any commitment to review it, so I would like to ask again: Will the Premier follow the recommendation of the Public Accounts Committee and review the new asset cap policy?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think it is important to say first that the asset cap that we use, which is \$100,000, is the largest — or I believe the highest asset cap — across western Canada. Actually, if you go back and look at the analyses that were done by third parties and the OAG, it was also that we had to have an asset cap that was across the board. So, we had an asset cap before, but we didn't have it for seniors — and so, fun a bit with numbers across the way.

It was actually that we were supposed to ensure there was an asset cap across all tenancies. So, that's what we did. We followed through on what the OAG said.

Now, there are challenges with that, and I will be open. We have heard that, especially in some of the communities that do not have ample opportunities to move into other types of seniors living. I think, again, I've heard it loud and clear. In some cases, — in the community of Watson Lake I would say specifically — there were a number of people who, at one point,

would have been removed from the list. We felt it was important, because their applications were in to Yukon Housing, that we respected that and that we honoured that, so we did. I think there were 35 or 37 applications that wouldn't have been received under the new guidelines, but we honoured those and grandfathered them all in. We will continue to watch and make sure we make the appropriate amendments and watch what the OAG is saying and have integrity with our —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Fuelwood subsidy

Mr. Istchenko: Last year, the Liberals introduced two different subsidies for firewood — a consumer subsidy and a subsidy for woodcutters.

They have announced an extension for the subsidy for woodcutters but not for consumers. Can the minister explain why?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, the subsidy for industry was far more successful and more effective. We had conversations with the Yukon Wood Products Association. That was the reason for extending that one. We also did another program where we partnered with CanNor to support industry. All of it is about trying to make sure that we get more wood moving to Yukoners. The reports that I have had into this fall are that there is more wood moving. The reports that I had on the incentive to industry was that it was received very favourably and very constructively.

Question re: Energy strategy effect on greenhouse gas emissions

Mr. Kent: I have some questions for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources regarding his greenhouse gas emissions targets.

Last year, the *Clean Energy Act* set targets of 45-percent reductions below 2010 levels by 2030. This was part of the CASA between the Liberals and NDP and went well beyond the 30-percent target set in the *Our Clean Future* plan.

Earlier this week, we found out from Yukon Energy Corporation officials that most of the 10-year renewable energy plan projects, like Atlin hydro and Moon Lake, are in jeopardy of not proceeding and the plan needs to actually be rewritten.

For example, the acting CEO of Yukon Energy said — and I quote: “We are not able to put a timeline on Moon Lake right now...” How will the minister meet his greenhouse gas targets by 2030 without these renewable energy projects coming online?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I think it's a fair question, and every time that we have challenges on some projects, then we need to refocus on others. For example, we are further ahead on some things, like electric vehicle uptake, on microgeneration, on independent power producer — those programs are ahead of schedule, moving faster than we anticipated. Some of the projects have seen challenges — the Atlin hydro project and Moon Lake — those projects require us to work supporting First Nations on the delivery of those.

Yes, I did ask the utility to go back and to work with ATCO and to work with Energy, Mines and Resources and the

Department of Environment to continue to review and upgrade our strategic plans so that we can work toward that goal of 45-percent reduction by 2030. It is a hard target to meet, but it's an important target to meet. We never said that it would be easy; we said that we were committed, and we remain committed.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, my question was: Can the minister meet those targets without projects like Atlin and Moon Lake coming online before 2030? So, emissions from the mining industry will be set through mining intensity targets; the Government of Yukon is proposing a target for the mining sector to reduce 45 percent of its greenhouse gas emissions per unit of production by 2035. This target was set in August 2022, but the minister had indicated that this target will soon be written into legislation. Can the minister confirm this and let industry know when these targets will be legislated into force?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: If the member opposite feels that I didn't answer the question earlier: Can we meet 45 percent without Atlin and Moon? If the question is “can”, the answer is yes, but I don't have the full pathway to 45 percent. That's why we continue to update *Our Clean Future* and the renewable energy strategy for Yukon Energy, and we will continue to work with Yukoners, with First Nations in investing in renewable energy futures.

We did just cut the ribbon on the Thäy Tāw Haeckel Hill wind project, which is an example of projects. We will work to backfill against other projects if we don't see them come to fruition early enough.

On the 45-percent target, I have always told the industry that we were engaging with industry last summer — that is my recollection — in 2022. I think we announced the target in 2023. We said to industry that we will seek to put this under the *Clean Energy Act*, and I would be keen to see the Yukon Party support that. I would like to see us together, across this territory, all political parties, work to address climate change.

Mr. Kent: We know that, even though the minister has set his own overall targets of a 45-percent reduction in emissions below 2010 levels by 2030, they are not enforceable, so many an industry is wondering how the intensity targets for mining will be dealt with. Are the intensity-based targets the Liberals are planning going to be enforceable, and if so, how will that be done? Will it be part of the mining licence, or is some other mechanism being considered?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: No, as I have said to industry and am happy to stand up and say here, the *Clean Energy Act* is about holding government to account. It's our job to work to get the Yukon to these targets, working with industry to get to industry-wide targets. For example, we do not say that our grocery stores or our forestry industry — that every one of them has to hit an individual target. What we are trying to do is move us toward 2050 and net zero. I think that it is important that we make those commitments as a territory.

Again, I ask the Yukon Party to please support the *Clean Energy Act* when we come back and amend it with the mining intensity targets, because we need to show that we are going to move there as a territory to give those strong price signals to everyone, and we will work to help industry to get there, starting with *Our Clean Future*. There are several actions

underneath it that I think are going to support the mining industry. Renewable diesel is a big example.

I will just say that we will work with industry to get to those targets, and it will be our commitment to get there.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

OPPOSITION PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 821

Clerk: Motion No. 821, standing in the name of Ms. White.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Leader of the Third Party:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Economic Development to extend the interest-free repayment period on the COVID-19 support loan to September 30, 2024.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, as I often mention in this House, before being elected, I used to run a small business. I operated a coffee shop at the Canada Games Centre and I know that things can get difficult. When our economy was shut down by a global pandemic in 2020, so many business owners wondered how they would survive. They did their part, they played by the rules, and they tried their best to keep our community safe and healthy, but it cost them.

Yukon government, to its credit, quickly offered support. A number of programs sprung up, seemingly overnight, to backstop businesses in a number of sectors to help keep them afloat through some very difficult and uncertain times. The COVID-19 support loan was a lifeline for many businesses in the pandemic and I know that many public servants worked very hard to make these happen so fast. I am sure that those programs saved a lot of businesses that wouldn't be here today without them. While the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic are over, we know that the lingering effects on our economy remain. People aren't travelling like they used to, and many are still nervous about getting on a cruise ship or a plane or hanging out in crowded spaces. Many workers may not have recovered financially from long periods without work and still can't afford to travel or eat out as much as they used to.

I will walk the House through the most recent tourism visitation numbers that show that we are still far from being back to pre-pandemic levels. International overnight visits were still down from the five-year average. International border crossings were up just four percent from the five-year average. Consumer confidence was down a staggering 30 percent, and Destination Canada's numbers show that non-resident tourism spending in 2022 was still only 70 percent of the 2019 peak across Canada.

One person I spoke to in the tourism industry summed things up as being still very fragile as a sector. Citing not just the pandemic but the compounding problems of lack of

housing, rising costs, and staff shortages, they said that the last three years will go down as some of the toughest times in living memory for business owners in the tourism sector. Many have burned through their cash reserves and continue to struggle to make ends meet.

The Yukon government's COVID-19 support loan repayment period should be extended, as this motion suggests. The program provided interest-free loans of up to \$100,000, which were to be repaid by December 31, 2023. After that date, five-percent interest will be added, and full repayment will be due by the end of 2025.

We chose to extend this to September 30, 2024 with the idea that a busy season in the summer of 2024 would be enough to get many back on solid footing.

Destination Canada forecasts that tourism spending will be fully recovered by tourism season 2024.

For business owners, extending the interest-free repayment period by nine months could be the difference between surviving another year or shutting down altogether. This would have very little impact on the government budget but would have a big impact on the small businesses that are still struggling, not only to make ends meet but to pay back their loans and to plan for the future.

The current repayment period for this program will cause undue hardship on small businesses that have not yet fully recovered from the pandemic. Extending the period through another summer season would go a long way to helping them recover.

I invite my colleagues to support this motion or to suggest constructive ways to move forward and help keep Yukon's small business community thriving.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Ms. White: All right. I was hoping for suggestions and changes, but here we are. I guess this is the vote, then.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Disagree.

Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.
Mr. Cathers: Agree.
Ms. McLeod: Agree.
Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.
Mr. Hassard: Agree.
Mr. Istchenko: Agree.
Ms. White: Agree.
Ms. Blake: Agree.
MLA Tredger: Agree.
Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 11 yeas, seven nays.
Speaker: The yeas have it.
 I declare the motion carried.
Motion No. 821 agreed to

Motion No. 823

Clerk: Motion No. 823, standing in the name of Ms. Blake.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to introduce legislation that would allow physicians' assistants to practice in the territory.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to this motion, which states:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to introduce legislation that would allow physicians' assistants to practice in the territory.

Nation-wide health care staffing challenges, such as shortages and the high rate of burnout, have had a big impact on health care delivery. It means long wait times, lack of access to primary care, community health centre closures, and overburdened inpatient care units. Physician assistants would be a great addition to team-based models of care, with the expertise to provide services that can significantly improve our health care system sustainability and functioning.

Physician assistants, or PAs, assist doctors in performing routine medical tasks. They reduce the burden on overworked doctors, reduce wait times, and improve access to essential medical care.

They have been used in the Canadian Armed Forces officially since the 1950s, but they have had roles under the title of "medic" since the early 1900s. PAs were introduced into the Canadian health care system in 1999 in Manitoba and now work in every province in Canada. In the NWT and the Yukon, PAs are already working at mine sites through private contracting services. PAs are physician extenders, which means that they extend the services of their supervising physician. They operate with a licensed doctor to increase capacity. Physician assistants do not hold their own patient list; they work under a physician or a group of physicians, or a doctor could have multiple physician assistants.

The scope of practice is versatile. They can lighten a doctor's workload to enable doctors to focus on more specialized patient care as well as take on more patients.

Physician assistants can assist with inpatient care, surgical and trauma assistance, hospitalist coverage, orphan patient

follow-up, cancer clinic support, emergency assessments, and patient assessments in primary care clinics. They can help patients with simple prescription refills but would check in with their supervising doctor if a case is more complicated. Each physician assistant can increase a doctor's patient load by 50 percent, which means that, in the Yukon, a doctor could accept between 500 to 900 additional patients on their patient list. This would remove a lot of people from the family doctor wait-list. They would be especially valuable in underserved rural communities where they can improve access to health care because they can work in community health care centres, issue prescriptions, or manage care for chronic conditions without people having to travel to Whitehorse.

They would still be attached to a physician, but that physician does not have to be on-site, which means more physician assistants could make visits and refer the more complex patients, et cetera.

In primary care, using physician assistants means that acute care patients can often have same-day appointments, as doctors under this model have more time in a day to see their patients and to block time off for same-day visits. If a person has a sudden illness, often they have to wait days or weeks before they can see their family doctor.

Physician assistants can help balance family doctors' workloads so that they can see acute care patients immediately. They improve many facets of a patient's experience when they visit the ER, including wait times, the number of people who can be seen, and how quickly they can get out of the hospital. They can bring down costs significantly. They can do home care and work in nursing homes or community health centres, do hospital visits, and ensure continuity of care for chronic conditions. This would be particularly useful in rural Yukon where we know a huge need exists in terms of home care and aging in place. They can help with mental health by initiating psychiatric referrals and writing prescriptions. They can also help with an aging population by working in long-term care, managing wound care, doing medication reviews, and more.

Physician assistants in primary care settings can be used for 75 percent of all visits without referral to physician-level care. For instance, if someone is coming for a routine prescription renewal, management for a chronic condition, or a referral to other health professionals such as a physiotherapist or psychiatrist, they can see a physician assistant.

When they work in an ER, data shows that they can care for over half of the patients without the need to refer a patient to a physician. This improves ER efficiency and wait times while alleviating pressure and workloads for overworked doctors and nurses. Having physician assistants at the ER also decreases the rate of people who leave without being seen.

An Ontario study on physician assistants showed that nearly three-quarters of physicians working with physician assistants reported that the PA had a positive impact on patient experiences. In the same study, 95 percent of physicians working with PAs said that the physician assistant had increased their own efficiency in providing care. In general surgery, using physician assistants can drastically reduce late discharges and increase early discharge rates. For instance, this

study showed that having physician assistants working at the hospital reduced wait times for surgeries by 14 weeks. We know that wait times for surgeries at the Whitehorse General Hospital have been an issue. Adopting a model that integrates physician assistants would be beneficial for Yukoners who have been waiting for surgeries.

Using physician assistants in infectious diseases services can lead to a decrease in time to a consultation and shorten the length of stay at the hospital. Physician assistants are allowing physicians to increase the number of patients they are able to treat in a day and to serve in their own practices overall. Physician assistants in long-term care settings for seniors decrease hospital admission rates by more than one-third, and re-admission rates drop nearly as much because of home care visits happening more often. Among Canadians who have received care from physician assistants, more than nine out of 10 were satisfied with their experience.

I think I painted a clear picture of the potential and concrete improvements to the health care system and to our access to health care that would come from the government allowing physician assistants to practise in the territory. This gives us hope that the numerous gaps that we hear about could be at least partially filled.

Yukoners are probably wondering why physician assistants are not a part of the health care system in the Yukon. Training takes 24 months, with 12 months in-classroom learning and the rest of the time spent in clinical rotations with physicians. There are currently about 1,000 certified physician assistants working in Canada, but this number is expected to grow quickly, because three additional universities are opening programs of their own. Dalhousie University, the University of Calgary, and the University of Ottawa are each going to be opening their own programs to train physician assistants.

I was so glad earlier today to hear the Premier talking about connecting with Alaskan schools for physician assistant training for Yukoners. CASA commitments include supporting students pursuing studies in medical fields who commit to returning to the Yukon after graduation. I would suggest that the Premier and the Minister of Education see how this commitment could be used in conjunction with the possibility of sending Yukoners to study in Alaska. This could be used to reduce costs and encourage more individuals to apply.

I would also encourage the Minister of Education to connect with the universities opening new physician assistant programs and with the existing programs at McMaster University, the University of Manitoba, and the University of Toronto to ensure that as many Yukon students as possible can access these programs and access funding. There is not only a need but also so many possibilities with the physician assistant profession.

Under the different medical acts that are in place provincially in Canada, doctors can delegate to both regulated and unregulated health professionals. For example, in Ontario, physician assistants are not yet regulated, but doctors are permitted to delegate to unregulated health professionals. This means that there was no need to make legal changes to the *Health Act*. While this option seems simpler than changing the

legislation, it comes with some significant drawbacks. It means that there are no guarantees that the physician assistants have met common entry-to-practice requirements and no guarantees that those physician assistants participate in continuing education. It also means that they have no legally defined scope of practice, which makes much more work for doctors who have to provide lengthy written or verbal orders every time that physician assistants carry out their duties.

On the contrary, in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Ontario, and New Brunswick, the profession is regulated by their respective colleges of physicians and surgeons so that doctors can delegate to physician assistants. In these provinces, all that was necessary were amendments to their existing medical act. This is what we are proposing in this motion. Changing the legislation allows physician assistants to work as regulated health professionals in all areas of medical practice, while ensuring that they work under a professional quality standard and with continuing education.

In BC and Nova Scotia, physician assistants are working through pilot projects with the support of doctors in those provinces to get permanent regulation in place. This shows how many different ways that physician assistants can be integrated into existing health care legislation and regulation. The changes required to get physician assistants working in the Yukon are not massive changes. It shows that the Yukon can quickly get physician assistants working here in the territory without huge demands on time and effort.

Physician assistants would allow our health care system to develop more team-based, interprofessional, patient-centred care. We know that this is a goal of many health care providers, but it is not always possible due to shortages and burnout but also accreditation, scope of practice, or hospital privileges.

Dr. Alex Kmet, president of the Yukon Medical Association, directly called for a new system of health care in which teams of people work together to provide care. Integrating physician assistants into the Yukon's health care system will be a valuable part of that new model of health care.

The Conference Board of Canada reports that when health care models are designed around teamwork and allow for real and concrete team-based practices on a daily basis, doctors are able to be more efficient, more satisfied at work, and have a decreased risk of burnout. It allows them to have a better work-life balance, which is so needed for many physicians and other health care professionals.

There is strong support from physicians and nursing groups across the country for increased use of physician assistants in the health care system for these reasons. Now that physician assistants have been practising in so many areas of Canada for more than a few decades, there is a lot of data to show that they have high levels of job satisfaction and lower burnout rates than doctors. This means that they are a sustainable way to decrease pressure on the health care system, as well as decrease pressure on the medical professionals themselves.

There is also a lot of evidence to show that there are considerable cost savings for the health care system and significant increases to the ability to access care for patients. In

the Yukon, where we know that access to health care is an issue, where we know that burnout is an issue, this could be a game changer for the health care system.

I hope that my colleagues will vote in favour of this motion, as physician assistants are a powerful tool to address many of the issues and challenges that the health care system as a whole is facing but also health care professionals and patients are facing every day.

Mahsi' cho.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I am really pleased to be able to get up today to speak to this motion, in particular because it is an opportunity to speak about the health care system transformation and recognize issues of ultimate importance to Yukoners.

The motion — I'm sorry; I think I have a copy of it here somewhere — that is before us involves the concept of drafting legislation to permit physician assistants to operate here in the territory. I think it's incredibly important for Yukoners to understand what physician assistants do. I think we have had a good overview by the member opposite who has introduced this motion, but there are some details in particular that would have to be addressed. I look forward to be able to outline those.

I'm going to start — I also intend to speak a bit about nurse practitioners and the difference between nurse practitioners and physician assistants and why, in general, my comments will be that we need to pursue every possible opportunity to improve access to health care for Yukoners. This is not currently unusual in the world, and I will speak a little bit about that too.

I will begin by saying that, from the pandemic to the substance use health emergency to the global health human resources crisis, the past four years have truly been an extraordinary and challenging time in the field of health and wellness and certainly in our lives and in our community.

I know that several comments have been made by members opposite about how there has been inaction with respect to addressing the health human resources challenges here in the territory. That's their perspective, and they are certainly entitled to that perspective, but the truth is that, five years ago when we were sitting here, we weren't dealing with the health human resources challenges that currently exist. Many of them have been exacerbated by COVID and by people choosing different paths, either individually or as a profession. I will have some more comments about that in a bit.

During this time, in the last three to four years, we have continually been inspired by the dedication, the expertise, and the resilience of Yukon nurses, physicians, and allied health care professionals. I truly appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak to that — to them — today and to Yukoners on their behalf. We are truly grateful for the exceptional care that Yukoners receive despite critical, shifting, and challenging conditions.

We're all working in close collaboration — the Government of Yukon and the Department of Health and Social Services are working with multiple partners to problem-solve, to advocate and design innovative solutions in order to improve and strengthen our health care system. That is the goal. The role

of doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals are essential in this transformation and this evolution of our health care system.

We know that, during this last period of time, those nurses, doctors, and allied health professionals have faced personal and professional challenges. Many of us have throughout the time period that was COVID. We fared quite well here in the territory in that we had, despite some commentary, quite a few less restrictions on our personal movement, on the ability for us to move around the territory and access essential services, like groceries, and our opportunities to gather in small groups. While they were restrictive for Yukoners, they were certainly less restrictive than existed in many places in Canada. We all probably have friends and relatives in other places where their restrictions and the impact on their health care and their mental and physical wellness was certainly severely or seriously impacted.

This approach to close collaboration with multiple partners means that the work that we do has a major impact on many areas of our lives, both professionally and personally, and on the lives of Yukoners. The past few years, Mr. Speaker, have not been easy, and I am very sure that there have been times when we have all felt in a state of mental or physical exhaustion or both. We recognize the pressure on our health care system and on our health care providers. We know that the importance of home and work/life balance, self-care, and taking breaks to recharge can truly not be stressed enough. Yet in spite of these constant and evolving realities, health care professionals have continued to meet the urgent and important challenges of the patient care needs of Yukoners.

Each one of them demonstrates qualities that we know exist in good and professional health care professionals. They possess qualities like excellent communication, collaboration, empathy, compassion, curiosity, resilience, and leadership, and those qualities exist here in abundance in our health care system.

I think that there is extensive coverage in the media about the challenges of the health care system across the country — actually, it's across the world. While many of those accounts of the challenges take the view that this is — and they should — a serious and important matter for all Canadians, when I hear many of those stories, I think about how important our experience here in the territory is and how absolutely critical it is that we appreciate the individuals who provide us that professional care every single day. Does it mean that there can be no improvements? Absolutely not — that's what we are here talking about today — improvements. It's actually what the officials at Health and Social Services, the Hospital Corporation, and the Yukon Medical Association work on every single day: improving services.

I just had an excellent opportunity to address the Yukon Medical Association's annual general meeting last Friday, and we had an excellent opportunity to show them the appreciation that we have, to recognize the benefits of the Yukon medical process and services, and to make sure that we focus on patient-centred experiences. Of course, in an annual general meeting like that, people come together for the purpose of representing

their own interests, but I can assure you that the medical professionals in that room are also thinking very carefully about their patient experience and how they can improve that and how we can work together as community members, as the government, as the health care professionals, as the Hospital Corporation and the regulators, Yukon University, the Yukon Employees' Union — all those who came together on the Health Human Resources Steering Committee for the purpose of turning their minds to addressing these very issues.

The attributes that I have noted that we are lucky enough to have here with respect to our health care professionals are essential to providing quality care and to advancing the progress of our health care system today and in the future. I am happy today to take the opportunity to thank them for the valuable work that they do every day — to concentrate and focus on their patients and to make their patients a priority each and every day.

The nurses, doctors, and allied health professionals whom we have here in the territory are dedicated, and their commitment to the health and well-being of Yukoners is key to how we will work together to transform Yukon's health care system and how we will do that together.

We find ourselves faced with extraordinary challenges. Maybe once in a lifetime or maybe once in a century, we have just lived through a world pandemic. Not since 1918 has there been such an impact on the world. I would argue that the pandemic that began in 2020 had an even more critical impact on citizens of the world simply because of the increased population, of technology, of the way in which we gather and do our work — and the impacts on school children. We could spend all day talking just about the impacts that we have had on parents, on patients, on Yukoners, and on those who run their own businesses. We heard earlier today about the impact on small business, on large business, on industries like the airline industry, and on higher education. The list goes on and on.

So, we have had that impact — COVID-19. We have a substance use health emergency that was declared here in January 2022. We have a health human resources challenge like none other that has ever existed in our civilization, and we have system transformation.

Actually, that can probably be broken into at least two — and maybe more, but I'll speak about two — parts of system transformation. We have system transformation that is required by patients and physicians and health care providers alike. It is truly the evolution of health care. We are asking ourselves questions like: What is expected, and how is it to be delivered in a modern world?

We are no longer spending and functioning in a system that was designed in the early part of the last century and has continued, in many ways, since that time. The system and patients — in particular in this case, Yukoners — are requiring that we transform that system.

Then there is another system transformation here in the territory and that is specific to Health and Social Services transforming our system here. It has been undertaken by our government and Yukoners to improve and integrate patient-centred care. It was developed as part of an independent review

of our Health and Social Services system, known as *Putting People First*, and Yukoners have participated in that process and then required that we will need our care to be transformed — our health system to be transformed — to a modern world so that we are integrating patient-centred care. We are removing biases and racism that we know exist and were recognized not only by that report but by our community at large. Yukoners are demanding this kind of transformation.

Some might call the confluence of these challenges overwhelming, and addressing even one of them could send us all home to hide under the covers. But they are here — those challenges are here before us. It's our responsibility to rise to meet them.

Meeting that perfect storm that is before us is also an incredible opportunity. While certainly media reports, opposition, and some individuals who are unhappy are prepared to say that all of these "challenges" — I'll call them — together cannot be met or that our lack of effort in meeting them is unacceptable, we must see these difficulties and challenges as an incredible opportunity.

We have the opportunity for new and improved partnerships that let us design a better mousetrap. We can design a system that can support patient-centred care. It can support balanced physician, nursing, and allied health professional practices and it can be one that uses technology and data to the benefit of us all.

Please know that if I really convey nothing else to Yukoners today, we believe that we cannot be successful in meeting these challenges without partnerships — without partnerships with physicians, the nursing profession, other allied health professionals or without a partnership with the YMA, with Yukoners, or with the Yukon Hospital Corporation — but we are well on our way to doing that.

We worked this summer with the Yukon Medical Association and it's important that this relationship be fostered and be a true partnership — particularly when we're talking about physician assistants, because that concept of introducing physician assistants or doing the work to consider how to enable them to be working here is not possible without the support of primary care physicians.

We met in a town-hall-designed event in August — Premier Pillai and I — with many of our primary care physicians here in the territory. One of the key themes during that event was about some physician billing and payments. The reason why I mention this today is because it is a critical piece of how physician assistants could work. We have formed a joint physician payment advisory committee with the Yukon Medical Association to work together to improve the claims and the payment system, as well as to respond to concerns that have been shared. Insured Health Services in the department has been working to improve the overall billing process and our goal is to ensure that all physicians and locum payments are made within 60 days of submission, specifically.

We have improved the payment system to automatically pay the 20 most frequently used bill codes, including the doctor of the day, which we have heard about this week and how it is being transformed into the hospitalist process.

Our claims team is working to ensure that eligible physician claims 60 days or older are being manually processed, so as soon as they can be, and in the billing system, we have updated the patient name rule to use the last name and first initial, which used to be a date-of-birth process.

We are working with a contractor to develop an auto-process to pay claims more quickly, and there is a fee liaison committee addressing more fee code changes and how those can be modernized and improved.

That physician payment advisory committee is working to improve the overall billing process. I just want to note that these are issues that we work with medical professionals on — in this case, physicians — but this is also time away and their volunteer time to help government and to help the Yukon Medical Association to improve systems for Yukoners. We know that improving the overall billing process will improve — individuals who want to come to work here, perhaps individuals who want to come and set up a practice here. We are currently working, as well, to support that with a multi-year digital health strategy. That also involves physician input.

We have an MOU with the Yukon Medical Association, and we are committed to working and reviewing that process, particularly with respect to the attachment and attraction of family physicians, which was put into that MOU last year. We are committed to family physicians and ensuring that the current and future success of primary care in the territory is absolutely key.

Family physicians and nurses in their clinics and their staff and allied health professionals there are truly the front line of medicine here in the territory and everywhere.

One of the first commitments that we made was to expedite an evaluation of the attraction program, and that work began in earnest with the Yukon Medical Association in October, and we have been working together to develop the evaluation framework, as we move forward, as quickly as we can.

Mr. Speaker, we are talking about physician assistants and how they will improve, primarily, the services that are provided by individual primary care providers, often known as “family practice physicians” or sometimes “family doctors”. In order to do that, we talked with the YMA and have done a number of improvements, where we have worked to stabilize primary care.

Health and Social Services is working collaboratively with the Yukon Hospital Corporation and physicians to develop an operational plan for the hospitalist services, which we heard about again this week. To improve equity and transparency, we are also working with the Yukon Medical Association and the Yukon Hospital Corporation to establish a tripartite policy for recruitment and selection of contract physicians. We are supporting the physician community by leasing space in the two largest primary care clinics in Whitehorse with the goal of integrating allied health professionals to improve patient care, system efficiency, and stability — so, inserting and supporting, in partnership, allied health professionals to assist and start to transform into those clinics and certainly, with the leadership and cooperation of the leaders of those clinics, into wraparound services for patients.

Work is underway with three consultant physicians to co-design the new primary care walk-in clinic. Local physician partners have provided evidence-based recommendations on the clinic model, including what kind of physician services are needed, the compensation, the staffing hours, the layout and the design, the emergency medical services, and policies and work standards that would be and should be required for such a clinic.

Health and Social Services officials have also met with physicians representing local clinics and specialty areas on the topic of digital health to identify priorities and next steps. A project manager within Health and Social Services has been working directly with the Yukon Medical Association to improve the Find a Primary Care Provider program and reduce the number of unattached patients.

We have also met several times with Yukon Medical Association members to identify specific feedback regarding the EMS inter-hospital transfers. An action plan has been identified to make improvements.

The health human resources crisis may be the most serious challenge facing any of us in our careers. The Yukon has struck a Health Human Resources Steering Committee. It was established in March 2023, and the strategy that they have developed will be released as soon as possible, certainly later this year. The strategy is the result of a collaborative — quote: “whole-of-Yukon approach” in participation, consultation, and collaboration with the Yukon Medical Association. The Health Human Resources Steering Committee was led by the Department of Health and Social Services — and the Yukon Hospital Corporation co-chaired — and members include representatives and decision-makers from organizations across the territory. We expect the strategy will address aspects of health human resources, including retention, recruitment, planning, learning, and innovation.

Also, in July, our government signed a letter of intent with the Government of Nova Scotia and are working collaboratively on health human resources issues. Our work with Nova Scotia is underway to develop a strategic collaboration plan that will outline the opportunities to address recruitment, retention, and reducing administrative burdens — something that Nova Scotia has been quite good at.

We are also in the process of developing Health and Wellness Yukon — a Yukon health authority. We are only one of two jurisdictions without a health authority here in Canada, the other being in Nunavut. We are building a solid foundation and creating a contemporary, high-performing health and social system that is integrated, collaborative, culturally safe, anti-racist, and puts Yukoners at the centre, as was a key recommendation of *Putting People First*, which was, of course, issued in the fall of 2020.

As we began down this road, our work was originally centred on information gathering of best practices and forming partnerships with Yukon First Nations for this purpose and people with lived experience for this purpose and health system partners and providers. *Putting People First* recognized that our current system has some flaws, and in particular, we must address racism and discrimination in the transformation of our health care system.

Our first priority in developing Health and Wellness Yukon has been to complete legislation necessary to establish the health authority. Establishing Health and Wellness Yukon will be a multi-year process, and we recognize the importance of working with our nurses, our physicians, and our allied health professionals in transforming our health care system.

Health and Social Services has worked collaboratively with the Yukon Medical Association to develop — also, again, supporting primary care providers — an EOI, or expression of interest, for a medical director. This position will provide medical leadership, a medical perspective, and clinical guidance in planning, development, operation, and evaluation of the delivery of clinical physician services across a variety of program areas as part of the health system transformation.

I look forward to having this individual provide guidance and assistance, medical perspective — sorry, clinical perspective as well — with respect to how we might have physician assistants and integrate physician assistants into our system.

Presumably, it won't surprise anyone that I have had my own personal experiences of late with the individuals who deliver extraordinary health care services to Yukoners. I have, dare I say, done my own little research project by virtue of necessity, and having spent some time recently with health care professionals — both in a personal capacity and separately, of course, in a professional capacity — I have spoken to many, many patients and many health care providers, and I am very pleased to say that, without exception, everyone, when speaking about their personal experiences, has conveyed appreciation for our professionals here in the territory and what great care they provide to Yukoners.

I also appreciate the interactions, and sometimes they are letters that we receive with suggestions for improvements to the system, and we always respond to them. We take them seriously and we very much appreciate someone's experience being conveyed — someone who takes the time to write and convey their experience. It's truly an incredible action and deserves respect and response. We work very hard to make sure that they have the best possible information and that we take into consideration how those recommended changes can improve our system.

I have the honour of being the Minister of the Department of Health and Social Services, and I know our team of officials and staff look forward to continuing to build on the work that I have described, further developing our partnerships and transforming our health care system, seeing it, frankly, in a positive way as opportunities to do better, to support patients and Yukoners who come in contact with the health care system.

When individuals come in contact with the health care system, they are often in a stressed situation. They are often very concerned about the unknown — What will be their experience? — and I know that we have professionals here who take that into account. I know that together we can take action to support the health and well-being of Yukoners, certainly now and in the future.

I will turn now to my comments with respect to physician assistants and the importance of the consideration that is being

brought here. Physician assistants in Canada have a professional organization. They are represented by the Canadian Association of Physician Assistants. They provide support through membership nationally for physician assistants. They also provide certification through the Physician Assistant Certification Council of Canada. They provide examinations to individuals who want to be certified by that council. They provide those examinations after an education process that has taken place at a recognized Canadian program.

Physician assistants are, as the member opposite said, really physician extenders, but I think that it is incredibly important for Yukoners to know that they are not independent practitioners. They cannot operate in Canada independent of a physician. They must have a relationship with a supervising physician — that's essential — which is also why I will speak briefly to nurse practitioners and the importance of the distinction between those two roles.

A physician assistant who is attached to a physician or under contract to work with a physician — the scope of their practice is defined by that individual physician.

In Canada, I think we've heard that there are approximately between 900 and 1,000 physician assistants currently working in Canada. The national organization indicates that they operate in Manitoba, Alberta, Ontario, and New Brunswick. There are also approximately 120 students who are currently being educated in Canada. It is a growing profession and one that we must recognize and consider for the impact that they can have on the care of Yukoners.

Because it's a relatively new role in our health care, they are currently undergoing an evaluation. They are looking at the impact that the physician assistants have on access to health care, on wait times, on the quality of care, and on patient and provider satisfaction.

If someone would like to be a physician assistant, which is one of the questions I had almost immediately — and, again, I note that I think this was mentioned earlier — it's a two-year program at a university. Individuals can enter that program after they have had at least two years of other university education. There are no specifics with respect to what that other education would be or should be. It's open for individuals to apply. It's not a university year program. It's actually two full calendar years, with the first 12 months focusing on clinical sciences and the second 12 months focusing on clinical training.

Also, I think it's very important to know that there are three places in Canada where you could be educated: McMaster University, which provides a bachelor of health sciences with a physician assistant title; the University of Toronto; the Northern Ontario School of Medicine presents and provides a BSc and a PA — which is a physician assistant — and the University of Manitoba has a master of physician assistant studies program.

I am not sure of the tuition at all of those places, but McMaster, as an example, is about \$12,500 a year for tuition, plus other expenses for lab requirements, books, et cetera, of about \$3,800 — so, over \$16,000 per year. It's important because it's at least four years of university — let's start there

— and it is expensive. It's not as expensive as some programs, but it is certainly not inexpensive, if I can say it that way. This is not a quick fix. I am not suggesting that the motion says that it is, but physician assistants require extensive education, as they should, and the goal of that education is to have adaptable, knowledgeable, competent health practitioners who are dedicated to life-long learning. Those are the students they are looking for; those are the students they produce after at least two years of undergraduate studies. Lots of people would have an undergraduate degree if they wanted to go there, or they might have a nursing degree, or they might have some other training that might permit them to be educated as a physician assistant.

Please be clear that I am not at all setting those up as barriers, but I think we need to be able to accurately understand what it is that we are pursuing here.

The health and professional regulatory requirements are different from province to province and territory. Ontario, by way of example, currently has no legislation in place that is specific to physician assistants. After the education requirements, one of the most important things is that all activities by a physician assistant are carried out as delegated under other pieces of legislation. I am using Ontario as the example again. Theirs is called *Regulated Health Professions Act*, but the determination and what this motion is asking for is legislation here in the territory.

There may well be some legislation here in the territory that could be amended and is ready and could regulate physician assistants, and that work has to be undertaken as part of whatever commitment is made with respect to this motion. I should say that we have already begun much of that work to determine how this could be integrated into the Yukon health care system.

It is important again for me to emphasize that all activities undertaken by a physician assistant are a direct delegation of the physician whom they work for. They are a contractual employee of that physician.

There is no decision yet — with Ontario as the example — if there will be a self-regulating college of physician assistants in Canada or if they will ultimately join a college of physicians and surgeons. Those operate differently in different places.

One of the, I think, primary questions for government in relation to this — contemplating physician assistants and adding them to our health care system — is how they are paid. They do not, as far as our research shows, get paid by fee for service, as a physician would. They are paid as a contractual employee of the physician. These are important considerations for us to have in conversation with the medical profession. There needs to be support from the medical profession, which we understand to exist here in the territory — or certainly support for further conversations to happen — but we have to make sure that individuals will ultimately have a role to play because they are supported by physicians here in the territory.

Nurse practitioners are being actively pursued here in the territory because they have a critical role in our health care system. Nurse practitioners are registered nurses with additional education and additional experience. Most registered

nursing programs are four years and then additional education and experience on top of that allows someone to be certified as a nurse practitioner.

The reason I note that nurse practitioners are being pursued here and are such an important aspect is because the extra education and the regulation of nurse practitioners allows them to autonomously diagnose and treat illnesses. They can order and interpret tests; they can prescribe medications and perform medical procedures; they focus on and treat the whole person — something that we are pursuing here in our work to improve Yukon's health care system.

Registered nurses take extended classes to be licensed and certified as nurse practitioners. They are registered nurses with a post-baccalaureate education and clinical experience. Nurse practitioners have the legal authority, including here in the territory, to independently perform a number of authorized acts beyond those that registered nurses are permitted to perform — and I will add or physician assistants — for example, ordering and interpreting diagnostic tests and communicating diagnoses, prescribing pharmaceuticals, and performing specific procedures. Nurse practitioners are required to practise within their legislated scope of practice — that is done here in the territory as well as in other places. Nurse practitioners work collaboratively with many other health professionals, and they consult with physicians, as required by the needs of their patients.

The reason that I am taking the time to draw this distinction is that a nurse practitioner can quite independently provide medical service and is a primary care provider here in the territory at clinics or in a clinic setting in some specialized clinic settings, like the Sexual Health Clinic, and — perhaps most importantly for communities — can do that work in a Yukon community and be a primary health care provider. Unfortunately, based on the way in which physician assistants are currently operating in Canada, that would not be a role that a physician assistant could take on. That said, I am not at all saying that there isn't a role for physician assistants — there certainly is — but our pursuit of nurse practitioners to provide additional primary health care to Yukoners in different settings and in communities is a goal.

Nurse practitioners are independent practitioners working within their legislated scope. In some cases, nurse practitioners and physician assistants may undertake similar types of clinical activity, but the physician assistant is always working in a delegated and supervised role with a physician. Nurse practitioners work to address the needs of relating a person's physical and mental health. They gather medical histories and focus on how an illness is affecting a person's life and family. They offer ways for a person to lead a healthy life and they teach individuals how to manage chronic illnesses. Nurse practitioners are also educators and researchers who can be consulted by other health care team members.

I think the focus here that I really want to emphasize is the idea that ultimately, as we progress and evolve the Yukon's health care system, there is a role for nurse practitioners, there is an independent role for physician assistants, and there are roles for social workers, for behavioural assistants, and for

individuals who work with the whole person and help provide care to individuals. Take it back to *Putting People First* — and the term that is used there is a “polyclinic” — full wraparound services for the purpose of managing a person’s whole life/health issues.

Nurse practitioners work in a variety of health care settings — community care, as I have noted, in community clinics, in health care centres, in physicians’ offices, and sometimes in patients’ homes. There are probably not too many of us here old enough to remember house calls — certainly not you, Mr. Speaker — but nurse practitioners can perform such things. We know that in communities with elders, seniors, or individuals who are perhaps homebound by their medical condition, this would be a welcome service in the territory. They work in a variety of other settings such as long-term care. They work in hospitals, outpatient clinics, emergency rooms, and other patient areas. They also work — and we have some here in the territory now working in nurse practitioner-led clinics, so they can be the primary health care provider.

They provide a wide range of direct care services to people at every stage of life. In addition to treating illnesses, they can, as I said, provide wraparound services or teach individuals and their families about healthy living. They bring together health care in a way that is seen as a bright future for health care in Canada and in other places in the world. They provide a wide range of direct care services to people. They don’t necessarily replace other health care professionals. NPs work and are trained to work in a space where wraparound services are presented and experienced by a patient and by a team.

They are part of a collaborative team that includes, ideally, registered nurses, doctors, social workers, and others. While seeing a nurse practitioner, you could still see your family doctor or other health care provider at a clinic, for instance. Many of the benefits of nurse practitioners, in comparison with physician assistants, which have many, many benefits themselves — we have heard about them from the member opposite. But nurse practitioners and physician assistants bring value to Canadians and their health care system.

Studies about these benefits and experiences inform us that nurse practitioners involve patients in decisions about their care. They improve access to primary health care. They reduce pressures on the health care system and they are valued and trusted by patients. They provide high-quality management of chronic illnesses and other emergency-type situations.

The first nurse practitioners appeared in Canada in the 1960s. Early on, nurse practitioners provided care in rural and remote areas. So, this is not a new concept — the idea that nurse practitioners can provide primary care in rural and remote areas, which is what many of the current challenges here in the territory involve.

By the 1970s, there was interest in the nurse practitioners’ role and it increased with more education programs. Today, nurse practitioners are an important part of the health care system here in Canada.

Now, physician assistants are also an opportunity for Yukoners and the Yukon health care system to be adjusted.

I will turn my last comments to what is being sought by this motion, which is new legislation — or introduced legislation, I believe it says. On a quick review, this would be or could be a significant legislative project. The *Medical Profession Act*, *Health Care Insurance Plan Act*, the *Medical Profession Act Regulations*, and the *Medical Profession Registration and Fees Regulation* would quite likely all need to be amended or to have supplementation.

We assume that the relevant regulating bodies, health care service-providing businesses, and other stakeholders would be engaged, of course, in that policy development for legislation, be it amendments to the current legislation or new legislation. It is also critical that we work in partnership to determine how the possible project could be proceeded with in relation to the *Health Professions Act* amendments, of course, which are a related regulation, and it currently has a target of being done a few years out yet. So, hopefully, in following — there will be sufficient consultation and sufficient consideration by the movers of this motion, that this is not a stand-alone project as far as drafting legislation or perhaps amendments to current legislation and that a number of other related pieces of legislation — in particular, the contractual pieces, how individual health care service businesses, like doctors’ offices, would be involved and the details with respect to how that might come to be.

Health and Social Services and Community Services would need to work together to determine what sort of accreditation would be relied on for physician assistants, whether it would be the one I mentioned earlier, done by the Canadian Association of Physician Assistants and the examination process that they undergo, which is post-education, or whether some other possible accreditation would be considered.

Health and Social Services and Community Services would need to determine whether and how they could adjust or replicate regulations that accommodate a new practice designation, because physician assistants would be a new practice designation.

So, just some of the issues that could arise. Of course, we would need to work with the Yukon Medical Council. I understand that they are currently drafting a letter of support for the concept of regulating physician assistants, which is terrific news — not something that I am surprised at, because I have had this conversation, as have our officials at Health and Social Services, with the Yukon Medical Association. I know that they recently spoke to members regarding the introduction of physician assistants to the territory, and it was supported by some individuals and lots queries and perhaps not so much support but recognition by all of the members who were spoken to that we are on this journey of transformation together and that every possible option for increasing Yukoners’ access to patient-centred care that is trauma-informed and non-biased has to be pursued.

As I’ve noted, physician assistants are health care professionals who work in collaboration with physicians and other health care providers to deliver patient care. This is critical. Physician assistants work under the supervision of a

licensed physician but possess the autonomy to perform a wide range of clinical tasks and procedures, many as I have compared them to nurse practitioners. The scope of practice for physician assistants varies across Canada, but typically, they also conduct patient assessments, order and interpret tests and investigations, formulate treatment plans and prescribe medications, assist in surgical procedures, and order and perform diagnostic and therapeutic procedures. There is a role for both nurse practitioners and physician assistants. I certainly don't want to be heard to be saying that this is not the case. There are many situations in which a physician assistant would be the appropriate person to expand practice and expand service to Yukon patients and others where a nurse practitioner would be that person.

As part of our work with the health human resource strategy, we are looking at a number of options to ensure that our health care workforce is properly resourced and able to provide the highest quality of care for all Yukoners. I certainly look forward to that work continuing with our health system partners, such as the Registered Nurses Association, the Yukon Medical Association, the Yukon Hospital Association, and front-line nurses, doctors, and allied health professionals, because they are absolutely critical in determining how we proceed with this work.

We are truly in partnership in trying to develop and respond to Yukoners' needs. It is absolutely critical that we do this in partnership, because then it will be a transformed system — I spoke earlier about why those transformations are required — a system that will be improved, a system that will be responsive to the needs of patients, and a system that will be one that responds to the greatest challenges facing Canada and the Yukon's health care system today.

We are open to innovative solutions. The Health Human Resources Steering Committee has spoken extensively among themselves and to me about innovative solutions, about thinking big, and about determining how each piece of the health care puzzle can come together for Yukoners to have improved care. There are certainly a number of ways in which physician assistants can be used and integrated into Yukon's health care system, and we have begun the engagement with our health care system partners on this topic, and as I have said, we will continue to do that.

We are exploring the work to introduce changes to licensing classes and membership classes for nurse practitioners and to allow nurse practitioners to practise in full scope. That legislation — perhaps despite some of the questions earlier today — is, in fact, before this Legislature during this Sitting.

We will also learn from the other provinces in Canada on how they have integrated physician assistants into their public health care system. We are looking forward to the continuation of that work. I can also indicate that I certainly support the exploration, the integration of physician assistants into our system. As I have said many times, there are complex problems — and I have set this one out to be probably the most complex problem — that perhaps will be faced by any of us during a political career or even a personal, community approach. This

is the most complex of problems, and all complex problems require many solutions, many individual pieces of a puzzle to come together so that Yukoners will have the very best health care that they deserve, that we experience to a great extent already, but there is always room for improvement. And providing front-line primary care is a place that we concentrate on for providing improvement, and adding physician assistants, although probably not through immediate legislation to do so but exploring the options, exploring the legislation we have already — is there already a part of one of those pieces of legislation that permits us to expand to permit physician assistants?

Is there a regulation that could be used to do that? Is there a policy change that could be used to do that, or are we going to need stand-alone separate legislation? I don't anticipate that, but as you have heard, there are several pieces of legislation that must be addressed. All of that work, I think, is contemplated by this motion, but I urge the members opposite to fully understand the scope of that work and how that work can be done and also understand that we not only support that work being done but have begun it already.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk so broadly and in such support of our current health care professionals — how they are providing service to Yukoners, how they wish to continue to provide that kind of service, which is truly second to none. We are extremely lucky and fortunate here in the territory to have the health care providers that we do and to have them come to the table, as they do, for us to all join forces and determine how we can bring improvements to that system on behalf of Yukoners.

Mr. Cathers: I will be fairly brief in speaking to this motion here today. We do support the concept of this motion. The one concern that wasn't specifically addressed in the motion wording itself is the importance of consulting with other health care practitioners, including the Yukon Medical Association and the Yukon Registered Nurses Association, as well as other health care professionals. That may have been the intent of the member who introduced it, but we feel that it should be explicitly noted, because issues around scope of practice and who does what within a health care setting are ones that have at times been contentious, and they are certainly important to get the details of right.

Again, we do support the intent of this motion. I will be moving an amendment that I genuinely hope will be considered or well-received by the member who moved it.

Amendment proposed

Mr. Cathers: I move:

THAT Motion No. 823 be amended by deleting the word "introduce" and replacing it with the words "consult with the Yukon Medical Association, the Yukon Registered Nurses Association, and health professionals about the concept of introducing".

Deputy Speaker (Ms. Blake): The amendment is in order.

It has been moved by the Member for Lake Laberge:

THAT Motion No. 823 be amended by deleting the word “introduce” and replacing it with the words “consult with the Yukon Medical Association, the Yukon Registered Nurses Association, and health professionals about the concept of introducing”.

Mr. Cathers: Madam Deputy Speaker, I will be very brief in speaking to it at this point.

Again, the intention of this amendment was to specifically acknowledge that there should be consultation with the Yukon Medical Association, the Yukon Registered Nurses Association, and other health professionals about this proposal. I gather, from conversations off mic, that there may be some concern about the wording of “concept”. What I was trying to do was simply note that there are different paths in approaching this, whether government would do it through a legislative change or a regulatory change, and I was trying not to be limiting in the language.

The intention of this is just simply to reflect the importance of consulting with those health professions before any changes are made regarding this area.

Ms. White: I have no issue with the language around being more specific about the consultations. I do, however — I do not like the word “concept” — about the concept of introducing. As it stands, I wouldn’t support the motion. I may look to amend the proposed amendment, but as it stands, I won’t support it.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: On the amendment, I think it’s important to note that the Minister of Health and Social Services had already spoken to the fact that there was going to be significant consultation in earlier comments. I would have to go back and look to Hansard, but I think both the Yukon Medical Association and the Yukon Registered Nurses Association were named in that process.

When we look to build new policy, if it’s an amendment to legislation or it’s new legislation, we would always be undertaking that significant consultation that would occur, especially with the key health care professionals who deliver these services.

I do appreciate the comments from the member opposite around scope of practice. I think that, in the initial conversations concerning the introduction of this capacity, there is a lot of concern about what it will mean. We have seen in other parts of the country where there has been the ability to support nurse practitioners in private clinics but that there have been concerns, in some cases, by other medical professionals. We know that, over the last couple of days, there has been significant conversation around that topic and how we could maximize services for all Yukoners, or all Canadians, but also understanding and supporting the health professionals in those specific jurisdictions and roles and knowing what that is.

I had the unique opportunity to grow up in an environment where one parent was the chief of staff as a doctor and the other one was the president of the nurses union. There were lots of things they agreed on and lots of things they certainly did not agree on — especially when it came to scope of practice and supporting that particular work. I think we are going to have to have a deeper understanding of what this is going to mean when it does come to the Yukon Medical Association. The sense that I have to date, in conversations I have undertaken, as well as the Minister of Health and Social Services, is that there has been a good conversation to date with the Minister of Health and Social Services. I know there is going to be a further conversation.

We talked in the summer with Nova Scotia about some of their aspirations when it comes to ensuring that there are physician assistants inside their practice. One of the things we have come to know as well — if you look at the expectation and the vision from province to province at this particular time, what you will see is that the number of actual post-secondary seats that are available to train folks in this field do not equate to the vision that provinces have and the capacity they want to see deployed. I could be off, and I think the Minister of Health and Social Services spoke about this. We are talking about under 100 seats in the country. When you are deploying new programs — and it was talked about by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin — building up those programs, having them in place, and then being able to have folks trained, even if it is a two-year program after your initial undergrad — it’s still going to take a while to be able to get the number of people in place that we want to see in place across the country.

It is going to be important to have those discussions, and as well, as we talked about a little bit today in Question Period, it is also — when you take into consideration what the interface is going to be like or what it has been like in the country when we talk about agency nurses — that was a very significant topic. On Monday this week, we had a number of provinces, and now Québec is taking some very strong actions when it comes to agency nurses, really trying to eliminate the use, as I understood it, of agency nurses. What we are seeing in places like Atlantic Canada, where a nurse in one province can drive an hour and then they are under an agency nurse contract — and, of course, what we have seen is that they have been necessary to meet the needs across this country, but also what we are seeing is, as we all become avid users of agency nurses, there is a challenge with that.

We want to make sure — and the Minister of Health and Social Services and I are focused on making sure that we have as many full-time Yukon nurses in place doing this good work. The same would be in the move toward physician assistants, after a consultation with the Yukon Medical Association, Yukon Registered Nurses Association, and understanding the scope of practice.

I don’t know if there is going to be a move toward agency physician assistants or if there is going to be a different process. I think that is something, as well, that we are going to have to continue to keep an eye on. I think that it will be very important to understand how the role will take place when we talk about

the health authority and how we meet the goals of the *Putting People First* plan, which really talks about some key services also being available in our hubs throughout the Yukon and having an opportunity for potentially, in some cases, physician assistants, if that is the route we go and it is supported by our health professionals — also working, potentially, alongside others in our community.

Can we do that — which is going to be important if we have nurse practitioners in those hubs doing some of the leading work, and do we still meet the criteria of the mentorship and some of that extra work? I think that our early understanding would be that we may not, but again, that is going to be a deeper conversation with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association on this topic.

I did touch on it earlier and I will again. Some of the early work — there have been some folks really, really driving the fact across the country. There have been a couple of individuals — MPs — who have been focused on this work and have been champions of it. MP Battiste from Nova Scotia has been one of the loud voices in Canada on this, meeting with provinces and territories and talking about it.

I have had an opportunity to sit down and talk about what the mindset is and what the supports can be in this country and federally on this subject. I think that it is going to be: How do we build up the opportunity in seats, and how do we make sure that we don't go down the road that we did the last time, which was a patchwork of legislation and validation of credential, as well as being in this position where you can work in one province but you can't work in the other one? I think that, on this, we have a real opportunity from coast to coast to coast to put in a system that is recognized when it comes to what meets the criteria, what the payment model is, what the scope of practice is, and again, how that interfaces with each and every unique health care system that is being deployed across the country.

In the early work, folks will know that we have a reciprocal agreement when it comes to post-secondary in the Yukon with Alaska. There have been lots of great Yukon athletes who go to Alaska, and they play hockey, they ski, and they do a number of different things. I think that there is a real opportunity for us, as well, to note that we should be getting more Alaskans to come to attend Yukon University. But digging into that, one of the things that came to mind was that we really have to look at if there are physician assistant programs in Alaska, and would the reciprocal agreements that we have in place give us an upper hand? Because if you have all of these provinces competing for a few spots for physician assistants, are we going to be in a favourable position where Yukoners — maybe they have gone through and done a BSc in nursing; maybe they have done a BSc in an environmental field. Whatever it might be, as long as they have the post-secondary, they will meet that requirement to go on and do the extra two years in Alaska, paying a fee that is really significantly lower than a Canadian going into another US school where there is no reciprocal agreement.

That was some of the early work that we did. When we have been back and forth about areas of cooperation with Alaska, of course, we are always going to be talking about

Shakwak and other areas to work on, but one of the newest ones we brought up is: Can we work with you around these positions?

It has been a school in the southern US that is delivering a physician assistant program in Anchorage, and that is where, essentially, we have been trying to have a discussion with them and say: Look, is there a possibility for a seat?

Look, we are working right now on renewing the work that has been done years before with Alaska. We think it is important to codify some of those commitments and priorities, and this is one that we have looked to have in that agreement. It is important to note that we have to be identifying where we can recruit and where we can actually have Yukoners get this expertise.

You know, I think that the member opposite had touched on that there might be individuals now who are in the Yukon and have gone through that training and who want to use their skills here and to do that work here. I think that has been part of the reason that — it has been one of the things that has been a catalyst for the discussion today.

You know, again, I want to thank the member opposite, because it is extremely important that we are all speaking to Yukon registered nurses, as well as the Yukon Medical Association, and saying that we highly respect what you do. You know, we have great respect for the hours and sacrifices that all of these folks make, and what we are really looking at here is trying to augment and support their work — to make their work as efficient as possible, to reduce some of their tasks and undertaking that they do. You know, when you think about what is the best use of their time, whether it's the reduction of red tape, which we are really focused on now with the work with Nova Scotia — I mean, this week, I didn't have an opportunity, because I was in Halifax on this topic — but, you know, one of the individuals who worked with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business was here for the Yukon Medical Association's annual AGM with a focus on looking at some — deploying some of the same strategies on red tape reduction here. I know that further work is going to be done —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, the Minister of Health and Social Services had a good discussion.

There is going to be further work now where we think it is important to have Health and Social Services team members and members of The Yukon Medical Association all together in a discussion in Nova Scotia, looking at exactly what is happening there.

I think we all should be supporting this. I think the concept part, yes, is difficult for us; it is not just that. The keywords — as the Health and Social Services minister said, it was really important for us to touch on — and did — the fact that, of course, there would be a deep conversation. I think there is a bit of redundancy here with this, really, after — it has been noted and is in Hansard today that the Minister of Health and Social Services committed to doing all of those things, and now we are coming back again to duplicate that language, as well as use that word “concept”, which probably causes some discomfort for some in the House today.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to be very long on the discussion on this amendment this afternoon, but I did want to weigh in a little bit. I think it's important to note that, this afternoon, again — and it has happened several times this session in this House — we're all in agreement, and despite the occasional political scrimmage that we may see in this Chamber, when it comes to the big issues in this Legislative Assembly this session, we are often in agreement, and the votes that my good colleague will no doubt tally at some point will back that up. Health human resources present one of the greatest challenges facing Canada and the Yukon's health care system today, and our government is open to innovative solutions. We have been, as the Minister of Health and Social Services noted earlier, working on this issue of physician assistants in addition to many, many other things. But this is the issue of the day, and the Member for Lake Laberge has just asked for an amendment to the motion that is before us today to follow more process, to actually do a little bit more consultation, and I can't see how anybody can disagree with that, given that we are trying to improve health care and are working with our partners.

We have gone into quite a bit of detail about what a physician assistant is. The scope of practice varies across Canada, but typically, they conduct patient assessments, order and interpret investigations, formulate treatment plans, prescribe medications, assist in surgical procedures, and order and perform diagnostic and therapeutic procedures. Their scope of practice is similar to, in that case, but not identical to those of a nurse practitioner. There are a lot of perspectives regarding the use and integration of physician assistants in the Yukon health care system, and further engagement with our health care system partners on this profession is required, which is why I think that the Member for Lake Laberge's motion is suitable this afternoon.

We are also working with physicians on a number of things to address — priorities to enable our system to operate more seamlessly — and we also know that there are currently no physician assistants practising in the Yukon. At present, they are not regulated to do so. There may be some people trained as physician assistants, but they are certainly not working within our health care system because they're not regulated to do so.

We will have more to say on this in the future, but at the moment, I want to just say thanks very much for the amendment. We look forward to further discussions from members opposite.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, I would like to propose a subamendment to the amendment to Motion No. 823.

Subamendment proposed

MLA Tredger: I move:

THAT the amendment to Motion No. 823 be amended by deleting the phrase “about the concept of introducing” and replacing it with the phrase “and introduce”.

Speaker: The subamendment is in order.

It has been moved by the Member for Whitehorse Centre:

THAT the amendment to Motion No. 823 be amended by deleting the phrase “about the concept of introducing” and replacing it with the phrase “and introduce”.

MLA Tredger: I will be quite brief on this. I would just note that we appreciate the amendment about consultation, which is really important, and we have to do this as partners with the people who are the experts in the field, but we are also in a really difficult situation where there are thousands of people waiting for a family doctor or a health care provider of any kind. We need to move boldly on this. We are sticking with the wording around introducing this legislation rather than modifying it to being about the concept of introducing — we need to take action.

Speaker: Is there any further debate on the subamendment?

Subamendment to Motion No. 823 agreed to

Speaker: Is there any further debate on the amendment as amended?

Amendment, as amended, to Motion No. 823 agreed to

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

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, this House has turned its attention to the medical profession again. Our colleagues across the way have joined us in contemplating physician assistants and I welcome them to this show. I thank them for this motion, which allows us to speak about some of the tremendous work we are doing on this file. A physician assistant — sometimes called a “medical assistant” — does many things, but in many cases does much of an office's administrative heavy lifting — sets appointments, inputs data for health records, formats reports, and helps patients fill out forms. This depends on the size of the physicians' office, of course, and how it operates.

To dive into this a little further, a physician assistant's scope of practice varies across Canada, but typically, they conduct patient assessments, order and interpret investigations, formulate treatment plans, prescribe medications, assist in surgical procedures, and order and perform diagnostic and therapeutic procedures.

Their scope of practice is similar to but not identical to those of a nurse practitioner. They need to know the business and the health care environment and have more than a passing knowledge of medicine. This is, in the long history of medicine, a relatively new addition to medicine — less so for other professions. Talk to any lawyer, CEO, minister, or any role with a lot of administrative work about the value of their assistants or advisors and you will soon learn how irreplaceable they are to the role. They make the systems that they touch more efficient and effective.

This is a relatively new refinement of the Canadian health care field. It is something that several jurisdictions are beginning to explore in more depth. We are among them. According to my investigation, there are no physician assistants practising in the territory and they are not regulated to do so yet. The Department of Health and Social Services is taking steps to mitigate the current resource strains through measures such as integration and expansion of nurse practitioners and their scope, as well as reducing operational burdens for physicians, but it is new — something we started exploring in earnest over the last several months. It is something that my good colleague, my friend, the Minister of Health and Social Services has just spoken about in the context of this incredible work she is doing to improve the Yukon's health care system. This is one little piece of a much, much broader initiative that will profoundly change the way we receive medical help here in the territory.

There are 76 recommendations in the *Putting People First* report. One of those is the creation of a health authority to deliver an integrated approach to health and wellness. It allows better coordination among organizations and sectors, using data and the citizenry's lived experience, in the best interest of Yukoners. So far, almost 20 percent of the recommendations have been fully implemented; another 50 percent are underway.

Our goal is to improve the health and well-being of all Yukoners and we are committed to *Putting People First* and transforming our health care system for the better. Health and Social Services is central to this care model.

Community Services is responsible for making sure that we make the Yukon a good place for medical professionals of all stripes to practise. It may seem simple to legitimize physician assistants in the Yukon, but it is one small component in a much larger machine that is being fundamentally retooled and we don't want to delay those larger changes any more than necessary.

For example, work is underway to revise the *Health Professions Act* and to improve how we regulate health care service professionals. This may be where physician assistants fit, or this profession may have to be slipped into some other piece of legislation in the Yukon.

So, what do we have to do? We are currently doing the hard work on all of these matters within Community Services. This multi-year project to do the *Health Professions Act* will ensure a high standard of regulation that responds to Yukoners' unique needs and context. We are modernizing the regulation of health professions in keeping with initiatives across Canada. This work will make Yukon an even more attractive place for health professionals to work and will allow us to provide Yukoners with access to new and innovative health care. Regulation of these professionals helps to protect Yukoners to make sure that those working here, serving them, are competent and safe to practise, as well as providing clear processes for dealing with complaints and disciplinary issues.

One priority that we have already broken out of the larger effort is psychologists. We are developing a psychologist regulation in the Yukon with an aim of delivery in the spring of 2024. We know that this is important to support Yukoners'

access to safe mental and behavioural health services. This is important work and there is a lot to it.

The Professional Licensing and Regulatory Affairs branch manages and supports registrants for 12 health professions and an additional 11 non-health professionals, totalling approximately 5,700 registrants a year. Only four of the 12 health professions are regulated under the *Health Professions Act*, while the other have stand-alone acts. The number of registrants varies. For example, denturists, optometrists, chiropractors, and midwives each have less than 10 registrants requiring the same support and resources as a larger profession like licensed practical nurses, which has 225 registrants in the Yukon.

I mention this because moving professionals to the health profession framework is expected to bring more consistency to licensing and related processes, improving services to professionals and bringing efficiencies to the regulator — that would be the Yukon government.

The policy branch and the Professional Licensing and Regulatory Affairs branch worked with consultants to establish the gaps in the current legislation for regulated health professionals. The report was finalized in the summer of 2022. Policy and the Professional Licensing and Regulatory Affairs branch are beginning the in-depth policy work in determining the appropriate engagement plans to determine options for addressing the gaps and improving the regulation of health professions in the Yukon. As I've said, this work is important and is well underway.

Psychologists are an outlier in the *Health Professions Act* work and we prioritized them for a reason. Yukon has declared a substance use health emergency highlighting the importance that Yukoners have access to quality mental health services. We are in the process of developing regulations for psychologists. In the meantime, the department has rolled out a public awareness webpage on how to select a psychologist. It includes a voluntary list of psychologists practising in the Yukon, indicating who holds a valid licence in other Canadian jurisdictions.

I mention all this because you get the point that regulating even a profession like psychologists has taken a lot of time and work, both with the profession and with the department and with Justice and Health and Social Services all collaborating. Now we're asking for another profession to be regulated in the territory. It takes a lot of work to do that — to integrate these folks into our system. That is why, in the longer term, Community Services is leading a comprehensive review of the *Health Professions Act* to support enhanced standards and safety of health care for Yukoners with an aim to improve the overall efficiencies for the regulatory system.

We want to work within the program that we have going. Any other distractions, like putting in one-off professional regulatory approvals, are just going to delay the overall whole, which is the *Health Professions Act*, and it is well underway.

The psychologist regulation, for example, is expected to be completed in 2024. After those regulations are drafted, they will need to go through a line-by-line review. Policy and Professional Licensing and Regulatory Affairs are working

with local psychologists and other psychologist regulators to develop the regulation in a shorter timeline. Work is also underway on a privacy impact assessment. Amendments and more complex considerations will be included in a larger *Health Professions Act* overhaul. This may be where physician assistants will fit or not. That work will have to be done with Community Services, Health and Social Services, and Justice.

The bottom line is that improving the way in which health professions are regulated under the *Health Professions Act* is a multi-year project. Regulation of health professionals helps Yukoners receive services by competent professionals who practise according to the high standards and ethics of their profession. It also provides Yukoners with clear means and processes for dealing with complaints and disciplinary issues.

We are working to improve the health care system. We want to make sure, for example, that there are nurses, which is why we just brought in legislation to help speed the recruitment of nurses in this House. They are critical to the health care system. Our existing regulations impeded the recruitment of nurses, so we're now taking steps to improve that. Again, the point is that we have to be careful when doing these changes so that we don't actually step on our own feet. That is why the amendment proposed by the Member for Lake Laberge was important — so we work with our partners. And I have another amendment that I would like to propose that will further help us with the legislation and the drafting of this to make sure that physician assistants are integrated into our health model.

Amendment proposed to motion, as amended

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I move:

THAT Motion No. 823 as amended be further amended by deleting the words “introduce legislation that would allow” and substituting for them the following: “make the necessary changes to enable”.

Speaker: The amendment is in order.

It has been moved by the Member for Whitehorse West:

THAT Motion No. 823 as amended be further amended by deleting the words “introduce legislation that would allow” and substituting for them the following: “make the necessary changes to enable”.

The motion as amended would then read:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to consult with the Yukon Medical Association, the Yukon Registered Nurses Association, and health professionals and make the necessary changes to enable physicians' assistants to practice in the territory.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I know that our health system in Canada is under pressure and those pressures are echoed here in the Yukon. Post-pandemic, things are a struggle; we have heard that this afternoon. I know that numerous letters have been sent to different branches of our government advocating for the allowance of physician assistants to practise here.

As I have said, this is something we are assessing and have been for the last several months. We are talking to the Yukon

Medical Council, the Yukon Medical Association, and other organizations about this. The departments of Health and Social Services, Community Services, and Justice will also work together to analyze this proposition with an eye to all the other legislative work that this small team has on its plate.

This is a live conversation, and I don't think it would be appropriate for us to commit to something right now on the floor of this House before it's fully analyzed by our immensely talented professional civil servants — that is, I don't know where it fits in the context of our legal framework, policies, or regulations. We are going to do that hard work. We want to give civil servants the time to work through this proposition, consult with those in the medical system who will be most affected by this, and fit it into the ongoing work that's happening in Community Services to improve our *Health Professions Act*.

Once again, we are supportive of exploring the use of these professionals to further enhance Yukon's health services, and we are going to explore it in a responsible fashion in tandem with our health partners. It's important that we get this right. That may be within the *Health Professions Act*, which the folks at Community Services are currently working on. It may be some other piece of legislation like the *Medical Professions Act*, but we have to work smart with an eye to how best we can serve Yukoners and build a better health care system as a whole.

It's going to take a little bit of work, but I am sure that the results will be better assimilated by all. This is an important amendment, and I thank you for your time this afternoon.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for this amendment.

In my speech, I talked about the importance of changing the legislation to ensure that the scope of practice of physician assistants is clearly defined and to ensure that the common entry-to-practice requirements are met. I understand that the minister wants the motion to have broader language to leave flexibility for this government to make necessary changes that may go beyond legislation.

I agree with the principle of the amendment, especially if the government can work on temporary regulations or policies to allow physician assistants while waiting for more legislative changes. I trust that public servants will be working hard to find the best way to make these changes happen as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

The Minister of Health and Social Services did mention that physician assistants are paid through the physicians they work under.

This is not always the case. While salary is the most common approach to compensation, we see a variety of payment models across Canada when it comes to physician assistants. In Alberta, PAs are paid through the Ministry of Health by salary; in Manitoba, they are contractors; and in Ontario, they use fee for service. There has also been a lot of federal grant funding for physician assistants to work in northern Manitoba through Healthcare Excellence Canada. The reason that I wanted to specify this is that we can see, with these examples, that physician assistants can be successfully

integrated into existing health care systems in many different ways and following different models.

I am hopeful that this government will work toward finding the best way to make this happen here in the territory, as well as by necessary changes to policies, regulation, and legislation. Mahsi'.

Speaker: Is there any further debate on the amendment? *Amendment to Motion No. 823, as amended, agreed to*

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

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

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 yea, nil nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion No. 823, as amended, agreed to

Motion No. 775

Clerk: Motion No. 775, standing in the name of Ms. McLeod.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Watson Lake:

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

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Motion No. 775, urging the Government of Yukon to ensure the financial and long-term sustainability of Yukon communities by amending the comprehensive municipal grant.

I would like to begin by thanking the executive and board of directors at the Association of Yukon Communities for their continued work to achieve strong and effective local government and provide a united approach to our Yukon community ambitions. I would also like to thank the government staff and municipal staff who have taken part in various committees and community meetings. All of their input is appreciated.

The comprehensive municipal grant is unconditional block funding provided to municipalities by the Yukon government. This funding was created in 1991 and is renewed every five years. We understand that the CMG is intended to supplement municipal finances and is not intended to fully fund the operations. With the latest third-party review and analysis of CMG funding completed in July 2023, it is clear that changes need to be made before the next renewal. For example, a quote from this review states, "The need to review and adjust the grant every 5 years is more of a catch up than keep up mentality of the reality faced to deliver services to 90% of Yukon residents."

The CMG is intended to be a predictable and adequate funding resource to help municipalities plan effectively to meet the needs of residents, and this funding should have the ability to grow and change. This July 2023 report highlighted several areas of municipal costs that have increased significantly. These areas are identified as: peripheral users, who are people living outside of the municipal boundaries but using municipal resources; increasing government relations; core program service provision; additional service provision; and impact from climate change.

The president of AYC confirmed community financial struggles in a recent interview with CBC Yukon by stating — quote: "All of these impacts are hitting municipal governments which have a very small tax base..." The CMG is calculated per municipality using a formula that considers population, infrastructure, number of buildings, and inflation.

Now, over the past decade, the CMG grew by 17.5 percent, which was less than the inflation growth of 20.8 percent.

Earlier this year, the Minister of Community Services stated that — and I quote: "This funding is the cornerstone of our financial support for healthy, resilient and sustainable Yukon..." communities.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that the Minister of Community Services still feels this way and will respect the recommendations from AYC and the third-party report to amend the comprehensive municipal grant.

There are many more important recommendations in the report that I did not mention with respect to the time of this House, but I urge all members to vote in favour to amend the comprehensive municipal grant to assist our Yukon communities. This motion is about listening to the requests and recommendations from our communities to ensure that the

comprehensive municipal grant is financially sufficient now and provides long-term sustainability.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, good afternoon again. This afternoon, the Official Opposition is proposing that we amend the comprehensive municipal grant based on a report commissioned by the Association of Yukon Communities. I want to be very clear in my expression of appreciation to the work of the consultant hired by the Association of Yukon Communities, which is feeding into our review of the comprehensive municipal grant. That review has been going on now since about 2020.

As I begin, it's important that people understand a little bit more about the comprehensive municipal grant. This grant provides core funding support to municipalities and is based on the principles of adequacy, certainty, equity, transparency, and accountability.

The grant formula accounts for inflation. Calculations use data from two years prior, so it can take some time for inflation to be captured by the formula, but grant funding to municipalities has continued to increase annually under the current formula, which was put into place by my colleague the MLA for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes, and it has continued to increase annually under that formula that was put in place.

Now, this stands in stark contrast to the way it was before, where it was static. We built in escalators, and so those escalators have been going, and just this year, they resulted in a sizable increase to the monies received by municipalities across the Yukon. Now, the Government of Yukon and I recognize the need for healthy, thriving communities — the important role that municipalities play in delivering essential services to Yukoners. The territory's eight municipalities are expected to receive a 10.3-percent increase in the comprehensive municipal grant funding — a total of \$24.5 million in 2024-25, and this funding will be transferred to the municipalities on April 1, 2024, which is common.

As I said, this grant is a grant. It's money that municipalities can use however they want, and it's not the only money that municipalities get, but it's a stipend that helps them operate the municipal governments and serve the citizens they represent, and it reflects the Government of Yukon's commitment to supporting local governance and sustainable communities. It's how the Yukon government directly funds municipal governments. As I have said, this core funding supplements municipal resources and pays for vital municipal services, like the provision of fresh drinking water, the collection of solid waste and recycling, recreational programming, and other services, as required by the *Municipal Act* and other legislation.

There are no conditions on this funding. It helps municipal governments balance budgets and reduce the burden on local taxpayers. As I mentioned just a few moments ago, the comprehensive municipal grant was enhanced in 2018 to offset the costs of operating and maintaining infrastructure and increasing regulatory requirements, which have resulted in increased grant amounts in the municipality ever since. With this money, they can fund their priorities. It's a cornerstone of

our financial support for healthy, resilient, sustainable communities, and we are working with the Association of Yukon Communities to ensure that it remains so for years to come. As the member opposite said, the comprehensive municipal grant was established in 1991 as unconditional block funding to municipalities.

If my memory serves, that was a New Democratic government that established that block funding, which was progressive at the time. I think it has served the territory well.

In 2017 and 2018, a review of the comprehensive municipal grant by the Government of Yukon and the Association of Yukon Communities reinforced key aspects of the grant, including fairness, transparency, and predictability, and led to an annual increase in grant funding. One of the key changes back then was the \$50,000 previously identified as a supplementary grant. This is now a permanent feature of the grant to directly address compliance with regulatory requirements. The grant allocation process utilizes a formula that incorporates readily available data from two years prior and includes factors such as population, properties, infrastructure, and the tax base of each unincorporated municipality. The formula is tied to the consumer price index and increases with inflation to protect municipal governments from broader market forces.

Every single municipality in the territory will see an increase this year — a sizable increase, as I said — of about 10.3 percent overall, and it will be disbursed equally to all municipalities. This is important because it's not everything that the municipalities are asking for, but it is a sizable increase in their municipal funding base this year. It represents a step toward making up for the increases in inflation that we have seen recently, and it will help municipalities. I have heard that from municipal leaders whom I have been speaking to about this. They have said that it is step up. It's not everything they want, but that is why this review is ongoing.

The submitted report from the Association of Yukon Communities that we are talking about this afternoon is important in that it goes some way toward identifying municipalities' perspectives when it comes to the comprehensive municipal grant and their funding gaps.

For context, I have been meeting with municipal leaders now for two years, and I have heard the pleas for more than two years, and I have heard the pleas for more funding from the Yukon government, especially in the wake of the pandemic. In fact, initially, I was asked by municipalities for more post-pandemic support. The federal government had provided a package for municipalities to help them deal with the economic effects of the pandemic — that was early in the pandemic — and that federal support was a one-time funding. Once it was dispersed, that was it.

In the wake of that, municipalities came to the Yukon government and asked for more pandemic support. They asked us to step in and fund a mirror of the expired federal program. We did not do that because we could not receive tangible numbers of the need; it was difficult. I spoke to municipal leaders and they said that they needed more money, but it was

difficult to quantify what the money was supposed to go for and why it was.

I tried; I asked municipal leaders, and frankly, it is difficult. We needed more information. The details just simply were not clear. At the officials' level, as well, we were searching for more concrete information. It was difficult to come up with where the gaps actually were, which is why, as part of our — and this is important information when we are doing a review of the comprehensive municipal grant for its renewal.

Frankly, I was delighted to see the Association of Yukon Communities hire a consultant to dig into the issue and help us understand how municipalities see the grant and see their funding gaps. The report arrived in July. The department has been working through to understand the report's findings and costs, to figure out exactly what they mean, and to verify them.

Again — I have to be absolutely clear about this — I want municipalities to be healthy and financially sustainable. This government wants municipalities to be healthy and financially sustainable. That is one of the reasons why we built an escalator into the comprehensive municipal grant, which had been static for a long time. That is one of the refinements we made to make sure that it captured and continually got better and to reflect the rising costs of living as they occurred. As a general principle, I think that is good policy.

Municipalities have to be healthy and financially sustainable. I have said that in this House. I have been consistent in conveying that to our municipal partners. It is important and I support it.

On November 3, Community Affairs directors met with the Association of Yukon Communities' executive to confirm the approach to continue to engage with the association on the comprehensive municipal grant. That was on November 3. Community Affairs has conducted a preliminary analysis of the recommendations made by the Association of Yukon Communities and the comprehensive municipal grant working group consultant. The association's recommendations would result in increasing the 2024 amounts by approximately \$11.8 million — \$11.8 million.

Currently, the Association of Yukon Communities is getting, through the grant, roughly — in the neighbourhood of \$20 million to \$24 million. I believe the increase in this year was \$24.5 million. So, if you are looking at \$20.4 million and adding \$11.8 million to that sum, it is more than a 40-percent increase in the comprehensive municipal grant. That is an incredible amount.

I appreciate that they need to be made whole, but we have to really look at this seriously and do some real analysis, because that is a lot of money. Further to that, the \$11.8 million — Whitehorse received the majority of that — approximately \$9.2 million in funding. Additional analysis is required to assess the rationale for proposed changes to the specific parts of the formula. While these changes will influence higher payments, it is difficult to assess the numbers without also understanding the long-term financial needs and pressures faced by all municipal budgets.

Currently, the department leads are engaging with an accounting specialist to evaluate the financial health of all

municipalities in the Yukon to confirm the most pressing issues affecting their financial sustainability. All of this work will be shared through the CMG working group. Just this year, coming up in the next fiscal year, they will be making an additional \$10.3 million and there is every indication that, in the following year, it will increase again a sizable amount. So, the comprehensive municipal grant, which was altered in 2017 and 2018, is already making up sizable chunks of the difference that have been identified with the Association of Yukon Communities in its current iteration. We really have to figure out the delta between what the municipalities want and what this report has said would be fair with what the grant is actually doing today, how that will interact, and what is actually fair.

Is it fair that, of an \$11-million increase, Whitehorse gets that, or should municipalities and other rural areas — do they need more? What is this? This is the assessment that we are doing right now and I have committed to have that done for the 2025-26 fiscal year, knowing that municipalities next year will be seeing a sizable increase of more than 10 percent, just because — it is just the formula doing what the formula has been designed to do, and that is to address and make sure that municipalities are financially viable and healthy.

All the work that we are doing — engaging the accounting specialist to evaluate the financial health of municipalities in the Yukon to confirm the most pressing issues affecting their financial sustainability — will be shared through the comprehensive municipal grant working group, which the Association of Yukon Communities has assigned three delegates to sit on. This work is going on, it is important work, and it is going to continue.

The department additionally is conducting an analysis of all regular payments made to Yukon municipalities. The comprehensive municipal grant is their mad money, the money that we grant municipalities to do whatever they want with, but we give other monies to municipalities, and that is not referenced in the report that we got from the Association of Yukon Communities. There is other funding that we are getting to the municipalities that isn't covered by the 22-page report that we got from the association, and so we are starting to correlate those. This will help to better understand the scope of support and revenue that municipalities currently receive from the Government of Yukon.

The Yukon government supplements municipal budgets with the comprehensive municipal grant but also transfers funds for grants in lieu of taxes — for example, funding to offset certain administrative processes. We fund land development and contribute to plans and engineering and consulting. We project-manage many municipal government projects. Yukon government invests significantly alongside the federal government in municipal infrastructure and capital projects. In some cases, we pay operating costs that are a municipal responsibility — for example, the Dawson wastewater treatment facility. Yukon provides funding in many cases to help municipalities respond to emergencies and disasters — the \$2-million contribution to Whitehorse for the escarpment slides.

We often contribute toward plans, studies, evaluations, project scoping, and more, and we provide in-kind services and flow funding to municipalities for a range of programs and services. None of this is captured by the Association of Yukon Communities' report. It's like a slice of what the funding is, but it is not holistic in any way. We really do need to assess all these other things to get a full picture of what municipalities are getting, what they need, and what they should be able to expect from the Yukon government. That's just due diligence, so I am a little surprised this afternoon to hear the members of the Official Opposition get ahead of this and just say: Hey, they gave you this report. Give them all this money — but without all this other work being done. The point is that the comprehensive municipal grant is meant to contribute toward the cost of running a municipality, but it is not the sole source of funding, nor does it represent the entirety of our support to municipalities.

I think, if we are going to retool the comprehensive municipal grant thoughtfully, fundamentally, we need to get a full picture of what municipalities need, what they're getting, what we are willing to provide, where some of the gaps are, and what some of the areas are where they need the support. It seems to be a lot broader than the report that we received — as good as that report is.

Mr. Speaker, municipalities, as responsible levels of government, have the ability to raise revenues and they make choices on how they do this — whether through property taxes, fees, or otherwise. A financial review into the long-term health of municipal governments will help us to better understand whether the comprehensive municipal grant is adequate or if there are other factors that should be considered. An analysis of the financial health of all municipalities will provide evidence that helps to support long-term solutions to financial sustainability.

We know that allowing this committee and our respective policy advisors time to conduct this analysis will serve Yukon communities the best in the long term. We don't want to get ahead of ourselves. I will once again note that municipalities will be getting a 10.3-percent bump in 2024-25.

Community Affairs is working with an independent contractor to develop tools required to assist with the overall health of municipalities. One indicator of financial health is the accumulated surplus in each municipality, which is recorded on their most recent financial statement, as it is the primary indicator of the financial resources a community has available to provide future services. I am not going to get into that today. That work is still underway, but it's also another indicator that we think should be considered in this whole thing. Currently, the proposal or plan that we got from AYC doesn't consider it at all.

Now, again, the context is that Yukon communities are absolutely the backbone of our territory, and they play a vital role in shaping our identity and our future. When I first got to the territory, I was a municipal affairs reporter before I moved up to the Legislative Assembly. I went to AYC's annual meetings, travelled to communities from Haines Junction to Carmacks to Carcross, and listened in on their community

meetings. In some cases, there were no local advisory committees back then. It was really interesting for me to see, as a reporter, how important these municipalities are to their citizens and how direct the correlation is between the services the municipalities provide and their citizens. This perhaps is the most intimate level of government. It is absolutely important to our territory that those communities — that closest of connections to the citizens of the territory — is robust and healthy.

Sewer and water, road snow clearing, bylaws — and there are a number of them — even lighting and garbage collection — these are most basic of human needs and services, and they are the ones provided by our municipalities. I understand the relationship and how important municipalities are to the territory. It's a great honour for me to sit in this chair and work for the betterment of our municipalities. I take that very seriously.

Many of the municipal leaders whom I deal with are effectively volunteers dedicating enormous amounts of their time to better their communities, and I think that needs to be recognized and acknowledged — the work that they do — because it is often thankless, and it's very, very important. So, I understand that they need the resources to do that job as well as they can. It is vital that this happens. I know my colleague — my predecessor in this role — certainly understands that very, very well too.

These community leaders — in times of crisis, they step up, and we have seen that this year with the fires that threatened both Old Crow and Mayo. In those places, the community leaders stepped up — in some cases, leading the charge. They were often in contact with me by cellphone — at any time of the day or night, we were talking. They don't get paid enough to do this work, but they were there for the citizens. And we saw in Mayo, for example, the mayor and the chief of the First Nation — the mayor and Chief Hope — were right there on the front lines, leading and helping their citizens to evacuate the community, giving them instructions, and, in some cases, working the fire lines, making sure that they had the support that they needed to protect their homes.

I celebrate that, so far be it from me to prevent them from getting the resources they need to run those municipalities, but I want to make sure it's done in a way that encompasses all the nuances of the funding and the relationship that the Yukon government has built with our municipalities over the years. There are really deep questions in that AYC report, and I know my colleague will probably address them as well, but there are tax implications that have been proposed, and that's a big issue. It's one that we really have to consider when we're talking about affordability in this territory and how we go forward.

How does an increase in tax revenue on people living outside of municipalities affect them and affect the municipalities? I am not clear on that yet, and neither are many people, so we are doing some analysis — we have looked into that. It was a surprising recommendation coming from the Association of Yukon Communities; it is baked into this report, and it has some implications that really do deserve some hard thought. So, we are doing that work; we are doing that analysis

so that we can actually assess what it means. This is in this report, and we could start cherry-picking ideas, but really, if we are going to start cherry-picking ideas, let's do it in a much more thoughtful and deep manner, which is why we are looking at the fiscal year of 2025-26.

There is no debate here on the floor of the House today on the importance of Yukon communities or the need and the important role that they play in our lives. What is up for debate is the nature of the funding that the Government of Yukon provides to the Yukon communities, and what we are discussing here today is how our communities are funded.

I would like to think that we share common goals of ensuring the financial and long-term sustainability of Yukon communities. How do we do that? How do we exercise fiscal and social responsibilities? It is a cornerstone of what differentiates us as political parties. It is not really the "what" but the "how" that we are debating today. Let me be, again, clear: Ensuring the financial stability and long-term sustainability of Yukon communities is something that we absolutely and fundamentally believe in. That is why the escalators were built in, and it is one of the reasons why my colleague addressed this issue when he came to office. Again, the Premier was a municipal politician; my colleague was a municipal politician. They served their communities because they believed in them, and they bring that ethos to our Cabinet, and that understanding — that context — is vital to us in understanding these things.

We want to make sure that our municipalities are sustainable. Again, how do we do that? I think that the best way to do that is by taking the information that we have been provided, plugging it into the bigger conversation — the wider consultation — about what our municipalities are receiving, and then build a better comprehensive municipal grant together as partners. That's really what we set in motion. It's what I support. We're going to continue that good work to bring all of our communities to a better place.

I don't know where or what that looks like in the end, but I do know that it will be vital to make sure that our citizens across the territory are represented by really committed, hard-working individuals who give their time, without regard, to serve their neighbours and families.

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, I want to be very clear that we support our municipalities, but we're going to do it in a measured and responsible fashion using all the facts at our disposal to get a fair and comprehensive municipal grant to our municipalities. That work is ongoing.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I would like to begin by thanking the Member for Watson Lake for bringing forward this motion.

The comprehensive municipal grant is a very important funding tool for our municipalities. I think that when she spoke — in the few minutes, as she spoke to this motion — and I'm also trying to remember her question today from Question Period — but I think she said that the comprehensive municipal grant is a supplement; it's not meant to be main funding.

But I think if we look at the report that the Association of Yukon Communities supplied, which we're effectively

debating today, the page that I find super informative on this is page 16 of the report, which talks about how some factors went into changing the formula in 2017.

Then we see, from 2017 forward, where the comprehensive municipal grant increases, but we ought to take a look at those numbers and put them in the context of tax revenue. The municipalities, generally speaking, have tax revenue. They also will have some revenue for services, although usually those services are fees for services. If you think of water and sewer here and garbage collection here in Whitehorse, really, that is meant to pay for that service itself, but when you think of the rest of the things that municipalities are trying to do to serve their citizens, the two main funding sources are the comprehensive municipal grant and property taxes.

It really depends on which community we're talking about when you try to think about the size of that. From that report that we're discussing today, put forward by the Association of Yukon Communities, they list a few areas or times of tax revenues through property taxes. I just took a quick look at a few of them just to get a sense, and they were showing numbers for 2021. Then I pulled some numbers off the graphs for their comprehensive municipal grants from 2021, which I actually have, because the Department of Community Services recently published the comprehensive municipal grant numbers for the last several years.

If we look at a community like Whitehorse, then yes, the comprehensive municipal grant in 2021 was around \$8 million and property taxes were in the range of \$25 million. What that means is that the comprehensive municipal grant is somewhere around 20 percent or 25 percent, so it's pretty significant. If we then look at, as you get into other communities — so let's take Dawson, which is the next largest; the property tax revenue was about \$1.5 million in 2021 and the comprehensive municipal grant was about \$2.5 million in 2021. What that means is that over 60 percent of your budget is the comprehensive municipal grant. Finally, if we look at our smaller communities — and I just took a quick look at Mayo — it can be over 80 percent or even 90 percent, so it's not a supplement anymore; it's a huge amount of the funding.

I think that it is a really good thing that we have the comprehensive municipal grant. I will build on some of the comments from the Minister of Community Services when he talked about the importance of municipalities and the importance of the work that they do and the services that they provide to Yukoners. These are incredibly important services and they allow our communities to function.

Here in the Yukon, we also get a federal transfer that is very similar in that sense — where there are a lot of dollars that flow to us. We are lucky to get that and it is good, and I think that the comprehensive municipal grant is important.

My first point that I am trying to make is that it is an incredibly important funding agreement for our municipalities, even more so for our smaller municipalities than larger.

The next thing I want to mention is that years ago, when I was a city councillor, I used to go to a thing called the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. You would go and meet

with colleagues from across the country who were also councillors, and they would talk about what their relationship is and what their situation is financially and how they are dealing with infrastructure investments — all that sort of stuff. It was great being from the Yukon at those events. One of the first reasons was because they always put up what percentage of the municipalities were part of — within any province or territory — the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and the Yukon was always on the top because it was 100 percent — 100 percent of our municipalities are part of the federation. We always got this little shout-out.

People would come up to us, from the Yukon, and they would ask about the relationship with, for example, the territorial government.

I would say: Yes, our council met with the minister one time last year.

Municipalities from across the country would be like: What? You met with the minister?

We said yes, and they said: How are you dealing with these issues?

We said: Well, here is our situation.

They were kind of stunned when we talked about the comprehensive municipal grant. There is no such thing in many of our provinces. It is not very common. The Yukon was the envy of other jurisdictions.

Fast-forward to after the 2016 election, I had the privilege of being in the role as Minister of Community Services, and a couple of times, I went to FCM — the Federation of Canadian Municipalities — in support of our municipalities as they talked about national issues and about the Yukon's context. A couple of times, I was introduced to other municipalities and they were just kind of stunned that there would be a minister there trying to support, in this case, the territorial municipalities.

I want to say that comprehensive municipal grants are very important, especially for our smaller communities, and I want to say that it's not that common across the country.

Let's come back for a second and talk about a bit of the history of the comprehensive municipal grant. If you go back to that page that I was referencing in the report from the Association of Yukon Communities, page 16, you can pretty quickly see this visual of what was happening with the comprehensive municipal grant up until 2016 — well, 2017. We were elected in 2016 and we started working with municipalities in 2017. The new grant came in, so the first change happened in 2018. You can see that the comprehensive municipal grant was static. It was unchanging for at least several years before that. There were several years when the comprehensive municipal grant was static. What I am trying to understand — and I do appreciate this motion — is why this wasn't something that was done back when the Yukon Party was the government of the day.

I was a municipal councillor. I remember asking for it to happen. I remember requesting the Yukon Party, as the government, to unstick the comprehensive municipal grant. It wasn't so much in my role as a councillor from the City of Whitehorse; it was as a member of the Association of Yukon Communities. I would always go to the Association of Yukon

Communities' annual general meetings and we would talk about funding within our municipalities. We would talk about infrastructure funding; we would talk about the comprehensive municipal grant.

When the Member for Watson Lake rises to close out this motion, it is my hope that she will talk about why there was not an initiative to change the comprehensive municipal grant during their term. I think that what I hear all of us saying today is that the comprehensive municipal grant is very important to municipalities, but it was very important back in 2016 and earlier, too.

When you start to look at it, you start to see that increase. So, from 2017 to 2018 — increase and on we go. The report only goes up to 2022. I think there are a few things that we should acknowledge within there that are different. I have heard the minister talk in this House over the last couple of weeks during this Sitting about how the grant has moved and how it has changed. So, I went and grabbed those numbers to take a look at them and try to understand them a bit better. He has said — and I can confirm — that this year, the 2024 comprehensive municipal grant will go up — it is going up — by 10.4 percent. That is a big jump. Why is that jump there? The answer is inflation.

Well, let me go back for a minute to talk about that change. The Member for Watson Lake talked about — I think she mentioned that inflation has gone up 20 percent over the past decade and that the comprehensive municipal grant has not kept up. If you start to break that out and take a look — which I did while I was preparing for this debate — at how much the comprehensive municipal grant has gone up since 2017, it has gone up 20 percent. In other words, we have been increasing it dramatically.

I am pretty sure that when the Member for Watson Lake did those numbers, she was calculating it based on the report that was given by the Association of Yukon Communities. Unfortunately, that report only goes to 2022 and does not yet take into account the big jumps that have just happened. What I see as jumps over the past — last year, in 2023, the jump was just over five percent, and this year, it is over 10 percent. If you add those numbers in, you start to see that we are ahead of inflation right now, but all of that "ahead" has happened since the Liberals were in government and none of that is from the Yukon Party. That still doesn't take away from the debate or the point that I think is very important about the services that are provided by municipalities.

The question that we ought to be asking is: If we flow dollars to municipalities, can they do more? Would it improve the Yukon? The simple answer, of course, is yes. The harder answer is: How should that work in the balance of all of the questions that we have?

The report that we're being asked to discuss today — when I look at that report and we go down toward the end of the report, there are about four pages of summary at the end. Three of those pages are next steps and short- and long-term suggestions.

This is one of those challenges. The way that the motion is worded in front of us right now; it's saying that we should

amend the comprehensive municipal grant in response to the analysis and report conducted. There are both short-term and long-term suggestions in there. There are actually three pages of suggestions in there. There are a lot of them.

From my perspective, I hope that there would be an opportunity to try to go through that. I think it's pretty important to update those numbers. Right now, the numbers are talking about 2022, but, of course, we know that there are two more years of numbers that have had an increase of five and 10 percent — so, together, a 15-percent increase.

Within this, it's important to try to take a look at it and dig in and figure out the best approach.

One of the things that is discussed in this is property tax. One of the motions that the Association of Yukon Communities put forward at their last AGM was to look at raising tax rates outside of municipalities. Basically, they're asking us to raise property tax rates. I will say that I attended the local advisory council forum on October 27.

The Association of Yukon Communities — most Yukoners think of it as our eight municipalities, but it also includes our five local advisory councils. Four of those local advisory councils happen to be within Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes. I am going to a local advisory council meeting tonight. What I can tell you is that every one of those local advisory councils were pretty upset about that motion about raising tax rates outside of our municipalities. When I went to that forum, that was one of the big topics. It was the first time that I had seen the president of the Association of Yukon Communities at an LAC forum or meeting. I have not been to every local advisory council meeting, so I may have missed times when they were there. I know that the minister attends those meetings yearly. I know, for example, that he meets with municipalities at least a couple of times. He travels to the communities and meets with municipalities and councils a couple of times a year. Here in Whitehorse, I think there are four times a year for formal meetings, but there are lots of other informal meetings.

There is a concern and I think that one of the things I heard the president of the Association of Yukon Communities say to the local advisory councils at the local advisory council forum — he referred to the question about raising the property tax in unincorporated Yukon as a “red herring”. I haven't had a chance to talk with him further about that, but the sense that I got from him talking with the local advisory councils was that the bigger issue in his mind is the comprehensive municipal grant. As I have pointed out, it certainly is a significant funding piece for our municipalities.

If I go to those long- and short-term suggestions, there is a whole range of them. Really, what they are doing is trying to get at the formula of the comprehensive municipal grant. Let me talk for a second, then, about how that formula was created. It was created by sitting down and working with the Association of Yukon Communities. When we went and amended it in 2017 to get it moving and increase the dollars that were flowing to our municipalities — because, under the Yukon Party, it had not been increasing — we said to municipalities: Tell us what you would like in that formula. Tell

us what would be, from your perspective, the best way to make that formula work for you.

That's what we did. We took their advice —

Speaker: Order, please.

The time being 5:30 p.m., this House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

Debate on Motion No. 775 accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.