



# Yukon Legislative Assembly

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35<sup>th</sup> Legislature

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## HANSARD

Monday, November 20, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

# YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

## 2023 Fall Sitting

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

### CABINET MINISTERS

NAME	CONSTITUENCY	PORTFOLIO
<b>Hon. Ranj Pillai</b>	Porter Creek South	Premier Minister of the Executive Council Office; Economic Development; Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation
<b>Hon. Jeanie McLean</b>	Mountainview	Deputy Premier Minister of Education; Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate
<b>Hon. Nils Clarke</b>	Riverdale North	Minister of Environment; Highways and Public Works
<b>Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee</b>	Riverdale South	Minister of Health and Social Services; Justice
<b>Hon. Richard Mostyn</b>	Whitehorse West	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board
<b>Hon. John Streicker</b>	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
<b>Hon. Sandy Silver</b>	Klondike	Minister of Finance; Public Service Commission; Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission

### OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

#### Yukon Party

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

### THIRD PARTY

#### New Democratic Party

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

### LEGISLATIVE STAFF

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

**Yukon Legislative Assembly  
Whitehorse, Yukon  
Monday, November 20, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

*Prayers*

**Speaker's statement in recognition of National Child Day**

**Speaker:** Today, we are here celebrating National Child Day. On November 20, 1989, 34 years ago, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNCRC, was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. Canada ratified the UNCRC two years later in December 1991. National Child Day recognizes a historic commitment to the world's children. All governments carry the responsibility and are obligated to uphold children's rights.

This day provides an opportunity to celebrate the powers of the youth voice and the actions of those who work to promote the realization of children's rights.

Our Legislative Assembly has had a Child and Youth Advocate Office for the past 13 years promoting the voices and rights of the young people across our territory and reminding us legislators how important it is to listen to young people.

Youth are raising their voices on the issues that matter to their generation and are calling for adults to create a better future. One way in which the Yukon youth are doing this is through the territorial youth strategy. The Child and Youth Advocate Office is supporting the youth leading the strategy and is monitoring progress through an accountability forum held during the Yukon Youth Summit each spring to assess the progress and celebrate the successes from the strategy.

Children's rights are everyone's responsibility. I urge you to take the opportunity to ask a young person what they think.

**Withdrawal of motions**

**Speaker:** The Chair wishes to inform the House of a change made to the Order Paper. The following motion has been removed from the Order Paper as it is outdated: Motion No. 817, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse West.

**DAILY ROUTINE**

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

**INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS**

**Speaker:** Under Introduction of Visitors, the Chair is pleased to introduce: Annette King, the Child and Youth Advocate; Julia Milnes, deputy advocate; Rachel Veinott-McKeough, policy and systems analyst; McKenzie Amundson, client and service administrator; and Anya Braeuner, advocacy caseworker.

*Applause*

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to help me welcome a few guests we have here today.

We have Ash Kayseas with the Public Service Commission, and we four guests from Queer Yukon here for today's tribute as well: Emily Brooks, Sadie Segriff, Asha Bittenbender, and Finley Parkes.

Thank you for being here.

*Applause*

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleagues to join me in welcoming some special guests who are here with us today. These folks are here to witness the tabling of the Yukon Child Care Board annual report and to also hear a ministerial statement. I will also be delivering a tribute on National Child Day.

From the Yukon Child Care Board, we have Chair Laurie Parker, board members Kristy Kennedy and Ashley Griffis, and the board's administrative support, Sophie Partridge. From the Department of Education Early Learning and Child Care branch, we have Clara Northcott, director of Early Learning and Child Care, and finally, from the Cabinet Office, we have Paolo Gallina, who is my ministerial adviser and a former MLA to this House.

Thank you so much.

*Applause*

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, last week, I asked my colleagues to say thank you to our outgoing chief of staff, and today, I ask you to join me in saying welcome to my new chief of staff. Bronte Renwick-Shields joins the team today and we are delighted to have her.

*Applause*

**Speaker:** Tributes.

**TRIBUTES**

**In recognition of Transgender Day of Remembrance**

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, every year on November 20, we observe the Transgender Day of Remembrance. In November 1998, a transgender woman named Rita Hester was stabbed to death in her apartment in Boston. Unfortunately, Rita's story is not unique. Her tragic death was a catalyst to establishing this day — a day where we can remember transgender people whose lives were lost to violence. It is crucial that we honour their stories and continue to tell them. We know that transgender, two-spirit and gender-nonconforming people still face a significantly higher risk of violence and abuse. Worldwide, 327 transgender and gender-diverse people were reported murdered in 2002. Transgender women of colour experience the highest rates of gender-based violence compared to any other group in our society. These numbers are showing that deadly violence against trans and gender-nonconforming people remains alarmingly high.

Everyone deserves to live a life free of violence and fear. We are working hard to ensure that the Yukon is a place where everyone should feel safe, supported, and welcomed. One of the ways to support transgender youth and the 2SLGBTQIA+

community is by including sexual orientation and gender identity — also known as SOGI — resources in Yukon schools.

SOGI resources play an important role in preventing self-harm and suicidal thoughts. Through education, we can help reduce stigma and discrimination. When all students have a better understanding of what it means to be 2SLGBTQIA+, we can reduce bullying and foster positive environments. Together, through education and collaboration, we can work toward a more equitable and inclusive society where everyone is treated with dignity and respect and where we celebrate transgender people for their achievements and contributions rather than mourning their deaths.

While we have much to celebrate here in the Yukon when it comes to inclusion and diversity, Transgender Day of Remembrance remains a solemn day and an occasion to reflect on the lives unnecessarily cut short due to hate.

I know this is a challenging day for many. Please know that you can reach out for help if you need support. The Canadian Mental Health Association Yukon division has a reach-out support line that operates daily. The Kids Help Phone has resources for youth and young adults at kidshelphone.ca. All of the contact information for support lines and other supports can be found on the Queer Yukon website.

Tonight at 5:00 p.m., Queer Yukon will be hosting a vigil at their headquarters for those seeking to gather and show their support. Thank you to the organizers for your support and heart-centred work. Our collective strength lies in embracing the values of inclusion and acceptance.

*Applause*

**Mr. Istchenko:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize Transgender Awareness Week as well as Transgender Day of Remembrance.

Transgender Awareness Week takes place this year from November 13 to 17. It is observed as an opportunity to celebrate the lives and contributions of two-spirited, trans, and non-binary people in our communities. Today marks Transgender Day of Remembrance in memory and in honour of those who have lost their lives to transphobic violence.

Violence against two-spirited, transgender, and non-binary individuals continues. They experience higher rates of discrimination, stigma, and violence, as well as mental health issues and other complex challenges.

Many feel vulnerable, alone, and isolated. We can change the trajectory of someone's life by simply talking with them, listening, and letting them know that they have someone standing by them willing to help and support them on their journey.

I wish for an inclusive and diverse world for our children to grow up in and feel free from discrimination, where all people can know that they are valued and feel safe to be themselves.

As the minister said earlier, there will be a candlelight vigil held tonight, hosted by Queer Yukon, and similar vigils will be taking place across Canada and around the world.

*Applause*

**Ms. White:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleagues for their words. It's a heavy and hard day, and I want to add my voice on behalf of the Yukon NDP to honour and mourn all of the trans lives that we have lost — lives lost to indifference, to ignorance, to fear, to cruelty, and to hate. I also want to keep in mind a quote from Kai Cheng Thom, a Canadian writer; she wrote — and I quote: "We need people to stop talking about how trans women get killed all the time. We need people to start telling us that they won't let us die."

So, today, that's what I want to say to the trans community: We will fight to keep you safe. We will put ourselves between you and danger, and when we make mistakes, we will make amends and do better going forward. We will listen and we will celebrate your voices. We will fight to make a world that is full of trans joy and possibility. You are wanted; you are needed; you are loved.

*Applause*

### In recognition of National Child Day

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** On behalf of this Liberal government, I rise today to pay tribute to the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of National Child Day. This year's theme is "Every Child Every Right" and celebrates the rights of eight million children in Canada.

National Child Day was proclaimed by the Government of Canada on March 19, 1993 to acknowledge our country's commitment to uphold the rights of children. There were two historic events: the 1959 signing of the UN *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* and the adoption of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* in 1989.

Today, we are reminded that the growth and future of our children hinges on providing the nurturing, love, and respect that they deserve. It is an opportunity to celebrate the individuality and potential that they bring to society. On this day, we honour the importance of family and consider the profound impact that adults have on the development of the children in their care.

In the Yukon, we are fortunate to have organizations that champion the rights of children and youth. They work tirelessly and passionately to improve the lives of those they advocate for. The Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office is committed to promoting and supporting meaningful and effective advocacy on behalf of Yukon children and youth. Their advocacy ensures that the rights, interests, voice, and well-being of children and youth are heard and respected. They value the input of children and youth and work to elevate their voices so that they are fully heard. Hearing a child or youth's voice and respectfully considering their views are important when decisions are being made to determine what is in the child or youth's best interest. Children have the right to form their own views and opinions and have the right to have those opinions heard and respected.

On this day of celebration, I would also like to acknowledge the work of Yukon First Nation governments and organizations along with many other Yukon organizations that

support children and families to achieve their hopes and dreams.

Thank you to all Yukoners who advocate for and protect the rights of children and youth. I encourage all Yukoners to take an opportunity today to learn more about children's rights by visiting National Child Day on [canada.ca](http://canada.ca).

*Applause*

**Ms. Clarke:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize November 20 as National Child Day in Canada, which celebrates the rights of children. By acknowledging the importance of children's rights and making the commitment to uphold them, we also acknowledge that children are our future and have a place in the decisions that are made that will affect their lives when they become adults.

I would like to recognize the important work of the Child and Youth Advocate Office for the work that they do and to all those individuals and organizations that help to be a voice and advocate for our young Yukoners. The Yukon Child and Youth Advocate's 2022-23 annual report shares a clear and concise message around this topic. If we are serious as a territory about building up our young people, then it starts with a fundamental commitment to their rights. Consider it the first brick.

Thank you to all those who work with and on behalf of children and young adults throughout the territory.

Salamat.

*Applause*

**Ms. Blake:** I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to National Child Day. This year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of National Child Day in Canada. The Government of Canada declared November 20 as National Child Day, coinciding with the anniversary of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

This day reminds us as adults and leaders of our obligation to uphold the 54 articles that are laid out in the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* while also promoting opportunities where all children and youth can be engaged and their rights protected. This day also celebrates children and youth as active participants in their own lives, in their families, and in their communities. National Child Day reminds us that young people do have a voice and that they do have something to say, so let's listen.

Children and youth have a right to have their views and voices included and meaningfully engaged at all tables where issues are talked about and where decisions are being made, at all times. As we recognize and celebrate National Child Day, we want all children and youth to know that they are important, that their voices do matter, and that we are here to listen and learn from them.

We extend our gratitude to all youth-serving organizations across the Yukon that do the hard work of supporting Yukon's children and youth and upholding their rights and voices.

Mahsi'.

*Applause*

## In recognition of Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** I rise on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government as well as the Third Party to pay tribute to Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week.

This week is a time for reflection and for action. Bullying, a hurtful and harmful behaviour, targets people's vulnerabilities and often exploits differences in race, gender, and abilities. Bullying takes place in schools and other social settings, but it also takes place beyond physical settings. Cyber bullying is also a serious problem that affects young people every day. Cyber bullying is the use of computers, smartphones, or other connected devices to embarrass, hurt, mock, threaten, or be mean to someone online. Three out of 10 Canadian youth say that they have been cyber bullied at some point in their lives.

The impact of bullying is profound. It can lead to lasting psychological effects such as anxiety, depression, and also a decline in self-esteem. Tragically, in extreme cases, it pushes young people to desperate measures. We recognize the gravity of the issue and its ripple effect on learning, on safety, and on mental wellness as well. In our commitment to promote safe schools and nurturing learning environments, we understand the urgency of addressing and preventing bullying. The safer schools action plan and continued efforts toward inclusive education are testaments to this commitment.

The harm caused by bullying demands our serious attention. We are dedicated to exploring policies to address peer-to-peer harm and ensure prompt, effective responses to any serious incidents in our schools. The Department of Education and Victim Services have produced robust guidelines to support victims, reaffirming our commitment to safe educational spaces.

To further support our youth, we advocate using resources such as the Kids Help Phone, which is a free 24/7 service that is provided to our young people.

One thing that parents and families can do is to know the warning signs. Youth who are affected by bullying all cope differently, but there are some warning signs. They may be things like being afraid to go to school or avoiding school or complaining that they feel sick; their performance might suddenly decrease; they may lose personal belongings or come home with damaged items; and, in extreme cases, they may engage in self-harm or attempt or talk about suicide.

But I remind everyone that bullying is preventable. Everyone must do their part to create schools that are safe spaces for everyone. Every student, teacher, and school staff member deserves to feel safe and valued in their school community. Together, we can make a difference and create a culture of respect and kindness.

*Applause*

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week from November 20 to 24.

What is bullying? It is something that has been around forever, but that doesn't make it right. It is definitely a power imbalance when abuse, meanness, or harassment is shown to

someone on purpose and usually repeated. The act of being a bully is meant to hurt, frighten, exclude, or insult, and it causes pain and emotional angst leading to all sorts of problems — trouble learning at school, difficulty facing your day, and so on — and the new modern wrinkle of cyber bullying. Social media posts, texts, e-mails, and all digital means offer another platform to attack others.

We encourage you to learn about bullying and ensure that children and adults alike are aware of the implications of being a bully, that some action that one does can have detrimental effects on another person's life for a very long time.

I'm sure all of us have had an experience to share. We do know enough about this character flaw that we should be able to nip it in the bud.

It is important to be an individual. Stay the course.

If you are being bullied, remember: It's not your fault, as no one deserves to be bullied — ever. So, reach out, speak about it, report it, get support, and, most of all, don't tolerate it in your group or space. Be the strength. Be kind.

*Applause*

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

## TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Pursuant to section 4(11) of the Yukon *Child Care Act*, I have for tabling the Yukon Child Care Board 2022-23 annual report.

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

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

## NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House congratulates Phyllis Villaver on the opening of her new restaurant in Faro.

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

THAT this House urges the Premier to make public the full report done by Ernst & Young Orenda Corporate Finance regarding the financial management of the Yukon Hospital Corporation, including any and all analyses and opinions they provided to government, by 5:00 p.m. November 20, 2023 in order to provide MLAs time to review this report and ask witnesses from Yukon Hospital Corporation questions about it.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to introduce a payroll tax for workers who earn income from work in the Yukon but file their taxes in another jurisdiction.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to keep the solid-waste transfer stations open at Silver City, Johnsons Crossing, and Braeburn until solutions that meet the solid-waste disposal needs of each community are found.

**Speaker:** Is there a statement by a minister?

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### *Child Care Act* review

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Mr. Speaker, today, National Child Day, I am happy to share that our government is launching a review of the *Child Care Act*. This work begins with a public engagement process set to begin next week. The theme of this year's National Child Day is "Every Child Every Right". As we advance this work, we will keep the best interests of children at the heart of what we do.

In 2021, I committed to modernizing the act in collaboration with First Nation governments, the Child Care Board, stakeholders, and interested Yukoners in a meaningful way where all views would be considered. Today, we are delivering on that commitment. We want to hear from Yukoners about what is important to them when it comes to licensed early learning and childcare programs. An updated *Child Care Act* will reflect what's important in an early learning and childcare environment — high-quality, varied, and nurturing learning experiences that help children develop and grow.

Updating the *Child Care Act* will also help support our commitments to the truth and reconciliation calls to action and the LGBTQ2S+ inclusion action plan, the *Putting People First* report, and the objectives in the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and the two-spirit+ strategy and implementation plan.

The principles of quality, affordability, accessibility, and inclusivity will guide the public engagement and the review of this essential legislation. These pillars are important guideposts as we continue to expand early learning and childcare across the Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to moving things forward. I encourage all Yukoners to take the opportunity to provide feedback about what's important to them when it comes to early learning and childcare. The engagement is scheduled to collect feedback from Monday, November 27, 2023 until Tuesday, January 30, 2024. Building a resilient childcare system is central to supporting strong, healthy, and vibrant Yukon communities.

I encourage everyone to consider adding their voice to this important subject. Our government relies on feedback from Yukoners to strengthen our shared future together.

Shāw nīthān. Thank you.

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for this statement and the opportunity to respond. I should begin by stating that I absolutely agree that the *Child Care Act* needs to be reviewed. This has been a formal

recommendation of the Child Care Board for many years now and something that successive boards, regardless of their membership, have been pushing for.

One of the motions — if not the first motion — that I brought forward in the 35<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly was to review this act. At that time, there was disagreement about how and when that should happen, but my takeaway at the time during the debate in April 2021 was that all parties agreed with reviewing the act. What I did caution at the time was that I was worried that if the review of the act didn't start soon, it would drag out. Sure enough, here we are, a few weeks away from 2024, and the government is only formally announcing that they will review the act now.

I appreciate that the minister has outlined the timing of the next steps for the review — the public engagement that will run until the end of January 2024. What the minister did not indicate was what the timeline was for the development, drafting, and tabling of the act. Perhaps the minister could use her response to be clear about when we can expect to see this revised act come forward. Can she provide a commitment to a date by which the reviewed act will be tabled?

The problems and gaps with the current act are well known and well-documented. The government has already conducted a two-year review of this act and the “what we heard” document from that engagement was released in March of this year. Each and every Child Care Board report for the last number of years has included a list of issues with the act as well. I won't go into the details today about those issues, but I will simply note that I look forward to this work being completed and I hope that it advances as soon as possible, because it is long overdue.

**Ms. Blake:** Mr. Speaker, the *Child Care Act* came into force in 1990, which is 33 years ago. In March of this year, this government released the *Work to review the Child Care Act: what we heard* document from public consultation with partners. We would have assumed that parents and caregivers of children would have been included as partners.

The report included a summary of possible amendments. A few of these included are: simplify the childcare subsidy; establishes maximum fees; approval of an early learning framework for operators; establish a wage scale determined by the director; and establish standards for operators. There were several other possible amendments in the “what we heard” document, but what we haven't heard is what will be kept. What new questions need answering that weren't asked in the first round? What else is being considered and what will the delay be with this new consultation? When will the work on the new amendments be completed and when will the bill be tabled in the House?

There are so many issues that we still hear from Yukoners that have not been addressed. They include: more access to or more available childcare spaces; consideration of part-time spaces, after-school spaces, and summertime programs for school-age children; and consideration of evening-, overnight-, and weekend-accessible daycare. Many parents do not work a Monday-to-Friday job and struggle to find coverage when they are engaged in shift work. In communities, the struggle is real

to keep daycares open and staffed. Without daycare programs in some communities, parents find it nearly impossible to work.

We are happy with the federal funding and Yukon agreement that provides universal, affordable daycare, but we are concerned that this just delays important changes that will protect children and provide them with the best early learning and childcare experience.

Mahsi'.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the members opposite for their remarks today. I will work to bring some of those answers to some of the questions that have been posed today.

Accessible and quality childcare is essential to the well-being of Yukon families. Since implementation of universal childcare in 2021, we have an increase of over 350 early learning and childcare spaces in the territory. We are now paying one of the highest wages in the country for early learning educators. As a result, the early learning and childcare sector saw job growth and many parents were able to re-enter the workforce. High-quality, affordable childcare not only benefits children and families; it benefits the economy. We know how important affordability is to Yukon families.

Starting in 2021, parent fees for childcare services were reduced to less than \$10 per day on average. Families are saving up to \$8,400 a year for children in full-time early learning and childcare programs. In addition, licensed centres and programs received more funding to enhance their programming. Our government understands that the needs and expectations of Yukoners regarding childcare are diverse and dynamic.

That is why we are reviewing the *Child Care Act* and why we are doing so with feedback from Yukoners. This began with a review of the early feedback gathered from conversations happening since 2021 with First Nation governments, the Child Care Board, and other stakeholders. Then, on March 27, 2023, we released the report based on the feedback that outlines themes that can shape the review of the *Child Care Act* and a summary of possible amendments.

Many of the conversations that we had were really in consultation around universal childcare at that time. The report included potential amendments that could improve inclusive supports, simplify subsidy processes for families and operators, and modernize credentials and licensing required for educators.

Mr. Speaker, we work through a process called the “Cabinet Committee on Legislation”, and all of the work that we will do on this review will come back to that Cabinet committee and we will be working toward amending or re-writing this act and will work within that committee. We will be bringing that information back to Yukoners when we are able to.

I think that what we are hearing today is a commitment to do the review and make the changes that are necessary to this important piece of legislation. We hope to collect as many voices as possible to contribute to the future of childcare in the territory, including speaking with families and ensuring that their voices are absolutely heard.



You will be hearing a lot more about this next week. I really encourage Yukoners to get engaged through [yukon.ca](http://yukon.ca). That is an important platform and we will be releasing a news release later today. Thank you so much for allowing me this opportunity to update Yukoners on such important legislation.

**Speaker:** This then brings us to Question Period.

## QUESTION PERIOD

### Question re: Mammography services

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, last week, my colleague asked the Minister of Health and Social Services about the reduction in mammography services at the hospital due to budget constraints. In response, the minister said — quote: “It has been presented as a possible option for some reduction and to align with what is a usual reduction in services ... That determination is being explored and there has not yet been a final determination.”

Well, Mr. Speaker, we have received internal documents from the Yukon Hospital Corporation that show that this isn't just being explored; there is a reduction in medical imaging services being implemented already. The reason for these reductions is cost containment due to budget constraints.

Can the minister tell us how many fewer mammograms will be conducted due to the lack of sufficient budget at the hospital?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, our team is actively actioning a plan that we were working on previous to last week and then ramped up when we learned that there were anticipated service reductions at the Hospital Corporation. I would be very pleased to have the document that the member opposite has. The document that I have and was provided with for the purposes of a meeting last week is still marked “draft”. As a result, we are working with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to hopefully mitigate any of the slowdowns that are anticipated to meet the budget issues that they have.

With respect to cost-cutting measures, certainly the Yukon Hospital Corporation takes seriously their obligation to abide by a budget. But as you can see and as anyone can see, we have brought a supplementary budget, as is often the case, with respect to the Yukon Hospital Corporation because determining their budget at the beginning of the year is an exercise — an important one — to determine core funding for the transfer payment agreement. We have managed in the past number of years — and we'll continue to manage — the location of the Yukon Hospital Corporation by way of bringing additional applications through supplementary budgets — \$17.1 million this year. I hope they vote for it.

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, what's clear about the budget and the supplementary budget is that they are insufficient to keep services from being cut at the hospital.

The wait-list for a mammography exam has been over a year, which means that Yukon women requiring this potentially life-saving exam have had to wait. Earlier this year, a second technologist was hired to help address the growing backlog and attempt to bring the wait-list down. Since the early fall, the hospital has been conducting up to 120 mammograms per

week, but due to these recent cost-containment measures, that number will be reduced to 75 per week in November and even lower in December. This is all because the hospital is struggling with their limited budget from the Liberal government.

My question is simple: Will the minister agree to provide additional funding to the hospital to restore full mammography services and let the hospital work to reduce the growing wait-list for this important service?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I always strive to make sure that Yukoners have accurate information with respect to the answers that they are given here in the Legislative Assembly. I can't control the information that they get in the questions.

The Government of Yukon continues to fully meet the funding needs of the Yukon Hospital Corporation. Year over year, we have provided funding through core and additional transfer payment agreements commensurate with the total identified needs of the Yukon Hospital Corporation.

Through the 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 fiscal years, we have worked with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to respond to funding requests identified during the main and supplementary budget exercises. We recognize that we are in unprecedented times — although some don't — as we emerge from the acute stage of COVID-19, the inflationary pressures, the worldwide health human resources crisis, and the aging and increasing population — all that needs to be responded to by the Yukon Hospital Corporation. They are doing a job that is unprecedented in order to do so. We have asked for \$17.1 million in this supplementary budget to assist them.

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, as I said before, it's clear that the amount provided is insufficient. According to an internal e-mail at Whitehorse General Hospital, the cost-containment measures started in November, but — quote: “... additional measures will be taken in some areas starting in December to get us to our final goal of offering services within our current budget.” The e-mail goes on to say that corporate communications and social media posts are being prepared to — quote: “... remind patients that hospital services will now experience longer wait times...”

Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely clear that these cost containment measures are only needed because of Yukon Hospital Corporation's insufficient budget. In the case of mammography, they have the equipment and they have the staff; they just don't have the financial resources. Will the minister agree to provide the resources necessary to stop this reduction in services at Whitehorse General Hospital?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I know that Yukoners are listening to the answer, although my friend across the way is not. We have worked year over year with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to provide the necessary funding — core and additional transfer payment agreements — commensurate with the total identified needs of Yukon hospitals. With respect to the current slowdown — as I have noted, that I have in draft and presumably the member opposite has something different than what I have — there are concerns — absolutely. Are we interested in a slowdown that results in care — or longer wait times — for Yukoners being delayed? Absolutely not. We hope



to fully mitigate any of the slowdowns that are considered with respect to our ongoing work with the Yukon Hospital Corporation. The relationship that we have built with the Yukon Medical Association, the Yukon Hospital Corporation, and the Department of Health and Social Services will allow us to all work together to support Yukoners.

**Question re: Health care specialist wait times**

**Mr. Cathers:** Mr. Speaker, the cost-containment measures due to the limited budget at Yukon hospitals are preventing women from getting mammography exams that they need and are also impacting multiple medical imaging services at Whitehorse General Hospital. The cost constraints that have been imposed cap the number of X-rays that can be done per day at 35. As stated in an internal e-mail: “It is important to note that these are ‘exams’ per day and not ‘patients’ per day. If a patient has two exams required this will utilize 2 of the total appointment spots available in that day.” We have also heard from Yukoners who have been turned away already from X-rays because the daily cap was hit by mid-morning. When will the Minister of Health and Social Services admit that the only reason that these cost-containment measures are necessary is because her government hasn’t adequately funded our hospitals?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, during the 2022-23 fiscal year, we budgeted \$93.6 million for the Yukon hospital services O&M as well as \$12.2 million in capital expenditures for a combined total of \$105.84 million as part of the first supplementary budget for 2023-24. We have worked with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to identify additional funding needs. The 2023-24 supplementary budget before this Legislative Assembly now includes an increase of \$17.11 million. This increase responds to the growth in hospital and surgical services costs, higher costs associated with responding to the health human resources crisis and increased use of agency nurses as well as for all maintenance capital, which is intended to maintain facilities and replace equipment. This increase also includes funding for the Hospital Corporation employee pension program.

Between 2017-18 and this year’s main estimates, we increased the Yukon hospital budget by 32.64 percent. We work with them every day to make sure we are responding to the needs of Yukoners.

**Mr. Cathers:** Let’s look at another example, Mr. Speaker: CT scans. According to the leaked e-mail from hospital staff, CT scans are capped at 15 per day. Another letter received from a whistle-blower tells of longer wait times for priority 2 and 3 patients, saying: “As a result targeted P2 wait times of 1-3 weeks are not being met: the current wait time is approximately 12 weeks.”

These cuts to health care services at our hospitals are the direct result of the Liberals’ chronic underfunding of Yukon hospitals. Last year, hospital expenses were \$2 million more than revenue. In the last few years, hospital expenses have been as much as \$4 million more than total revenue. This funding crisis is now causing a health care crisis.

Will the minister agree to amend the supplementary budget that is before this House right now to increase the funding for Yukon hospitals so that these cuts to vital health care services can be reversed?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, the members opposite certainly sound like they think they should support additional funding for the Yukon Hospital Corporation, but they just don’t, unfortunately.

We hope to fully mitigate the slowdowns that are being noted here with respect to these issues. We are not interested in having slowdowns or longer wait times for Yukoners — absolutely not.

We are working with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to resolve the issues that are currently noted. I am not sure what documents the other members have, but the ones that I have indicate that we are working and taking steps immediately to draft responses and to work with the Yukon Hospital Corporation in relation to information that came forward to us last week regarding potential options for reduced amounts of expenditures at the hospital. We are working with them to make sure that we can address them together and that we can anticipate that our work together will continue in a positive way. Unfortunately, the members opposite don’t seem to understand the way the budgeting happens for the Yukon Hospital Corporation, which is often if not always through supplementary budgets when other costs are identified. I hope that they will change their minds and vote for it.

**Mr. Cathers:** We do understand — the hospital needs more money. The information shared by courageous whistle-blowers at Yukon hospitals is clear. They are imposing cost containment measures to fit the budget that they have been given by the Liberal government. The hospital told staff that they are — quote: “... re-aligning the services we offer to meet the budget that we have been approved to operate within.”

Those cuts to medical imaging have already started and are planned to get even worse in December. They are affecting medical imaging, including CT scans, MRIs, X-rays, mammograms, and ultrasounds. These cuts to health care services and increases in wait times are the result of this Liberal government’s underfunding of our hospitals. Yukoners are paying the price for the Liberals’ neglect of our hospitals.

When will the Liberal government stop chronically underfunding Yukon hospitals and start providing them with the resources they need to reduce health care wait times and meet the needs of Yukoners?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I don’t think that it does Yukoners any service — it actually does them a disservice — when the opposition brings information that is not correct. Between the 2017-18 and 2023-24 main estimates, this Liberal government has increased the Yukon hospital services O&M funding from \$70.6 million to \$93.6 million, which is an increase of 32.64 percent. Between 2020-21 and 2022-23, we have provided a total of \$16.4 million in additional funding to the Yukon Hospital Corporation in direct response to COVID-19-related pressures.

While the majority of the funding for the Yukon Hospital Corporation is provided through the Yukon government, there

is an additional amount of funding that is provided to them, often in the range of \$9 million. In the 2022-23 fiscal year, we provided a total of \$97 million to the Hospital Corporation, including O&M funding through a transfer payment agreement, but that did not include capital funding. During the 2023-24 fiscal year, we anticipate providing approximately \$115.2 million to the Hospital Corporation based on their forecasts.

**Question re: Health care services in rural communities**

**Ms. Blake:** This year, rural Yukoners have experienced repeated closures to their health centres. Between May and July, Pelly Crossing, Destruction Bay, Mayo, Teslin, Beaver Creek, and Ross River have had repeated closures or reduced services, sometimes for several weeks at a time. It is not acceptable for rural Yukoners to be left without access to health care services in their communities, especially for extended periods.

Health centres are a lifeline for people in medical distress and local services can mean the difference between life and death. What is this government doing to ensure that Yukoners living in rural communities have access to essential health care when health centres are repeatedly closed?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I think this is a very important topic, although again, unfortunately, the facts are not correct. We have not had health centres closed for weeks on end, and truly, for the most part, we have not had them closed at all. There are — absolutely — slowdowns. There have been slowdowns with respect to staff so that we might appreciate them, take care of them, and allow them to have important time away. There are also those same slowdowns with respect to having difficulty in having staff, but we know that, in order to fully staff health centres ready to serve Yukoners when and where they need it, we need to continue investing in our health care professionals and in those communities.

I can also indicate that, for the most part, there are emergency services — EMS services — that are brought in, in addition, if they have to support those health centres. On occasion, we have brought an extra ambulance and extra volunteers to work in a community. For the most part, those administrators of those health centres are still there in place. They can still have itinerant doctor visits; they can still have appointments if there is one nurse and not more than one. I can indicate that we are supporting each and every one of those health centres to the point where — the opposition comes with the idea that this is something that we support in some way. It is absolutely not. We —

**Speaker:** Order, please.

**Ms. Blake:** Mr. Speaker, yearly between December and January, there is an increased demand for emergency care. This is the season when there are heightened risks for respiratory viruses like the flu, COVID, RSV, and pneumonia. Cold weather conditions worsen symptoms for people with asthma, heart disease, and arthritis, which also increases the demand for health services. The holiday season is also a challenging time for many people who struggle with grief and loss, mental health

and addiction issues, and increasing stress, anxiety, and depression. This is the season when it is critical that community health centres are operating and fully staffed.

What is this government doing to prevent rural health centre closures during the upcoming holiday season?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate the information given there, we work every day to make sure that the health centres are properly staffed and open throughout the year. A particular season is important to acknowledge, but what I must note is that having fully staffed health centres is our goal every day.

Like the rest of Canada and around the world, Yukon is impacted by a health human resources shortage. To mitigate the impact on Yukoners, the Yukon government continues to work to recruit and retain health care providers. As a matter of fact, the nurses' recruitment and retention bonuses that were put in place last year by this government have had a positive impact on making sure that the number of community nursing vacancies has been reduced significantly. Community nursing is currently experiencing a vacancy rate of approximately 19 percent of primary health care nurses, which is definitely not something that we want to maintain, but it is an improvement of approximately 29 percent since the fall of 2022. The facts are that the vacancy rate has improved. There have been flexible schedules permitted in the communities. We have worked together to have a positive impact.

**Ms. Blake:** Mr. Speaker, in December of last year, this government announced the recruitment and retention bonus package to acquire and retain health care workers in the Yukon. In March, the government created a steering committee to provide — and I quote: "... bold and innovative solutions for immediate action, mid-term action and long-term action." However, rural health centres continue to face closures due to staffing shortages. This government has not managed to improve the functioning of rural health centres in the immediate or medium term.

Can the minister tell Yukoners what immediate actions this government is taking to address health care shortages across the Yukon?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I think I have been saying the difficulties that exist and the actions that our government has taken to mitigate those.

We are working to support health care workers in our community settings. We are working to recruit health care workers so that Yukoners across the territory have access to health and social services. That is a priority for our government. We have fulfilled the first of our three-year commitment under CASA to allocate funding to the budget for recruitment and retention of new health care professionals. I know that we have reduced the vacancy rate of community nursing to approximately 19 percent. I know that we work — whenever there needs to be an opportunity for a health centre to have a reduction in care — to make sure that the additional resources are put there. We, on occasion, have to use agency nurses. We also have other nurses who come from different departments to make sure that they can support a community.

I have also noted that we have emergency medical services that do the same thing. I also noted that we have a recruitment and retention bonus for Yukon nurses that has continued to support Yukon communities.

**Question re: Rural solid-waste transfer stations**

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, Silver City, Braeburn, Keno, and Johnsons Crossing have been repeatedly let down by this government. Although there is a workable solution in Keno for now, there are still three community transfer stations slated for closure. First the minister refused to talk to the communities, and when the NDP made talks happen, the minister refused to listen. He ignored residents' concerns and insists on closing their transfer stations in the name of modernization. These rural communities were told to modernize by making multi-hour roundtrips to dump their garbage. Cutting essential government services to rural Yukon communities is not the future of our territory and is not the future that rural Yukoners expect from those who represent them.

When will this government reverse its decision to close these three community transfer stations?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to talk this afternoon about how this government is improving and investing in our communities across the territory to improve our landfills. From Haines Junction to Teslin, Mayo, Keno, and Watson Lake, communities need better landfills. We're producing way too much garbage as a society, and so we are investing in our landfills to make sure that they are better run and that they are more environmentally responsible.

The Yukon solid-waste management system was not sustainable under previous governments. Changes to solid-waste disposal systems in communities were instigated in response to a 2016 report by the Association of Yukon Communities. Specifically, this report highlighted the problem of peripheral dumping at Yukon government-operated transfer sites and the need to discourage peripheral dumping.

The closure of these specific sites is part of our efforts to modernize waste management across the territory and address climate change while ensuring that every Yukoner is within 50 to 60 kilometres of a managed transfer site.

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, the minister seems to think that he knows what is good for these communities better than they do. Well, he doesn't.

The minister has said several times that he wants to — and I am quoting — save taxpayers' money and reduce emissions. Noble goals — but that is not what would be accomplished by these closures. This government will be asking these same taxpayers to drive hundreds of kilometres to dispose of their waste. Instead of one vehicle, dozens of vehicles will have to make the same trip.

Will the minister finally recognize that his plan is flawed, and will he go back to the drawing board with the communities to find solutions that work for them?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Mr. Speaker, the decision to regionalize our landfills was made at the behest of the Association of Yukon Communities. They came to us and said: Listen, we have to do better.

There are a number of reasons why we have to do better. It is an enormous environmental liability for our communities. It is a place where — if our landfills are not supervised properly, if they are not gated, and if we don't have controls on those landfills — people are dumping noxious substances in those sites, out of sight of anybody, and getting away with it.

I have heard from the community of Dawson City that they had to get rid of PCBs and send them down to Swan Hills at enormous expense to the community of Dawson City. In Haines Junction, we are hearing of people dump-shopping — coming from Whitehorse and disposing of metals and other materiel from Whitehorse to Haines Junction. It is costing Haines Junction residents a lot of money. I just had a conversation with Haines Junction about this. We are looking at solutions for that community. We are hearing the same thing — just this week in Pelly Crossing, the dump was set on fire. Now we have an enormous expense up in that community as well. We have to do better, Mr. Speaker, to manage these landfills and start to control them so that our environment is better looked after and our communities are not left holding a bill that they shouldn't have to pay.

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, even if the minister doesn't want to support rural Yukoners, he has a responsibility to do so. Residents have raised concerns about protecting wildlife. In rural Yukon, the progression of waste management started with people storing garbage at home, and then it was moving to open pits and then open burn pits and then burn barrels. Finally, after decades, a solution that worked for wildlife and for people and the environment was found, and that is transfer stations with electric fences, cattle guards, and metal bins. Now the minister is determined to force rural Yukoners to go backwards.

From long drives for residents to take garbage to other communities to installing or finding ways to protect wildlife from getting into their stored garbage, none of this makes sense. This government is moving backwards.

Why does the minister think that any of these options will save money, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, protect wildlife, or serve rural Yukon communities?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Mr. Speaker, there are plenty of people in the territory who bring their garbage to Whitehorse. As a matter of fact, I spoke to some people in Silver City who actually do just that every time. They move their garbage from Silver City to Whitehorse and deposit it at the Whitehorse dump. This is happening already. We're asking residents who have no gas or grocery facilities to actually bring their garbage to those places where they buy gas and buy groceries. These aren't extra trips — the same trip, making it more efficient.

As per our confidence and supply agreement commitment, we are consulting with communities to determine a path forward with respect to household waste-disposal options. We understand that the Leader of the NDP has been closely following the discussion around waste transfer stations. She was the only person who registered or attended a Zoom meeting with Braeburn residents about waste transfer stations. We have held 28 consultations on it since 2019. We held nine of those in 2023 alone. We are continuing to talk to residents in Silver City — on these transfer stations — to come up with options to make

this transition easier for them. We have not made a decision yet to close these transfer stations. We are working toward that with regional transfer stations in all the communities nearby these communities.

I will say that Silver City may be losing its transfer station, but there is still a workable and monitored landfill in Destruction Bay, not more than 60 kilometres from those people's homes.

**Question re: Watson Lake continuing care services**

**Ms. McLeod:** Mr. Speaker, on November 2, I asked the Minister of Health and Social Services about an announcement that she made in November 2022 to open two long-term care beds in the Watson Lake hospital. In response, she informed the Legislature that this project was no longer going forward because the minister had heard concerns from the community. Well, I can certainly attest to the concerns that were raised by the community. The fact that the government had decided not to proceed with this after making the announcement last November came as a surprise to everyone.

Can the minister tell us when the decision was made and why it took a question in Question Period for it to be announced publicly?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to have a further discussion with the member opposite if she has other information. The information that I have been given — and I don't have the details, but I am happy to get them — is that, through consultation with the community of Watson Lake, it was not the option that they wanted to pursue with respect to providing long-term care in their community. I also can note that the information I have — I will check on the date — is that there is currently nobody waiting on the wait-list for long-term care from Watson Lake, which doesn't mean that we don't have to plan. I am happy to have further conversations and discussions with the community, but nonetheless, the conversations that we have had to date were that this was not to be pursued.

We had money in the budget in addition to the announcement that was made with respect to having those long-term care beds and making those particular rooms located in the Watson Lake hospital a bit more home-like and a bit more comfortable for individuals to stay in so that they could receive those services. We also had money in the budget to pursue the caregivers there. That has been placed on hold, as I have noted.

**Ms. McLeod:** Mr. Speaker, we understand that the government is now conducting a community needs assessment about long-term care in Watson Lake, so I would like to ask about this.

What are the terms of reference for the needs assessment? Who will be consulted with respect to this needs assessment? When will it be conducted, and why hasn't the minister announced any of this publicly?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite might recall — I'm not sure if she would be aware — that we were interested in doing a ministerial statement with respect to long-term care and that was not permitted by the members opposite.

What I can tell you and tell Yukoners is that the Government of Yukon is truly committed to ensuring that seniors and elders in Yukon receive the support that they need. We have an interest in doing that in their home communities. It is absolutely crucial that people feel, in their senior years, that they are receiving the care that they need and the opportunities to do so in their community.

We have been working with the Hospital Corporation to integrate two long-term care rooms in the Watson Lake Community Hospital, as was noted in the first question in relation to an announcement that was made, because we were continuing that work and we wanted to provide increased supports in the community. That work is continuing. Of course, we have had issues with the nursing capacity going forward, but we appreciate that the residents of Watson Lake were bringing forward feedback and concerns about the availability of continuing care. We will continue that conversation.

**Ms. McLeod:** Mr. Speaker, it makes me wonder if the minister even knows about a needs assessment that is being done.

It has been made clear in all of the public meetings and consultations that have been held so far about this issue that the community is interested in a long-term care facility in Watson Lake.

If the community needs assessment determines that this is what is needed and wanted by the community, will the minister commit to supporting the construction of such a facility in Watson Lake?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, there were unfortunately a lot of "ifs" in that question. As a result, I won't commit to building anything. What I will commit to doing is working with communities — all communities, including Watson Lake — to make sure that we are meeting the needs of long-term care for that community. It is on hold at the moment because we seek to best understand the local needs and values. The information that I have is that the long-term care option that was presented was not something supported by the community at the time. We continue to work to assess the opportunities to support Yukoners, including through the implementation of the *Aging in Place Action Plan* and *Putting People First*.

Watson Lake is a community that is supported by a permanent registered nurse providing home care, one AOC registered nurse, two AOC home support workers, and one Whitehorse-based home care occupational physical therapist who visits the community throughout the year.

As of September 2023, no one from the Watson Lake area is on an active wait-list for permanent placement in a long-term care home. We are working individually with Yukoners and Watson Lake residents to make sure that they are supported.

**Speaker:** The time for the Question Period has now elapsed.

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

*Motion agreed to*

*Speaker leaves the Chair*

## COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

### Motion re appearance of witnesses

#### Committee of the Whole Motion No. 14

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Madam Chair, I move:

THAT from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Monday, November 20, 2023, Lesley Brown, President and Vice-Chancellor of Yukon University, and Christine Mahar, public member on the Yukon University Board of Governors, appear as witnesses before Committee of the Whole to answer questions regarding the operation of Yukon University.

**Chair:** It has been moved by the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes:

THAT from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Monday, November 20, 2023, Lesley Brown, President and Vice-Chancellor of Yukon University, and Christine Mahar, public member on the Yukon University Board of Governors, appear as witnesses before Committee of the Whole to answer questions regarding the operation of Yukon University.

*Committee of the Whole Motion No. 14 agreed to*

**Chair:** The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

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

*Recess*

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

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

**Chair:** The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

#### Request for Acting Chair of Committee of the Whole

**Chair:** At this time, I will ask if any private member wishes to volunteer to be Acting Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

*Member for Takhini-Kopper King rises*

#### Department of Highways and Public Works — continued

**Acting Chair (Ms. White):** Is there any further general debate?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** I don't think I have much time, but it is a pleasure to be back here for debate on Highways and Public Works. To my right, I have Deputy Minister Catherine Harwood and, to her right, Assistant Deputy Minister Richard Gorczyca. I look forward to questions.

**Mr. Hassard:** I too would like to thank the officials for being here today as we once again work our way through some questions regarding Highways and Public Works.

I had a few questions this afternoon about the vendor performance review program. This program came into effect in October 2021 and we know that last year was what YG said would be a trial year and that it would be an open book, I guess, with industry about how it went. I believe that there was going to be some sort of review, but to the best of my knowledge, we haven't seen anything yet. I am wondering if the minister could provide us with an update on how things are going there.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** The vendor performance review program is a mechanism used to recognize and encourage vendors who deliver good performance on contracts and provide a way to give feedback and incentives for those contractors who do not. The program evaluates and scores vendors on their performance throughout a government contract. The program also provides incentive to vendors for good performance. For example, vendors with higher scores could ultimately receive a competitive advantage during future tender evaluations, ultimately increasing their chances of securing future government contracts.

The program will help services to Yukoners by incentivizing the highest level of service from contractors during government contracts. As the member opposite indicated, implementation of the program is being phased in to ensure that both the Yukon government project managers and vendors have sufficient time to become familiar with the new process. The first phase was between October 21 and October 22, when scores were collected but not kept. The second phase, which started a year ago, collected scores from vendors but did not apply them to procurements. This allowed us to create an overall score per vendor. The final phase was implemented in October 2023.

The Yukon government can begin using the vendors' overall scores from the previous year and apply them during a procurement evaluation. We will be monitoring the effects of this program moving forward. We will be consulting with industry on any unanticipated effects, which could lead to further changes if necessary.

Highways and Public Works is actively engaging with industry with the Yukon Contractors Association and the

Yukon Chamber of Commerce's procurement committee to assist in vendors becoming more accustomed to the new program and to hear feedback about improvements.

Before launching the first phase of implementation, we spoke to industry at a Procurement Business Committee meeting in September 2021 and received input. The Procurement Support Centre has engaged with industry throughout the phases of implementation in order to provide training through the live sessions, as well as providing an online training course, available on [YGLearn](#) for government staff.

More recently, the Procurement Support Centre has been meeting with industry representatives — including on May 17, June 28, and November 2, 2023 — in order to get feedback on the program and to find solutions to any concerns that have been raised. The Procurement Support Centre will continue to meet with industry in order to provide updates on the feedback received and to discuss potential adjustments to the program. Highways and Public Works is committed to listening to industry's feedback and considering adjustments to the program that advance shared interests.

The Procurement Support Centre met with our First Nation partners on July 19 in order to provide an update on the program's progress and we will continue to meet with them as needed.

Specifically with respect to scoring, when a vendor receives their score, they can either accept, contest, or not respond. When a vendor contests their score, it will initiate the contestation process. The first step will be that the project manager and the vendor, working together, will communicate with each other to come to an agreement. If no agreement is reached, the Procurement Support Centre will review and submit a recommendation to the Deputy Minister of Highways and Public Works for a final decision.

One of the criteria that a vendor can be scored on is the fulfillment of their tendering commitments to Yukon First Nation participation.

Based on the tender type, there are up to seven key performance indicators that are assessed for each contract, which creates an overall performance score. The key performance indicators are: cost control; health and safety; quality assurance; schedule and timetable; staff and administration; Yukon First Nation participation, if that is applicable; functionality; and training for goods contracts.

That's where we are at. I have certainly been monitoring this from time to time. I am just waiting to see if there are any other updates. Just by way of an update to the general public, on November 29, 2023 of this year, at the Reverse Trade Show, between 1:00 and 1:30, there will be a session entitled "Vendor Performance Review Program", which is being presented by the Procurement Support Centre. It is certainly a work in progress, but it does appear, in my view, that progress is being made.

Just to finish my comments, the design of the vendor performance review program is based on other jurisdictions that have had similar successful initiatives, such as that from the federal government and Alberta.

**Mr. Hassard:** When I asked that question, I asked the minister about whether there was going to be a review happening. I guess what I am looking for is: Will there be a document or a "what we heard" or something that people will actually be able to look at, read, hold in their hands — however you want to put it?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Thank you for the question. I have been advised that there will very likely be a "what we have learned so far" session or sessions for the industry procurement conference. My officials were just trying to get a date of when it is, but generally speaking, they are in February or March. So, in February or March 2024 at that industry conference, there will very likely be sessions on an update on the vendor performance review program.

**Mr. Hassard:** Am I to understand that you have to attend one of these sessions in order to get this update, or will there be other ways to find out where the government is at or how this review is proceeding?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** I am advised that HPW is meeting with vendors and I guess potential contractors on a regular basis and addressing their feedback as we go on a continuous basis with a view to continuously improve the program, which I believe is consistent with the comments that I made in my first response. For example, the most recent meetings were held two weeks ago.

I am also advised that if there are any changes to the program, they would be published on yukon.ca, and HPW also regularly holds lunch and learns and they will continue to offer those programs on a regular basis.

**Mr. Hassard:** I wasn't trying to make this a difficult question, so I'll try once again in case there is something that is confusing to the minister or if I am not conveying it well. Will there be an actual document that people will be able to hold in their hand or read or go through in regard to this review process?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** As I said previously, this is a work in progress — continuous improvement — and continuous updates are taking place on yukon.ca, but perhaps to put a metaphorical bow on this, I will take the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin's specific question with respect to the generating of a point-in-time document — which will probably be moving in certain directions, in any event — and return to the House with that answer. I will consult with my officials with respect to generating such a document.

**Mr. Hassard:** I think it's a little bit disturbing for vendors and contractors to think that there seems to be a problem or that it would be such a challenge to provide them with something that they can sit down and look at to see whether or not this is working and how well it is working, but I will move on, Acting Chair. I'm curious if the minister can provide us with information as to how many tenders have actually provided a score since October 2022.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** I am advised that, because this is a fairly specific question and it also involves a sort of all-of-government query with respect to tenders, I will have to come back with a legislative return.

This is probably a good opportunity to briefly talk about the tendering process. Public procurements are vital to local businesses, and the Yukon government remains committed to the continuous improvement of our procurement processes. The Yukon government provides advanced notice of upcoming projects by hosting planned procurements to the Yukon Bids and Tenders website and sharing information through our five-year capital plan.

When planning the timing of our tenders, we recognize that many projects are seasonally dependent. When deciding when to post tenders, we consider factors such as project type, the location, and market availability.

The Yukon government forecasts and issues tenders as early as possible to help vendors prepare for upcoming work and to be prepared for the short building season. We also stagger closing dates to make it easier for contractors to build on several tenders and to encourage price stability.

When planning and tendering projects, we aim to tender well in advance of the time when physical work needs to start. This timing allows contractors to plan their season, place orders, and hire staff. The department has engaged with the Yukon Contractors Association on the timing of tendering in recent years and the association has noticed improvement in the timing of tenders.

We have many examples of tenders that were posted early enough that contractors could prepare for the work. Some examples include critical upgrades to the domestic water system at Copper Ridge Place. This was tendered in February 2023 for construction in the summer of 2023. There were tender forecasts issued in October 2021 for solar energy systems for the Klondike and Ogilvie grader stations. This was tendered in April 2022 for construction to start in the summer of 2023.

As I said previously in this House, I had the opportunity to travel on the Dempster Highway this summer and to see both the Klondike and Ogilvie solar energy systems. We look forward to both of those energy systems displacing significant volumes of diesel by next spring.

As well, there's a standing offer arrangement for home heating fuel that was tendered in July 2023 for use during the 2023-24 winter season. There was a tender for sodium chloride that was posted in January 2023 for the 2023-24 winter season. As well, there was a tender forecast that was issued in January 2022 for the Watson Lake Housing First project. This was tendered in February 2023 for work to start in the summer of 2023. As well, there was a wildland fire air tanker services contract that was tendered in August 2022 for services in 2024 to 2029 — their fire seasons.

Industry has historically requested more advance notice regarding the timing and tendering of forecasts to ensure that they can make the most of Yukon's short building season. This year, the Yukon government right-time tendered 57 projects totalling \$104.4 million before March 31, 2023. Between April 1 and July 31, 2023, the Yukon government right-time tendered 30 projects totalling \$66.4 million. The Procurement Support Centre is certainly — and we are doing our best to do right-time tendering. With respect specifically to the question

the member asked with respect to vendor performance and those tenders and the number of tenders, as I indicated, as this involves an all-of-government analysis and has a certain degree of specificity, I will return to the House with a legislative return on that specific question.

**Mr. Hassard:** I appreciate the minister committing to provide the House with that information.

I'm wondering — it may be a little simpler if the minister could tell us if 100 percent of the contracts that have gone out since October 2022 have now generated a score and, if not all, if he could provide us with a percentage or a number of that, please.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** We have the question — we will have the question on Hansard and my officials have taken note of that sort of follow-up question from the previous question and we will integrate the answer in a combined legislative return with respect to both the first part of the question and the follow-up part of that question.

**Mr. Hassard:** I guess maybe I will ask if the minister could also include in that legislative return how many contractors or how many vendors in the Yukon now have a score for their companies that they will be starting from.

Just to follow up on that a little bit further, Acting Chair, I'm curious: If one vendor or one contractor or one company has a score of three out of five, we'll say, and they bid on a project or a tender against someone who doesn't already have a score, how does it work? Like, what score does the contractor or the vendor that hasn't previously bid on something — hasn't previously created a score for themselves — how do they compare?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** I just have some comments here generally with respect to contract management and I am endeavouring to get the specific answer to the member opposite's question. I just want to make sure that I'm providing accurate information to the House.

Yukon government strives to provide tender and contract documents that clearly outline their requirements and deliverables for contractors. When a contractor bids on a tender, their bid will include certain commitments, such as pricing, delivery of the project, and Yukon First Nation participation. The government expects that the contractor will fulfill all commitments that they make in the tendering process during contract performance.

During the tender period, contractors can ask for clarification of expectations in the tender documents. Once the tender closes, a post-tender review meeting is often held where the contractor who is eligible for the award confirms that they will meet the commitments in their tender. After the contract is awarded, the Yukon government's role during the contract performance is to actively manage the contract to verify that all deliverables and commitments are being met. This includes the schedule, the price, or Yukon First Nation participation.

To have effective contract management, there must be continuous communication between the government and the contractor. Our project managers have regular check-ins throughout a contract to track the progress of the commitments. If a contractor is not meeting their commitments, there are both



formal and informal mechanisms for engaging with the contractor. It is important to note that these mechanisms are also available to the contractor if they feel that they are not being treated appropriately.

When issues cannot be resolve through these conversations, the dispute resolution processes outlined in the contract document are triggered. Depending on the type of contract, this can include mediation or arbitration. If the Yukon government and the contractor cannot resolve the performance issues, legal action is sometimes required. The vendor performance review program gives both parties a chance to take performance into account in future procurements.

I can share that previously no score was applied if a bidder did not have a score with YG. Highways and Public Works is proposing a change and I have described it to the chambers of commerce and the Yukon Contractors Association. The change would see an average score applied instead of no score. This change has not been put into effect as yet.

There are still discussions, but it is a good question from the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin —

**Some Hon. Member:** (Inaudible)

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** A good question and hopefully a decent answer. We have the member opposite's specific questions — the various questions that he has asked. My officials are here and they are listening closely and certainly we will make best efforts to answer the detailed questions in a more fulsome manner, as I certainly have tried to do on various questions that have come forward over the course of my time in this position.

When I was introduced to the whole issue of vendor performance, approaching three years ago now — one wants to get it right, but there certainly was attractiveness because there may well have been contracts that were not based on the seven criteria that the contractor did not perhaps objectively and subjectively deliver on what they said that they would, and ultimately, it was important to generate a vendor-performance review program.

I know that the Department of Highways and Public Works is certainly doing their best to ensure that this program is delivered in a fair manner and that there is a fair appeal process. Certainly, if there are negative findings on certain major procurements or major contracts, that will have a negative downstream consequence to contractors going forward, which, of course, Yukon contractors will want to avoid with some rigour. I know that the Department of Highways and Public Works has tread reasonably carefully with this and wants to get it right.

The vendor performance review program is a mechanism used to recognize and encourage vendors to deliver good performance on contracts and provide a way to give feedback and incentives for those contractors who do not. The program is evaluating and scoring vendors on their performance throughout a government contract.

The program also provides incentive to vendors for good performance. For example, vendors with higher scores could ultimately receive a competitive advantage during future tender

evaluations, ultimately increasing their chances of securing future government contracts.

The program will improve services to Yukoners by incentivizing the highest level of service from contractors during government contracts — yes, the best value for dollar for, ultimately, Yukon citizens and the government. This is a good program that likely is long overdue and it's in progress, but having continuous communication and continuous improvement is certainly how the department is being governed on this.

**Mr. Hassard:** I think that it could be good program, but unfortunately, if the minister is not able to provide us with any information on how it's going to work or how it is working or isn't working, it's really challenging to try to convince people that it is a good program.

As we rapidly run out of time here, I am wondering if the minister, between this session and the last session — on October 19, the minister committed to providing several legislative returns. I am wondering if he could commit to having those legislative returns back to the Legislature before it rises on November 23. If not, could he provide us with a date for when he actually will provide the Legislature with those returns?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Sorry, just so I understand the member opposite's question — the member opposite is asking about what I had committed to respond to when we were most recently in Committee of the Whole on October 19. The answer is yes; I have now received those proposed legislative returns — with my office — prepared by the department. Those legislative returns will be tabled with the Legislature prior to the end of the Fall Sitting.

**Mr. Hassard:** I think I heard the minister say that he would commit to having them before the House rises on November 23 for the questions regarding the discussions that we had on October 19. I'm wondering if he could provide us with a date for when he would provide the legislative returns for the questions that we have unfortunately been unable to get answers to today.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** I just had an opportunity to speak with my officials with respect to the specific questions about vendor performance that have been asked by the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin in today's abbreviated Committee of the Whole session. Yes, I have spoken to my deputy minister and have been advised that we will be responding to the member opposite in writing within a month. So, I can give you a specific date, I suppose — is December 20 a weekday? A Christmas present for the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin.

I know that this is unhelpful in the spirit of cooperation, but my final comments might be — because I know that some of my colleagues take pretty detailed statistics about the responsiveness of prior legislatures — whether it be the 33<sup>rd</sup>, the 34<sup>th</sup>, or maybe even the 32<sup>nd</sup>. But I have it on reasonably good authority that there was, I believe, one legislative return that was provided by the Yukon Party government in the 33<sup>rd</sup> —

**Some Hon. Member:** (Inaudible)

**Acting Chair:** Order, please.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** In any event, the industry standard now in the 34<sup>th</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup> has been to provide a fair bit of information by way of legislative return to the members opposite.

In any event, that's the information that I have.

The legislative returns that were committed to on October 19 will be provided to the Legislative Assembly in advance of or before the final sitting day, which is November 23, and the answers specifically with respect to vendor performance will be provided on or before December 20, 2023 to the member opposite.

I will leave it at that in the spirit of cooperation.

Perhaps it was that the Yukon Party, between 2011 and 2016, communicated in different ways, but I don't know. I wasn't there, but I doubt that was the case.

Those are my comments today. Once again, with respect to vendor performance, the Highways and Public Works procurement branch continues to have active conversations with all vendors with respect to rolling out this program.

We will be in a position to provide additional information at both the reverse trade show and in the information that I will be providing to the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin in the very near future.

**Mr. Hassard:** Acting Chair, seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

**Acting Chair:** It has been moved by the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin that the Chair report progress.

Are you agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Acting Chair:** I declare the motion carried. Pursuant to Committee of the Whole Motion No. 14 adopted earlier today, Committee of the Whole will receive witnesses from Yukon University.

In order to allow the witnesses to take their places in the Chamber, the Committee will now recess and reconvene at 3:30 p.m.

*Recess*

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

### Appearance of witnesses

**Chair:** Pursuant to Committee of the Whole Motion No. 14 adopted on this day, Committee of the Whole will now receive witnesses from Yukon University.

I would ask all members to remember to refer their remarks through the Chair when addressing the witnesses. I would also ask the witnesses to refer their answers through the Chair when they are responding to the members of the Committee.

Member for Mountainview, I believe you will introduce the witnesses.

*Witnesses introduced*

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** The witnesses appearing before Committee of the Whole today are Dr. Lesley Brown, president and vice-chancellor of Yukon University, and Christine Mahar,

public member of the Yukon University Board of Governors. Please join me in welcoming them to the Assembly today.

**Chair:** Would the witnesses like to make brief opening remarks?

**Ms. Mahar:** Thank you, Madam Chair, Hon. Minister McLean, and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the opportunity to speak with you today.

I would like to acknowledge that we are present on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

I am here as a member of the Yukon University Board of Governors and chair of our governance committee. I'm pleased to appear before you today with our president and vice-chancellor, Dr. Lesley Brown.

Madam Chair, it has been two years since we appeared before you as witnesses to provide an update on Yukon University. At the time of our last visit, we were just finalizing our strategic plan. A few months after our visit, in January 2022, we launched our strategic plan and it has become our guiding framework for all we do and all that we aspire to become. We named this document *Becoming* because it's a word that captures our state of transformation as we step into our new identity as a university — in fact, as you know, Canada's newest university and Canada's only university north of 60, something we remain extremely proud of.

Our vision is to become a thriving learning and research community leading Canada's north. To put this vision into action, we have also launched a new academic plan that is a road map for the future of our primary business of educating students. This plan, just released in June, outlines our priorities and aspirations for a new program in degree development. It also lays out our commitments to incorporating new and innovative approaches to teaching, including opportunities for learning that uphold, respect, and amplify Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being.

Embedded within these aspirations is our pride and our identity as an institution that serves the needs of the territory. This means that we will continue to work with communities to provide access to relevant learning opportunities. It also means a continued and unwavering commitment to our offerings in skilled trade programs alongside our plans and intentions to build new degree programs that are responsive to the needs of this territory.

In this regard, we are committed to doing our part to help alleviate the crucial need for health care providers in the Yukon. Among other outcomes, this includes Yukon University's aspiration to provide a bachelor of science in nursing program here at home because we also understand the need to have a culturally informed workforce for this territory.

The framing priority within our strategic plan is to take our place in advancing reconciliation. This priority is echoed in our academic plan where we commit to amplify Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being. Our intention is for these operating priorities to influence all teaching and learning in Yukon University. These strong and bold commitments appear in both of the key planning documents because we understand that education is the pathway to reconciliation and, as such, we

have embraced the invitation to make right our collective failings of the past.

Finally, the goals and proposed actions for how Yukon University will work to advance reconciliation are identified in our soon-to-be finalized reconciliation framework, a document that has considered the input and voice of Yukon First Nation people and has been shaped by the leadership of Tosh Southwick, Robyn Bradasch, and now Nadia Joe of Yukon U. There have been great strides made to finalizing this framework over the past year, and we fully anticipate celebrating its launch in the new year.

We have also made significant strides in planning our new science building, which we refer to as the “Polaris Project”. Polaris, meaning “north star”, is a building that will mark the future of Canada’s newest university because, through its design and intention, this building will cultivate an interplay between Yukon First Nation culture, traditional knowledge and ways of knowing, and western approaches to learning. This new building will meet zero-carbon targets and will also allow Yukon University to modernize drastically outdated science labs and classrooms and allow students to learn in industry-standard facilities. More than this, it will allow Yukon University to grow and expand existing programs.

At an exciting juncture, the design is 75-percent complete and we are moving the project toward a construction commencement date of the spring of 2024.

As a long-time resident, I have always known that the college, and now the university, was actively involved in research. Whether it was through news stories or snippets on the radio that would catch my ear, I knew that impressive research was being done here in the territory, but it wasn’t until I became a member of the board of governors —

**Chair:** Order, please.

**Mr. Kent:** Madam Chair, I would like to take the opportunity to welcome the witnesses. It sounds like Ms. Mahar has additional remarks, so I will just cede the floor back to her to complete her remarks.

**Ms. Mahar:** Thank you. I am nearly complete.

First, though, it’s important to note that the way universities demonstrate their impact on research is by reporting the amount of research funding from federal funding agencies that the university secures in a given year; however, securing research funding is a highly competitive process, often pitting faculty institutions against each other on the national stage.

This past year, Yukon University secured \$6.7 million in research funding, with \$4.8 million of that coming from federal funding agencies. To provide context and comparison, this amount of funding exceeds — in fact, in some cases, it doubles — that of benchmark institutions in BC and Alberta.

Friends and fellow Yukoners, I share this with you for your information and update because I want you to know that Yukon University is punching well above its weight and I think we should all be really proud of that.

Lastly, I am confident that Yukon University is on a strong path — the path we always hoped for. President Brown joined Yukon University in 2021 and, over the past two years, has

positioned the institution for an exciting future. She has built a solid leadership team who individually and collectively carry a passion for the potential of Yukon University that is refreshing and infectious. There are many great aspirations ahead and the board of governors is looking forward to the future of Yukon University with pride and great optimism.

Fellow Yukoners, this is our university. It is an institution with a solid and proud history serving the needs for education in this territory. Going forward, I am confident that Yukon U will continue to walk together with Yukon First Nations toward an even more promising future for this place that we call home.

**Mr. Kent:** Madam Chair, I thank the witnesses for the opening remarks. As mentioned, it has been a couple of years, I think, since the university has been here, so I am just going to jump right into the questions that I have.

The first one that I wanted to start out with is with respect to enrolment in the university. The document that was tabled last week, which was the 2022-23 year in review — I will direct the witnesses to page 17 of that document with respect to enrolment and the fall numbers.

In the fall of 2021, there were 981 full time and part time — combined — in the total credit programming. In the fall of 2022, that number had slipped to 842, and then, in a CBC article that I found online dated October 25 of this year, it was reported that the total number of credit students for the fall of 2023 was 734.

I am just wondering if the witnesses can offer any insight into why those numbers are dropping and whether or not they are concerned with those enrolment numbers falling like they are.

**Ms. Brown:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the question.

I would like to start by recognizing that our numbers are always in flux. As an institution that offers apprenticeship programs, sometimes programs start a little bit later than others. At time of the October 25 article that I think you are referring to, I don’t think our numbers had been fully finalized.

The numbers that I’m looking at, at this point in time for 2023, are indicating that there are 1,166 credit students enrolled at Yukon University. Those are the solid and final numbers.

**Mr. Kent:** Can the witnesses tell us if they expect those numbers to go up further as we go into the winter program? The president indicated that some programs start later on in the year. Is that 1,166 expected to rise as we move through the year?

**Ms. Brown:** Thank you for the question, Madam Chair. The numbers that I reported are numbers from 2022-23. As I said, our numbers continue to flux throughout the semester. Right now, our numbers are tracking on par with last year. I am also very happy to report that our enrolments are tracking toward our pre-COVID levels.

**Mr. Kent:** I thank the president for clarifying that. So, that was for the 2022-23 academic year, but the fall totals that are in the document suggest that, in the fall of 2021, it was 981; in the fall of 2022, it was 842; and then, as I mentioned, those fall numbers reported in that CBC article were 734. I am just trying to make sure that we are talking about the same things

here. So, the 1,166 — is that for the 2022-23 academic year? And then the 734 — is that for the fall of 2023?

**Ms. Brown:** That is correct.

**Mr. Kent:** Again, those fall numbers over the past few years have seen a downward trend from the 981 in the fall of 2021 to 734 in the fall of this year. Do the witnesses believe that it is a problem attracting new students or is it retaining existing ones or is it a combination of both of those?

**Ms. Brown:** Thank you for the question. I think that the issue is actually a recovery from COVID. COVID was a high-water mark for enrolment for Yukon University and, in fact, for many universities in Canada — post-secondary institutions in Canada — and so we are recovering from the effect of COVID when many people chose to go back to school.

**Mr. Kent:** In that same CBC article dated October 25 of this year, the article was focused on — Yukon University had applied to join Universities Canada. Can the witnesses just explain if there are any student enrolment numbers that need to be met — any thresholds that need to be met — in order for us to qualify for Universities Canada and perhaps even give us an update on the status of the application to join Universities Canada?

**Ms. Brown:** Thank you very much for the question. With respect to the enrolment requirements for Universities Canada, it would be up to Universities Canada to make a statement on that. My understanding is that Universities Canada recognizes that there are institutions across the country of varying sizes serving both large and small regions in Canada.

With respect to our application, our application has been submitted, as indicated in the article, and we continue to work alongside Universities Canada to steward that process.

**Mr. Kent:** In the article — and I believe it was a professor of higher education at the University of Toronto — Mr. Glen Jones said: “Universities Canada has become the kind of national club. It’s the club that you want to become a member of, partly so that you have recognition from your peers and partly because I think it also provides some broader international recognition.”

I guess one of the questions that I have is: How much has been spent so far preparing the application for Universities Canada? Is there an ongoing fee or set of fees to remain a member of Universities Canada?

**Ms. Brown:** I don’t think it is appropriate for me to provide comment on Glen Jones’ comments regarding our application to Universities Canada, but specifically on your question about how much has been spent in preparation of the ongoing application, I would say that the contributions would be noted as time and in-kind effort on the part of my leadership team. There is a membership fee associated with membership in Universities Canada, just as there is a membership fee associated with membership in Colleges and Institutes Canada. I do have a sense of what it might be off the top of my head, but I don’t want to say and misquote. So, if it’s appropriate, I would like to bring that information back with the specific number and I might be able to get it for you in a few minutes.

**Mr. Kent:** I would appreciate that. In order to become a member of Universities Canada, the witnesses off the top

mentioned the variety of programming, including trades and other types of programming, offered at the university currently, which sort of sets it apart from other universities. But there are no plans to decrease that side of programming in order to make the application to Universities Canada more appealing to them, is there?

**Ms. Brown:** Thank you for the question. The answer is that there is no plan at all to change the profile of programming at Yukon University to make an application to Universities Canada. In fact, Yukon University is an institution, like other institutions in Canada, that offers a breadth of programs, including certificates, diplomas, degrees, and skilled trades training. A couple of examples that I can draw upon that are also members of Universities Canada are Vancouver Island University, University of the Fraser Valley, as well as Thompson Rivers University.

**Mr. Kent:** At the bottom of page 17 in the year-in-review document, it talks about international student enrolment. I will just read it quickly into the record. It says that, in 2021-22, “... a total of 168 international students were enrolled. This was down 6% from 179 in 2020-21. In Fall 2022, a total of 105 international students were enrolled, down 15% from 124 in Fall 2021.”

I am just curious if there has been any analysis done on why these numbers are dropping, as we have seen over the past number of years. If the witnesses have the fall of 2023 numbers, I would appreciate that.

**Ms. Brown:** Thank you for the question. With respect to year-over-year enrolment rates for international students, I don’t have an explanation for your interpretation that the numbers are dropping; however, I can tell you the 2023 current numbers of international students. We are currently sitting at 114 international students, which I believe is higher than the number last year. This number reflects a board of governors target that has been set at 15 percent of our student demographic.

**Mr. Kent:** So, 114 is up nine places from the 105 in the fall of 2022. Just to be clear, these aren’t my interpretations; these are just the numbers that are in last year’s year-in-review.

Just a couple of recent announcements from the federal government — I am just wondering if the university is tracking them. I believe that federal ministers had, at one point over the past number of weeks, talked about a cap on the number of international students allowed into the country. Are the witnesses monitoring this, and have there been any internal discussions or discussions with the Government of Yukon or Government of Canada about this potential cap?

**Ms. Brown:** Thank you for the question. Yes, this is something that we are monitoring quite closely and we are very aware of. At this point in time, Yukon University is working alongside Colleges and Institutes Canada to ensure that we are best represented as an institution of choice for international students.

**Mr. Kent:** One of the other things that I think is affecting international students is the cap on the number of hours per week they can work outside of their studies. It is my understanding that the cap has been removed recently so that

international students can work more than the 20 hours per week, but that is coming to an end at the end of this year, so it will be back to the 20 hours per week. Does this affect any of the international students at Yukon University, and have the witnesses heard from those students about any concerns they have with this?

**Ms. Brown:** May I ask for a clarification of the question?

**Mr. Kent:** In a recent news article — and I apologize; I don't have it here with me — there was a program in place where the hours per week that an international student could work was set at 20 hours. That was removed and they were able to work full time, but that exemption is coming to an end at the end of the calendar year. I am just curious if the witnesses have heard from any of the students who attend the university here who have concerns about that. If not, I am certainly happy to forward the media articles to the minister, who can send them on to the witnesses.

**Ms. Brown:** My question for clarification is around the reference to “concerns”. What I would like to know is: Are the concerns regarding access to employment, or are the concerns regarding the impact of the opportunity to work 20 hours a week on the availability of study time?

**Mr. Kent:** I think that it would probably be a little bit of both. Some of the students I saw interviewed from southern jurisdictions were concerned that, given the inflationary pressures that we see in the country right now, they were using that full-time employment combined with their studies to either pay down their tuition or there was rent or housing costs that, of course, are seeing inflationary pressures as well.

I was curious if any of the international students who are attending Yukon University have raised that with the witnesses or any other senior staff.

**Ms. Brown:** Thank you for the clarification. We have not had any direct conversations with students regarding this issue. The cap regarding the number of hours was raised a number of years ago, if I am correct. Anecdotal observation at the time was that students were pleased about the opportunity to work longer hours.

**Mr. Kent:** I guess that is sort of what I am taking from the media that I read on this, as well — is that the affected students who I saw from southern jurisdictions are unhappy with the cap going back to 20 hours from where it has been for the past number of years. That is why I am curious if there are any concerns from local international students as well.

I am going to move on now. Just a quick question: I did see a student engagement report dated December 2021. I just wanted to make sure that was the most recent student engagement report and when the next student engagement survey will be conducted, if that is indeed the most recent one.

**Ms. Brown:** Madam Chair, thank you for the question; I am very happy to answer that. This is something that we are currently looking at. Student engagement is a really important measure of an institution's vibrancy, of an institution's value, and it is also something that students often look at when they are selecting an institution for their choice of post-secondary education.

Yukon University is in a state of transition and it is also in a growth state. One of the things that we are realizing is that we now need to conduct a survey that will allow us to compare our data on the national stage — conduct a study that will ensure that the data we are gather are valid, both internally and externally. At this point in time, we are considering how we can do that. There is a student engagement study that is the standard and that is available; it is called CUSC. We are currently considering if Yukon University will contribute in that study. I imagine that the next student engagement report will be coming out in the next year or so.

**Mr. Kent:** Is the plan then, once the preferred model is chosen, to go to a regular interval? Will it be annual or once every two years or once every three years? What will the frequency be once the appropriate model is chosen?

**Ms. Brown:** At a minimum, it would be once every two years. This is such an important measure for us to be monitoring and so I expect that it will be reported at a minimum of every two years.

**Mr. Kent:** Just turning over to staff and employees then at the university, can the witnesses give us an idea of how many employees, full time and part time, are working for the university now and how many vacancies there are for positions at the university?

**Ms. Brown:** Thank you for the question. Currently, Yukon University employs approximately 190 staff and 95 faculty in both term and permanent positions. Comparative data — the data that I have just provided are from November 2023. Comparative data: July 2023, we had 91 faculty and 205 staff; September 1, 2022, we had 100 faculty and 209 staff. If you were to approximate or average across the years, you would say that we have about 96 faculty and approximately 205 staff.

The reason for the fluctuations is that our retirement numbers are up slightly this year, and we have, just like many businesses and institutions across the territory post-COVID — the first two years of employment is the period at which we see the highest turnover.

**Mr. Kent:** Just a quick follow-up and perhaps the witness didn't catch it in my earlier question, but I'm just curious about the vacancies. Are there positions that are vacant right now that should be filled? Sorry, just one other quick clarification too: Are the witnesses able to give us a breakdown of the Ayamdigut campus versus those campuses in rural Yukon as far as the staffing numbers?

**Ms. Brown:** With respect to the vacancies that are available right now and that should be filled, I am sorry; I can't give that information to you off the top of my head, but it is available on our HR page, I'm sure. I can also say that my leadership team is now complete and finalized. With respect to vacancies in community campuses versus our Ayamdigut campus, I'm sorry, but I can't provide that information offhand. I would be happy to follow up.

**Mr. Kent:** Madam Chair, yes, that would be great if the witnesses could follow up with those community numbers. I was just looking at the staff directory at yukon.ca, and Haines Junction and Watson Lake look like they are fully staffed. Other campuses don't have staff. I'm not sure about Ross River

— if there is anyone working at the campus there. Again, that's just going on the staff directory. I will visit the HR page, as referenced by the witness, and take a look at that. I'm not sure if the witnesses have any comments on those community campus numbers, but there was a commitment to get those numbers back to us, so I would look forward to getting those.

I do want to just take a bit of time to go through the 2022-23 audited financial statements. I have a few questions about that. I'll direct the witnesses to page 6, which is the Yukon University consolidated statement of operations for the year ended March 31. It looked like, in 2022, the surplus was \$4.571 million or so. Then in 2023, the annual surplus is \$7.209 million. I'm just wondering if there is an accumulated surplus or where the excess of revenues over expenses, as stated here — does that go into an accumulated surplus or is it paying down an accumulated debt? I'm just curious about those profit numbers for the past couple of years.

**Ms. Mahar:** Madam Chair, the main reason for the excess revenue over expenses is that this year primarily was a year in the accrued pension benefit assets. What happened in previous years was that we have had a deficit, but with the increased interest rate, that is now turning around, so we have less expended for this year over last.

**Mr. Kent:** I will direct the witnesses to page 24 of the audited financial statements. It is note 16, which is about expenditures by object. A couple of things sort of jumped off the page for me — where there have been significant year-over-year increases. I am hoping that the witnesses can provide an explanation. I will just go through them one by one.

The first is contract services in 2023. I will use approximations. It was approximately \$5.8 million, which was up from about \$4.7 million in 2022. I am curious if there is an explanation for why these contract services have jumped so significantly year over year.

**Ms. Brown:** Thank you for the question. Unfortunately, we don't have an answer to that at this point in time but possibly could get that to you before the end of the session.

**Mr. Kent:** Does the Yukon University maintain a contract registry — a public registry — that individuals could look at with respect to the contracts that are let?

**Ms. Brown:** Thank you for the question. Unfortunately, we are unsure about the certainty of that question.

**Mr. Kent:** Hopefully, the witnesses will commit to getting back — if there is a contract registry or if there is one being contemplated for development.

I wanted to move down to the next line, which is for rental of facilities and equipment. In 2022, it was approximately \$3.5 million and then, in 2023, up to \$5.1 million. I am looking for an explanation of that increase, which is significant year over year.

**Ms. Brown:** We are just confirming that, but we expect that it might be due to some driver education training that we are doing currently.

**Mr. Kent:** I will look forward to that clarification — when it comes — on whether or not that is what constitutes the increase in that line.

I did want to jump down now to the materials and supplies. This went from approximately \$1.6 million in 2022 to \$2.7 million in 2023. I am just looking for an explanation of the increase in that line item.

**Ms. Brown:** I am very pleased to share that our research intensity has increased over the past year. It is anticipated that those costs are associated with purchases of research equipment.

**Mr. Kent:** Again, I would appreciate any sort of a breakdown that the witnesses are able to provide with respect to the individual items that have led to that increase in that line item.

The final one that I wanted to ask about is travel. In 2022, it was \$484,000 or so — \$485,000. Then it jumped to \$1.339 million in 2023. I am just looking for an explanation and whether or not the university maintains a quarterly or annual list of travel for staff and whether it is in-territory or out-of-territory and how much was spent. I note that ministerial travel is made public on the Yukon government's website, as well as for any supporting staff who travels with them. I think it's done at the end of each quarter. I am just wondering if there is something similar that the university does for their travel line items.

**Ms. Brown:** Madam Chair, thank you for the question. The reason for the increase in expenditures on travel reflects the reality of coming out of COVID. Many of the meetings and conferences that faculty and staff attend — particularly faculty — would have been primarily held, prior to 2023, in a virtual format. In 2023, I think that the travel pathways and conferences have opened up and so we are seeing an increase in expenditure on travel.

With respect to in-territory versus out-of-territory travel, we don't keep a registry on that, but we do make decisions based on guiding principles regarding the prudent expenditure of funding. We also recognize that, as the only post-secondary in the territory, all of our conference travel is outside of the territory.

**Mr. Kent:** Would the witnesses be able to — I guess that I could go back and look, but if they do have it, off the top of their heads, are there any numbers for pre-COVID? So, 2019 I guess would be the most recent pre-COVID year for travel so that we can sort of compare apples to apples. If the witnesses have it, that would be great, or if they can provide it, that would be helpful in comparing the 2023 numbers to those from 2019.

**Ms. Brown:** We are happy to provide that.

**Mr. Kent:** I apologize if the witness answered this in the previous response, but I am just curious about some sort of a travel registry or some sort of a public website where individuals can view the travel. I will use the ministerial travel as the reference point. If ministers travel and if they have support staff, those numbers are made public at the end of every quarter depending on the travel, so I am just curious if that is something that the university would consider, just given the amount of expenditure in this line item.

**Ms. Brown:** The expenditures on travel are available on our Public Accounts. It is not something that we have recorded

— destinations, et cetera, are not recorded, nor publicly available.

**Mr. Kent:** This was a question that I wanted to ask when I was talking about some of the staffing issues previously. We talked about a student engagement survey. I searched online and I was unable to find one, but is there an employee engagement survey for Yukon University similar to the one that the Yukon government does with their staff? Or is it done through the Public Service Commission of Yukon? Is Yukon University included in that employee engagement?

**Ms. Brown:** If I may, can I provide some answers to some questions that were asked previously and I now have some further information? Thank you.

With respect to travel, our 2019-20 numbers are indicating — this is pre-COVID-19 — \$1.3 million on expenditure of travel, which, I believe, is on par with our 2023 numbers.

The second question that I was unable to provide an answer to was the cost of the Universities Canada membership. We are unable to find the actual amount of the cost, but it's set annually and it's on par with other national post-secondary institutions like CICan.

To answer the original question, the answer is no. There is not an employee engagement survey yet. In fact, this is something that we are preparing to do and we are hoping to launch something in the new year.

**Mr. Kent:** I look forward to seeing that when it is available.

I did want to talk a little bit about the accountability framework. In the *Yukon University Act* — which was passed in this Legislature I think four years ago — section 55 of the act talks about accountability and performance measures, and 55(1) says: “The Minister must, in consultation with each Yukon First Nation and the board, establish accountability and performance measures by which to assess (a) the university’s performance in carrying out its purposes; and (b) the effectiveness of the strategies developed by the university to carry out its purposes.” Then 55(2) says: “Before modifying the accountability and performance measures established under subsection (1), the Minister must consult with each Yukon First Nation and the board.” So, of course, recognizing that there is a role for the minister here, I’m just curious if the board of governors at the university has talked about developing this accountability framework.

I can’t find where anything has been consulted on or done. Perhaps it’s done directly with First Nations, but looking at [engageyukon.ca](http://engageyukon.ca), there is nothing with respect to this. I’m just curious if there is a status update that the witnesses can provide with respect to the accountability framework.

**Ms. Mahar:** The board of governors have approved an accountability framework that has been provided to the government. Of course, our portions are just part of a territory-wide framework. We are waiting to hear back.

**Mr. Kent:** I appreciate that. I will follow up with the minister and the government on that particular commitment.

In the opening remarks, the witnesses mentioned the Polaris building, the new science building at the university. When we go back to March of 2019, that is when the

Government of Canada made the initial announcement about the \$26 million toward a new science building. At the time, it was suggested that the building would be open in 2023. Obviously, that hasn’t happened. Then, a year ago in December, a design was announced. A local architecture firm has been paid, I believe, \$2.3 million for their work designing Polaris.

I was just looking at the Polaris webpage before I came in here today, and there are milestones on that page that I don’t believe are accurate, but I will leave it to the witnesses to explain. It says: March to May 2023, a tender for construction; spring 2023, construction starts with completion anticipated for the fall of 2025. I don’t believe that it has been tendered or that construction has started. I stand to be corrected on that, but hopefully, the witnesses can explain whether or not the construction has started on the Polaris building.

**Ms. Mahar:** I’m sorry; the website is outdated and we will work on that right away. No, construction has not started. We are about 75 percent through the design and, over the course of the winter, hope to have — we will have all of the tender documents ready and out and we are hoping for a spring construction start.

**Mr. Kent:** Can the witness can let us know: Is there a revised completion date? Is there a revised budget? Obviously, going back in the budget of 2019, it was estimated at \$36 million. A year ago, that cost was up to \$41 million. I’m just curious, given the delays, if there is a revised completion timeline and a revised budget for the building.

**Ms. Mahar:** Yeah, we are dealing with a difficult market at present, obviously. Yes, the costs have gone up — inflation, et cetera. We’re also a little hesitant about noting any final completion date until such time as the tender documents are ready and out. As we work through the final design piece and the tender documents, we will have a better estimate.

**Mr. Kent:** The Government of Canada, as I mentioned, announced \$26 million toward that new science building back in 2019. Is the university confident that the money is still secure from the Government of Canada? Obviously, as of last year, there was a \$15-million funding gap. I’m curious where that additional funding is coming from, keeping in mind that obviously that \$41 million will probably be going up here as well. I’m just curious about the funding gap and whether or not the Government of Canada commitment is secure or if that money has already been transferred to the university.

**Ms. Mahar:** Yes, the \$26 million federal funding is still secure, but we appreciate that time is moving along, so there is an urgency of getting this out to tender and beginning construction this spring.

In addition, we’ve also secured a further \$5.3 million to support the building of the zero-carbon building that will be accessible and inclusive and have the Rick Hansen accessibility certification.

We are continuing to work with all partners — whether that be the business community, First Nation governments, or others. As we know, in case there are further inflated costs, we are trying to find new partnerships right now.



**Mr. Kent:** So, \$26 million from the Government of Canada and then a \$5.3-million funding contribution based on, I believe the witness said, the low carbon aspects of the building. That still leaves us about \$10 million short on last year's price. Obviously, there's a concern with that funding gap. The witnesses mentioned that they are hoping to start construction in the spring, but will they start construction with that funding gap still in place, or is there a commitment to close that funding gap completely before the construction begins?

**Ms. Mahar:** Just one clarification: That \$5.3 million is still conditional. They are still reviewing the application. We are very definitely looking at having the sources of the funding for the entire estimate of building costs ready prior to tender. Yes, we are continuing negotiating with all of our partners.

**Mr. Kent:** We will obviously look forward to any future announcements where that funding gap has been closed.

I just wanted to jump quickly with respect to one final piece on the Polaris building. From reviewing the board of governor minutes from February 17 earlier this year, there was talk about adding new training facilities to the Polaris building for the nursing program. Has that changed the design, or does the current design also incorporate any changes to the building to support a nursing program?

I guess the other question is: Would it be for the existing practical nurse diploma program or for a new bachelor of science in nursing program that I read about earlier today in that CBC article from October 25? I am just curious if this has been incorporated into the design and what type of program it is. Is it the existing program or is it this new program that was referenced in that CBC story from October 25?

**Ms. Brown:** The current design of the Polaris building does not include a second floor or space for a nursing program. The current design of the Polaris building is for foundational science programs and the capacity to move into more specialized degree-oriented science programs. These programs, of course, will serve any nursing programs because many science courses are foundational to nursing programs, be it the LPN or our future aspirations for a bachelor of nursing program.

**Mr. Kent:** Just for clarification: The existing design will be able to incorporate either the LPN program or a future bachelor of nursing program? I just wanted to be clear on that.

**Ms. Brown:** I am not sure that's what I said. My intention was to convey the reality that the existing design is for science courses and also to convey the reality that programs in nursing, both the LPN and a bachelor of science in nursing, which is our future aspiration, would need to have access to high-fidelity science laboratories and science teaching classrooms.

**Mr. Kent:** If we were to pursue a bachelor of science nursing program, there would need to be additional facilities constructed to support that, whether in existing buildings or a new facility on campus?

**Ms. Brown:** It would be ideal. It would be perfect to be able to have access to new facilities to teach future nurses in state-of-the-art nursing laboratories. That is not going to be the case. What we are looking at is ensuring that we can provide a

high-quality program within the existing space and space constraints that currently exist in Yukon University, and feasibility studies and assessments have informed us that this is possible.

**Mr. Kent:** I appreciate that clarification.

I did want to just jump quickly to not fundraising for the Polaris building but a fundraising campaign that is mentioned in the year in review that was tabled last week, and it is the "Together, for the North" campaign. It has a stated aim to raise \$4 million to enhance student experiences and was kicked off with a \$1-million donation from Northern Vision Development. I am just curious how much more, beyond that initial donation from NVD, has been raised so far, and what is the timeline for this campaign? Is this fundraising separate from the Polaris building fundraising that is still being looked at?

**Ms. Brown:** Thank you for recognizing the \$1-million donation from NVD which Yukon University was so pleased to receive. That donation inspired a further donation from Whitehorse Motors of \$250,000 just last week. These funds will be directed to the support of mental health for students in the trades. This funding campaign, "Together, for the North", is directed specifically for student experiences and will serve for enhancing the core services that we provide our students, particularly in the areas of wraparound supports for our students as they navigate through their academic journey.

The "Together, for the North" campaign is based on philanthropic donations, which is different than the recruitment for funding that we are currently doing for the Polaris building.

**Mr. Kent:** Obviously, that acknowledgement of Northern Vision Development and then the witness' acknowledging the donation last week from Whitehorse Motors of \$250,000 is fantastic.

Can the witness confirm that is the amount that has been raised so far: \$1.25 million? Over what time horizon is that money committed to? I am not sure if it is just a one-time cheque written or if it is over a number of years, so I am looking for that time horizon. Then, with respect to reaching that \$4-million goal — is there a time frame that has been set up to reach the \$4 million that is envisioned for this fund and this campaign?

**Ms. Brown:** Both of those donations are donations that will be realized over five years. The campaign itself does not have a definitive end date. We're very hopeful, of course, that we can reach our target sooner rather than later. If I were to suggest a timeline, I would say probably close to three years.

**Mr. Kent:** I'm going to make the assumption that some of the money has been spent already with respect to this campaign. If it hasn't, the witnesses can certainly correct me if I'm wrong. I'm just curious what kind of student experiences have been funded with money raised in this campaign so far.

**Ms. Brown:** Yes, we have begun to expense some of the funds that we have received from Northern Vision Development. Those expenditures were related to the recruitment and appointment of a new research chair within our program in Indigenous governance.

This research chair is Dr. Rebecca Major, who is an Indigenous scholar coming to us from the University of

Windsor. Dr. Major is a leading mind in northern governance and the benefit that she will bring to our students is unparalleled.

**Mr. Kent:** I appreciate that answer from the witnesses. We will look to hearing about future announcements associated with this campaign as well.

I just have a few more topics that I want to talk about before I turn the floor over to my colleague from Takhini-Kopper King.

The first one is student housing. Obviously, the housing market has been challenging in many places across the country but also here in the Yukon over the past number of years. I'm just curious if there are any plans to expand student housing beyond what is already there. Perhaps the witnesses can give us a sense of how many units are available at the Ayamdigut Campus and then how many, if any, are available off campus and in the community campuses as well.

**Ms. Brown:** With respect to beds available in student housing at the Ayamdigut Campus, we currently have capacity for 136 beds. Of those 136, it's important to note that 108 are available to students. The difference is because many of our students come to us as members of a family, so we also provide family housing.

Those 136 beds are broken down into 60 single dorm-style units, 40 beds in two-bedroom apartments, and 36 beds in three-bedroom apartments. The total number of beds is 136. Our current occupancy is at 90.7 percent.

With respect to the availability of housing at our community campuses, this is a barrier at the present moment. We currently do not have any housing available in any of our community campuses, and this is a barrier that is preventing us from expansion, particularly in what we regard to be a hub community campus and that's in Dawson.

**Mr. Kent:** Are there any plans to address those shortages of student housing in communities? We will talk about Dawson City, which is what the witness mentioned. Are there plans to try to address any of those shortages that they have in Dawson?

**Ms. Brown:** Our capacity to address some of those shortages right now is looking at creative solutions. Right now, for example, in Dawson, we are working with the Klondike travel firm — I'm sorry; I don't know the name. It is the company that works with the availability of hotel rooms, and so our students in Dawson — and particularly in SOVA — are residing in hotel rooms off-season, but we are working with local partners to explore potential solutions for the future to have some permanent, safe, long-term housing for students.

**Mr. Kent:** Are there any plans to expand — perhaps the witness answered this and I just missed it — housing opportunities here in the Whitehorse area? Are there any plans to build additional student residences either on campus or off campus?

Just a little bit of a pivot on the housing question is with respect to staff housing, particularly in the communities. Is there staff housing available to Yukon University staff who are working in the communities? We have heard — whether it is from the Yukon government or some companies in the private

sector — that the housing market has led to challenges in filling available job vacancies. I am just wondering if the university is seeing that as well.

So, just to sum it up: Are there any plans to expand student housing in Whitehorse and then staff housing in the communities — whether there is some available and if it is having an adverse effect on filling job vacancies outside of Whitehorse?

**Ms. Brown:** With respect to student housing at Ayamdigut, right now, we are at the point of recognizing that the availability of student housing is a pinch point. We are looking at our data and will be tracking our data to make an informed decision regarding future plans and aspirations about building or making available more student housing options on the Ayamdigut Campus. This decision needs to be considered very closely and in alignment with our future plans for growth and enrolment and the enrolment profile of the students that we are hoping to recruit to the Ayamdigut Campus. All this to say — early days but definitely something that is a big priority for us at this point in time.

The second part of the question was around the availability of staff housing in our communities. We currently do not have any staff housing for community staff, but I understand that the majority of our staff in the communities are local.

**Mr. Kent:** I appreciate that.

Just two more topics — the first one is with respect to the varsity sports program. I believe that the last time the witnesses were here, there was some initial work being done on that. I think that the study was just released this year by the Government of Yukon and suggests that introducing varsity sports to Yukon University will cost \$17 million to \$24 million over 10 years — I just want to make sure that I have those numbers correct — and just any thoughts from the witnesses on whether or not this program is going to be pursued, or is it paused and on hold for now?

Just one other quick question about recreational infrastructure that a constituent brought to me was with respect to the climbing wall. Since the witnesses last appeared, it sounded like — the media reports at the time suggested that there was \$70,000 to \$80,000, I believe, spent on building a climbing wall for students and then dismantling it. I'm just curious if the witnesses can provide some clarity on why that project was installed and then uninstalled. What has happened to that infrastructure since? Has it been sold or will it be reinstalled in a different venue in the Whitehorse area?

**Ms. Brown:** With respect to varsity sports, the numbers that were provided are correct. The estimated cost is coming in at about \$17 million to \$24.5 million — \$17 million for a three-sport program and \$24.5 million for a five-sport program. With respect to our aspirations to provide varsity sports, it's definitely something that is on our horizon as we look to the future, recognizing how important the sporting experience is or how participating directly or indirectly in sporting events is to enhancing the student experience. It's just not something that will be a priority in the coming year for us, but it will always be on our horizon.

The second part of the question was about the climbing wall and the expenditures associated with a structure that was put up and then taken down. You're absolutely correct. The reason that the structure was removed was because of the lack of appropriate consultation regarding the placement of the climbing wall and the recognition that the choice of location would have been disruptive to our plans to offer things like varsity sports or convocation, and so the climbing wall was removed. We still have it in storage and are currently considering the next steps for that structure.

**Mr. Kent:** If the witnesses are able to provide some sort of a timeline for what they will decide with respect to that asset, it would be helpful.

The final topic that I wanted to talk about is with respect to the research at the university. I believe that Ms. Mahar mentioned off the top that, of the \$6.7-million budget for research this year, \$4.8 million came from the feds, so I'm just curious about the gap there. How has that been filled? What sort of combination of funding has filled that gap from what the federal government provided to the total amount?

When I was on the university website preparing for today, I noticed that the research projects are listed by what is being done, who the lead is, and whether it's open or closed, so I'm just curious if there is any consideration being given to also attaching a budget amount to the open projects and the closed ones as well — just to get a sense of how much money is being spent on each research project.

After that, I'll thank the witnesses and cede the floor to my colleague from Takhini-Kopper King. We appreciate the witnesses' time here today and responding to the questions I have had.

**Ms. Brown:** Thank you for the question and thank you for bringing up research. It's such a crucial contribution that a university makes for the betterment of the common good. It's something that I am incredibly proud to speak about. I am very happy to again underscore what board member Mahar shared and that is that Yukon University, given its size, is truly punching above its weight on the national stage.

This past year, we secured \$4.7 million in tri-agency funding, the federal funding agencies — and then in a total of just over \$6.7 million. The gap between the \$4.7 million and the \$6.7 million is contributed often by third-party sources. Many of our researchers are conducting applied research, which is research in partnership with industry to provide solutions to problems. Some of that funding would come, of course, from Yukon government as part of support for some of our research chair positions.

With respect to the second part of the question, which was about providing a budget associated with open and closed projects, that's not something that is typically done, but I don't see any reason why we wouldn't do that. In fact, it would emphasize how much and how well Yukon University is doing on the national stage. Thank you for the suggestion.

**Ms. White:** I thank my colleague for his fantastic questions as I furiously scratched out things that I had planned to ask about, but that's always the hazard.

Welcome, of course, to the witnesses. It's delightful to have you both here and challenging, as always, as I direct my comments to the Chair and my back toward you both.

Just in talking about research right now, I think that there is a real opportunity and I would love to hear from the president. For example, Alison Perrin presented to the Senate Committee on Climate Change, and other researchers and staff of Yukon University have really been taking their knowledge and their skills far. I would love to give the witnesses an opportunity to celebrate some of those achievements, because often I think here at home that we don't actually know that they are happening and sometimes it is not until much later.

So, if we could just start by maybe focusing on some of those achievements and then I will move on.

**Ms. Brown:** Madam Chair, thank you very much for that invitation. I will speak of a couple of great achievements.

Yukon University, as I have just mentioned, recently recruited one of Canada's premier Indigenous scholars in the area of northern governance — Dr. Rebecca Major — who chose to come here, who chose to be part of our Indigenous governance program, and who is choosing to stand in front of our students to make them more informed for tomorrow.

The second thing I would like to recognize is the work of Dr. Sara McPhee-Knowles. Dr. McPhee-Knowles is an assistant professor at Yukon University and she, with some colleagues, has secured a very prominent and very competitive research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. She secured the largest SSHRC grant from a faculty member outside of the Yukon University Research Centre.

I would also like to speak about the work of Dr. Michael Ross, who is in Yukon University Research Centre. Dr. Ross is part of a research program out of partnership with the University of Victoria that secured one of Canada's most prominent research grants and that is the Canada First Research Excellence Fund. There were just a small number of these grants — I believe about 11 — that were awarded throughout Canada, and a researcher at Yukon University is working with a team that secured one of those grants. These are incredible points of pride and points that we should all be celebrating.

Thank you for that invitation.

**Ms. White:** Madam Chair, I thank the president for that. It is a perfect example of things that I didn't know. I am just going through the list of research topics, for example, that have been done by university faculty and, in some cases, I would guess, students. It does cover a wide spectrum of things and I see, in some cases, they are very much directed to — for example, there is the hazard mapping of Yukon government buildings. My point is that there are things that are definitely very relevant. Whether to Yukon government or we talk about mine remediation or energy research, it is a very interesting and exciting time at the university. If there were, for example, teachers in the high school stream who were interested in trying to access to tour — one of the things we talked about often, in here and in other circumstances, is the idea of making Yukon University — well, Yukon College, now university — be that

institution in the territory as an opportunity for local kids to study in a university setting close to home.

If there was an interest from high school teachers to do tours or see more, how could they access — I have to say that seeing the mine remediation and seeing the plants growing in the different tubes and things — how does one go about setting up that kind of tour?

**Ms. Brown:** Thank you for the question and also for the interest.

At this point in time, we are working to amplify our recruitment efforts for Yukon University. I would suggest that it's probably up to us to be reaching out to high schools in and around the region and offering tours as part of our entire strategy of recruitment to ensure that potential students understand that Yukon University is a viable option for their post-secondary aspiration.

But to answer your question directly, I would suggest that the point of contact would be our university registrar.

**Ms. White:** I thank the witness for that. I will make that suggestion when I go into high school classes.

One thing that is really of interest to me is the Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining in that purpose-built building. It's impressive when you go into the shop and you have big pieces of equipment. I was noticing online the different courses that are available, some that aren't currently accepting applications and some, for example, that are driven by interest. I was curious as to the number of students who we see going through programs in that building — the programs that are running currently and ones that we hope will have more uptake in the future. I'm interested to know the status of the northern mining innovation centre.

**Ms. Brown:** The direct answer is that the Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining is thriving. With respect to the enrolments and the programs offered, I can share some quick statistics.

I will start with our environmental monitoring certificate program. This is the sixth cohort of this program this year. We have nine students — all Yukon First Nation students. Last year, in June 2023, we graduated five First Nation students from that program.

We also have a housing maintainer program, which contributed to four homes in the Champagne and Aishihik First Nation, as well as the Takhini subdivision. I believe that there are nine if not 13 students enrolled in that program.

The earth science program, in the fall of 2023, has 10 majors currently enrolled. We have a record number of heavy equipment technicians enrolled this fall.

A new program that we are offering and which has created much enthusiasm is our commercial driver training simulator program. Currently in Dawson, we have nine students enrolled. Two students are also enrolled in class 1 instruction, and we have seven firefighters working on a class 3 restricted licence.

Of course, the training simulator is mobile, so it is currently in Dawson, moving on to Teslin where we have four commercial driving students enrolled. In Whitehorse, we have two government employees trained on our commercial driver training simulator.

## Request for Acting Chair of Committee of the Whole

**Chair:** At this time, I will ask if any private member wishes to volunteer to be Acting Chair of Committee of the Whole.

*Member for Pelly-Nisutlin rises*

**Acting Chair (Mr. Hassard):** Member for Takhini-Kopper King, please continue.

**Ms. White:** I appreciate you stepping into that role to assist, Acting Chair.

I thank the witness for that answer. One thing I have always said in this House that I think is really important is that we can't move too far away from the trades programs or the programs that are real life and really have those practicalities in the north, especially in the territory. As a tradesperson myself, it paid me a lot better than politics ever did, until I had already been elected for I think almost nine years. Just in case anyone is listening, cooking really can pay.

The one thing that I thought was really, really interesting is the relationship that has been happening with the community campuses, and one example would be the water and wastewater training that I think was delivered in the community of Old Crow. Maybe I will ask specifically about that but giving the witnesses more opportunity to expand from that, if they can share with us other examples of where community campuses have made a request for specialized training. The witnesses just used the example of driver training, but are there other examples of it going to community campuses.

**Ms. Brown:** Specifically, I can share some updates from Dawson, where we have just completed the level 2 carpentry apprenticeship program. That was in the spring of 2023 when six students were registered in that program. That campus is also offering a mix of class 3 air brakes driver training. I will go next to Mayo, where we have campus staff preparing to deliver a job readiness for employment learning in culinary program for six to eight students in January of 2024. As well, that culinary program is also being prepared to be delivered in Old Crow for six to eight students. Culinary skills is also being offered in Pelly. In Ross River, we have courses in small engine maintenance, driver training, class 5 and 7 air brakes, and class 3 and 1 introduction to water treatment and bulk water delivery for six to eight students. Finally, Watson Lake is delivering a job readiness program for a breadth of skills in trades, mining, office administration, and environmental monitoring for six students.

**Ms. White:** That list the witness just shared is an accomplishment, and I think, more than that, it actually in lots of those cases will be changing things not just for the person taking the classes but for the community. I know that this spring, when the Carmacks arena had its grand opening, the culinary program had been there doing a training program and the culinary students catered the event. There was so much and it was really fantastic to see young and older people taking on that new role and spreading their wings. Anytime that we are able to go out into a community and support the community with a program that they are asking for, I hope that we continue to do that, just for that benefit.

I am curious — we have a big conversation — well, in the territory especially when we talk about a shortage of teachers, educational assistants, and learning assistance teachers. I was hoping that the witnesses could give me an update on kind of recent statistics for the number of graduates that they put through the YNTEP, the Yukon Native Teacher Education Program, and if there have ever been thoughts about — I know that in other jurisdictions, other provinces, there is specific schooling for educational assistants that then prepares someone for that role. When they go into it, they have more skills than a person off the street, but I'm just looking for statistics and thoughts about an educational assistant program.

**Ms. Brown:** The area of developing teachers is something that is a priority for Yukon University as we look to the future. In fact, it is a priority that is articulated in our new academic plan. With respect to the YNTEP program, we have two opportunities to earn that degree. That degree is currently offered in partnership with the University of Regina and we have two streams. The one stream is a four-year stream and the other stream is an after-degree stream — so a student may have a different type of degree and would like to finish with a teaching degree.

With respect to graduation rates, I can say that in 2022-23, we had 10 students graduate in the after-degree stream, and in the four-year stream in 2022-23, we had another two students graduate.

I started by saying that our future aspirations are to help build and develop new teachers for the territory. This is something, as I have said, that is articulated in our academic plan. With respect to educational assistants, that is something that I will take back and discuss with Provost Shelagh Rowles.

**Ms. White:** I thank the witness for that. One thing that we have heard as a refrain is that Canada — and the world as a whole — is facing a health care worker crisis. I know that there is talk about a nursing program in the future, but if the witnesses could share with me what is available now as far as health care, whether it is the nursing home attendant program that I know previously existed — I'm not sure if it still does — but if they can let me know the plans around health care courses.

**Ms. Brown:** I would like to start by saying that Yukon University recognizes the opportunity to help contribute to a solution for the health care crisis in the territory and our contribution in that regard would be in education.

At the present moment in time, we do offer programs of direct relevance to health care. We offer a health care assistant program and we also offer a practical nursing program. I can give some enrolment numbers. With respect to our practical nursing program, enrolment for 2023-24 is 29 full time and two part time, and in 2022-23, we had a total of 32 full time. We have aspirations of broadening that program because, for us, it is a high-demand program. In addition, we also have aspirations of providing access to a program that would allow existing licensed practical nurses to bridge toward a RN program offered at another institution and that's something that we are currently working on.

**Ms. White:** I thank the witness for that. I'm sure that "hybrid" is not the right terminology for that kind of course

where the degree certification may come from an outside institution, but are there other programs where the university is partnered up? So, again, the University of Regina does the teachers. Are there other hybrid programs or similar models that we are looking at for courses that aren't currently offered?

**Ms. Brown:** Yes, having partner degrees has been a strategy for Yukon University — formerly the Yukon College — and as we look to the future, we are looking to offer those degrees as Yukon University degrees. Some examples specifically are the teacher education program that we have already spoken about, the social work program that we are currently exploring, and, as well, there is an environmental science program.

**Ms. White:** I thank the witness for that. A number of years ago, the student union actually worked quite hard to be able to get city bus passes for students. In that relationship, what they were also able to do is to extend the operating hours of the city buses to make sure that the city buses went up to the school campus at the end of classes so that people were still able to get home. Is it possible for the witnesses to let me know if that is an ongoing relationship with the City of Whitehorse? Are students still able to get city transit passes? Are they able to share a bit about what is currently happening with the student union and the university?

**Ms. Brown:** I can say that we still have a bus program with the city. Unfortunately, I don't have any information on further discussions with the city yet.

**Ms. White:** May this lead to further discussions.

One of the things that had been mentioned earlier in the conversation with my colleague was the crunch around housing. The witness did talk about the work that is happening in Dawson City for SOVA students — trying to make sure that students wanting to go the art school there had that opportunity.

A number of years ago, as an example, international students were really running into a lot of barriers — not fully understanding that housing did not come with their school application. Is there a specific person within the university who helps students bridge their search for housing? Have there been conversations with the Yukon government in developing student housing — I am going to suggest, actually, at the Whitehorse campus, at the Dawson City one for sure, and even in other communities as required?

**Ms. Brown:** We make great efforts to ensure that international students recognize the need for housing and we work with international students to do the best that we can to provide housing, be that on campus or off campus, and help them access housing off campus. We don't have a specific position that is actually dedicated to that role, but we do have student-life coordinators who are functioning in a helpful role for international students.

With respect to further housing and conversations with Yukon government, we have not explored that with the Yukon government at this point in time. We do need to look at our internal resources to make sure that we are currently using and making the best use of the available space that we currently have.

**Ms. White:** I do thank the witness for that, which can bring us up to the university endowment lands. There has been a commitment from the Yukon government to create the McIntyre Creek park and that will, I imagine, affect the university, as it should, I imagine, about the endowment lands. Where is the university in terms of — there have been lots of discussions. We spoke a little bit about the Polaris building today. I went through the planning process of that — probably 10 or seven or eight years ago — and it was a great process. I am looking forward to the groundbreaking of that.

Are there any updates on the university endowment lands or plans there? Are there future plans for housing? What kind of future look does the university hold right now?

**Ms. Brown:** The university is in very early stages of entering into an MOU with YG about the endowment lands.

**Ms. White:** I thank the witness for that.

At this point, I would really like to just give the witnesses an opportunity to maybe again celebrate things that they are proud of or excited about. I would highlight things like the Kinnickinnick Kaff, which has really seen students being able to host in a culinary way — and in a way that you don't get in very many restaurants — and to even start plating or presentation. Whether we want to talk about the research or any of those things, I will give the witnesses that opportunity and then thank them for their time, and I don't have any further questions.

**Ms. Brown:** Thank you for the invitation. You have invited a president to brag about the university. I recognize that we are close on time, so I'll keep my remarks short. However, if given free reign, they wouldn't be.

In the interest of time, I would just like to recognize the exceptional staff and faculty who approach every day with a sense of enthusiasm and possibility and belief in the institution and tremendous pride in their role in educating students and particularly educating students for the north.

**Ms. White:** Sorry, Madam Chair, I had said that was going to be my last. There is actually one further comment, and just to the witness, we have until 5:30, so you have plenty of time.

I did just want to note that there has been a change at the university in the use of the flagpoles, knowing that all of the Yukon First Nation flags are hung. On the Transgender Day of Remembrance, I would note that the transgender flag was flown today for the first time. I think that it is a really important thing. Continuing education is political in its very nature. At the time when it becomes something that everyone can afford and everyone can access, maybe then it won't be viewed in that way, but it is a privilege that unfortunately many in many circumstances do not have access to.

I do think that the university has an important role to play in leadership when we talk about, today, acknowledging the Transgender Day of Remembrance and things that are happening globally. I congratulate the faculty and staff and whoever drove that. It is really important that places like our higher education establishments are free and open to all.

**Ms. Brown:** Thank you for that recognition. You are absolutely correct. Yukon University for the first time raised

the transgender flag today, November 20, the Transgender Day of Remembrance. We raised that flag as a demonstration of the resilience of transgender people and in observance of the over 390 transgender people who have lost their lives due to acts of violence against transgender people.

We strive to ensure that Yukon University is a place of belonging for everybody, and today was a very emotional day for some and a day filled of pride for some as well, so thank you for the recognition.

**Chair:** Are there any further questions for the witnesses?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** On behalf of the Committee of the Whole, I would like to thank Dr. Lesley Brown, President and Vice-Chancellor of Yukon University, and Christine Mahar, public member of the Yukon University Board of Governors, for appearing as witnesses today. Thank you very much for your time and for your thoughtful answers. I also thank the members from the Official Opposition and the New Democratic Party for their questions here today.

*Witnesses excused*

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

**Chair:** It has been moved by the Member for Mountainview that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

*Motion agreed to*

*Speaker resumes the Chair*

**Speaker:** I will now call the House to order.

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

### Chair's report

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

Also, pursuant to Committee of the Whole Motion No. 14 adopted earlier today, witnesses appeared before Committee of the Whole to answer questions regarding the operations of Yukon University.

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

Are you agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Speaker:** I declare the report carried.

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

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that the House do now adjourn.

*Motion agreed to*

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

*The House adjourned at 5:15 p.m.*

**The following sessional paper was tabled November 20, 2023:**

35-1-133

*Yukon Child Care Board Annual Report 2022-2023*  
(McLean)