



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 165

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Monday, March 11, 2024 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2024 Spring Sitting

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

CABINET MINISTERS

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

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
March 11, 2024 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.
 At this time, we will proceed with prayers.

Prayers

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 at the request of the member: Motion No. 785, standing in the name of the Leader of the Third Party.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I ask my colleagues to help me welcome a number of visitors who are here today in the Legislative Assembly.

From the Health Transformation Advisory Committee, we have Doris Bill, Stephen Mills, Deputy Chief Darla Lindstrom, Chief Barb Joe, Chief Pauline Frost, and Diane Strand. We also have Paul Banks from the Yukon Registered Nurses Association. We have a health analyst from the Council of Yukon First Nations, Ryan Moyer, who is the public health analyst, and Kristeen McTavish and Kathleen Chapman, Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada and the president of the Yukon branch of the Yukon Hospital Corporation Group. We have, from the Boys and Girls Club of Yukon, Lindsay Cornell, Emily-Ann Harris, Isabelle Piche, and Sen Schmidt. From the Department of Health and Social Services, we have Tiffany Boyd, deputy minister focused on health. We have Ed van Randen, Deputy Minister of Social Services. We have: Savanna Leary, project manager; Alex Taylor, senior policy analyst; and Cathy McNeil, assistant deputy minister. We have: Jessica Hall, junior policy analyst; Jennifer Gehmair, assistant deputy minister; and Sharon Specht, assistant deputy minister. We have: Mary Vanstone, assistant deputy minister; Jason Bilsky, chief executive officer of the Yukon Hospital Corporation; and Mark Pindera, chief negotiator and special counsel to the department. We have Assistant Deputy Minister Paul Payne. We have: Misty Ticiniski, project coordinator; Dave Anderson from Labour Relations; and Angela Salé-Roche. We have Mandeep Bajwa, project coordinator; and we have Adam Labar, chief information officer. Again from the department, we have: Jacob Rohloff, policy analyst; and Nigel Allan, director of communications and information. We also have Helen Slama from the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition.

We welcome you all. Thank you all for being here.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, we have quite a few guests here today for our tribute to the 60th anniversary of Rendezvous. I have a list — not quite as long as the Minister of Health and Social Services' list. First of all — Mr. and Mrs. Yukon, Ron and Merrilee Chambers, who are the 55th Mr. and Mrs. Yukon. From the Yukon Order of Pioneers, which is celebrating their 130th anniversary this year, Gordy Ryder, Gordon Steele, Ken Mason, David Schlosser, Michael Gates, and James Mooney.

From the Rendezvous board and staff, we have “Time bomb” Tamara, “Shenanigan” Chanel Kane — and I’m sorry if I get your surname wrong, Sandy — “Silverstrike Sandy” Schuschkleb, “Snake Charmer Shantay” Shantay Karhut, “Rossi Rockhound” Chris Ross. From the Snowshoe Shufflers, we have: “Keno City” Kim Solonick, “Gold Claim” Lorraine Heynen, and “Tricky Vicky” Stallabrass.

We have First Princess and Miss Congeniality, Kerri Scholz, and we have the 2024 Rendezvous Queen, Jessica Gatensby.

Could we welcome them all here, please?

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Ramadan

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a sacred time in the lives of many millions around the world and the Muslim community here in the Yukon — the holy month of Ramadan.

Ramadan is not only a religious observance; it is a testament to the values of compassion, self-discipline, and community that resonate across diverse cultures and faiths. During this sacred month, Muslims around the globe embark on a spiritual journey marked by fasting, prayer, and acts of kindness. Fasting from dawn to sunset is a central tenet of Ramadan, serving as a powerful reminder of the blessings of sustenance. This act of self-discipline fosters a deep sense of gratitude and solidarity with the less fortunate, teaching valuable lessons of empathy and humility.

The nights during Ramadan are filled with special prayers know as “Tarawih” and the recitation of the Koran. These moments of reflection and spiritual connection offer a profound opportunity for individuals to strengthen their relationship with the divine, promoting inner peace and personal growth.

Beyond the individual journey, Ramadan is a time for community and charity. Families and friends come together to break their fast, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose. The spirit of generosity is shown through initiatives to support the less fortunate, highlighting the values of compassion and charity.

In our diverse and inclusive society, it is crucial to recognize and appreciate the richness of cultural and religious traditions. Ramadan stands as a symbol of the importance of religious freedom and the celebration of diversity. In embracing the customs and practices associated with Ramadan, we not

only honour the Muslim community but also affirm our commitment to a society that values understanding, tolerance, and respect.

As we reflect on the significance of Ramadan, let us draw inspiration from the principles that it embodies: compassion, self-discipline, community, and charity.

Regardless of our religious or cultural backgrounds, these values are universal and serve as a foundation for an inclusive society. Ramadan is a rich tapestry of traditions that contribute to the cultural mosaic of the Yukon. For many this year, celebrations are muted as they reflect on the tragedy in Gaza. May this month inspire us all to foster understanding, respect, and belonging among the diverse communities that are part of the Yukon and our world.

Applause

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize Ramadan and pay tribute to the Muslim community across the Yukon. For the next month, they will observe Ramadan with prayer, reflection, and spiritual development through remarkable self-discipline and acts of worship.

Ramadan, observed annually in the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, is a time for heightened devotion and empathy for those less fortunate. It strengthens the bond within the community and within family, teaching understanding, kindness, patience, and the importance of selflessness.

I have also heard that, over the past few months, the Yukon has welcomed several new people to the Muslim community. So, on behalf of myself and my colleagues, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all those for whom this is their first Ramadan in the Yukon. To all those Yukoners observing Ramadan, Ramadan Mubarak, and may this holy month bring peace, happiness, and prosperity to you and your families.

Applause

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the NDP to pay tribute to Ramadan. Yesterday, Muslims in the Yukon and around the world welcomed the beginning of the holy month, a month of spirituality and reflection. For many, this is a month that people hold close to their hearts. It's a time where the pace of life changes, where families create more space to be together, to celebrate, to fast, and to pray. But this year, Ramadan is clouded by another feeling. On this day, it is impossible to not think about the millions of Palestinians who, during this Ramadan, are suffering relentless bombings, mass displacement, and starvation.

I think of the millions of families around the world who have been watching the violence from afar, feeling helpless as they watch their friends and loved ones suffer, not knowing if they will survive the night. I think of the countless journalists on the ground documenting these horrors. People like Motaz, Plestia, and Bisan are risking everything so that the whole world can bear witness to this genocide.

I also think of the helpers, the people who are acting against this injustice in every part of the world, including the incredible folks right here in the Yukon, people who have seen

the injustice in Gaza and banded together to try to make the world a safer place. They are working together from all walks of life, planning rallies, writing letters to politicians, and raising and donating money to Palestinian relief funds.

In bearing witness to the horrors in the Gaza strip, we have also been reminded to never forget our humanity. We have seen Yukoners do what they do best: be together, work together, and do things in a good way together. At the mosque, at the healing totem, in communities across the territory, and even out in front of this building, we have been reminded that good can still prevail, that no matter how far apart in the world we are, every human life is precious and must be protected.

In the spirit of Ramadan and in the spirit of togetherness, I thank them for their work in solidarity. On this Ramadan, I say: Free Palestine, end the siege, and ceasefire now.

Ramadan Mubarak.

Applause

In recognition of Yukon Rendezvous 60th anniversary

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the 60th anniversary of the Yukon Rendezvous festival. Sixty years ago, some truly inspired minds got together and said, "Why not celebrate the middle of winter?" — a reason to gather and rekindle communal bonds amidst the frosty embrace of the season, a festival to bring people together with spirit and frivolity, showcasing the very best of the Yukon's quirks and charms.

Sixty years later, what started as a local phenomenon has snowballed into a legendary bash attracting folks from the far reaches of the globe, all eager to dance, laugh, and perhaps engage in a few rounds of competitive tea boiling and chainsaw chucking. From hand games to hairy legs, flour packing to fan dancing, Rendezvous leaves us laughing, smiling, and sometimes questioning the laws of physics. It also leaves us with a renewed appreciation for the wild and wonderful technicolourful spirit of this community.

As we bask in the glow of this Diamond Jubilee, let's tip our furry hats — or tiaras — to the dreamers who conjured up this winter fantasia. To the countless volunteers whose dedication has fuelled the festival's success, to the Rendezvous event participants and winners over the years, to the amazing Snow Shoe Shufflers, to Mr. and Mrs. Yukon — Ron and Merrilee Chambers from Haines Junction — to Rendezvous' new queen and court, and to the generations of attendees who have brought their zest, zeal, and "Yukoniness", your contributions have cemented Rendezvous' place as a cherished tradition bringing warmth to our winters with high kicks and hijinks.

I ask the members of this House to join me in congratulating the Yukon Rendezvous festival on 60 incredible years north of 60. May it continue to bring us together year after year in an amazing display of community, culture, and camaraderie; may it continue to be a beacon of hilarity, a forge of friendship, and a never-ending source of stories that begin with: "Remember that time at Rendezvous...?" May it be a place where we can all let our hair down and let it freeze.

On behalf of all members of this Assembly, congratulations on Rendezvous' 60th anniversary.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to Yukon Rendezvous, which just celebrated its 60th anniversary.

The celebrations would not be possible if it were not for the thousands of volunteer hours put into making this annual event happen. Rendezvous has held a special place in the hearts of many long-time Yukoners from a young age, and so many people work very hard to ensure that the nostalgia and tradition is kept alive for future generations.

The festival is an exciting way to embrace Yukon history, say goodbye to the long winter, and welcome the warmer weather.

The board puts in very long hours in order to plan, promote, and attract the large volume of volunteers required to put on the festival and also to attract the entire community to take part and make Rendezvous a success.

Snow carvings and contests, shufflers and high kicks, team challenges, drummers, chainsaws, crowns, and logs — a quirky mix of talent and fun that comes together brilliantly for a fun and exciting time. Rendezvous truly is the first sign of spring in the Yukon.

Maraming salamat again to the board and to all volunteers and participants for an exciting 60th Yukon Rendezvous.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to congratulate Rendezvous on their 60th anniversary.

My first memory of Rendezvous was the year I was eight years old. I had just moved from Pelly Crossing into Whitehorse, and I had high expectations of the big city to provide a lot of excitement and entertainment. When Rendezvous rolled around, I knew that this was the event I had been waiting for, and I was not disappointed. I had a lot of fun, but what I remember most clearly was the incredible colours of the cancan skirts.

Every year, Whitehorse is lucky to have a festival packed with events that are fun, exciting, social, quirky, community building, offbeat, and always entertaining. From the fiddle show to the snow sculptures, from hand games to flour packing, there is something for everyone.

There are a couple special congratulations I want to include. Congratulations to Ron and Merrilee Chambers, our Mr. and Mrs. Yukon; congratulations to Jessica Gatensby, Miss The Craft Shop, our Rendezvous Queen this year, and all of the contestants.

Of course, congratulations and a huge thank you to the many staff, volunteers, board members, and participants on another wonderful Rendezvous. February is always the time I think we could all use a festival and we very much appreciate the people who make it happen. So, congratulations, Rendezvous, on 60 years of festivals.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling a letter from the Silver47 Exploration Corp. to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources.

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

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 38: *Health Authority Act* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 38, entitled *Health Authority Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Health and Social Services that Bill No. 38, entitled *Health Authority Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 38 agreed to

Speaker: Are there any further bills for introduction?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to avoid operational reductions and decreased services at the Yukon Hospital Corporation by fully funding its operational costs in 2024-25 and by providing at least the same total of operation and maintenance funding as provided in 2023-24, which was \$124.78 million.

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

THAT this House supports the implementation of Yukon's five-year innovation strategy to provide a framework of how the Government of Yukon will support and enable innovative practices.

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

THAT this House supports the creation of a Yukon disaster financial assistance program to help Yukoners impacted by large natural disasters.

Ms. White: I rise to give notice of the following motion: THAT this House urges the Government of Canada to:

(1) demand an immediate permanent ceasefire between Hamas and Israel;

(2) demand a release of all hostages;

(3) demand unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza;
 (4) suspend all trade in military arms and technology with Israel; and
 (5) support the prosecution of all crimes and violations of international law committed in the region and support the work of the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to address the lack of reliable school bus transportation in all Yukon communities.

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

THAT this House urges the Parliament of Canada to pass Bill C 273, *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (Corinne's Quest and the protection of children)*.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Yukon health authority

Hon. Ms. McPhee: In 2019, our government struck an independent panel to ask Yukoners for their thoughts about how we could improve our health and social system. Based on what they heard, they created the *Putting People First* report, our blueprint for transforming the Yukon's health and social services to better reflect the needs and values of Yukoners while supporting our health care professionals who provide us with excellent compassionate and committed care.

Central to the report's recommendations is the establishment of a health authority aimed at creating an improved, efficient, and person-centred approach to health and wellness in the Yukon. Yukoners will have noticed that in budget 2024-25, our government has put forward \$9.4 million to begin the work of establishing a health authority.

Working to establish Shāw Kwā'ą Health and Wellness Yukon demonstrates significant progress toward our government's commitment to the integrated model of health care that puts Yukoners first.

The health authority legislation lays the groundwork for this transformative work. Today, with the tabling of the legislation, we stand at the forefront of the transformative work that will represent a groundbreaking shift in Yukon's health and social services system. Having been developed in collaboration with the Chiefs Committee on Health and Yukon First Nations, health authority legislation is committed to: enhancing the physical and mental well-being of all Yukoners; ensuring equal access to health care services for everyone in the Yukon; advancing health equity and addressing disparities, particularly for Yukon First Nations; and embracing Indigenous views on health that are embodied in the name Shāw Kwā'ą, which means "all is well; all is good" in Southern Tutchone.

Paramount to the creation of Shāw Kwā'ą Health and Wellness Yukon and the transformation of the Health and Social Services system is the continued effort to build and

nurture strong partnerships with Yukon First Nations, health care professionals, and Yukoners.

Health authority legislation also signifies our government's dedication to fostering culturally safe, inclusive, and responsive services that advance reconciliation, deliver on commitments from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action, and *Putting People First* report recommendations.

Today marks an important moment in our commitment to creating a strong, responsive, and culturally appropriate health care system. We recognize that the journey ahead is complex and requires the collective effort, dedication, and passion of all those involved. However, it is a journey that we embark on with optimism and determination, inspired by the progress that we have made so far and the potential for what lies ahead.

As we progress with the work related to the legislation, we will continue to keep the channels of communication open and actively seek input from partners and stakeholders to shape the creation and execution of an integrated health authority. We will move forward with confidence rooted in strong partnerships, a clear vision for the future, and a commitment to the health and well-being of Yukoners. Together, we are setting the course and charting the way for a healthier, more vibrant territory for all Yukoners.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government has talked a lot about developing a health authority but so far has provided very little in terms of actual details about it. This has left us with a lot of questions and few answers from government, so I will begin with a few questions today. I hope the minister will attempt to actually answer them when she rises.

Our health care system is vitally important to all Yukoners. If the government is proposing major structural changes, it is very important that any model reflects the needs of patients and health care professionals.

What consultation occurred with health professionals and the organizations and unions representing them? We understand that hundreds of government and hospital employees may see their employer change because of this new corporate entity. What is the total number of public employees whose employer will change? What parts of the Department of Health and Social Services will be transferred to this new health corporation? Will any employees of other departments be transferred and, if so, who? Were health professionals involved in the drafting of the legislation? Who has seen the legislation prior to tabling?

It's important to note that this change will directly impact more public employees than devolution did. As major a change as devolution was, the number of employees who saw their employer change was far smaller. In the lead-up to devolution, years of planning work took place, including dealing carefully and specifically with how to ensure that employees' pay, benefits, and pensions were dealt with fairly.

In contrast, we are hearing concerns from health professionals that they don't know yet how this change will impact them. What details have been shared with employees

about the impact on their pay, benefits, and pensions? Why has the government not shared its plan for dealing fairly with employees prior to tabling legislation?

We know that this Liberal government chronically underfunded Yukon hospitals for years, including forcing them to borrow millions of dollars from a bank just to cover employee pension solvency costs. Ernst & Young reviewed four years of financial statements and found that the Yukon Hospital Corporation suffered from a — I quote: “... chronic cashflow and operating shortfall.” In 2022-23, the financial shortfall was so serious that they found — and I quote: “... YHC was facing a deficit and was at risk of not meeting payroll and operations obligations” had it not diverted \$7.3 million in capital funding.

In the 2023-24 main estimates, the government provided Yukon hospitals with just over \$95 million in O&M funding. Our hospitals were short almost \$30 million at the start of the year. Under intense pressure from the Yukon Party, the Liberal government finally gave our hospitals more money last fall and another \$12.5 million in O&M in the second supplementary for 2023-24 tabled last week. According to the 2024-25 main estimates, the revised amount for the 2023-24 fiscal year is \$124.78 million in O&M for Yukon hospital services. According to the same page, the total O&M being provided for the upcoming fiscal year is just \$110.41 million. That is \$14.37 million less than the estimated O&M costs for the fiscal year that we are wrapping up of \$124.78 million.

So, how will setting up another arm’s-length entity avoid running into the same problems that Yukon hospitals have had in getting adequate funding from this Liberal government?

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health and Social Services needs to show Yukoners their detailed plan for establishing a health authority. Our health care professionals deserve transparency from this government, and every employee has a right to know how their job, pay, benefits, and pension will be impacted.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, *Putting People First* is an important document. It highlights the need to hear directly from the people who access our health care system and the staff who work in it.

Unfortunately, I have concerns that, as we move toward a health authority, we are no longer listening. When I sit in people’s homes and listen to their stories, I am always reminded that while we may share struggles, we need supports that meet us as individuals.

Our systems need to meet people where they are at. People want a system that is responsive to their individual needs, that provides the support that they need when and where they need it. Health care cannot be a blanket approach. We must take the time to see individuals for who they are and to learn their stories.

When I think of equal access to health care, I am always reminded of the impacts of systemic racism. I am a First Nation woman and I grew up with my identity and have felt and seen the impact of systemic racism in my personal and professional life. Canada has a race-based system for health care. I grew up

under the *Indian Act*, and as I stand here today, I am still under the *Indian Act*.

Our country was built on a foundation of racism against Indigenous people and this must be acknowledged as we move forward with transforming the health care system. We must be mindful of how racism continues to be embedded in policies and practice. It is easy to say that we are working toward ensuring equitable access, but it means more than just ensuring that doors are open. Deeper things need to be addressed and people’s voices need to be heard. We also cannot forget to provide adequate supports to service providers working in the system who work so hard to take care of all of us. We need to make sure that we are listening to them and taking care of them as well.

When we talk about enhancing health care, we need to look at the unique needs of each community. For example, on my recent trip home to Old Crow, there were multiple medevacs in a week while I was there. With the creation of the health centre in Old Crow, this is an opportunity for health care to be reshaped and to ensure that the health care supports in my home community meet the needs of the community in that community and across all communities in the Yukon.

How is the government working now to better serve the Yukon and, in particular, rural Yukon?

Whenever I ask questions about this, I am told that changes will come with the health authority. I would like to know what is being done now. Our communities and our health care workers are suffering while we wait. We can no longer wait.

When we say “putting people first”, it must mean that the people who access our health care system and work in the health care system are at the table from the beginning, not just when it is convenient. If we are truly putting people first, why are the people who access the system and the people who work in it always the last to be engaged? I always try to remember that when you build a new system, it is important that you think of giving power back to the people. These processes need to start from the ground up, not top down. Mahsi’ cho.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to improving health care for all Yukoners and expanding services across the territory. This includes building a health authority in partnership with Yukon First Nations, health care partners, staff, professionals, and Yukoners. It also includes laying the groundwork for a health care system that is strong, responsive, and culturally sensitive for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, this is a tremendous opportunity to transform our health care system. The members opposite have brought forward a number of questions today — all good questions. This is the first we have heard of them wanting this kind of information and we are happy to provide it.

In budget 2024-25, we are investing an additional \$70 million in our health care system. This includes \$5.1 million to complete the mental wellness unit at the Whitehorse General Hospital. It includes an additional \$30 million for insured health services and an additional \$15.3 million to help meet the needs of the Yukon Hospital Corporation as they provide high-quality patient care. There is

an additional \$2.8 million to bolster health human resources, along with millions more to improve health care services across the territory. This supports our government's work to recruit and retain talented health care professionals, much of which is outlined in the *Health Human Resources Strategy* that was released last year.

I would like to highlight the progress that we have made. As of the last month, the vacancy rate was 15.5 percent for primary health care nurses in the Yukon, down from a 47-percent vacancy rate in 2022. But there is much more work to be done. In total, our 2024-25 budget has more than \$594 million to support health and social services for Yukoners. I encourage members opposite to put politics aside and vote in favour of this 2024-25 budget and the *Health Authority Act*. Hopefully, they will do this if they truly want to see a better funded health care system that serves the needs of Yukoners. Through the creation of the health authority, we are supporting the needs and direction of Yukoners.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to close with a powerful quote shared with me by Doris Bill, First Nation member of the Health Transformation Advisory Committee and former Chief of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, who is here with us today. I quote: "In the 90s, when Yukon drafted legislation without us, the voices of our people were absent. We have seen the results of that in a health care system that is not inclusive of Yukon First Nation people, and a system that has resulted in lower health outcomes for our people. Now, through collaboration, we are creating a system that gives hope. This will be a system that has the potential to transform lives, ensuring good health care for all Yukoners. This initiative is not just for us, but an opportunity for the world to witness the power of a small yet mighty territory in the north."

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Educational assistants

Mr. Dixon: Last week, the Minister of Education received a scathing letter from several important education stakeholders, including the Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon, the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, Autism Yukon, the Yukon Association of Education Professionals, and the Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees, about changes her department has made recently regarding the allocation of educational assistants. Here's how these groups characterize the changes made by the minister — quote: "These recent harmful changes to the EA allocation policy and procedures have been made unilaterally, without public consultation or engagement and absent ongoing communication with important community stakeholders."

Mr. Speaker, my first question is simple: Why did the minister and her department make these changes to the EA staffing and school allocation policy?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I will start by saying, of course, that our goal is to provide support and interventions for students to better meet their learning needs. Through reimagining inclusive and special education — also known as

the RISE initiative — we are examining how we allocate educational assistants and other resources for students.

We are considering individual student needs as well as looking at classroom composition, universal design for learning, and small group supports.

We know that there remains a lot to do in improving support services for our students. Our focus remains on providing care and intervention for students to better meet their needs. We will continue to be committed to moving forward in this direction.

The department has started a lot of really great work. We understand that there is some confusion about the EA allocation process.

For clarity, there were minor updates made to the 2024-25 school year. These were administrative and do not affect how EAs are allocated. The administrative updates allow the Student Support Services team to collect more individualized information. I will continue to build on my answer.

Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, as concerning as the policy changes are themselves, the groups that have written to this minister are particularly concerned about the disregard that the minister and her department have shown to stakeholders who represent essential and valuable sources of information about the students whom these changes will directly affect. Here is what they said. The Department of Education has — quote: "... failed to seek input, or any kind of feedback, from our organizations regarding the changes. It is disheartening, if not disrespectful, that we are now learning of these potentially very damaging changes from worried schools and their communities and not the Yukon Government."

The groups that have written this letter are some of the most engaged and knowledgeable stakeholders in the education system, and yet they had to learn about these changes indirectly from the schools themselves rather than the government. So, the question for the minister is simply: Why?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, again, we remain focused on providing the best services for our students. The department, in this particular matter and all matters — I think that most folks know that my way of working with Yukoners is absolutely in collaboration. We have been working on reimagining inclusive and special education for some years now and have worked very closely with our partners.

The department is working closely with all partners, including superintendents and school board executive directors, to incorporate feedback from stakeholders into the EA allocation process.

Again, Mr. Speaker, no major changes to the EA allocation processes were made for the 2024-25 school year. Minor updates to current processes were completed, including increasing transparency. Teachers and administrators will now see if a student needs intensive or shared support — a better understanding of the needs of students and a streamlined process for teachers and administrators. Instead of filling out two forms, there is only one.

Our students are at the centre of this process, and our focus remains on the students and supporting their needs. Any

substantial changes to EA allocations will take time. We are committing to working with all of our partners on any substantive changes.

Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, well, Yukoners are left to decide who they believe — the Minister of Education or these five highly engaged groups that are directly affected by this change. According to the five groups that have written this letter, the changes that the minister and her department have made — quote: "... are harmful and will result in inequitable and diminished critical services in Yukon schools." The groups have a simple request, Mr. Speaker; they request that the minister address the specific concerns that they have raised and seek their feedback and input prior to the 2024-25 school year.

So, will the minister agree to undo the changes that the department has already made and agree to seek the input and feedback of these groups prior to the next school year?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, again, there were no major changes made to the EA allocation for the 2024-25 school year. Minor updates, as I have just gone over, were completed. We understand that there is some confusion on the EA allocation process. For clarity, there were minor updates made for the 2024-25 school year. These were administrative and do not affect EA allocation. The administrative updates allow the Student Support Services team to collect more individualized information about a student's needs so that the EA can better support them. Allocation numbers for the schools can vary from year to year based on the needs and enrolment.

Again, I want to reiterate that we are committed to working respectfully with our education partners on any substantive changes.

When we began the information gathering process in the fall of 2023, we invited many partners, including the Yukon Association of Education Professionals, to provide more perspectives on the overall EA allocation. The Yukon Association of Education Professionals is welcome to use the tools available to them and express their concerns. I will continue to work directly with all of our partners —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Educational assistants

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, I have further questions about the letter sent to the Minister of Education by several organizations that have expressed concerns about recent changes to the EA staffing and school allocation policy made by the Department of Education. The letter notes that the department hired an external consultant to review the department's EA allocation policy and procedures and that the consultant facilitated several workshops in November of last year. According to the letter, considerable time, resources, and efforts were spent on this external consultant process.

So, I would like to ask the minister for clarity about this contract. Reviewing the contract registry, a sole-source contract of almost \$50,000 was given to a Calgary-based consultant to do this work.

Can the minister tell us why this consultant was chosen, and will she commit to making the external consultant's report available publicly?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I want to again start by saying that our goal is to provide support and interventions for students to better meet their learning needs. We set out a number of years ago, as a result of the Auditor General's report and the Nikki Yee report, to reimagine inclusive and special education. We are examining how we allocate educational assistants and other resources to students. We are considering individual needs of students. We are looking at classroom composition, universal design for learning, and small group supports. Enhanced professional development and learning opportunities for teachers and educational assistants are linked to this work.

In terms of additional resources that we brought to this project, yes, we worked with an outside consultant. Again, we value the input and perspective of our partners and stakeholders across the Yukon education system. We invited educational assistants themselves, administrators, principals, vice-principals, learning assistance teachers, teachers, the association, and many councils and groups to input into this. The work was extensive.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate this response, there were no answers to the questions that I had asked. Again, according to the letter, considerable time, resources, and efforts were spent on this external consultant process. When I reviewed the contract registry, there was a sole-source contract of almost \$50,000 given to a Calgary-based consultant to do this work.

I am going to ask this again: Why was this consultant chosen? Again, to reiterate what those groups were asking for, will the minister commit to making the external consultant's report available to stakeholders and, indeed, available to the public?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, we have put a tremendous amount of work into the work that is underway. We have worked very closely with all of our partners to ensure that we have thorough information. We have gathered an extensive amount of information regarding the EA allocation and, of course, other supports to students.

We have engaged the work of an outside, external support. I will continue to just finish off in terms of who that outside consultant with whom we consulted was.

We worked with the school councils, boards and committees, superintendents, executive directors of the First Nation School Board, executive directors of the CSFY, the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, the Child Development Centre, the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office, and partners within the Department of Education. We continue to work with the data that we have collected and we will be bringing that forward at a future date.

Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, of the groups that the minister just mentioned, they all co-signed a letter to the minister asking that the Department of Education be transparent and share with

their organizations a copy of the report prepared by the external consultant.

In my first two questions, I asked about why this consultant was chosen. Looking again at the contract registry, they have been involved in three other contracts with the Yukon government in the past number of years, starting in 2020, all with Highways and Public Works, yet they earned a direct-award contract from the Department of Education to review and create an education allocation framework.

Again, I will ask the minister this: Why did the department choose this particular consultant to do this important work, and once again, will the minister commit to making the external consultant's report available publicly?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I have had a chance to go over the importance of this work today and to assure Yukoners that at the centre of the work that we are doing is to support students to better meet their learning needs. I have spoken extensively today about the importance of our partners and that we have worked with them.

I understand the question that the member is bringing forward today in terms of the release of reports. We are still working to analyze some of the content within the report. We will be bringing forward that information at a later time. I will, of course, continue to be committed to working with our partners as we reimagine inclusive and special education. I think that, at the heart of this, we understand that there has been some confusion around the EA allocation process. I have made some clarification around that today.

We will be working directly with our partners to address the concerns that they have laid out in the letter addressed to me.

Question re: Primary health care providers

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, Yukoners need access to primary health care. Without it, they are missing out on preventive care. Without it, small health problems can become life-threatening ones. Thousands of Yukoners are on the wait-list for a family doctor or nurse practitioner and these people can't build relationships with health care providers. When it comes to making the toughest medical decisions, they do not have health care providers they know and trust to support them.

These Yukoners have been waiting for years and the wait-list keeps growing. This is not a new problem; it has been like this for years and nothing ever seems to change.

So, can the minister tell Yukoners why, after seven years of her government managing health care, the wait-list for family doctors is still growing?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the question. I always relish the opportunity to talk about the importance of our health care providers here in the territory and the services deserved by Yukoners.

Our population has grown second to none in the country. So, clearly, it impacts the need for Yukoners to have access to health care and to primary health care professionals. I can also indicate that we have an aging population which affects the impact of the individuals who are seeking health care as well. I

can also note that there are far more challenging and complex health issues that factor into this situation.

Health human resources presents one of the greatest challenges facing the Canadian health care system today, domestically and globally. Let's be clear: This is not a problem that only the Yukon is facing. Everywhere in the world, we are faced with unprecedented challenges in retaining, recruiting, and training enough health care workers to meet demand, and these challenges have been further exacerbated by COVID-19 and both the growing and aging population, as I have noted.

Mr. Speaker, we must also remember to factor in the fact that health care burnout is a real thing that we must be challenged by and take care of.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that our population is growing, as it has been for years now, and it also should be no surprise to the Minister of Health and Social Services that our population is also aging. Yet her government repeatedly seems unprepared for these easily predictable trends.

A family doctor or nurse practitioner is such a basic need. All Yukoners deserve access to primary health care — whether they need preventive care and early detection or help navigating a health care system in times of crisis — but the Liberals have failed in this basic function of government. Their inaction and lack of vision have left thousands of Yukoners without a family doctor and Yukoners are suffering because of it.

So, why should people trust this government to manage health care when they have failed so badly for so long?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that's one perspective, but it's not actually accurate.

We budgeted \$2.8 million during the 2024-25 fiscal year for the implementation of the *Health Human Resources Strategy*. This includes funding to support the following initiatives: \$1.5 million for staffing, including salary support for licensed practical nurses bridging to registered nurses; \$321,000 for consulting, including a physician recruiter working with the Yukon Medical Association and a policy analyst at the Yukon University; \$580,000 for Yukon University programming, including a social work degree program; and the medical office assistant diploma program. These are certainly programs that will encourage students who will join the health care profession which is so needed here in the territory. There is \$340,000 for travel and health professional development, including nurse training and support for Indian nursing students, support in bridging, and support for a pan-territorial health conference.

In January of 2024, the community nursing vacancy rate was reduced to 15 percent, providing service across the territory.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, one thing that is helping Yukoners without family doctors is the new walk-in clinic in Whitehorse, and that was a real roller coaster. First, in the spring of 2022, the minister promised to open one, and then that fell apart, as plans for the clinic were postponed indefinitely. Finally, with the 2023 CASA, the NDP forced this government to open one. In fact, the new walk-in clinic is the only thing that has happened in the last 12 months to help Yukoners without a family doctor.

We certainly appreciate that the Liberals took our advice, even if we didn't really give them a choice, but you would hope that they would have a few ideas of their own. We have just heard a long laundry list of investments in the future, but what is the minister going to do to help the thousands of Yukoners still on the wait-list to find a family doctor right now?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am actually puzzled by the preamble of the question because clearly we were working on the concept of a walk-in clinic long before it was mentioned in the confidence and supply agreement, but I don't mind who takes credit so long as Yukoners are deserving of the service and they are the recipients of the benefits of that.

In January of 2023, we committed to improving the delivery of access to health care across the territory, and the Department of Health and Social Services opened a walk-in clinic on December 18, 2023. Opening the new walk-in clinic in Whitehorse has been wildly successful. It offers Yukoners a new access point for primary care and decreases the pressures on the hospital emergency department for non-urgent medical needs.

While renovations are being completed to the walk-in clinic's permanent location at Mah's Point, the clinic is open at a temporary location at 9010 Quartz Road. The temporary location is in the same building as the Yukon midwifery program and the Centre de Santé Constellation Health Centre, which is also providing stellar service to Yukoners, particularly those who have not previously been attached to a health care provider. The clinics are expected to provide additional service to Yukoners going forward.

Question re: Michelle Creek mining project

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that every member of this House knows that the Peel watershed plan took more than a decade to settle, but this past year, the government took YESAB to court after it recommended against the Silver47 mining project on Michelle Creek. This was an opportunity for the Liberal government to support that plan and to give more than lip service to environmental protection and reconciliation. Instead, they decided to take YESAB to court to fight what was laid out in the final Peel plan.

This government says that they stand with First Nations, but what this decision shows is that they would rather side with a Vancouver-based mining company and hide behind the courts. Will the minister explain the decision to move forward in the courts with this petition rather than accepting, rejecting, or modifying YESAB's recommendations?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, we do support the Peel plan, and I appreciate the opportunity to talk to Yukoners about it.

We were concerned, so we are seeking a judicial review of the Michelle Creek mineral exploration project about how the assessment took place. We depend on environmental and socio-economic assessments of projects to make decisions on whether projects should proceed and what terms and conditions may be necessary. If there are flaws in the assessment process leading up to recommendations, we can't make a fully informed decision to accept, reject, or vary the recommendations. That is

why we asked for clarity from the courts; it is that straightforward.

Overall, we are very happy about the Peel plan. I know we have been working hard on the implementation of the plan, and I know that we are continuing to work hard on introducing new land use planning processes and getting the Dawson regional land use plan over the finish line.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals insist that they are committed to reconciliation, but if that were the case, they would respect and listen to what affected First Nations have been saying for years about the Peel watershed. The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and Na-Cho Nyäk Dun have expressed concern over the Michelle Creek project and how it would impact their ability to hunt and to access their traditional territory for culture and wellness. The concerns they brought, along with YESAB's findings, were that mining at Michelle Creek would devastate the Peel's sheep, caribou, and fish populations.

Yukoners want mining policies that reflect traditional ways of life and the environment. The Liberals' stance on this issue is contradictory to the government's commitments to respecting Yukon First Nation treaty rights. Why did the government not fulfill their duty to consult with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and Na-Cho Nyäk Dun before filing a petition against YESAB's recommendations?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, the first thing — let's just acknowledge that this area that is being proposed for development was an area of the Peel plan that said that yes, there could be development here. It is one of those places — I mean, most of the Peel is protected, but some of it was identified as areas where there could be development. This was a pre-existing claim. The application went in. There are some concerns that we had with the assessment process and we have asked the courts to advise on that; that's all.

I have had conversations with chiefs about the Michelle Creek project and our approach to seek clarification from the courts. Respectfully, I hope we are always respectful of First Nation governments and I hope that we always consider reconciliation, but I am not sure that is going to mean that we always agree. I hope that the way in which we disagree is done respectfully and that we are always considering reconciliation.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, we know that after the YESAB report, Silver47 wrote to the minister to express their disapproval of the findings, and it appears that this letter reached the minister's desk, as the judicial request shared similar language to Silver47's letter. I will note that it does not highlight any of the concerns from the YESAB report. The minister is echoing what has been said by the mining company, who, I might add, are not registered lobbyists in the Yukon.

One moment the Liberals are championing reconciliation and the next they are ignoring the desires of First Nations, their final agreements, and land use planning. Yukoners want the Peel protected, but despite this, the Liberals have chosen mining over the environment, Yukon First Nations, the final agreements, and the integrity of chapter 11 land use planning.

So, why has the minister chosen to build the case for judicial review that reflects Silver47's interests rather than the interests of affected First Nations?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I will look to table my response to the letter that came from Michelle Creek, which said: Hey, we can't consider any of this stuff that you're sending to us; thanks very much.

So, I will share that.

Can we please acknowledge that there is a great deal of land in the Peel plan that was designated for conservation and we have been working with miners and those who hold claims to relinquish those claims? I think that we have about two-thirds of those claims now relinquished in the areas in the Peel plan that were identified for conservation. This was not one of those areas — just to make it clear for all Yukoners. By the way, we have not taken a decision about the Michelle Creek application and that assessment because we feel that there were some flaws with the process. That is why we have gone back to ask the courts to assist us with identifying the process so that we can make sure that, as we move forward as a territory, there will be clarity to assist all future applications.

Question re: Health authority establishment

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I have some questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services about the Liberal government's plan to establish a health authority. First of all, during the budget briefing for opposition members last week, the Department of Finance told us that, along with this budget, the Department of Health and Social Services is hiring an additional 28.5 full-time-equivalent employee positions to support the establishment of a new health authority.

Can the minister please confirm that number of 28.5 FTEs, and can she tell us what those new department employees will be doing?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to talk about the health authority on the day in which we have tabled legislation to move forward. I appreciate that there were some questions earlier in the process of the ministerial statement from the Yukon Party and I look forward to debating this piece of legislation that they have only just today had the opportunity to review. I know they have spoken publicly about not supporting it, and I certainly hope that they will change their minds and that we can go forward together with this transformation of the Yukon's health care system and social service system.

In the 2024-25 budget, there are 22.5 FTEs allocated to implementing *Putting People First*. This includes the creation of a health authority, implementing the *Health Human Resources Strategy*, and embedding cultural safety in the health and social system. So, those positions are spread across those responsibilities.

The rest of the increase in FTEs is dedicated to front-line staff, including those addressing the substance use health emergency, the walk-in medical clinic, and the managed alcohol program.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for that response. I just want to seek clarity from her, because there is a discrepancy between the handout we were given by Finance officials last week, which identifies 28.5 officials for Health

and Wellness Yukon, and I believe the minister just indicated the number was 22 and change.

Could the minister confirm the number of employees that are being added for the new health authority and what those employees will be doing?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I can deal with any discrepancy perceived by the Yukon Party. Certainly, I will look into the numbers. I have 22.5 FTEs which are allocated to implementing *Putting People First*, which does include the creation of the health authority. It also includes implementing the *Health Human Resources Strategy* and it includes embedding cultural safety in the health and social system.

The rest of the increase — which may be the six individuals mentioned by the opposition, but I will confirm that — the rest are dedicated to front-line staff, as I have said, including those addressing the substance use health emergency, the walk-in medical clinic, and the managed alcohol program.

Vacancy rates in community nursing have decreased from 47 percent in July of 2022 to 15 percent in February of 2024. I mention this now and I mentioned it earlier today because it is incredible progress with respect to staffing community nursing positions across the territory, but there is more to do.

We have been doing work coordinating across the department for the system-wide transformation.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I do hope to get more clarification from the minister on the number of staff, because there is a fairly significant discrepancy between the handout we were given by officials and what the minister indicated.

I want to move on to the question of consultation. The legislation tabled today represents a significant change for many government and hospital employees who work in the health care system. As large as the change that devolution was, the number of Yukon public servants who will see their employer change is a much larger shift with this move to a health authority.

Can the minister please provide some information about the consultations that went into this legislation? Does the minister think that consultation with affected health care professionals, workers, and experts in this field was sufficient? If so, can she explain who was consulted, what they were consulted on, and when?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, well, let's start with the fact that Yukoners were consulted and consulted widely in the development of *Putting People First*, which is the foundation of the creation of a health authority. In addition to that, the Yukon First Nations and more than 60 individual groups and health system partners were consulted through the process of the development of this legislation.

Perhaps more importantly, Mr. Speaker, the *Health Authority Act*, as the members opposite will see when they review it, is a foundational document, a document that enables the creation of a health authority — the steel girders, if you will, of the building of a health authority. We will continue, as I have said many times today and had the opportunity to say in the ministerial statement — we will consult, we will collaborate, and we will work with health system partners to design the health authority in a way that is culturally responsible, that is

people-centred, that is innovative, and that provides a transformation of Yukon's health care system for all Yukoners.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Some Hon. Member: Mr. Speaker, I have a question of privilege.

Question of privilege

Speaker: Member for Lake Laberge, on a question of privilege.

Mr. Cathers: Pursuant to Standing Order 7, I would like to raise a question of privilege regarding seven press releases issued by the Premier, Deputy Premier, and two other ministers which we believe are in contravention of past Speakers' rulings. Those Speakers' rulings are respectively by Speaker Staffen, the current MLA for Riverdale North during his time as Speaker, and by yourself, Mr. Speaker.

We raised this matter at the earliest opportunity, and we do so in the hopes that the rules will be upheld and that the Premier and ministers will be reminded that they are not above the rules of the Legislative Assembly.

The seven press releases in question, of which copies have been sent to you, are pre-announcements of spending contained in the government's 2024-25 main estimates but failed to include any mention of the fact that the planned spending is subject to the approval of the Legislative Assembly. The offending ministers are the Premier, Deputy Premier, Minister of Community Services, and Minister of Health and Social Services.

In issuing those seven press releases, we believe that the Premier and ministers have violated the rules of the Assembly. Three of the press releases were issued by the Premier himself. Several previous Speakers' rulings have dealt with similar matters and upheld the principle that government press releases and advertising should state that planned spending is subject to the approval of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

Previous rulings in the Assembly regarding this principle were issued by Speaker Staffen in April 2005, the Member for Riverdale North, in his time as Speaker, on March 7, 2019, and yourself, Mr. Speaker, on November 4, 2021. In your ruling on November 4, 2021, you stated — quote: "... it may be convenient to leave out that programs are not yet in place and require legislative approval. It is, however, the best practice and the clearest for the public for members to ensure in these communications that there is no confusion and that the authority of the Assembly is neither called into question nor is the impression given that the Legislative Assembly plays a perfunctory role."

Speaker Staffen's ruling may be the most applicable to the current situation, as it also dealt with news releases that announced government spending plans in advance of the actual introduction of the main appropriation bill in this Assembly. To take an excerpt from how your predecessor, as Speaker, ruled on it when he addressed this matter, he ended his ruling with the following statement: "The government should take care in how it announces its intention for spending money that the

House has yet to appropriate. In researching this ruling the Chair noted that not all government news releases acknowledged that such spending was subject to the approval of the Legislature. The Chair believes this statement should be included in all such statements to ensure that the Assembly's authority is respected, its dignity is protected and the public is properly informed."

He further stated: "Though the Chair concludes that the action of the government on November 22, 2018 does not rise to the level of a contempt, the Chair agrees that the news release should not have been worded as it was.

"Further, the Chair believes that those who draft and authorize the release of government information have an obligation to ensure that they accurately describe the proceedings of this House."

To quote former Speaker Staffen, this should be done so that — quote: "... the Assembly's authority is respected, its dignity is protected and the public is properly informed.

"Therefore, having now addressed this issue, the Chair cannot be expected to extend the benefit of the doubt should this occur again."

That is a quote from Hansard, page 3769, March 7, 2019.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will wrap up my comments and again note that we believe that the press releases contravene past Speakers' rulings, and we are simply asking and hoping that you will require that the government abide by the rules going forward.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Questions of privilege are complicated matters and the rulings are of great importance to the House. The Chair will therefore reserve ruling on this question of privilege for a later date.

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Speaker: Motions respecting committee reports.

MOTIONS RESPECTING COMMITTEE REPORTS

Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 9

Clerk: Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 9, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Mostyn.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Chair of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges:

THAT the *Ninth Report of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges*, presented to the House on March 7, 2024, be concurred in; and

THAT the amendments to the Standing Orders of the Yukon Legislative Assembly recommended by the committee regarding notice of committee meetings be adopted.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I don't have an awful lot to say on Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 9, except to thank the members of the committee for all their hard work and meeting so often in the last little while.

Mr. Kent: The Official Opposition will be supporting this motion here today, and to echo my colleague's comments, I would like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges, or the SCREP committee, including the two Yukon Party members, the two Official Opposition members — the Member for Watson Lake and the Member for Lake Laberge — for their work in bringing this report here today.

MLA Tredger: The Yukon NDP will also be supporting this motion and we thank everyone for their work.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 17 yea, nil nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 9 agreed to

Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 10

Clerk: Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 10, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Mostyn.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Chair of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges:

THAT the *Tenth Report of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges*, presented to the House on March 7, 2024, be concurred in; and

THAT the amendments to the Standing Orders of the Yukon Legislative Assembly recommended by the committee, regarding remote participation, be adopted.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, much like my comments earlier, I just want to thank the members of the

Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges for all of their work on this file. This was an issue that we brought to the committee to make permanent some of the changes that came out of our pandemic response here in the House and also the sick leave policy that we put in the territory. We are asking citizens in the territory to make sure that, when they are sick, they don't come into work, and so we had that discussion: What happens in this Chamber when we are sick, and how do we actually deal with that? We had a really good all-party discussion about this. It went on for several days inside the committee hearing process.

I really want to thank all the members for their hard work on this file. We had a lot of ideas bounced around, a lot of great discussion about the issues — deep conversations about it from all three parties. I think that we have reached a compromise that will serve the House going forward on this issue — making sure that the staff in this Chamber are safe, that the MLAs are safe, and that when an emergency happens, as we saw in the Northwest Territories, the territory has rules now that will help guide our ability to conduct the public's business in this House in the event that, god forbid, anything should happen to the City of Whitehorse and we aren't able to come into this Chamber again for a period of time. So, that is really good.

I want to thank not only the MLAs who participated in these discussions but also the Clerk's staff, who really did help shape and provide so much really important logistical support to us.

Thanks to all, and I look forward to the comments from my colleagues across the way.

Mr. Kent: As with the previous motion, the Official Opposition will be supporting this motion here today, as we agree with the substance of the report.

MLA Tredger: I am really excited that this is here today. I won't talk about it for too long. I just think that it is really important that, as we have said over and over again, people need to stay home when they are sick. We have talked about ways to make that possible for people. There is still more work to be done on that to make it possible for all Yukoners to stay home when they are sick, but that also applies to us, and it is about keeping each other safe. It is about keeping all the staff and the people in this building safe. It is about compassion toward others Members of the Legislative Assembly so that we can all fully participate as best as we can, knowing that we are human.

I am really excited that this is here. I think that this is going to make for a better Legislative Assembly, better participation of members, and I am really happy to hear that everyone will be supporting it.

I want to thank everyone, especially the Clerks, who worked very, very hard to get us all the information. There was a surprising number of details that had to be figured out for this to move ahead — questions like: What happens if someone loses their Internet connection during a vote? All of these little details that the Clerks helped to bring to our attention — I'm

really happy that we found a compromise that we can all work with, and I think that this is going to be great, so thank you.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a few more comments or add some comments to the ones that we have heard today, just because it's probably difficult for the public to read deeply into the report and figure out what these changes mean.

There are basically two parts to this. Like others, I would like to thank all members from across the parties who brought this work forward. The first part really came with the support of the Yukon Party — or the efforts of the Yukon Party. It was around what happens if we hit an emergency here like we saw with the Northwest Territories last year where they had to evacuate Yellowknife. When that happens, you still need to be able to meet as an Assembly to make sure that we support Yukoners in that time. So, we borrowed from the Northwest Territories and Prince Edward Island to make sure that there is a way to convene using technology so that we can still make decisions for Yukoners and keep people safe.

The other one, which came from more work — well, from our side of the House and from the NDP — was around how we deal with things like illness. Sometimes, especially if it is, say, for example, a respiratory illness — our chief medical officer of health has been saying to us that we shouldn't go into work when we're sick because it's not good for our co-workers, but what do we do here, especially if the MLA is still able to participate? We extended that to one other sort of typical situation that we can imagine, which is: Say there is a road closure and one of our rural members can't make it safely to the Assembly; could they still participate remotely using technology?

Also, built into this is that there should be a review in a year so that, once we have seen the policy at work, we have a chance to consider some of the details. So, it's important that we get these things right. I want to just acknowledge that, last fall, we had the opportunity to use this. It was on a non-permanent motion; it was for the Fall Sitting. Our experience here was that it worked pretty well. We appreciated the opportunity to make sure that members who weren't able to be in the Assembly were still able to participate in our democracy.

Again, thanks to everyone who helped out — in particular, the Clerk's office, for all of their hard work.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 17 yeas, nil nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 10 agreed to

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 213: *First Appropriation Act 2024-25 — Second Reading — continued*

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 213, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver; adjourned debate, Mr. Cathers.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to arise here today as the Official Opposition Finance critic to speak to the Liberal government's 2024-25 budget.

I will note that my colleagues and I will be saving most of our questions and comments for department debate, but I will speak briefly to a few key points.

When they took office, the Liberals talked a good line about improving the budget, the trajectory of spending, and fiscal management. Instead, despite funding from the federal government increasing significantly every year, this Liberal government continues to blow through these resources with reckless spending. This includes growing the size of the bureaucracy significantly every year, including another large increase this year in mismanaging capital projects.

Personnel spending has increased by almost a third under the Liberal watch, comparing Public Accounts to Public Accounts. The 2024-25 budget forecasts a record net debt of \$488.8 million. According to the Public Accounts, the Yukon government's net financial assets in 2021 were over \$182 million. This is a dramatic change in the fiscal picture and not for the better.

Last year, according to the information provided by Finance officials, O&M spending grew by almost 10 percent. Meanwhile, the government continues to chronically underfund Yukon hospitals, giving them \$14.3 million less in operational funding for the coming year than was needed in 2023-24 and failing to account for increases in the negotiated agreement with hospital employees.

For reference, Mr. Speaker, I will give the numbers from the government's own budget documents. In the 2023-24 second supplementary estimates tabled last week, they provided Yukon hospital services with an additional \$12.5 million in O&M funding for the current fiscal year. That

number can be found on page 10-4 of the second supplementary. This is after, I would note — the Yukon Party spent years questioning the amount of funding provided to hospitals and expressed concerns and, during a large portion of last year and last fall, pressing the government to provide the hospital with more resources and to address the deficit.

Despite the fact that the Minister of Health and Social Services claimed at the time, back in the fall, that the hospital was doing just fine, we see that they finally recognized that, indeed, the hospitals needed that additional \$12.5 million this year to meet their needs.

So, then we look at the 2024-25 main estimates for Health and Social Services showing the revised amount for the 2023-24 fiscal year of \$124.78 million in O&M for Yukon hospital services. That number can be found on page 13-4. According to the same page, the total O&M being provided for the 2024-25 fiscal year, the upcoming fiscal year, is \$110.41 million for Yukon hospital services. That is \$14.37 million less than the actual estimated O&M cost for the fiscal year that we are wrapping up, which, again, according to the government's own documents, shows as \$124.78 million.

However, the government made the outlandish claim in the budget highlights that they have increased hospital funding by \$15.3 million this year, which is quite misleading. They are comparing the current main estimates to last year's main estimates and glossing over the very important fact that this amount was almost \$30 million short of the actual O&M needs for Yukon hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, I would note as well that transfers from the federal government continue to grow every year, with the increase this year in the major federal transfers being \$101 million more than the territory received last year, and the previous year, the increase was \$83 million. Despite that, the government continues to spend beyond that growth in resources.

I want to talk briefly about a few areas that we are pleased to see. As I noted in my speech at second reading last year on the budget, we were pleased to see the government finally commit to developing a health human resources strategy. The Yukon Party has championed the need for a new health human resources strategy for years and we are pleased that the government finally has recognized the need for one. We are pleased to see work happening on it, but we do have some questions and concerns, including the lack of urgency received in that document, but we believe that it is very important for us to focus on training, recruiting, retaining, and supporting health care professionals.

We were also pleased to see the government provide resources to the Yukon Medical Association for physician recruitment. That, as you will recall, Mr. Speaker, is something that we have urged the government to do for years — that additional resources should be provided for physician recruitment — and we thank the Yukon Medical Association for their steps in taking the lead on this when government was failing to act and are pleased that the government did provide them with those resources.

We would also like to commend the Yukon Medical Association for their work toward developing a medical residency program and are pleased to see that the government has agreed to support that as well.

We are also pleased to see increased resources for the RCMP. You will recall that we have pushed for that for quite some time and brought forward a motion last year, that passed, urging the government to provide more resources to the RCMP. But, Mr. Speaker, a few major areas that the Liberals are neglecting include Yukoners' health care needs, the opioid and toxic drug crisis that has caused the loss of our fellow citizens at the worst rate per capita in the country, and an increase in organized crime and the illegal drug trade, while RCMP resources did not grow sufficiently to meet them. Again, we are pleased to see some increase for this year, but still, overall under the Liberals' watch, the growth in RCMP resources has not even kept up with the population growth.

We have also seen the growth of energy demand outpacing supply while the government fans the flames to increase demand and rents more portable diesels at a cost of tens of millions of dollars. A lack of access to firewood and logs for homebuilding continues to be a problem. There continue to be major failures in our education system. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the list goes on and on and on.

Thousands of Yukoners do not have a family doctor and the wait-list for a doctor continues to grow. Under the Liberals, we also saw Whitehorse General Hospital having to cancel surgeries and cut the number of surgeries due to their financial shortages, struggling as well with staff shortages.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to see a lack of action by this government on addictions treatment, despite the fact that our opioid and substance abuse crisis is worse here per capita than in British Columbia. Again, the Yukon Party continues to emphasize that we believe that any action plan for dealing with the substance use crisis should have as its number one goal helping as many people as possible break free of their addictions and live healthy lives.

We also see health care wait times grow for special services and for necessary procedures. We saw the rate of vacancies for rural nursing hit an unprecedented 47 percent, thanks to the Minister of Health and Social Services. We were pleased to see that the standby pay for rural EMS was finally increased. I would note that we have called for that multiple times and are pleased that the government did finally recognize that an increase in that area was needed.

Of course, in the area of energy policy, we see that the Liberals' planned projects are all either totally derailed or behind schedule and experiencing large cost overruns.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I do want to, before closing, raise an issue that is of great importance for my constituents, that being the Takhini River bridge on the Mayo Road. While I am pleased that the government has allocated \$8.5 million for the project, based on the statements that the government has made to date, it is not clear whether the government is actually addressing the number one issue that people raise about this bridge.

To be clear, Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated to the minister in correspondence, the number one issue that people

raise about the Takhini River bridge on the Mayo Road is how dangerous this narrow bridge is for vehicle traffic. Whether the bridge is widened or replaced with a new bridge, my constituents want a bridge that has a wider road width for motor vehicles. Any project that does not include widening the vehicle lanes on the Takhini River bridge will miss dealing with the number one public concern and priority. In addition to accidents, people frequently report close calls and dangerous situations involving vehicles meeting on this narrow bridge. I would note that during a press conference about it, the Minister of Community Services acknowledged this problem, calling the bridge a “dangerous crossing”.

Again, I hope that the government will clarify the public consultation process, the timelines for that, and commit to ensuring that the project will include widening the road surface of the Takhini River bridge, whether that is widening the existing bridge or replacing it with a new one.

With that, Mr. Speaker, as I noted in the interest of progressing through debate, we will not be long in speaking to this at the outset. I will wrap up my comments here and look forward to providing other comments and asking questions as we engage in departmental debate and during Question Period.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this afternoon to respond to Bill No. 213, the first appropriation act for the 2024-25 fiscal year.

On Thursday, our Liberal government presented our clear focus, which is improving the lives of all Yukoners. This government is tackling the rising costs of living. We are investing significantly in our health care system and our children through the education system. We are investing significant resources and continuing to improve our infrastructure. This government is demonstrating leadership on the critical issues of climate change and its effects on our lives in the north as well as the substance use health emergency that many in our various communities are dealing with.

Mr. Speaker, we are extremely fortunate to call the Yukon home. We have a strong economy, some of the highest wages in Canada, and the lowest unemployment rate in all of Canada. We are the envy of many. Yukon is a sought-after place to live, work, and visit. This is why many of us have made the Yukon home.

The budget that this Liberal government has tabled in this Spring Sitting aims to ensure that the benefits of our growing Yukon economy are extended to all Yukoners. Through this budget, our Liberal government upholds and embraces the values and priorities that are important to Yukoners. This budget provides approximately \$484 million in planned capital spending for fiscal year 2024-25 and approximately \$1.6 billion in operation and maintenance spending. This budget is strongly guided by making life more affordable for Yukoners, looking after each other, and investing in our collective future while advancing reconciliation.

Mr. Speaker, as Yukon’s Minister of Highways and Public Works and Yukon’s Minister of Environment, in this speech, I will focus on the dedicated, innovative, and responsive work

that these two departments have been doing for Yukoners. I will start today with the Department of Environment.

In the 2024-25 main estimates, the Department of Environment capital and operation and maintenance budget is \$62.23 million. When compared to the 2023-24 estimates, this represents an increase of approximately \$770,000, which is a 1.3-percent increase. The operation and maintenance budget is approximately \$55.6 million, with \$11.8 million being recoverable. For this department, the capital estimate for this budget is approximately \$6.6 million, with almost \$1 million being fully recoverable. Compared to last year, this represents a \$2.58-million increase. For this year’s budget, we expect to receive over \$15.4 million in recoveries and revenue. Other recoveries — \$12.6 million — are from the federal government. Mr. Speaker, as indicated, this is a total of \$15.4 million in recoveries out of a total budget of \$62.23 million. The Department of Environment showcases the efforts that our government is taking to reduce the impact on Yukon’s fiscal framework while still advancing our goals and objectives.

A major part of the work done by the Department of Environment revolves around the climate change emergency. This is one of the most defining challenges facing humanity today. In this regard, I would like to acknowledge the Yukon NDP for seeing eye to eye with the Liberal government on the importance of addressing the climate change crisis.

It isn’t always clear what the Official Opposition’s position is, but they definitely appear to be strong proponents of fossil fuel and want this government to build more diesel plants.

Our government takes the climate change crisis seriously and is active on multiple fronts. This is reflected strongly through our actions and investments.

Mr. Speaker, last year, we saw the catastrophic effects of a warming north, with forest fires and extremely and actually debilitatingly smoky conditions in Yellowknife, Mayo, and Old Crow.

Over the course of the summer of 2023, at one point in time, approximately one half of the Northwest Territories’ population was forced to evacuate at one point or another. I had the opportunity to speak with Deputy Premier Wawzonek recently in person, and she certainly related the concerns that existed in the Northwest Territories in dealing with that crisis last year. This issue is occurring now and we are not burying our heads in the sand, as we continue to deal with climate records being shattered in all hemispheres.

The plan guiding our action is the *Our Clean Future* strategy. This is an evolving strategy that we are updating and constantly working on as we adapt to this global crisis. Our actions in the *Our Clean Future* strategy are on two main fronts: adaptation and building up the Yukon’s resilience to the subtle but also the not so subtle and devastating impacts of climate change. The other focus is reducing our greenhouse gas emissions so that we can play our part in the effort to slow climate change and to protect the environment.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite Yukoners to visit the Internet website that tracks our progress as we tackle the goals and objectives set out in the *Our Clean Future*

strategy. The site is <https://our-clean-future.service.yukon.ca/>. There are lots of forward slashes and dots in there, but I am sure that Yukoners will be able to find that. It has useful charts and visual aids that illustrate the hard work that we are doing and the challenging path forward.

Yukoners have been clear that they identify climate change as a pressing issue and actually as an emergency. Our government has heard them loud and clear. In the main estimates for the department, approximately \$1.25 million of additional funds for the work that we are doing on climate change preparedness has been dedicated. One-half of a million dollars will be supporting our Climate Change Secretariat, which is the team that is leading our response to climate change. It is their responsibility to coordinate our activities on this front and to develop our policies and strategies.

This budget also includes half a million dollars of funding for a mobile incident response team that will support upgrades to aging emergency response infrastructure in Carmacks and to develop tools and guidance in order to ensure that climate hazards are reflected in the planning and in the maintenance of Government of Yukon buildings.

I am proud to say that both the funding for the Climate Change Secretariat and the mobile incident response team are fully recoverable from the Government of Canada. We are also doing this work in the Department of Highways and Public Works as we look at retrofits, alternate and innovative heating solutions, solar upgrades, and much more.

As minister of both Highways and Public Works and Environment, I know that these departments work hard to ensure that our buildings and infrastructure are resilient to the climate change crisis that we are facing. The front-end investment may be high, but it is abundantly clear that the more we work on the resilience of our infrastructure that we do complete, the more money will be saved in the future. The science on the effects of climate change is real. Ocean temperatures are breaking records; the threat of wildfires is significant and does appear to be increasing; we are facing a biodiversity crisis; and in the Yukon, we continue to deal with increased landslides, flooding, and highway washouts as well. We must continue to plan and prepare for and reduce the impacts of future climate events that could jeopardize our health, safety, and way of life in the Yukon.

One of the impacts of climate change that we are facing in the Yukon is flooding in our communities across the territory. In the next few years, we are mapping the flood hazards for 14 flood-prone communities. These communities include Carcross, Tagish, Marsh Lake, Lake Laberge, Teslin, Old Crow, Ross River, Dawson City, the Klondike Valley, Mayo, Upper Liard, Pelly Crossing, and the City of Whitehorse.

This winter, we released the maps for the communities in the Southern Lakes district and the Village of Carmacks. These maps will map out different scenarios for flooding and will assist us in understanding the potential effects and guiding our government, First Nation governments, municipalities, and private citizens in building more resilient communities. Through these efforts, we will be more prepared to mitigate the risks and respond in the most effective manner possible. Soon

we will be releasing the “what we heard” report as it relates to those draft flood maps for Carmacks and the Southern Lakes. The next community that we are focusing on is Teslin. Very soon, we will be reaching out to the Teslin Tlingit Council, Village of Teslin, and Teslin residents in order to receive their feedback. We will continue to invest in this important work in the next fiscal year with an additional \$316,000. This sum is fully recoverable through an agreement with the federal government, again underscoring the effective efforts that the department is engaged in to secure stable funding. After Teslin, we will be focusing on Old Crow, Dawson City, and the Klondike Valley. We know that, in fact, we did experience some very significant impacts last spring in those communities. A shout-out to all of the citizens of Old Crow, Dawson City, and those in the Klondike Valley for the work and diligence — sometimes on an hour-by-hour basis — in order to combat the flooding and threats to infrastructure that occurred in those three areas.

Finally, an important aspect of this work is aligning this work with the important work that is being done at the Yukon’s Department of Community Services through the Emergency Measures Organization, as Community Services is the lead when it comes to the preparation, mitigation, and response to flooding. There is strong communication that exists between Community Services, Environment, and Highways and Public Works. There have certainly been incidents where resources have been brought to bear in order to aid the response to flooding, landslides, and fire. We anticipate that this seamless relationship will continue going forward.

Mr. Speaker, waste management and recycling are fundamental as well. We know that they are vital for Yukoners. They want solutions that reduce waste and build greener communities. The work of the department reflects these values. Our government is committed to increasing waste diversion to 40 percent, and we are taking steps to make that a reality. We are, in fact, working in the right direction. In 2022, the diversion rate in Whitehorse was estimated at approximately 30 percent; in 2020, that rate was estimated at approximately 25 percent.

Working with our partners in achieving this goal is critical if we want to move toward an efficient and cost-effective waste-diversion system. To reach this goal, as set out in *Our Clean Future*, we are working on the implementation of an extended producer responsibility framework by 2025. Extended producer responsibility aims to shift the cost of recycling from individuals and communities to the producers of packaging and hazardous waste.

At the beginning of this year, the so-called EPR regulations came into force. Mr. Speaker, every province either has a fully implemented extended producer responsibility program or is in the process of implementing such a program. I am certainly excited to report to Yukoners that the Yukon has demonstrated leadership by becoming the first Canadian jurisdiction north of 60 to adopt this framework. While the specific details of the Yukon’s new waste management approach will be determined during the stewardship plan development period — a critical step in implementation — Yukoners can expect the same or

better access to waste collection and recovery services as they have now.

Mr. Speaker, the work that I have described above is only one part of the department's work. Another key aspect of the Department of Environment's work is to protect and conserve new areas of the Yukon to support Indigenous leadership and conservation, to monitor and protect species at risk, and to support the protection and conservation of lands and waters.

While reducing greenhouse gas emissions is a central goal of this government, another critical goal is protecting and conserving lands and habitats, specifically the goal of conserving 25 percent of the Yukon's land by 2025 and creating a pathway to 30 percent by 2030.

The Government of Yukon recently reported setting aside or conserving an additional 1.8 percent of land within the Yukon to bring our current total to 21.1 percent under the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database. The Yukon is a Canadian leader in conservation, but we, of course, can be better.

Our government will continue to work with Indigenous partners, including Yukon First Nations and transboundary Indigenous governments and groups, in order to advance conservation initiatives. Our Liberal government will continue to plan for the future and to ensure the responsible management and sustainable use of our lands and resources for future generations.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to the responsible management of wildlife, maintaining healthy populations while ensuring ample harvest opportunities for the future. In order to achieve this, we have a strong team of experienced biologists and harvest experts collecting data so that the Department of Environment can make scientifically based, informed decisions on the management of the iconic species that we share this land with.

We are in frequent discussions with our co-management partners, with Yukon First Nations, and with all other stakeholders who want to see responsible and sensible management of harvest. It is critical that we strive to honour our commitments to respect First Nation rights and jurisdiction and the provisions of the Yukon's modern treaties. This is, of course, true in many manners of topics but particularly with respect to the management and determination of harvest.

I will now briefly touch upon the work that we are doing with respect to the *Animal Protection and Control Act*. This new act is a comprehensive, modern, and enforceable legal framework that will manage animal protection and control in the Yukon through higher standards of care than previously existed. This new act includes permits and inspections of animal-related businesses, expands enforcement tools to address high-risk and feral animals, and can empower deputy officers to take action. This act was passed by this House in the fall of 2022, at which point, the department continued to engage with Yukoners on the development of regulations. I have full confidence in the scope and depth of the consultation that has occurred and I have reviewed the consultation record, guided by the strong leadership of the chief veterinary officer on this

file. I am looking forward to this legislation coming into force and effect this year.

Mr. Speaker, before moving on to the Department of Highways and Public Works, I will talk a little bit about camping, which, of course, is near and dear to Yukoners' hearts and is an absolute pleasure to be enjoyed by national and international guests as well.

The department is doing significant innovative and creative work to improve the experience for both Yukoners and national and international visitors. The department currently maintains 57 territorial parks, including 42 campgrounds with over 1,100 campsites, 12 recreation sites, and natural environment parks. Guided by our parks strategy, we aim to strengthen campground networks and to enhance camping experiences.

In 2024-25, we plan to redesign the Tatchun Lake campground in a way that honours and celebrates the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation through language, signage, and education events. We also plan to enhance the campground by adding 26 new drive-in campsites, five walk-in campsites, and an improved day-use and trail system. We are also investing \$450,000 to support work for the Teslin boat launch and parking lot redesign, the construction of the Nunatak boat launch, and the new Kusawa park dock system. We are working to formalize 10 new sites at Snafu campground this year and four new sites at the Ethel Lake campground.

As Yukoners may have heard recently at a press conference, we are piloting a campsite reservation system for 50 percent of the sites at four front-country campsites: Pine Lake, Marsh Lake, Wolf Creek, and Tombstone Mountain. This pilot is designed in a way that responds to the expressed will of Yukoners to test this type of system in the Yukon, but it will also help determine if this is a model that works for the Yukon going forward.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention the conservation officers who encounter a wide range of challenges and risks in their work reducing human-wildlife conflict and ensuring that our communities are safe for everyone.

The Conservation Officer Services branch coordinates responses, community and stakeholder engagement, training, and leading investigations into serious human-wildlife conflict incidents. Last year, the Department of Environment responded to 180 black bear calls and 54 grizzly bear calls; 11 black bears and three grizzly bears were translocated; and unfortunately, 29 black bears and 11 grizzly bears were euthanized due to human conflict. Mr. Speaker, unsecured garbage and bird seed accounted for 51 percent of attractants involved in conflicts with bears. I will close the Department of Environment with a call to Yukoners to do their part to reduce human-wildlife conflicts and with praise to our busy and professional conservation officers as they face another season, sometimes risking their own safety to keep us all safe.

I will now move on to the work of the Department of Highways and Public Works. The Department of Highways and Public Works builds and maintains resilient infrastructure, our transportation network, and government infrastructure for the benefit of Yukoners. The work that they do is essential and

critical. This is immediately felt when we have closures and disruptions. Highways and Public Works does this by investing in our transportation infrastructure and by providing building maintenance, information technology, government procurement, and our fleet vehicle program. These projects span from designing and maintaining safe and effective transportation systems, like roads, bridges, and airports, to implementing new technologies that increase the efficiency and accessibility of government services.

From building fibre lines, airports, bridges, schools, monitoring truck traffic, vehicle registration, plowing the roads in the winter and grading in the summer, and so much more, the work that the department does is wide ranging. Just briefly, some highlights of some of the budgetary allotments in the 2024-25 budget — Highways and Public Works is allocating \$9.5 million to building maintenance, projects such as: approximately \$1 million for the Golden Horn Elementary School fire panel replacement; slightly more than \$1 million for the completion of the Selkirk Elementary School sidewalk and landscaping; \$100,000 for flooring replacement at Takhini Elementary and also at the Tantalus School classroom in Carmacks; \$1 million for the upgrades to the Whitehorse Correctional Centre for a kitchen; almost \$700,000 on upgrades to the Yukon Justice Centre firewall and exterior accessibility area; and over \$200,000 for upgrades to the septic systems at the Ross River Health Centre.

Another important line item under division is approximately \$3.2 million under building overhead. This funds the planning, programming, designing, and constructing of facilities to meet the needs of programs. This can include upgrades to buildings across the territory that are under \$50,000 each, do not require design work, and are completed within a year. Some of these projects include: flooring replacement at the Dawson visitor reception centre, a backup generator replacement at the Pelly Crossing Health Centre, a fuel tank replacement at the Beaver Creek Health Centre, designs for the Watson Lake Secondary School boiler replacement, and the Yukon Archives chiller upgrade.

Another notable line under this division is building development. Here, we are investing on behalf of HPW \$1.2 million in demolition, such as the 205 Rogers group home and the living quarters in Swift River and Stewart Crossing. Other allocations are: \$300,000 for the ongoing old territorial building retrofit in Dawson City that, combined with retrofits that have occurred in prior years and will occur in subsequent years, will add over 20 years of expected life to the building — hopefully more.

For energy retrofit projects in fiscal 2024-25, the primary project is the replacement of the roof of the Yukon University, which is being done over the course of three fiscal years. In this year, it is \$7.3 million, of which \$5.5 million is recoverable from the Government of Canada through the small communities fund. Finally under this division, I am also proud to report that approximately \$12 million is budgeted to the green infrastructure program, which includes allocations of \$800,000 for the Haines Junction biomass district energy system and a little more than \$6.5 million for solar installations

at the Ogilvie, Klondike, Blanchard, and Tuchitua grader stations. We anticipate that the Klondike and Ogilvie solar installations will become active in the late spring, offsetting hundreds of thousands of litres of diesel in a given year, and that the Blanchard and Tuchitua grader stations projects will proceed this summer. These are indeed exciting times for those green infrastructure program eligible projects.

We are also building new and resilient infrastructure to serve Yukoners now and long into the future. I have the honour and privilege, with some of my colleagues, of recently touring the Whistle Bend school and can certainly report that it is a state-of-the-art, modern-day learning space with many interesting, significant, and noteworthy design features. I know that the students who will start using this facility next fall will be in for a wonderful — I wouldn't say "surprise" — but a wonderful experience at the Whistle Bend school, which will form a bit of an anchor in the Whistle Bend community and provide students with the ability to — it is hoped — walk or bike or otherwise travel to this community school.

As well, the new health centre and tenplex in Old Crow will also soon be open to serve residents of Old Crow. That was certainly also a notable project, not without challenges, but it is substantially complete now.

The department is also in charge of the Fleet Vehicle Agency. We are responsible for vehicles for government use, such as vehicles for conservation and natural resources officers, wildland fire personnel, community nurses, and social workers. We are adding substantially zero-emission vehicles to the fleet and promoting sustainable vehicle options wherever possible. We have added 47 hybrid or full-battery electric vehicles to the fleet and have been using them across the territory. Mail and courier services are now using two electric cargo vans to deliver parcels and letters between the Yukon government and other agencies.

In that regard, I would like to thank the mail and courier services team who provide reliable, confidential, and timely delivery of material between communities, other departments, and agencies.

I had the honour of getting a tour of the mail and courier services facility in this building and meeting with all staff. I also had the opportunity to do a brief tour with one of the new vans. I certainly thank them for being early adopters. I would say that the report card on the performance was good. Of course, cold weather performance will always be an issue, but generally speaking, it is fit for the purpose of delivering mail within the City of Whitehorse. We plan to continue to build our electric fleet in 2024 with the aim of electrifying approximately 10 percent of our entire fleet by early 2025 to either full-battery electric, plug-in electric, or hybrid vehicles.

Yukon's aviation system is essential for connecting our communities, building our economy, and linking the Yukon with the rest of the world. Our government continues to make strategic investments to keep our aerodromes and airports safe and open for business for many years to come. The Department of Highways and Public Works has made significant investments in aviation over the past few years and this year is no exception, including upgrades to equipment and facilities.

The \$160.7-million contract to reconstruct the main runway at the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport was awarded to Flatiron Construction Canada Limited on May 19, 2023. This work is part of, in total, a \$258-million program to improve the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport infrastructure. The federal government is contributing approximately \$186 million through the national trade corridors fund, with the Yukon government funding the remaining \$72 million. In this budget, we are committing \$75 million to make these necessary infrastructure upgrades in this fiscal year. Of this investment, \$56 million is recoverable through the federal national trade corridors fund.

I had the honour and privilege of attending at the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport within the last month or so — with the federal Minister of Transport Pablo Rodriguez, Kwanlin Dün First Nation Chief Sean Smith, Ta'an Kwäch'än Chief Amanda Leas, Mayor Laura Cabott, and Yukon MP Brendan Hanley — where these funding contributions were confirmed. They had been confirmed before, but the Minister of Transport Rodriguez was able to attend in Yukon and meet with us at that time.

Major reconstruction work will begin on the main runway in this upcoming 2024 construction season. Work is expected to include reconstruction of the north half of the runway surface, which will include rubblization of the existing asphalt and concrete surface, placing a new base material and placing new asphalt pavement, installation of new edge lighting, installation of a storm drainage system, construction of a new taxiway F, and adjustments to the north perimeter service road.

For this project, of course, it is important for our government to work with Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council by entering into community development agreements on this work so that both self-governing First Nations can maximize socio-economic benefits such as employment, subcontracting, training and workforce development, and providing both materials and services. Certainly, this government is committed to continuing the ongoing dialogue with both Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council during the course of this project, which is scheduled to be substantially complete by the end of 2025, with some work to be finished in the spring of 2026.

I will move to the topic of procurement. I can advise that, in recent fiscal years, on average, the government procures approximately \$370 million in goods and services for Yukoners. This includes construction contracts on major infrastructure projects like schools and bridges, buying new equipment that keeps our roads clear, our airports functioning, and our health care and education systems supported, and making sure that our environment is protected and that our justice system is working.

The Procurement Support Centre sits at Highways and Public Works and guides all procurement occurring within government. The office is always working to improve the way that procurement happens in the Yukon.

The Procurement Support Centre works to bring social and ethical procurement to the forefront of government purchasing by integrating sustainability into our processes wherever

possible. The job of the Procurement Support Centre is critical in order to ensure that the Yukon maintains and builds a thriving and fair economy.

I will now speak of the significant investments that we have in the budget for our roads and bridges. We rely upon our highways, bridges, airports, and ferries. These transportation systems connect us to necessities like groceries and medical appointments, our loved ones, and even economic benefits from the tourism and mining industries. We are making sure that our infrastructure is resilient to meet the varying needs of Yukoners, and this is becoming more and more challenging as we face climate change impacts.

The operation and maintenance of transportation is significant, at approximately \$71 million. The Transportation division employs almost 400 Yukoners who work across the territory in order to keep our transportation systems running. They maintain almost 5,000 kilometres of roads. On top of the roads, our crews inspect and maintain 136 bridges, 267 large structural culverts, and over 7,000 smaller drainage culverts. The capital component of this division stands at \$195 million for 2024-25.

Looking more closely at some of these capital investments, we are investing \$2.3 million in our transportation asset management system so that we can define service levels and develop tools, resources, and procedures to monitor the condition and performance of transportation infrastructure. We are investing half a million dollars in building and improving safety rest areas, which are the highway rest areas. We are investing \$150,000 in a Dempster Highway corridor plan for the provision of engineering services to develop plans to use and prioritizing services and infrastructure changes to the highway.

Thank you for the opportunity to highlight some of the important work that is being done by the Department of Environment and the Department of Highways and Public Works. I would like to salute the public service and staff in my departments who work hard year-round to provide services to Yukoners.

Our government is continuing to prioritize investments that will positively impact Yukoners today and for many years into the future while upholding values that are important to them, whether it is completing the Dempster fibre line, ongoing, exciting work on the Nisutlin Bay bridge, totally revitalizing the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport main runway and parallel runway, and the various other exciting infrastructure projects that are being done. I thank —

Deputy Speaker (Ms. Blake): Order.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Deputy Speaker: Before we proceed, under introduction of visitors outside of proceedings, I would like to welcome Bruce Charlie to the gallery, who is a constituent from Vuntut Gwitchin.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to reply to the 2024-25 budget tabled by the Minister of Finance on March 7.

As the minister stated, this budget has been designed to enhance the lives of Yukoners and address our territory's growing needs. Throughout the budget, you will see initiatives to tackle the rising cost of living, foster healthy communities through infrastructure, addressing the housing needs, investing in health care and education, among many other highlights. I really encourage Yukoners to have a look at the budget; look at the highlights that have been provided. There is a tremendous amount of information contained in these documents, and I encourage Yukoners to see themselves in the budget that was tabled last week.

As well, through this budget, we will actively be addressing the substance use health emergency, changing the story to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit+ people, responding to the climate crisis, and continuing our commitment to reconciliation.

My roles in the community and with this government are very important to me. I was first elected as the MLA for Mountainview in 2016 and I remain very proud to represent my constituents. I am proud to accept the responsibility of Deputy Premier, Minister of Education, and Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate.

I value my role in my life as a dedicated auntie to many nieces and nephews, many of whom go to our public schools and/or early learning childcare or advanced education. I am dedicated to my incredibly supportive husband, Rick McLean, who is always there to support me and I think support the work of our government. I am a very proud parent to Colin and Jedrek Dendys. I'm so proud of my sons and what they have accomplished and how they continue to help build this territory and contribute to it in important ways.

I believe in the work of this government. I remain very committed to my work as an MLA. To the constituents of Mountainview, I thank them for continuing to support me as their MLA. We have had many accomplishments over the years, including upgrades to the Alaska Highway, which include new stoplights and safe turning lanes and widening them adjacent to part of my riding in Hillcrest. Of course, that impacts Granger, Mountainview, and Valleyview. I am very happy that those upgrades happened. Also, there are new playgrounds in the Kwanlin Dün First Nation community and, of course, the new building that they enjoy today. Our government was very happy and proud to support that work.

I would like to go into some of the responsibilities that I hold within government. I would like to start by reinforcing the importance of adequately funded educational systems, including supports for early learning and adult learners. Education plays a crucial role in individual, societal, and economic development. A well-funded educational system is important for many reasons, including quality. An education system must be funded in order to hire qualified staff, provide relevant and modern resources, and keep facilities maintained and updated. I am proud that our government is ensuring a high quality of education for students in the Yukon.

Inclusivity and accessibility — as you will see in our budget, inclusivity and accessibility are key priorities for us. Our goal is to reduce disparity between students and ensure that education is more accessible and that every student has a chance to succeed. You will see this throughout the educational spectrum, through early learning subsidies and grants through to K to 12 education, as we work to make schools more inclusive, and all the way into grants and other supports for adult learners.

Our government is committed to building new, modern learning facilities. The way students learn is changing and we need our school environments to reflect these changes. As you will see, the 2024-25 budget supports important school capital projects such as the Whistle Bend Elementary School. I'm very excited to see the completion of that school this year and we look forward to seeing students in that school in August of this year.

Replacing École Whitehorse Elementary School — again, it's one of our oldest schools in the territory. The planning for this facility is moving forward and is reflected in our five-year capital budget. The building of the Kêts'ádañ Kù, the new house of learning, in Burwash Landing — this is a 100-year commitment that is so long overdue. It's absolutely a major part of reconciliation with Yukon First Nations.

I would like to thank the Minister of Highways and Public Works for the overview on the many other infrastructure upgrades throughout the Yukon. We will certainly be hearing a lot about those upgrades and various projects throughout this Sitting and beyond.

Education is linked to economic growth. Well-funded, quality systems result in workforces that are more skilled, innovative, and adaptable, contributing to Yukon's economic prosperity. Education has many programs to prepare students to contribute to the Yukon's workforce. I also make that connection to the work that we are doing with women and gender equity, particularly the work around missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit+ people. One of the pathways to address violence against Indigenous women is through education and economic development. There are a lot of connections to my two major portfolios. I always work hard to make those very distinct connections.

Our budget supports our work to ensure all families have access to high quality early learning and childcare that is affordable, accessible, and inclusive. Our 2024-25 budget supports the continuation of our childcare subsidy. As of November 30, 2023, there were 1,834 children and their families benefiting from universal childcare, saving up to \$8,400 a year per child enrolled in licensed programs.

The universal childcare program, when combined with the subsidy program for lower income earners, means some families have no out-of-pocket expenses for childcare. Additionally, teen parents continuing their education and grandparents with primary responsibility for their grandchildren receive free childcare.

We also administer a supported childcare program that provides funding for licensed programs for additional supports for children who need them. Providing greater access to early

learning and childcare programs that are affordable, accessible, and inclusive reduces barriers to entering the workforce and ensures proper supports are in place for families when parents are returning to work.

The 2024-25 budget supports our work to continue to improve quality in early learning environments by increasing wages for educators to some of the highest in Canada, increasing bursaries available for educator learning and development, introducing funding for operators to access comprehensive health insurance benefits, and increasing our funding for programs and cultural supports to enhance early learning programs.

We provide wage enhancements for more than 500 early childhood educators and provide funding to all licensed programs to reduce operational and administrative expenses and support program needs.

As of October 1, 2023, the program had extended \$6.9 million in wage enhancements and benefits. The total investment this year — for the 2024-25 year — will be \$42.5 million. These are historic amounts in terms of our supports for our littlest Yukoners.

The 2024-25 budget supports the day-to-day operations of 35 public schools and educational programs across the territory. We provide K to 12 education for almost 6,000 students in the Yukon. As of January 2024, we had just under 5,000 students enrolled in the Whitehorse schools and just over 1,000 students in our community schools.

There are 587.3 teaching positions allocated to schools across the Yukon. The Human Resource Services branch and the Schools and Student Services division are implementing enhanced marketing for recruitment, participating more widely at career and job fairs, and providing supplementary funds for rural teachers where housing is not available and enhanced onboarding and training for staff.

Our commitment to the health and safety of students and staff includes ongoing maintenance of all facilities, addressing both routine and emergency needs regardless of the building's age. We ensure regular preventive maintenance throughout the school year with a focus on minimizing disruptions to school activities. Maintenance tasks affecting school programs are planned during closure times like winter, spring, and summer breaks wherever feasible. We work closely with Highways and Public Works and the school administrators to identify areas in need of maintenance. These efforts help to ensure that we have a healthy and safe environment for students.

We are also proud to offer experiential learning programs across several Yukon schools. The objective of these programs is to give students an opportunity to learn through experience. Each program operates as a school within a school. This model allows each program to have their own unique schedule and learning objectives. These initiatives reflect our commitment to a holistic and inclusive approach to education rooted in respect for and understanding of Yukon First Nation culture and knowledge.

The department continues to work to enhance inclusivity and supports across the territory for both students and educators. We are continuing to increase the allocation of

educational assistants and learning assistance teachers, as well as working to implement the school wellness specialist roles in the schools. This is all important work in setting up our students for success and we're proud to be doing this together with our partners.

Student Support Services has enhanced its service delivery model for psychological assessments and consultations, thereby providing more accessible and efficient supports for students. In fact, between January 2023 and January 2024, we have completed 138 psychological educational assessments. This is a huge achievement that is due in large part to the dedication shown each and every day by staff at the department and staff at the school level.

The Ready-to-Learn Schools initiative is continuing to expand across the territory. Ready-to-Learn Schools is an approach that provides positive social change and well-being for all students and staff. Eventually, these responsive instructional approaches will be implemented into all Yukon schools. To date, the department has received final recommendations from seven out of the eight communities of inquiry. Throughout the upcoming year, the department will focus on analyzing the recommendations and subsequently presenting them to our partners.

We are working with partners across government, non-governmental organizations, educators, and others to update the guidelines and procedures to ensure that staff have the information and training they need. The Department of Education is developing a comprehensive mental health and wellness approach. This is an important part of the overall work that we are doing to reimagine inclusive and special education. We are taking a holistic approach to mental health and wellness, focusing on preventing issues and promoting mental health. Additionally, the approach will provide support and intervention both in and out of school when needed. An important aspect of this work is that the approach will be developmentally and culturally responsive.

The 2024-25 budget will fund continued support for eligible students pursuing post-secondary education. The Yukon grant continues to be a significant and meaningful funding program supporting Yukon students to study at Yukon University and designated institutions anywhere in the world. Students can receive up to 170 weeks of funding over their lifetime if they meet the eligibility requirements at the time of application. The Yukon grant is calculated on a weekly basis of \$167 per week and is paid out in two lump sum payments. For a full academic school year of 34 weeks, from September to April, a student will receive approximately \$5,700.

If attending school outside of the territory, a student may be eligible for travel in the amount of \$1,500. Students from Yukon communities may also be eligible for extra travel amounts. As of February 23, 2024, hard-working student financial assistance officers processed and issued payments to 732 Yukon grant applicants. As of February 23, 2024, there are currently 100 Yukoners attending Yukon University who are receiving the Yukon grant as well.

Mr. Speaker, the budget also supports our apprenticeship program. This program provides flexible support and training

opportunities for Yukoners pursuing in-demand, diverse, and meaningful careers in skilled trades and technology. The Department of Education budgets over \$2.5 million toward supporting apprentices annually. Yukon apprentices have access to a robust and comprehensive support program. These supports include tuition and seat fees through Yukon government's agreements with Yukon University and Alberta apprenticeship and funding supports through Yukon government's Working Up program to cover the costs not eligible under employment insurance while taking technical training, which also may include funding for travel, books, commuting, a second residence, living allowance, and even daycare costs, eligibility for employment insurance through the Government of Canada loans and grants to support all stages of the apprenticeship journey, including equity-deserving groups and red seal completion.

In addition to the financial support, Yukon apprentices have access to the virtual learning strategy program to support their diverse learning needs, tutoring, and exam preparation. It is exciting to see the apprenticeship growing in the Yukon. There was an increase of 126 new apprentices in 2023.

The student training and employment program — or STEP — wages remain available and are budgeted for within this 2024-25 budget. This is an important program that will continue to be available to employers within the Yukon. I look forward to discussing that more during Committee of the Whole. I would think that we may have opportunity to discuss that program there.

The Working Up program, which provides broad financial support for individuals to advance toward their career goals, is also offered through the training programs unit. Since April 1, 2022, there have been more than 450 individuals supported through this program. The funding supports individuals seeking upgrading for more vocational training, including apprenticeship, foundational, and essential skills, accommodations for persons with disabilities, and may cover training costs for programs that are not covered by other programs.

Yukon First Nation governments are key partners in supporting First Nation students and in teaching all Yukon students about Yukon First Nation ways of knowing, doing, and being. The establishment of the First Nation School Board is enabling Yukon First Nations to reclaim greater responsibility for the administration of education programs in their communities, and I am pleased that 11 schools are now governed by the First Nation School Board.

We also work with First Nations on a government-to-government basis through community-level education and funding agreements. An excellent example of this is the relationship between the Yukon government and the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation to implement section 17.7 of their self-government agreement and the work underway toward co-governance education within their traditional territory.

The Department of Education is committed to the decolonization of education and supporting the revitalization of Indigenous languages in Yukon schools. A key example of this is the training program that has been piloted in the 2023-24

school year for two Yukon First Nation educators to take paid professional development leave to further develop their skills and fluency in Yukon First Nation languages. We look forward to seeing how this program will improve language teaching in our classrooms.

I would like to move into some of the work that we are doing in the Women and Gender Equity Directorate. As the minister responsible for this important directorate within our government, I am proud to highlight the work that we are doing and the importance of this budget to ensure that all Yukoners have equal access to opportunities in our territory and society.

Gender equity is a matter of human rights. For women and gender-diverse people, it is about personal safety and bodily autonomy. Gender equity is one of the most important ways to ensure that we are building healthier and more prosperous communities for all Yukoners.

We are striving to create a more equal society by addressing gender-based violence and the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit+ people. We are also working to create equity for 2SLGBTQIA+ Yukoners. This work seems especially important now that we see some jurisdictions in Canada and internationally take steps backwards on gender equity. We are seeing an increase in transphobic rhetoric driven by misinformation and simply ignorance. In other parts of the world, we are seeing attacks on reproductive rights for women. We must continue fighting to protect the gains that we have made. We must continue advancing the rights of women, girls, and gender-diverse people in our territory.

You will see in the budget that missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit+ people are a priority for our government. I am grateful to the Yukon advisory committee for the work that they have done on *Changing the Story to Upholding Dignity and Justice: Yukon's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit+ People Strategy* as well as the implementation plan that was released in June of last year.

I am also proud of the approach that we have taken in the spirit of decolonization. We have worked in partnership with Yukon First Nations and Indigenous organizations, keeping families and survivors at the centre of everything we do. We have committed to two full-time positions to continue moving this work forward and to support action and accountability on the implementation plan. We are also funding the accountability forum, the Yukon advisory committee, and the Indigenous women's equity fund so that we can make a difference in the lives of Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit+ people.

No one should experience violence because of their gender or gender expression. Tragically, this is the case for many across the north. The rates of gender-based violence in Canada's north are unacceptable. They are three times higher than the rest of Canada and three times higher yet if you are an Indigenous woman. Through the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*, we have signed an agreement with Canada to address gender-based violence in the Yukon. Through this funding, we will enhance prevention and response

efforts toward ending gender-based violence. Our goal is to leverage this collaboration with the federal government and invest in meaningful actions to address gender-based violence in the Yukon and support the important work of the non-profit sector. As part of Yukon's implementation plan to end gender-based violence, the Yukon government is providing more than \$3.6 million — over two fiscal years, for 2023-24 and 2024-25 — in additional funding to 13 non-governmental organizations that are working to address gender-based violence in the Yukon.

We are committed to a vision of the Yukon as a place where everyone feels safe, welcomed, valued, and celebrated, including 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. We continue to support Queer Yukon with core funding. We are working with them to streamline funding and ensure that they have sustainable funding for the long term. Through the LGBTQ2S+ *Inclusion Action Plan*, we are making government programs and services more inclusive and accessible to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and two-spirit+ communities.

We have hired a full-time, dedicated person to help realize this plan and engage Yukon's 2SLGBTQIA+ community. We conducted a survey with the community this past fall to ask about our progress on the plan so far. I am looking forward to sharing a report on what we heard this spring.

Mr. Speaker, I am again very pleased to be able to rise today in the Legislative Assembly to talk about some of the work and highlights from the two departments that I work directly with, but I absolutely hold my hands up to all of my colleagues for the hard work and effort that we collectively put in to establish this important budget for Yukoners. I believe that Yukoners can feel proud of the government and the budget that is before us today. I also thank the New Democratic Party for their collaboration on important priorities in the Yukon. I think that, to quote other folks who say this quite often — Kluane Adamek says it on a regular basis — “We are a Yukon that leads”. I fully believe that and share our Assembly of First Nations regional chief's views on this.

I think that being at this stage in our mandate and continuing to work as a minority government and to work for Yukoners is a really important message that I hope that Yukoners can be proud of. They asked us all to come here to the Legislative Assembly to work together, and I think that, when I review and just reflect on the budget that is before us today, it is absolutely what we presented for Yukoners. I hope that every member of this Legislative Assembly will vote yes for this important budget to move the Yukon forward.

I thank you very much again for the opportunity to share some of these highlights and some of my thoughts as we move into this important Spring Sitting.

Ms. Blake: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the privilege to respond to this budget.

I continue to prioritize being present in my riding of Vuntut Gwitchin while also building connections to rural communities. As I continue to maintain connection and build relationships across many communities in our territory, I have the privilege of sitting in homes and with organizations to listen as folks

share their stories of their life experiences and the needs of not only themselves but also their families and communities. I am always reminded that no matter what path people may be on, many Yukoners face daily challenges in their lives and struggle with isolation.

I continue to hear the countless experiences each day of Yukoners who are not getting the services or support that they need. These people have expressed their concerns directly to me and this government. I continue to understand and be reminded that although many of us share similar experiences and challenges, the needs of every Yukoner are diverse and unique and that there is not one approach that can be expected to meet those needs. Yukoners' needs have grown and will continue to grow. The challenges that we see in our roles and in the communities also continue to grow.

I am grateful for the trusting relationships that I have with many families across the Yukon, especially with youth. When I travel home to Old Crow, there are a number of young people who will reach out to check in on me, visit, or take me out on the land to hunt. It is often during these times that the youth will share their stories and their struggles with me. I am always reminded in these times of vulnerability that the challenges faced by young people do not only impact youth who are vulnerable or living at risk. All children and youth are impacted one way or another. The young people, particularly the young boys in my home community of Old Crow, share their struggles and needs with me. They often remind me that the healing they find is out on the land. These are young boys who became hunters at the age of six or seven years old. They are the providers of our community. They are the ones who go out on the land regularly to hunt, cut wood, gather ice, snare rabbits, and hunt ducks and geese.

They return to our home community and deliver what they harvest to elders, single parents, and homes where people live with very little resources. It is folks like these young boys who display leadership and taking care of our communities, making sure that folks don't go without. When I sit with the young girls in our community, I am reminded of the resilience of our young Gwitchin women, and no matter what we go through in life, these young women continue to take on the roles as young aunties who are there not only to take care of our families but to lead our communities forward with the teachings of our past and present elders.

When I am out on the land with the youth, I am reminded of the great power of healing that we find in our traditional territory and along our river systems as young people today continue to uphold the sacred, traditional ways of our ancestors and all those who have come before us. When young people take care of their community through culture, they also support their mental health by getting out on the land. They also contribute to restoring family and community relationships while also maintaining their general health.

Our young people in the territory continue to be at an even greater risk of facing complex struggles in their lives and are tasked with overcoming the adverse challenges that are unique to youth in the territory today. It is something that many of us in this Chamber may at times struggle to understand. I am

thankful to the young people who continue to teach me, because I know that no matter what journey I am on, I will always have something to learn.

When I sit in homes with folks who invite me in for a visit, I continue to listen to their stories of trauma linked directly back to the Indian residential schools, Indian day schools, the Sixties Scoop, the impacts of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in our territory, and to the Millennium Scoop. This reminds me that a critical step of addressing crises like the substance use emergency is making sure that people don't fall through the cracks of government systems that should be there to support them. We need to ensure that folks who live in rural communities have access to opportunities, services, and supports. In the challenging times that we are in, I believe that there is a critical need to implement supports that can be delivered directly in people's homes where life begins and people live. Accessibility should prioritize building on systems in the community rather than making people leave their home environments to access supports or services that they need.

Recently, I had the privilege of sitting in homes with those who struggle with addiction. As I listened to their stories of grief, loss, abuse, and so many other challenges that they face on their journey, I was reminded about how we can become blind to the fact that people who use drugs, people who struggle with addictions, and those who are faced with selling drugs in order to support themselves continue to be stigmatized or ostracized across our communities. For me, this is something that is important to highlight. How are we working toward ensuring that supports are welcoming for all people, no matter what path they are on in their lives?

The more that we exclude people, we will not move ahead together, and there are many people who will continue to be left behind.

I also had the privilege of sitting in spaces with some of Yukon's most vulnerable people, who remind me of their importance of connection and belonging not only in our community but in our families and extended communities. When I spend time with service providers working across many government systems, I am reminded that there are many who have taken on the challenges of holding systems together with very limited supports in place. As we continue to move past the COVID-19 pandemic, I hear the impacts that this pandemic has had and continues to have on service providers and their mental and physical health. Of particular concern are the supports in place for educators, nurses, and social workers working in systems such as child welfare, hospitals, community health centres, and schools. I often hear that there is a need for better mental health supports that include conflict resolution and debriefing after difficult situations occur. It is simple measures of support like this that can prevent burnout, vicarious trauma, and quick departures of those who can no longer stay in their roles.

There are still thousands of Yukoners who do not have a family doctor, which means that many Yukoners continue to access health care at the emergency department here in Whitehorse. This continues to have a huge cost to hospital workers, to the hospital, and most of all to the people who must

wait for hours at the ER just for basic care. We also must remember that community health centres must also rely on the emergency department when they are not able to provide the care needed at a community health centre.

We all understand that equitable access to primary care physicians is a social determinant of health for all Yukoners, especially for new babies and the growing aging population.

The *Putting People First* report indicates that primary care should follow Yukoners from birth until death. When I am in communities, I continue to hear the stories of lack of — or very limited — access to physio services, psychologists, physicians, dental services, and optometry services. The reality is that folks in rural Yukon continue to have to rely on services centralized in Whitehorse.

Another area of concern that I continue to hear from rural communities is the limitation of withdrawal management supports available in rural communities. In my home community of Vuntut Gwitchin, I hear stories from folks living with addictions who continually indicate that they often struggle with withdrawal in isolation. There are heavy experiences of depression, psychosis, and hallucinations that they deal with on their own. I hear stories from folks who struggle with hand-sanitizer consumption. People have told me that their addiction to hand sanitizer is one of the most powerful addictions that they have experienced. When I hear these stories, I am reminded that the consumption of hand sanitizer does not only impact folks who live in rural Yukon but also here in Whitehorse. This area of concern is one that needs to be brought to the forefront, as service providers often share their concerns with how or what can be done to support those who are living with addiction to hand sanitizer.

I am also reminded on a daily basis, in conversations with those who reach out for support, that addictions are complex. There is still much work to be done to support service providers, communities, and non-profit organizations that do the hard work of supporting people living with addictions in rural communities and here in Whitehorse. This is one reason I am proud that we were able to ensure that this budget includes funding for the managed alcohol program; however, there is so much more we need to do, especially for rural communities.

I am also reminded that more work needs to be done to make withdrawal management supports and detox services available and accessible in rural Yukon, especially when there continues to be limited beds available at detox services within mental wellness services and ongoing pressures at the emergency department at Whitehorse General Hospital.

I regularly visit with people who are incarcerated at Whitehorse Correctional Centre. I hear from these people how hard they are trying to change their path in life and how many barriers exist to that happening. This reminds me of the need for our justice system to provide people with opportunities for growth and learning and to focus on restorative practices, no matter how they are involved in the justice system. I hear from people how they don't feel supported in reintegrating into the community. Adequate reintegration supports benefit everybody, not just the person incarcerated. When speaking with people at WCC, I hear stories of how poverty, addiction,

the child welfare system, homelessness, and abuse often led people to the situations that they are in.

We cannot understand someone else's story unless we take the time to listen. We must remember that no one is disposable and we all can grow, learn, and thrive if given the opportunity and supports needed.

As we are well aware, the substance use emergency continues to impact Yukoners while also continuing to take lives. There are many folks who have shared stories with me of their losses, with some families losing multiple people in the last few years. I am reminded that there is not one person in this territory who is not directly impacted by the substance use emergency. For some families and communities, this grief has been endless. I know that there has been much pressure on the government to address the challenges at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — challenges that have impacted businesses and those who live near the shelter. From time to time, I visit the shelter to check in on family and friends who rely on this important service. I see the hard work that staff do to support those who access this space. I also see the challenges that staff face as they continue to be dedicated to supporting folks at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. Despite the stigma that folks face at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, we need to remind ourselves that the staff and clients are a part of our community and a part of our families, many of whom are our brothers, our sisters, our aunties, our uncles, and our grandparents who deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.

It has been a long time since I, too, was homeless here in Whitehorse, and I know that one of the most powerful things that helped me to straighten out and get my life together was connection back to my nation, my home community, my family, my culture, and my homelands. We thrive when we have a sense of belonging, a sense of connection, and a sense of purpose.

I would like to end by thanking the many people who reach out to share their stories, who share their struggles, and who share their views on how systems can be improved to better meet the needs of all people across the Yukon. I extend my deepest gratitude to the many youth who continue to reach out and support me while also teaching me in my daily life. Mahsi' cho to the elders who continue to reach out to share their traditional knowledge and their prayers and encouragement while always reminding me of who I am, where my roots began, and what my responsibility and accountability is, not only to my home community but to all people across the Yukon.

Mahsi' cho.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I want to begin with a phrase that I heard today when we were getting smudged in about determining our tomorrow. I thought it was a really insightful way to talk about what we try to do here, which is where we try to set the path of the territory. I mean, it's not always through budgets; it's sometimes through legislation, it's sometimes through motions, and it's sometimes through Question Period. But really, what it's about is that all of us have this job to try to improve the lives of Yukoners and to shape the

direction of the territory. I acknowledge right away that the way that we're set up here doesn't mean that we're always going to agree. There are different perspectives and I respect those differences. I also think that it's sort of an awesome and challenging responsibility — that idea that we are here to represent people, to hear their stories, to bring them into this place, to let them shape us, to know that there is heartache out there and there are also amazing things across the Yukon at the same time. Even if we work forever, we will still have those challenges, and so that is the really big task that is put in front of us, and together, that is our job.

Just these past couple of weekends, I was in my riding. I want to acknowledge a few things to begin with. Today, the Carcross/Tagish First Nation is opening a new supportive housing building that they built. I wished I could be there; I sent my regrets, but I am excited for that project to reach its completion. This past weekend, I was in Tagish volunteering for the day. They had a fundraiser for the hall there. It was a poker rally, so a skidoo — not really a race but circuit. The week before that, I spent the day in Marsh Lake at the winter carnival. It was cold out a weekend ago, as you will recall, Mr. Speaker. It started out at minus 30, and we weren't sure how many kids we were going to get, but we ended up with over 70 kids coming out. It was a fun bedlam, with lots of conversations with constituents. So, there were 70-plus kids running around doing all sorts of stuff indoors and outdoors, and then this past weekend was 70-plus older kids on their sleds in the Tagish poker rally.

I stop to think about these things, because just as with the remarks from the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, we need to think about who we are doing this for — right? It shouldn't be just about us and our preconceived ideas. It should be about who we are trying to serve. When we determine tomorrow for the Yukon who it is that we're here to try to support, I think that it's all of these people. It's the little kids; it's the teens; it's the elders — that I call them. In Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes, we have a lot of people who are over the age of 60, and I call them my north of 60 folk. I think that we need to look at what we're trying to do with a thing like a budget. How do we connect all of these numbers to these people? What are we trying to do here? What direction are we trying to take the Yukon?

I mean, certainly the purpose of this budget is to make life as affordable as possible for Yukoners. It is looking after people, in particular, in our communities. It is to advance reconciliation; it is to invest in our collective future. When I talk with Yukoners, that is what they have been talking to me about. We are really trying to build a Yukon that everyone can call home. We want a home for our young people, who deserve a strong and safe education system, where their diverse needs can be addressed. We want to build a Yukon home for our seniors and elders. They deserve to age, to live, to thrive in safety and in dignity, to utilize our health care system, and to be well. So, these are really big challenges, but I think that everyone who is elected to this House comes with this intention — to do their best to try to shape the direction of the territory in a good way. I know that we don't always agree.

So, let me start by stopping a little bit and think about where we have come in recent years, and the thing that I want to grab hold of first is Nunavut. I had a coat on that I got when I was in Nunavut a few years ago just this morning. I remember a few weeks back when Nunavut went through devolution — such a huge deal. I can remember, before I was ever elected to this House, being on national tables where they would say: Oh yeah, but in the territories, you don't have responsibility for your natural resources. And I said: Yes, we do. At that point, both we and the Northwest Territories had already had devolution. No, no, no, territories don't have that responsibility. And I would say: No, I'm from there — we do; there is this thing called “devolution” — a super big deal. I was very proud to see — because I remember when Nunavut became a territory and we redrew the maps of Canada, and now I see them coming to devolution, and I think back to our history — 20-plus years ago now — when we had devolution.

There was another thing that really struck me between the last time we were in this House and today, and that was that we held a Yukon Forum — really an intergovernmental forum — in Ottawa, and even though Centre Block is having all this renovation work done, the meetings that we had with Yukon First Nations and the federal government — we took a moment to talk about it, because we had just come from the 50th anniversary of *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow*. What an important moment in the Yukon's history — how much it shaped our direction. One of the things that First Nations said — which I completely believe — is that wasn't just a document for First Nations; that was a document for all Yukoners. It has shaped our direction as a territory so much.

I felt so proud to have been able to witness not only some of the people who were there, but also, the descendants of the people who were there 50 years ago on the front steps of Parliament were there, and there was a moment when they got their picture, and it was looking out toward Parliament. I thought, “Wow, that's a piece of Yukon history in that moment.”

When I come forward in time and I think back to the last couple of elections, one of the things that I heard from Yukoners is that they wanted more investment in our communities. They certainly wanted reconciliation, and they wanted us to develop an economy that wasn't against the environment. We needed to find a way to develop an economy that supported the environment and went hand in hand with it.

Where are we in this budget? There are few things. I just want to echo the comments of the Minister of Education. When she was up a few moments ago, she talked about the information in the Budget Address. There is a ton of information in here that I think is very important for Yukoners, and I am just going to point out a few things. I don't know how I didn't catch it, but the Yukon just became the largest of Canada's territories by population. I watch this stuff all the time, and I just hadn't noted it. That is a piece of information; so, we are growing. All Yukoners know that, but that sort of put a point on it for me.

I also want to talk a little bit about some of the economic indicators that we have in this budget to try to frame things a

bit, but one of the other things that is here under the section “fiscal and economic outlook” is that our rate of inflation has cooled. The growth of inflation in Whitehorse has trended down throughout 2023, and it's once again below the national average. That is great news. It doesn't mean that we don't have inflation; it just means that it's not growing as fast as it was.

One of the other comments that was made — and I'm going to draw just twice today sort of the difference between ourselves and the Yukon Party in what direction they seem to be saying we need to go. Before I do, let me talk for a second — one of the things that Yukoners might not know or I haven't heard it talked about too much in the media, though it's there in the budget, is that, when you look at what we're saying that we're going to spend this year, it's more than the revenue that we're taking in. Yet we are in surplus.

There is an explanation of this again in that same section. It just sort of explains that the reason for that is that, when we invest in infrastructure, which are tangible capital assets, we can have a positive impact on the surplus. Really, where our surplus comes from this time is the investment in the Kêts'ádañ Kù School, which is the school in Burwash Landing; it's the investment that the Minister of Highways and Public Works was talking about with the Erik Nielsen airport; it's also the investment in the Nisutlin Bay bridge. Those bricks-and-mortar things are allowing us to have a surplus and allowing us to spend more money than we are getting in this year. That is important, because it allows us to invest in the territory.

Here now, let me turn now for the first time to talk about the other issue that I heard right away from the Yukon Party, which is about net debt. Net debt is the difference between our liabilities and our assets, but of course, one of our liabilities are things like pensions. So, it would be if tomorrow there was no government, we would have to pay out those pensions — which is not happening — or, sorry, that there will be no government tomorrow; there will be. The Yukon is a very stable place from a political perspective, and so, that's not money that is borrowed.

Money that we have borrowed and have to pay back — the Yukon is in one of the most enviable positions of any jurisdiction in Canada. Roughly speaking, we have a little over \$200 million in long-term borrowing. That's what we landed with seven or eight years ago when we were elected into this Chamber, and that's what it is today. We have not increased our level of long-term borrowing, and that's why we continue to have a AA rating and why we're in this enviable financial position.

It's hard sometimes when you're here in the Yukon, because you don't notice what's going on necessarily in other jurisdictions, and you ask yourself, “Well, how are we doing compared to these other places?” I think we're in a pretty lucky position in terms of — and not to take away from the challenges that we are facing, but just from a financial perspective, we're in a good place.

Okay. As we have this hot economy, what should we choose to do? Here is one of those moments, and I want to try to draw a comparison on it. It's around our capital budget. Now, you sort of heard in Question Period last Thursday the Minister

of Highways and Public Works make some of these comments, but I heard them again today. The first thing that I want to point out is that when, in our first question of Question Period, the Leader of the Official Opposition stood up and said: Hey, we have too much net debt — then the second question, which came from the interim leader of the Yukon Party, when he stood up and said: Hey, you need to find more infrastructure dollars, because we need to have more capital spending — I was like: Wow. Okay. How did you get both — that there is too much spending and you need to spend more? It was in a blink of an eye, and I think that we should talk about this a bit.

So, I went back and looked at the Yukon Party and their capital budgets. Well, I guess I looked at the Public Accounts and their mains, but the Public Accounts is where I can see it more clearly. Their average, over sort of their four years of capital budgets, was around \$186 million a year. That's the average. Okay, by the way, that's much lower than what they put into their budgets. Their budgets were much higher, and their performance was around — well, under 70 percent, meaning that they said they were going to spend, but they spent less than 70 percent of what they said they were going to spend on that infrastructure, and the budget was averaging around \$185 million.

So, let's compare that to our last Public Accounts — the last one that is in the 2022-23 year — \$495 million in the capital budget. It is two to two and a half times larger. So, we really have been ramping up that investment and we have been spending that money in our communities because we have believed that there was an infrastructure deficit. If you look at the Yukon that we are building, we really have made this decision, as a government, to go around to our communities, ask them for their priorities — it is the hard work of the Department of Community Services, the hard work of Highways and Public Works — and really, we have been investing in the Yukon.

The Yukon Party, on the first day of this Sitting, said: You need to get more money to invest in our infrastructure. At the same time, though, they also said: You are spending too much money.

I just heard it reflected again by the Member for Lake Laberge. When he stood up to talk about our spending, he referred to us as not managing the capital spending well. So, I did — I looked up to see how our budgets were comparing to our expenditures and we are at just under 90 percent. That is a big improvement from where it was under the Yukon Party. It is a lot more investment and we think that it is good for the long term of the Yukon. Yes, net debt is going up at the moment, but we see that as a worthy investment in order to increase our infrastructure that we believe is needed around the territory. If I went to every community today, I bet you that there is still a lot of desire for even more investment.

Here is the other thing that I wanted to reference from the Member for Lake Laberge. He stood up and said that he appreciated some of the investment that we were doing — for example, in the hospital but not enough, into RCMP but not enough. He listed off several things where we needed more spending — health, RCMP, forestry, addictions, and a bridge

in his riding — and yet he also said that we are spending too much. The first words out of his mouth were that we were spending too much and then he listed off all the other places where we should spend more money. The thing that doesn't add up for me is to try to understand how the Yukon Party would do it differently. If all you are saying is: Spend more; you're spending too much — how does that make sense?

Let me shift for a few moments here to talk about a few of my departments. First of all, I just want to talk for a second — I am not going to be able to cover everything, because there is way too much across these departments. By the way, just a shout-out to all of the public servants who are hustling every day to make a difference. I would love to put an emphasis with a bit of an expletive in there, but I won't. "They are busy making a difference" — that is what I will say. Thank you to all of you. You know who you are. You are doing all this work on behalf of Yukoners.

Really quickly — I had a great meeting with the Agricultural Association late last week. I just wanted to comment about the importance of agriculture here in the territory. I wanted to thank Commissioner John Boyle. The Premier and Governor Dunleavy set up this time where we had the leaders from Alaska here in the Yukon. We talked about how we could work more closely. I had the opportunity to meet with Commissioner John Boyle. He met with several of us. We talked about ways we could work together, and agriculture was one of those conversations. I just wanted to make that note.

I also wanted to make a small note about mining. I note that, in this document — our fiscal and economic outlook for the Yukon — I looked under exploration. I had tabled some of these numbers — so they are still an estimate of numbers, but what they are saying is that exploration last year remained above the 10-year average. So, just a shout-out to the industry for all the work that they're doing on the development side and on the exploration side.

The main thing that I wanted to focus on is energy. This is one of those ones where I feel the difference between us and the Yukon Party. I think it is fair to say that we have different perspectives and that we would take the territory in different directions.

First of all, I want to say that when I talk to Yukoners, they tell me that they want renewables. They don't want us to go back to fossil fuels.

All that growth that is happening, all that mining activity that's happening, the reclamation work that's happening, our shift over to things like electric heat and electric vehicles — all of that has us forecasting that we need to supply more electricity here in the territory. We are so lucky to have the legacy of hydro here in the territory. When I look at our electricity prices, I am so thankful for our hydro facilities.

When we look forward in time and to the direction that we are going to go as a territory, what should we do with that growth?

I am going to point out a few things about what we are doing with renewables here in the territory with this budget. Let me just grab it here — \$12 million for the green infrastructure program; \$7.8 million for lowering emissions of government

buildings; \$2.8 million for increasing renewable energy production for green transportation and reducing emissions; \$2.7 million for energy efficiencies for homes and commercial buildings; we have just under \$9 million to increase renewable supply, including exploring our connection to British Columbia's grid; there is just over \$5.5 million going toward the grid-scale battery that we are building; and there is \$2.5 million for more independent power producer projects across the territory.

We have recently had projects ranging from Whitehorse to Old Crow, from Watson Lake to Beaver Creek. We have work happening around: hydro projects; solar projects; wind projects; the battery project that I have already mentioned; investigation into hydrogen storage; biomass, geothermal, and demand-side management where you reduce your demand for energy; and investing in our transmission lines. We are working with almost every single First Nation and we are working all across the territory. This is one of those big differences between where we think we should go and where I hear the Yukon Party talking about where they wish to go. The Yukon Party, of course, stood up in this House a couple of years ago and said — quote: “I don't think that there's any surprise to anyone that the Yukon Party certainly is pro oil and gas...” Whenever we get into these questions about rented diesel generators — I'm using my budget second reading reply time to try to get a bit more conversation about this going. I would love to have a debate with the Yukon Party. I appreciate that they have a different view about where we should go.

First of all, the Yukon has an islanded grid and our electricity system here needs backup. I believe that will be well into the future that we need backup, and that backup is thermal — meaning LNG or diesel, or it could be some other form like propane or something. The reason for that is that it's a lower capital cost and a higher energy cost. With backup, you are trying not to have to use it, but you need to have it there whenever the lights go out, because when they do, Yukoners need the ability to know that we are going to have their backs. The difference is not — because I think we all agree on that. But as we are growing and as our demand goes higher, we need more winter energy. Should that be with diesel? Is that the right solution? The Yukon Party keeps saying that we should build a diesel plant and make that sort of a more permanent choice, and we keep saying no — that what we ought to do is to hunt for more renewables.

Yes, if we need to put in diesels right now on a short-term basis, okay, but what we really need to do is to think about that long-term, renewable supply. We have an example of that — just this past week when the Thay Täw, the Haeckel Hill wind generators, officially came online. Later this year, we'll get the battery system in place and we will then have a wind battery system, which is a great winter energy solution, because it turns out that the wind blows more in the winter and it is pretty consistent. It allows for us to fill in the gaps with the battery, and you still need backup behind it. That's a solution that we're looking at, but we're looking at solutions — well, wind as well in Burwash, and we have solar in Beaver Creek. We already have solar in Old Crow and solar coming in Watson Lake,

which will displace diesel. We have all sorts of projects that are happening around the territory and we believe that we should continue to look for those renewable energy solutions. In fact, that is what Yukoners are telling us.

Now, I just want to talk about rates for a second, because one of the places where the Yukon Party presses its concerns is about the electricity rates. So, I asked for some background on electricity rates across the country and I am just going to talk about it here. I can table this information. I am comparing 2023 residential electricity rates and I am going on sort of an average of about 1,000 kilowatt hours per month. So, of course, if you have a bigger home, that is going to be higher; smaller will be lower, but this gives you a way for us to compare. By the way, thanks to Yukon Energy and Hydro Québec for this analysis.

So, Yellowknife is \$340 a month on average for their residential bill and Whitehorse is \$217. So, we are lower than Yellowknife by a fair chunk. Inuvik is \$729 a month and Old Crow is \$217. Why? Because in the Yukon we have decided to make sure that the rates are level across everywhere so that our communities — even though it costs more to produce the energy there, we say that we should average it out so that all Yukoners pay the same. By the way, this \$217 doesn't take into account the interim electrical rebate, which we have again in our budget and which will bring our monthly bill down a bit to just under \$200 a month, but I didn't want to put it in because it is not permanent. Iqaluit — over \$700 a month. When you get down to the provinces, how do our rates compare? We are higher than, say, Montréal or Toronto or Vancouver, but we are lower than Calgary and Edmonton. Here in the Yukon, our electricity rates are lower than Calgary and Edmonton — \$217 a month here, Edmonton is \$278, and Calgary is \$298 a month. Why? Well, one of the reasons, when you look across Canada — and by the way, if I were to pull the numbers for the United States, San Francisco is close to \$500 a month and New York is close to \$400 a month. Why are those places so much more?

The answer is hydro. Hydro is — again, thank you to the Yukoners who invested in hydro so long ago. We still are so lucky for that today around our electricity rates. Make no mistake; as we deal with this transition of our energy economy, we are now investing — both ATCO and the Yukon Energy Corporation — in modernizing the infrastructure to make it more robust and as well adding in all of this growth. There is a lot of investment that needs to take place in our electricity grid. We will always need thermal backup. We don't need, in the long term, to burn diesel for our winter energy supply. We need it as backup, but we don't want to make it our main one. So, this is just a complete policy difference between the Yukon Party and where they wish to go, which is to invest in diesel, and where we wish to go, which is to invest in renewables.

I'm going to be out of time shortly. I know that I could go on about this stuff forever, but I wanted a chance to talk about it a bit. I am looking forward to debate on this over time. We will enjoy that debate.

I just wanted to make a couple of comments about tourism. Did you know, Mr. Speaker, that the Yukon leads the country in how big tourism is as a part of our economy? If you take Prince Edward Island and British Columbia, which are the

highest in terms of the provinces, in terms of how important tourism is for their economy, we are 10 percent higher again. Tourism is a very big deal for us, and I just want to give a shout-out to our tourism sector. In 2023 — we are still trying to run all of the numbers, but generally speaking — and again, you can find this in the budget highlights — tourism visits into the territory with air traffic is at 90-percent recovery from 2019. We are way ahead of the rest of the country in this. We are further and faster, so a shout-out to the industry.

By the way, if you haven't checked it out, Mr. Speaker — and for all Yukoners — there is a great new ad out called "The Yukon: It's a Little Bit Metal". Please check it out, and I give a shout-out to all the creative people here in the territory who developed that ad for the Yukon.

Let me bring it back full circle to the folks in my communities. When we look back to think about how this budget and the decisions we make here will set a direction — what was the phrase? — "determine tomorrow" — when we think about that, I think about things like *Putting People First* and transitioning our health care system to a patient-centred model, to one where we have worked more closely with First Nations to develop the system that is going to work, where we see — and I think it was the Leader of the NDP today who said we could know that people are aging in place and we can see it and that there is growth in the territory, so there is this pressure on the system. This is a massive new direction. We feel it is the right direction to go. This came through all of the work around *Putting People First*. And because, in my riding, I have one of the elderly-ist demographics, I think this is incredibly important. I think that here is the first move inside of a budget where we are starting off in that direction together as a territory.

Then I look back to the investment that is going into education. In particular, I will just use the schools. We see the school being completed. I think the kids are going there this fall, in Whistle Bend. Then I remember travelling with the Minister of Education to a meeting in Burwash — gosh, it has to be about five years ago — and there was a letter that was almost 100 years to the day asking for a school in Burwash. I think of those investments, and I think this is the right direction — let me say that — and I think Yukoners think it is the right direction.

I'll just finish it off by saying that this awesome responsibility that I share among all of us here in this Assembly to try to set that direction — one of the things that I try to think about is yes, who do we need to support to make this transition? How can we make sure to have reconciliation? How can we make sure that we are going to make life affordable for Yukoners? How are we going to support our communities and invest in our collective future? But I also think about every time, when I have someone from my family or friends who comes to visit or a person who happens across the Yukon and who starts to see what is going on here, they are just in awe of the choices that we have made together as a territory and the path that we are trying to carve out together.

So, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to talk to you and through you to Yukoners about our budget, and I look forward to the debate as we move forward.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon, everybody. It is always a tough act to follow with my good colleague.

This afternoon, I am going to try to pull together some disparate threads, ask a few questions, answer a few questions, and just talk about our budget. We are talking about our Liberal government's budget this afternoon. Yukoners prepared this budget for Yukoners. It demonstrates how a progressive government supports Yukoners and lays out how that will happen over the coming year. Mr. Speaker, look at our benches: We are Yukoners, just like you. We are brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and mothers and fathers. We use the hospital, just like most Yukoners. We rely on nurses and doctors, just like most Yukoners. We have children. Some of those children are looking for houses or places to live, like so many others in our territory. We are also politicians, but unlike several on the Official Opposition benches, that is not all we have done. None of us are career politicians on this side, Mr. Speaker, with no other life experience. We have all had other careers — some of us, several of them. We have been lawyers, teachers, engineers, justice workers, business owners, journalists, and civil servants. That work experience, that life experience, always informs our work here — always.

It always informs our public service. Our work in service to Yukoners is what drives us. That life experience has served Yukoners well. We have crafted responsible, supportive budgets for all people in the territory eight times now, Mr. Speaker. Eight times we have invested in and improved our territory's health and social services programs. Remember, we expanded the mental health supports through our community hubs, hiring dozens of people where, under the Yukon Party, there was but one — one — and now we have dozens of people providing that service.

We have worked tirelessly on reconciliation with First Nations. We have held forums with First Nation leaders every three months since December 2016 — 28 Yukon Forums in all. We have set up the Yukon First Nations land-based healing fund, as laid out in our groundbreaking substance use health emergency strategy.

We have made historic investments in the Yukon's roads, bridges, airports, water and waste-water treatment facilities, schools, and rinks over the objections of the Yukon Party, which publicly told us to reject federal matching dollars. They said: Don't do it; leave it on the table; that's what we would do. We have a different approach.

I mentioned schools. We have built new schools for all our children, the first new elementary schools built in the Yukon in decades. We also used our budgets to navigate the pandemic better than any other Canadian jurisdiction. We launched nation-leading economic support programs, investments seen nowhere else in the country and probably nowhere else in North America, to shield and support Yukon businesses and residents during the pandemic shutdown.

We launched the Yukon's first universal childcare and early education program, saving families \$9,000 per child. I remember when I was younger and my children were in daycare

how onerous paying for daycare was to my family. In fact, one of our family had to stay home to look after the kids, because we couldn't afford to work and send the kids to daycare. Today's families do not have that problem, Mr. Speaker. That's an incredible achievement for Yukoners. It is a Liberal measure that put real money in Yukoners' pockets — real money.

We doubled the on-call wage for emergency medical services staff, a Liberal measure that put real money in Yukoners' pockets. We raised the minimum wage, a Liberal measure that put real money in Yukoners' pockets. We implemented a universal sick-leave policy, a first in the country. It's a Liberal program that has made life healthier, better, and more affordable for Yukon workers and business owners.

We implemented free dental coverage for Yukoners. This was recommendation 5.8 of the Liberal government's *Putting People First* report, drafted in April 2020. That date is important, because it predates the confidence and supply agreement, Mr. Speaker. Our plan for free dental predates the confidence and supply agreement. We were delighted the NDP agreed with our free dental proposal, which made it a no-brainer to include in that deal. It is another Liberal measure that has made life better and more affordable for Yukoners.

We made good on our commitment to refuse fracking and to shift Yukon from fossil-fuel-based energy. My colleague just talked about that a few minutes ago. We did not tie the Yukon to another century of dirty energy by investing \$100 million — or more — in a new carbon-burning power plant — something the Yukon Party's shadowy backers want desperately. Instead, we have made historic investments in wind, solar, and battery storage that is expanding the Yukon's leadership in green energy in Canada. You can see that vision in action every day atop Haeckel Hill, where four turbines turn in the wind, generating power for hundreds of Yukoners.

We also launched *Our Clean Future*, which is a measurable plan — a nation-leading plan — to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. Over the last eight years, the Yukon Liberal government has listened to Yukoners and responded with all this and much, much more.

Once again, we are delivering another wholly Liberal budget, Mr. Speaker. This is another wholly Liberal budget. There is no compromise — no compromise. This is our budget with programs designed for Yukoners by Yukoners. It is founded on four principles: making life more affordable; building healthy communities; investing in our future; and advancing reconciliation. It arrives at a remarkable time in Yukon history — a remarkable time, Mr. Speaker.

Yukoners have more money in their pockets, as their household income increased by 9.3 percent last year. In 2023, Yukon's minimum wage rose to \$16.77 — fully 80 percent of the estimated living wage in the territory. This year, I expect that gap will have narrowed further, putting more money in hard-working Yukoners' pockets for food, rent, school, recreation, and entertainment. This is what a progressive Liberal government delivers.

Today, because of that progressive Liberal government, Yukoners don't have to pay a year's salary for daycare.

Because of a progressive Liberal government, Yukoners no longer have to choose between making rent or getting their teeth fixed. Yukoners no longer have to expose colleagues to illness because they lack sick-day coverage. All this is possible because, as mentioned earlier, our progressive government has improved lives through our universal childcare, sick leave, and dental programs. Our nation-leading economic policies supported businesses through the pandemic. We have lowered taxes, raised wages, and launched the universal sick-leave policy — all of which helped business.

Retail sales are up almost eight percent, the strongest such growth in the country. Retail sales in the Yukon surpassed inflation, one of only five jurisdictions in the country to do that. Yukon's retail trade now surpasses \$1.17 billion, and at just 2.6 percent, the Yukon's inflation rate is now below the national rate. Remember, in November 2022, it was eight percent. That's no longer the case.

Smart financial stewardship from the federal government has pushed down inflation in Canada, and the Yukon's inflation rate hasn't been this low since March 2021. Building construction is also booming. Yukon reached a new record of \$450 million in building construction in 2023, surpassing the last record of \$372 million set in 2022. Contractors had enough work to train apprentices through to journeymen and there is work to keep them employed for years to come. The tourism industry, as we just heard, is coming back from the suppression of the pandemic. It is now about 90 percent of what we saw in 2019 before COVID shut down the global travel economy, and the success is good enough to draw many folks from other jurisdictions as well. The territory is growing fast, faster than most places in the country, and so fast that it recently became the most populous northern territory in Canada.

Now, does this mean that everyone in the territory is doing well? Of course not. Our work is not done; the progressive agenda continues and there are always things to improve on. I heard the Anti-Poverty Coalition on the radio this morning. I have known Kristina Craig for decades and respect the work she does for those Yukoners struggling in society. As I noted earlier, my colleagues have worked in many roles in this community, and we know first-hand the challenges that those Yukoners are facing and we are committed to finding ways to help them to prosper in society. We also recognize that this work is never done. There are always gaps and new problems that grab attention.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition will make sure to point these outliers out, ignoring all of the growing progress that we're seeing in the territory, and that's the game. That's raw politics, and we get it. In fact, in fairness, the opposition may not be able to help themselves when they focus on the negative. Humanity has a negative bias. As a species, we learn more from negative outcomes and experiences, so we pay attention to them more. That's just long-programmed human behaviour. But remember: Criticism without regard for all of our shared and frankly incredible success paints a false picture of where we are at — a false picture, Mr. Speaker.

It shortchanges Yukoners and everything they have achieved with great imagination and at some not insignificant

cost and sacrifice. It ignores everything that we have built and done together. A great many of the decisions of this Chamber have been unanimous, and this is a real success. Yukoners of all political stripes, even in this Chamber, have embraced our progressive governance. Under it, Yukoners have seen their day-to-day lives become more affordable, more equitable, safer, and healthier. Yes, today, Yukon is more affordable, safer, healthier, and more equitable than it was in 2016. This didn't happen by chance. Working together, we are building a future for everyone, regardless of race, sexual orientation, religious or political affiliation, where you live, or where you were born. Sadly, it hasn't always been that way.

It is doubtful that you will hear any of this from the opposition. The Yukon Party will vote against every single measure in this budget, lending support to none of it. They will vote against Yukoners, against the funding of programs that matter to them. They will claim that it is just politics, but it doesn't recognize that we are in a minority government. In a minority, a very rare occurrence in the Yukon, every single vote matters. Voting against programs that Yukoners need and want takes on a new relevance. These votes potentially have huge consequences. Votes against the best interests of Yukoners really matter in a minority. In a bid for power, the Yukon Party will, over the next 30 days or so, do their darnedest to tear this government and their accomplishments for so many Yukoners down. They will focus on a few issues, exaggerating their importance and faults, and give no credit to any successes whatsoever. There will be no mention of the improvements that Yukoners have seen in their lives — none. There will be no recognition of the benefits of universal childcare, dental programs, sick leave programs, energy subsidies and investments, and no mention of the incredible roads being built, the bridges, the airports, and the investments that will make our travels through the great territory safer and easier. There will be no mention of the fact that retail trade is up, no mention of the growth in the territory's economy, and no mention of investments in schools, rinks, or housing. I know this because I have watched and participated in this process for a good part of my professional life.

Yukoners should remember that those on the sidelines of government who want in don't focus on what is going well. They pick at and talk up programs, often exaggerating them for effect. As I have noted, this is standard human behaviour. We learn from mistakes and foul-ups. It's important to talk about them.

The opposition should selflessly challenge and prod us to improve the programs we are launching to help Yukoners. That would be fair and helpful, even, but there's no upside in that. So, far too often, without an eye on the public they're serving, they leverage the problems to carve out political opportunities for their own ambition and their own political agenda. I get it.

I also encourage everyone to remember that the Yukon is in an enviable position. We are stronger financially and culturally than we have ever been. We are also more inclusive and more connected than we have ever been, all of which is a great launch pad for even greater success here in the territory.

I mentioned our finances. Our progressive government — with free dental, new airports, roads, bridges, power, housing, daycare and early childhood education for all — has only added roughly \$33 million to the Yukon's consolidated debt. That's right — just \$33 million over eight years. That's it. The territory's accumulated debt is just around \$233 million and almost all of that was added by the Yukon Party. The budget was drafted with our eyes firmly fixed on the needs of Yukoners. This is not an austere, conservative budget that you might see from another party in the House. You have already heard the opposition leader rail to the media about spending in this budget. I wonder what he disagrees with. It's a good question and it raises many more — questions that the member opposite probably will not answer. Yukoners must assume that the Yukon Party would cut services and jobs. They've done it before. They value cash in the bank over services for Yukoners. We have seen lots of evidence of that.

You must assume that they would cut or privatize health services. You must assume that they would cut social services. If you want to save money, our investments in health and social services represent the largest government expenditure in the budget. They would likely end the daycare program in favour of some nebulous, difficult-to-figure-out tax exemption scheme. Remember that the Yukon Party campaigned on this in the last election.

Conservative times are tough times. That was the wisdom from my grandmother and it's as true today as it was when she was alive. Also, this is not an extravagant, anecdote-driven budget delivering off-the-cuff solutions to the latest grievance heard on the cocktail circuit. This is a realistic, data-driven budget addressing the needs of Yukoners — needs that they have told us they want addressed. This is a solid, evidence-based budget focused on delivering needed services and support for Yukoners.

I will now dive into specific work that we are doing within Community Services. We are at the forefront of emergency preparedness and we take that responsibility very seriously. Our team is world renowned for that work, and it shows.

We have, over the last several years, navigated floods and fires without losing a single building. There is some good fortune here. As everyone knows, a single rainstorm or shift in winds can help save buildings, roads, or powerlines that are in the line of a wildfire, for example. The opposite is also true, however. But as we showed at the Takhini bridge, in Mayo, and in Old Crow last year, planning and execution and sheer hard work can create its own luck. All that said, we are not resting on our laurels, because as the climate changes, we will see seasons that we've relied on change as well. Our once stable, predictable winter season now sees flood and fire season encroaching on it. Floods and fires are starting earlier in the spring and extending further into the fall. We are adapting to these changing conditions, however, and so must all Yukoners. Emergency preparedness is everyone's responsibility. No matter the emergency, you need to have a plan and an emergency kit. It's best to get these ready before you need them. Yukoners should also ensure they have adequate flood and home insurance.

Municipalities are the front-line planners for emergencies within their boundaries. Our Liberal government will be there for Yukoners alongside municipalities, First Nation governments, and the federal government to ensure that our communities are prepared, ready, and willing to deal with the emergencies they face.

For post-disaster recovery, work is underway to develop a territorial disaster financial assistance program that will support recovery from natural disasters. The program will align with the federal disaster financial assistance arrangement and will make it clearer for Yukoners, businesses, and municipalities about what funding is available and how to access it following an event.

Our Wildland Fire Management branch protects life, critical infrastructure, and property while facilitating the creation of wildfire-resilient Yukon communities. In 2023, Wildland Fire Management responded to more than 200 wildfires, which burned more than 400,000 hectares, including 57 wildfires — 27 percent of all fires — that were of high risk to communities or critical infrastructure.

Wildland Fire Management also responded to other emergencies, including spring flooding in the Klondike. Yukon First Nations Wildfire also helped a lot in the response to these disasters. To that effect, we are allocating an additional \$1.8 million for Yukon First Nation initial attack firefighter crew services. We are also budgeting \$1.1 million for the Fire Marshal's Office to operate community fire halls, administer programs, and offer honoraria and travel costs for volunteers.

Nearly \$1 million in additional funding will be invested in acknowledgement that the Yukon is more vulnerable to climate change impacts than other Canadian jurisdictions. We have entered a three-year funding agreement with Canada to support climate adaptation projects in the Yukon. This funding will support planning and preparation for wildland fires, improving climate resiliency for Yukon government building assets, and assessing slope hazards in the Klondike region.

We are developing land to provide Yukoners with homes and business opportunities. Working alongside communities and First Nations, the Land Development branch has tender-ready projects and housing lots for Yukoners in every community. Whistle Bend is, of course, our largest project, but Frances Avenue in Watson Lake and Willow Acres in Haines Junction are also well underway. In and around Whitehorse, we will have 22 infill lots that will be released this spring and summer.

Whitehorse declared a housing emergency and it is my hope that city council will demonstrate greater courage in improving infill areas. Some developments laid out in the official community plan were recently cancelled or delayed after a few residents opposed the infill proposal. It is critically important to everyone in Whitehorse that we get more housing lots built in the community. Infill is a very cost-effective way to do this and such development protects the beautiful wildlands currently on the fringe of the developed community.

Our government is also partnering with First Nations on housing issues. On housing development, the joint Kwanlin Dün First Nation-Yukon government Range Point Road master

plan was approved by Whitehorse city council in 2023. Detailed design will be awarded in the coming months, with construction targeted to start later this year. This new subdivision will provide more than 300 housing units for Yukoners on both Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Yukon government land.

We have started preliminary work on Whitehorse's identified north and south urban growth areas: McLean Lake and the Long Lake developments. This work will lead to master planning, which could start as early as 2025, for the priority south urban area. The work will also ease planning for the north area if the south proves too challenging.

I will now turn to the important work that we are doing to reduce the mountains of garbage that our society is producing at a record pace. It is not sustainable. On CBC Radio the other day, I heard Elyn Jones remark that we are closing rural landfills. I want to say clearly and without qualification that we are not closing rural landfills — none. We are, in fact, making historic investments in our rural landfills. We are gating them; we are putting in weigh scales; we are ensuring that they have the power and staff to supervise operations and collect tipping fees.

That is, we are working with municipalities to ensure that they are better managed and equipped so that they last longer and so those producing the garbage are paying to dispose of it.

We are not closing rural landfills; we are investing in rural landfills to manage them better and curb the mountains of garbage that this society is producing at a record pace. The Government of Yukon is implementing a sustainable model for solid-waste management in the territory. That model uses the recommendations of the Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste, which included municipalities, the Association of Yukon Communities, and the Yukon government.

Yukon municipalities are responsible for solid-waste facilities for their citizens; the Yukon government manages those in unincorporated communities. We have signed regional agreements with Carmacks, Dawson, Mayo, Teslin, and Watson Lake, and we compensate them for accepting waste from residents living outside their municipalities to make sure it's fair. We are pleased to have installed organics composting equipment in Carcross, Deep Creek, Marsh Lake, Mount Lorne, and Tagish over the last two years. It's part of our investments, and this is an important step for reducing carbon emissions from waste and to lessen leachate, which contaminates groundwater.

Mr. Speaker, the collective liabilities of our garbage and the landfills to dispose of it are massive. So, our efforts are not only geared toward the environment but also firmly focused on the financial well-being of Yukon's communities.

All right, Mr. Speaker, on to sport and recreation. The Sport and Recreation branch is implementing the Yukon active living strategy. Its funding supports training, capacity-building, and many, many active living programs for all Yukoners. The branch supports physical literacy in all Yukon communities. Physical literacy is important to laying a foundation for a life of healthy living.

The branch also funds the ElderActive Recreation Association of Yukon, which encourages Yukoners age 55-plus — old folks like me — to stay active through local programs and competitive sport training. It also supports Yukoners' participation at the Canada 55+ Games. The next games are August 27 to 30 in Québec City. I think that there are people in this House who may be there.

The *Yukon Sport Action Plan* aligns with the Canadian sport policy and guides the branch's funding and focus. Development of the next Canadian sport policy is well underway. The refurbished sport policy will identify Canadian priorities and provide necessary guidance to advance the community over the next 10 years. The *Yukon Sport Action Plan* supports development of a sport system in the Yukon that is inclusive, fun, and fair, and it also supports the development of athletes, coaches, and officials.

The branch is committed to Safe Sport and is working with provincial and territorial partners on implementing policy, training, and education on maltreatment, anti-harassment, and abuse. In a continued effort to empower people to recognize and prevent bullying, abuse, harassment, and discrimination, several online training opportunities have been added to the branch library. This is through the branch's partnership with Respect Group. They are offered free to athletes, coaches, administrators, and parents.

Mr. Speaker, I will now shift to our work supporting municipal governance. Our Community Affairs branch is a treasure trove of municipal information. It works tirelessly to build well-financed, sustainable, healthy communities. The branch provides valuable advice to municipalities and connects them to other government departments. It also helps other government departments connect and interact with municipalities and, more and more, First Nation governments. The goal is to foster coordinated and consistent approaches for community initiatives. An example of this collaboration is the Yukon Sustainable Communities Forum, the first-ever meeting of municipal and First Nation leaders, which happened on November 30, 2023. The two-day forum saw administrative staff work together to improve emergency preparedness, learn about better land use planning, and discuss asset management, with an eye on sustainable service delivery. They were also updated on the future of the Canada Community-Building Fund. Community Services is also tied into health care through regulation of health providers.

Yukon's *Health Professions Act* came into force in 2003, but little work was done by the former government after the act came into force. As a result, most of the health professional statutes and associated regulations were not brought under the *Health Professions Act* and are woefully out of date. Under our progressive Liberal government, Community Services is spearheading the long overdue modernization of the *Health Professions Act* to improve how health care service professionals are regulated in the Yukon. The goal is to make the regulation reflect today's society and health care practices. This will make it easier to recruit health professionals from within and from without Canada.

Modernizing the act will not be easy. The work will take a few years, during which we will engage with Yukoners, health professionals, and other stakeholders. The result will clarify standards for professionals and improve complaints processes for Yukoners. While the legislative work is underway, we are making less onerous changes to improve lives for Yukoners and for health professionals. The Professional Licensing and Regulatory Affairs branch has modernized its client service with the launch of an online registration and licensing system for all the professions it regulates. Streamlined processes enable a self-service approach that gives applicants more control and reduces red tape. The branch implemented the online system in five phases, following specific milestones and key dates. The phased approach allowed for accurate testing, configuration, and set-up. On February 1, the final phase was rolled out with online registration for physicians.

As you might know, the Yukon Registered Nurses Association regulates the profession in the Yukon. They requested changes to the *Registered Nurses Profession Act* to allow them to enter into multi-jurisdiction agreements and make it easier for nurses and nurse practitioners to work in the territory. These changes are required to help them address the shortage of nursing professionals in the Yukon and to attract new nurses and nurse practitioners. Last fall, our government's amendments to the *Registered Nurses Profession Act* passed the Legislature. Regulations are now being drafted to create four new membership classes that will allow registered nurses and nurse practitioners from other jurisdictions, newly graduated students, internationally educated nurses, and student nurses to practise in the Yukon. The amended regulations will also allow nurse practitioners to prescribe treatments more effectively and to employ their full scope of practice.

Now on to libraries, which are very important to so many in our community. Our Yukon public libraries are critical to the health and vibrancy of Yukon communities, serving Yukoners regardless of their socio-economic status. They provide a safe and welcoming environment for people to meet, read, learn, study, and play. To make libraries even more accessible, Yukon public libraries eliminated late fees in all 15 territorial libraries. Yukon public libraries have also significantly improved their online presence so Yukoners can more easily access library services, including a new library website. That website will allow you to search better and manage your accounts. It also allows users to make personalized recommendations, book meeting rooms, and submit book requests from their account. The new website will give community libraries a better online presence. Yukon public libraries' social media presence is an active and direct link to patrons and provides current information about our resources and services.

The Yukon workers' compensation board continues to make life safer for workers. The goal is ensuring Yukoners are not injured mentally or physically on the job. The goal is to prevent illness. Assessment rates remain stable this year, with only minor increases to four industry groups. Remember, rate increases to industries are based on costs coming from preventable injuries. As for injuries, we recognize 19 cancer presumptions in the Yukon — more than most other

jurisdictions in the country. But presumptions aside, anyone who contracts a cancer on the job is eligible for compensation. The more important goal is to make jobs safe, to prevent injuries and illness before they happen. Zero injuries — that is the goal and that is the focus of the safety and compensation board. If we do that, we will make presumptions — any presumptions — obsolete, and that should be our goal.

I could go on all day about all the work our government and my departments are doing. Unfortunately, time will not allow it; however, I have a few closing remarks.

In the many, many hours that our Cabinet team spent with our incredible and indefatigable civil servants drafting and revising this budget, it was always done with Yukoners in mind, balancing the pressing needs, hopes, and desires of a thinly spread community of people in one of the most challenging and beautiful geographic regions in our country.

We looked at our citizens' health needs. We looked at their housing needs. We looked at how to improve the way we educate our children. We looked at our territory's languages and cultures. We spoke about our business sector and what it needs to continue thriving in one of the continent's hottest economies. We looked at our power grid and how we can expand green energy projects throughout the territory. We looked at our changing climate — the fires and floods that have become a regular feature of our springs and summers. We looked at our roads, our bridges, our airports, the territorial arteries that connect our families, friends, and neighbours within the territory and from that territory to the world.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is filled with good news — the kind I am excited to share with my constituents, the kind that brings real material positive change for all ages, from all our communities to here in Whitehorse.

I want to thank the good people working with Community Services and the safety and compensation board. Their guidance, professionalism, and good sense have taught me much about very, very complicated problems in the territory. I am continually learning from them, and I am in their debt, and I thank them.

I am also, as always, grateful to the constituents of Whitehorse West who have supported me through the events of the past eight or so years with incredible grace, dignity, humour, and courage. On the floor of the Legislature, I have often noted that Whitehorse West is microcosm of the territory, a distillation of the Yukon as a whole, and so provides a window into our amazing people wherever they may live. I thank all of them from the bottom of my heart.

I want to thank my dear friends — you know who you are — for your fellowship, compassion, and advice, solicited or not, which keeps me grounded and constantly improving.

I also want to thank my growing family for their support, blunt assessments, and humour, which also makes me slightly humbler and eminently better. Thank you all.

And thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the time this afternoon.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today, to rise in the Legislative Assembly and speak to the 2024-25 budget. It is an

honour to be here as Yukon's Attorney General, Minister of Justice, and Minister of Health and Social Services.

We have had a big day, which I will speak about later, but it is an honour to speak to Bill No. 213, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2024-25*, introduced here last week by our Minister of Finance.

I would like to acknowledge that today I am speaking on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and as a member elected to represent Riverdale South. I am truly appreciative of the opportunity to address the Legislative Assembly today and, as my colleague said, through you to all Yukoners.

Our colleagues across the way don't seem to be terribly interested in talking about the budget 2024-25. It is incredibly important to do so, as we get to talk here today together about how it represents initiatives, services, and programs that are important to Yukoners, designed to support Yukoners, and I am pleased to take the opportunity to do this.

As one of my colleagues said earlier today, budgets shape the direction of the territory and it is truly a great honour to be given this responsibility. It is an honour to be part of a progressive government, particularly as we see hard-fought rights being eroded by conservative governments worldwide and unfortunately closer to home.

All communities matter. I know that this is something that our party said years ago now, but it is such an incredible piece of leadership by the former Premier, because when we look at this budget and we look at this budget compared to budgets that occurred in this Legislative Assembly prior to 2016, they are just not comparable. This budget lists — and the Minister of Finance the other day listed so many programs, initiatives, and projects to be built and programs to be delivered from every single corner of this territory.

Budgets in the past would be — well, we actually had questions here in the Legislative Assembly. I can remember very early on being asked a question about why a particular program was being funded in a particular riding that wasn't one of the Liberal government ridings. I was completely flabbergasted by such a concept. I think my answer was something like: Well, that may be the way that you governed, but that's not the way that this government will be approaching the needs and wants of Yukoners.

If you look at the budgets and compare the budgets, you can see that we have lived up to our commitment that all communities matter. We have lived up to making sure that programs and capital projects touch every corner of this Yukon and are supported in a way that makes sure that funding is properly distributed, that projects are properly distributed, and that they are prioritized with respect to how they support long-term planning, long-term infrastructure planning, and long-term support for Yukoners.

Mr. Speaker, all communities matter and I am very proud that our government has not only made this a priority but has worked extensively with each and every community to meet with them, to listen to their priorities, and to respond. The budget is about growing vibrant and sustainable communities and about supporting Yukoners absolutely everywhere. While

I appreciate that the opposition thinks that its job is to be critical despite whether or not there are great ideas, I truly hope they will consider looking at each and every one of these important communities and making sure that they support this budget so that critical investments can be made.

One example of one such critical investment might be something like the rink in Carmacks, which was completed last year. The rink in Carmacks is not, in my view, just a facility for sports. It's not just a facility for community gathering. It's not just a facility that supports activities in the community where they can host events and host —

Speaker: Order, please.

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

Debate on second reading of Bill No. 213 accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.