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HANSARD

Tuesday, March 12, 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
Tuesday, March 12, 2024 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: Before the House proceeds to Orders of the Day, the Chair will rule on the question of privilege raised by the Member for Lake Laberge yesterday, Monday, March 11, 2024.

The member raised the question of privilege in response to seven Government of Yukon news releases issued between February 27 and March 8, 2024. In raising the question of privilege, the Member for Lake Laberge said that, in publishing the press releases, the Premier and three ministers have — quote: "... violated the rules of the Legislative Assembly." The Member for Lake Laberge based this conclusion on the fact that the announcements included in the news releases were regarding items in the 2024-25 main budget, but no mention was made of the need for the spending to still be approved by the Legislative Assembly. In support of this proposition, the Member for Lake Laberge cited Speakers' rulings from April 7, 2005, March 7, 2019, and November 4, 2021.

Before providing a ruling, the Chair will first outline the process for dealing with a question of privilege. It is not the Chair's role to rule that a breach of privilege has or has not occurred; only the House can make that decision. The two questions for the Chair to decide are: (1) if the issue has been raised as soon as possible; and (2) whether there appears to be, on first impression, a breach of privilege.

Pursuant to Standing Order 7(4), when the Speaker has ruled that (a) there appears to be a prima facie case of breach of privilege and (b) the matter has been raised at the earliest opportunity, any member may either immediately propose a motion or, not later than at the conclusion of the next sitting day, give notice of a motion calling upon the Assembly to take action thereon or referring the same to a committee of the Assembly.

The Chair does agree that the Member for Lake Laberge brought the matter to the attention of the Assembly at the first possible opportunity. But does the Chair conclude that there is a prima facie breach of privilege or a contempt of the House in the matter brought to the attention of this House by the Member for Lake Laberge? The Chair does not.

The Chair affirms the previous rulings on this matter cited by the Member for Lake Laberge. As previously ruled, the offence does not rise to the level of contempt. The Chair does, however, note that the dignity of the House is being brought into question by government communications that fail to mention the requirement for bills to pass the Legislative Assembly before coming into force. In reading the news releases, the public may have the impression that Cabinet can do these things on its own.

In reviewing recent government news releases, the Chair observed an inconsistent approach to fulfilling this obligation. For example, the government issued a news release yesterday highlighting the introduction of Bill No. 38, the *Health Authority Act*. This news release uses language that indicates that the bill will not necessarily pass in the Assembly. This is not one of the news releases that the Member for Lake Laberge used in his examples, but it does show the inconsistency of the way news releases are handled compared to the offending examples.

In the examples provided to me by the Member for Lake Laberge, what the Chair often found was no mention of the fact that the budget needed to be passed in the Assembly prior to the money flowing. The government must do a better job on this issue. If not in the body of the news release, then at the very least it should appear in the Quick Facts section so that it is clear for the public that the budget still needs to be passed by this Assembly.

The Chair thanks the Member for Lake Laberge for raising this important issue.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, we have several guests here today who are here for the tribute for the Bravo awards. Please welcome: Alida Munro, who is the managing director of the Yukon Convention Bureau; Jennifer Logtenberg, who is the sales manager for the Convention Bureau. We have with us Tricia Baldwin, who is the executive director of the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre; and we also have Eduardo Lafforgue, who is the director of Tourism from Tourism and Culture — if we could welcome them all, please.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Today we have a number of members of Yukon First Nations Wildfire for our tribute that we're giving in a few minutes. We have Wayne Risby, Colin Henry, Ben Asquith, Amos Westropp, Jesse Latoski, Nick Mauro, and Jordan Profeit — if you can please join me in welcoming them to this House.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Bravo and Golden Bravo award winners

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the winners of this year's Bravo and Golden Bravo awards. Each year, the Yukon Convention Bureau, in partnership with the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce and the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre, presents these awards to recognize the top Yukon events, hosts, and hospitality industry

businesses. Conventions, conferences, and meetings are strong economic drivers and contribute to year-round tourism visitation — in fact, \$6.5 million annually to our economy recently.

They generate a range of benefits for the Yukon's business and tourism sectors as well as the community at large. Attendees at these events visit our territory, stay in our hotels, eat at our restaurants, and buy local. These events largely occur between October and April, complementing our shoulder and winter seasons. Beyond that, these events enable knowledge- and information-sharing and bring new ideas, expertise, and investments that ultimately grow and shape our territory.

Both awards this year were handed out to the exemplary job that the Yukon did in hosting the Equal Futures 2023: A Gender Equality Summit this past May. For their role in bringing this outstanding conference to the Yukon and organizing its logistics and agenda, the Bravo Award went to Erin Jex and her team from the Equal Futures Network, an initiative of the Canadian Partnership for Women and Children's Health. They organized a tremendously successful two-day event. Under the theme of "People, Perspectives and Partnerships", this in-person event brought together individuals in the gender-equality movement from across the country to build capacity and connections, share expertise, and develop actions to advance a more equitable and inclusive Canada.

As the caterer for the event, The Wandering Bison's Luke Legault was awarded the Golden Bravo Award, going above and beyond, raising the bar of standards within the Yukon meetings and event industry. The quality of service that Luke and his team provided to not only this event but many others here in the territory make him very deserving of this recognition. By the way, when Luke received his award, he made sure to give a shout-out to our local growers and producers, and I would like to echo his praise.

The hard work that these honourees displayed for their field of expertise is evident. I love their advocacy for the Yukon's natural beauty, rich culture, and amazing experiences. Their efforts are in turn helping to establish the territory as an ideal meeting location year-round, a key goal of the *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy*.

I would like the members of this House to join me in congratulating Erin from Equal Futures Network and Luke of The Wandering Bison for their much-deserved wins. I would also like to recognize the Yukon Convention Bureau, the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, and the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre for their great work in promoting the Yukon as a premier destination for meetings and events. Congratulations, again, to the winners.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize the winners of the Yukon Convention Bureau's Bravo and Golden Bravo awards.

The Bravo Award is given to recognize Yukoners who have championed hosting a meeting or event in the territory. This year's recipients were those who were part of bringing Equal Futures 2023: A Gender Equality Summit to Whitehorse,

held on May 17 and 18, 2023. This forum was supported by over 15 Yukon organizations and generated almost \$400,000 toward the Yukon economy.

The summit included dynamic discussions, networking opportunities, and panels on a wide range of aspects of gender equality. I would like to commend all those local organizations, businesses, and individuals who made the summit possible.

The Golden Bravo Award is given to a Yukon Convention Bureau member who has shown exemplary dedication and has gone above and beyond in service excellence in the meetings and convention sector.

Luke Legault of The Wandering Bison was the recipient this year. Luke and his team have been instrumental to the catering world here in Whitehorse and have been behind some of the biggest and best events held north of 60.

The Wandering Bison was nominated by the Equal Futures 2023: A Gender Equality Summit for their efforts in making the 2023 summit a great success, but Luke's dedication and service excellence are seen throughout the community.

Congratulations to all those award winners and those who made this year's event possible.

Salamat po.

Applause

Ms. Blake: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to congratulate the Yukon Convention Bureau on the 17th annual Bravo Awards.

In particular, we congratulate Equal Futures Network and Luke Legault. They were nominated for their work on the 2023 gender equality summit held in the Yukon last May. The Bravo Awards celebrate the Yukoners who work to bring meetings and conventions to the territory.

These events play a key role in our tourism industry and give us an opportunity to showcase our beautiful territory. When I think about the economic future of the Yukon, it is so important that it includes everyone and that all Yukoners have a chance to participate. That's why it was so exciting to see the gender equality summit celebrated this year. We appreciate how an event like that benefits the Yukon in so many ways.

Congratulations to the Yukon Convention Bureau on another year of being a wonderful ambassador for the Yukon and congratulations to all of their members who are an important part of our economy and community.

Mahsi' cho.

Applause

In recognition of Yukon First Nations Wildlife's Warrior program

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, today we are paying tribute to the Yukon First Nations Wildfire's Warrior program. Yukon First Nations Wildfire is a limited partnership wholly owned by nine Yukon First Nation governments or their corporations. First Nations Wildfire empowers Indigenous communities to effectively manage and prepare for wildfires and environmental emergencies. As we speak, First Nations Wildfire has four crew leaders in Brisbane, Australia through an agreement it has signed with a company there. They will

return on August 1 to prepare for the Yukon season. This summer, the Australian company may reciprocate by sending firefighters here to assist the Yukon. That's some of the world-leading innovations that we are seeing here in the Yukon.

First Nations Wildfire's mission is to fuse its innovative strategies and traditional Indigenous knowledge into innovative wildland firefighting and emergency response and training. Then there is Yukon First Nations Wildfire's Warrior program. This course integrates with the goal of supporting resilient communities, bridging the gap between young people and their entry into the local labour force. The Warrior program provides First Nation youth a creative and first-hand learning experience and prepares them to enter the workforce.

The program recruits First Nation leaders and wildfire firefighters as mentors and trainers. Through their guidance, participants build essential employment skills, learn how to problem-solve, communicate, use computers, or ace an interview. The first-hand learning alongside First Nation traditional knowledge and approaches gives participants new confidence in their future work. It was great to see participants on Yukon First Nations Wildfire social media this week partaking in skill-building activities that will undoubtedly shape their careers.

Prior to this most recent intake, the program has had 60 successful graduates. Courses are held twice per year in February and November. The two-week course arms the ambitious youth with employable skills and connections with employers. I congratulate recent graduates who completed their course on Friday. I also thank the instructors who worked hard to provide this dynamic and educational experience. Through your time and mentorship, you are building the future of the territory.

Mr. Speaker, I want everyone to know the importance of Yukon First Nations Wildfire and the effects that its programming has — repairing, safeguarding, and elevating communities. Your work is incredibly valuable and is shaping the future of our territory.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the 2024 graduates of Yukon First Nations Wildfire's Warrior program. This incredible training program works to provide at-risk Yukon youth between the ages of 16 and 30 with a mentorship opportunity with the Yukon First Nations Wildfire members. It provides pre-employment training and assistance in networking with local business partners, as well as continued job support. Skills learned include job interview training, computer skills, first aid, land-based healing, physical and mental wellness, and more. The program helps youth get on the right path — a great path — to productive and fulfilling employment.

So, thank you to all of the instructors and business partners and congratulations to all participants. We would like to give a special thank you to the whole crew at Yukon First Nations Wildfire ahead of the summer months. Their Beat the Heat boot camp has helped train over 250 firefighters right here at home.

I can't stress enough the importance of having these firefighters available to help serve the Yukon during our peak fire season.

Thanks to everyone for all you do for the Yukon.

Applause

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate the incredible triumph of a made-in-the-Yukon program designed to support Yukon youth as they launch into adulthood. Brought to us by the innovative thinkers at Yukon First Nations Wildfire, the Warrior program empowers Yukon's youth. Through skill development, hands-on learning, and confidence building, this program aims to uplift young people toward a future that is bright and of their own making. By gaining skills and a better understanding of themselves, the Warrior program's most recent graduates join those who have made the journey ahead of them.

We thank the instructors and all those who were involved in building and elevating Yukon's youth so that they may fully walk to their future with more confidence.

Congratulations to those who have just graduated the program. You get to write your own story. It won't always be easy, but trust yourself; you are more powerful and capable than you know. Be patient in your learning and give yourself grace when you make mistakes, because we all make mistakes. For any youth who are interested, don't wait. Reach out to Yukon First Nations Wildfire to learn more about their November program, and good luck.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling a March 6, 2024 letter to the Minister of Education regarding unilateral changes to educational assistant staffing and school allocations, signed by five stakeholder organizations in the education field.

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

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 36: *Exemptions Act* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 36, entitled *Exemptions Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 36, entitled *Exemptions Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 36 agreed to

Speaker: Are there any further bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House acknowledges Decora, CSR Management, Alkan Air, Whitehorse Motors Ltd., unorthodox Yukon, FawkesTrot Adventures, Bon.D Jewelry Services, Spin YT, Luxe 360, and Yukonstruct for becoming signatories to the Yukon's MMIWG2S+ strategy declaration and encourages others to take action to support the strategy's implementation, ending violence, and being accountable to families and survivors.

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

THAT this House supports the regulation created under the *Public Utilities Act* that allows the Yukon's private sector to provide electric vehicle charging services and collect user fees on the electricity sold to the public.

Mr. Kent: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to pause recent changes in the educational assistant staffing and school allocations policy and consult with affected stakeholders before proceeding with further changes.

I also give notice of the following motion for the production of papers:

THAT this House do issue an order for the immediate return of the full report done by EnGauge Consulting prepared for the Department of Education regarding the allocation framework for educational assistants.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?
This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Health authority establishment

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, the health authority legislation that the minister introduced yesterday includes provisions for the transfer of hospital and Yukon government employees to the new health corporation. According to CBC's coverage of the press conference yesterday, the minister told media that — quote: "... many employees who currently work for the health department will migrate to working under the health authority."

So, we would like to ask the minister about this. How many employees will have their jobs moved from the Yukon government into this new health corporation?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I am certainly pleased to be able to speak today to Yukoners about the health transformation of our system here in the territory that will be led by the implementation of a health authority, as put out in *Putting People First* in the recommendations that were there. This is truly an opportunity to collectively, with Yukon First Nations, organizations, governments, and leaders who did

groundbreaking work to create Yukon's *Health Authority Act* which was introduced here yesterday — you will note, through that conversation yesterday and the ministerial statement, that our government has had a number of consultations with individuals, organizations, and stakeholders across the territory in order to come to this Legislative Assembly with the legislative draft that is Bill No. 38.

Yukoners spoke clearly in *Putting People First*, which was first published back in 2020, so this should not be a surprise to anyone. We have been talking very clearly and openly about the opportunities, and *Putting People First* is in fact the blueprint for transforming Yukon's health and social system.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, the minister didn't even attempt to answer my question. The health authority legislation that the minister introduced yesterday included the provision for the transfer of hospital and Yukon government employees to the new health corporation.

Again, according to CBC's coverage of the press conference yesterday, the minister told media "... that many employees who currently work for the health department will migrate to working under the health authority."

Again, Mr. Speaker, since the minister didn't answer the first time, I am going to ask the minister again: How many employees will have their jobs moved from the Yukon government to under this new health corporation?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Our work to establish Shāw Kwā'ą Health and Wellness Yukon demonstrates significant progress toward our government's commitment to an integrated model of health care that puts Yukoners first. The *Health Authority Act* lays the groundwork for this transformative work.

When we tabled the *Health Authority Act* yesterday — we stand at the forefront of the transformative work that will be a fundamental shift for Yukon's health and social services system. There are a number of responsibilities of a future health authority act. These are not a surprise to anyone — how these health authorities are structured. Of course, we worked closely with stakeholders here in the territory and our health care partners to determine a health authority act that will reflect Yukoners.

Ultimately, a health authority will be responsible for providing acute care — primary care front-line services — for Yukoners. Particularly, my reference yesterday was with respect to the Hospital Corporation and perhaps initially also long-term care services. Emergency Medical Services are providing front-line acute services — and our community health centres as well.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Mr. Speaker, that was still not an answer from the minister. We know that this is going to be a big change for a lot of hospital and government employees, and we think it's only fair that we know how many employees are going to be affected and moved under this new corporation. While the minister may not know the number, I assume that she knows which branches of her department are slated to be removed.

Now, she just indicated which ones might be moved, but we're seeking more clarity. We would assume that the minister at least knows which branches of her department are slated to

be removed and transferred under the corporation. Can she tell us which ones will move from the Yukon government and into this new health authority corporation?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I think I described yesterday — and will be very happy to continue to describe — the fact that this process, this structure of a new health authority, has been arrived at and tabled as legislation in partnership with our health care providers with respect to our health partners and our stakeholders across the territory.

The determinations of the structure of the health authority — if the legislation passes here in this Legislative Assembly — will also continue to be developed with our partners.

The organizations that I have mentioned are quite likely to be the first of those that are put under the health authority, because they provide, by definition of what the health authority is to do, which is acute care/primary care — the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the three hospitals — but it is responsible for — long-term care is the next natural organization that would be put under a health authority so that there is movement and collaboration and integration of those two organizations. Others that come to mind at the moment are likely Emergency Medical Services and community health services.

Question re: Health authority establishment

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I have some more questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services about this. For employees of the Yukon government, the *Public Service Act* grants the legislative authority for many of the important aspects of their employment, including job classifications, pay and benefits, and suspension or dismissal.

Section 30 of the proposed health authority legislation makes it clear that the *Public Service Act* will no longer apply to employees of the new health authority corporation, including those who are being transferred from the Yukon government.

Mr. Speaker, for employees who are being transferred from the Yukon government to the new health authority corporation, what will replace the processes and employee protections set out in the *Public Service Act*, since it will no longer apply?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I know that the members opposite are hedging for some more information and for us to make announcements on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. We simply won't do that. We are going to engage with our partners and with the unions and everybody involved in this massive and extremely important — and overdue — transformation.

The Public Service Commission is supporting the Department of Health and Social Services in strategic planning for the overall human resource management function of the new, independent health authority, Health and Wellness Yukon. Our support encompasses various critical labour impacts and strategies, including pensions, benefits, union engagement, classification, personnel transfers, legislation, and human resource management systems.

Again, we are not going hedge any bets or make announcements on the floor of the Legislative Assembly without talking with our partners.

Additionally, the Public Service Commission is proactively identifying and planning for the future state of the Yukon government, recognizing the substantial impact that these significant organizational changes will bring.

Mr. Speaker, while actively engaging in supporting the creation of this new independent health authority, a primary focus remains on maintaining human resource operational supports and functions and systems for our amazing employees of the Yukon government.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I am not asking for the minister to “hedge any bets”, to use his term; I am asking him to explain to Yukoners what this legislation will mean for Yukon government employees. One of the biggest concerns that we have heard from Yukon government employees so far is about what this will mean for them to be transferred from the Yukon government to this new health corporation and what it will mean for their pay, benefits, and especially their pensions.

So, can the minister provide some certainty for the employees whose jobs are going to be directly affected by this new legislation? Can the minister guarantee that no employee will see a reduction or negative impact on their pension as a result of being transferred out of the Yukon government and into this new health authority corporation?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, again, this is exactly what we are talking about. There are a lot of processes here and a lot of conversations that are ongoing right now and are continuing to go on with the extremely important issues that the member opposite brings to the table and that I listed in my last response. These are not decisions that the Yukon Liberal government is going to make lightly. We are going to make sure that we have the evidence needed in these conversations. We are going to work with our partners to make sure that, as we advance this health care system — which is well overdue and the members opposite simply did not do the job — we want to make sure that we do it right and work with our partners. We will make announcements as they come through the subcommittee and the work that we are doing with Health and Social Services.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I think that Yukon government employees should be shocked to hear the Minister of Finance unwilling to guarantee that their pensions won't be negatively affected.

Section 74 of the new health authority bill makes it clear that, if passed, the Liberal Cabinet can transfer any employee or any class of employee to the new health authority corporation. They can do that unilaterally without any consultation. In fact, section 74 provides no guardrails at all about how that process will work. So, many employees are wondering if they will have a choice at all in this process.

Can the minister tell us: Will the Yukon government employees whom the Liberals want to move from the public service and transfer to the new health authority corporation have any choice in the matter at all, or will this be simply something that is done to them?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, we take the extremely important work that the public service does — not lightly.

Again, we are going to make announcements about the advancement of the health authority with our partners.

Again, in my answer, I will reiterate that while actively engaging in supporting the creation of this new and independent health authority, the primary focus, Mr. Speaker — the primary focus — is on maintaining human resources and maintaining the operational supports — the functions and the systems of these employees of the Yukon government. So, there you go, Mr. Speaker; that says it right there — maintaining the functioning — and in the end, we will bring a better system than the current system for our health care providers and for Yukoners.

Question re: Measles vaccination

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, health professionals across the country have raised concerns about the decline in measles vaccination rates in school-aged children and the rise in measles cases in the general population. Measles is a highly contagious disease that can cause serious illness and severe complications, including pneumonia, brain damage, blindness, deafness, and, in some cases, death, but we are lucky to have a very effective vaccine to combat it.

With March break just starting up and many travellers headed to areas of outbreaks, health care professionals in the Yukon are on high alert and they are worried. What is this government doing to educate families about the importance of measles vaccinations and a potential measles outbreak?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, the Government of Yukon is committed to supporting Yukoners to access services and to expanding preventive treatments through the implementation not only of *Putting People First* and the *Aging in Place Action Plan* but through availability of vaccines.

It should not surprise anyone that vaccines were the way in which Yukoners were kept safe going through the pandemic. Our chief medical officer of health has been very keen to make sure that the public is aware of what is optimal for their health with respect to public health.

On February 23, the chief public health officer of Canada published a statement on the global increase of measles. Measles is a highly contagious virus that usually causes mild disease; however, some infections can be quite severe, so the cases that have been identified in Canada have been taken seriously and notifications have gone to the public to say that they should make sure that their measles vaccine is up to date.

The measles vaccines here in the territory are funded by the Yukon immunization program and can be accessed through community health centres in Whitehorse and other parts of the Yukon.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, the World Health Organization recommends that at least 95 percent of people get two doses of the measles vaccine. This creates herd immunity, ensuring that enough people are protected from the disease and to prevent it from spreading easily. Based on the most recent Yukon data from 2022, 84 percent of seven-year-olds were vaccinated, which is 11 percent below the Yukon's immunization target.

During the pandemic, many kids fell through the cracks. Routine vaccinations were frequently cancelled or simply not

available. Some public health agencies in BC and Ontario are offering catch-up clinics to make sure that children and adults are up to date with their vaccinations.

Does the minister have a plan to get immunization rates up to the recommended 95 percent?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, absolutely — we are making sure that Yukoners are aware of the importance of having their measles vaccine up to date and, more importantly than that, that measles vaccines are available for them. First of all, two doses are generally considered to be a complete dose for anyone born in Canada after 1970. The first dose is usually administered after the first birthday, and usually a second dose is administered between the ages of four and six but may be administered as early as 15 months. A longer duration between doses is also available and thought to offer greater protection.

Travellers who are going to countries where a health system may not provide adequate treatment for measles are advised and encouraged to make sure that their vaccines for measles are up to date. There are currently no known cases of measles here in the territory.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, when talking about health care in the Yukon, I always want to highlight the unique challenges that remote communities face. For places like my home community of Vuntut Gwitchin, a measles outbreak could be devastating. Rural Yukoners have less access to vaccine clinics and health services, and many must leave their home communities if they need to access a hospital. A measles outbreak is preventable through education and vaccines.

We have all the tools to ensure that Yukoners living in rural communities are protected from the disease. Can the minister tell Yukoners what steps this government is taking to prevent a measles outbreak in rural Yukon communities?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, as everyone in the Yukon will be aware, vaccines are promoted by this government as a very important way in which health and public health can be protected. We led the way during the pandemic in availability of vaccines and ultimately the population benefited from that.

Measles vaccines are funded by the Yukon immunization program and can be accessed through community health centres and in Whitehorse at the Whitehorse Health Centre. Community health centres maintain a stock of measles vaccines available by appointment, which can be made over the phone. If an individual was not vaccinated as a child, an adult may access the vaccine with coverage under the Yukon immunization program. Travellers going to other countries — and individuals who are not necessarily travelling out of the Yukon but want to make sure that their vaccines are up to date — are encouraged to do so by contacting the program here in Whitehorse or their community health centre.

Question re: Municipal recycling program

Ms. McLeod: On February 27, the Minister of Community Services issued a press release stating that the Government of Yukon was offering \$2.4 million over two years to the City of Whitehorse to support a new curbside recycling pickup service. It was noticeable that the release did not involve

the City of Whitehorse or include a quote from the mayor. This shouldn't be surprising given the strained relationship between this minister and municipal governments.

According to the mayor, the city has written to the minister with several questions that, despite the announcement, have not been answered. Why did the minister make this pre-budget announcement about a city program without involving the city or answering their questions about it?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I disagree with the preamble that the Member for Watson Lake brought up in the question this afternoon, but I do thank her for raising the issue of recycling, because this is important. It is something that I certainly have been a big supporter — I mean, let's be perfectly clear — as has my predecessor in this role — is how we handle waste in the territory. I have spoken at length about the work that we are doing to improve our landfills across the territory. Here in Whitehorse, we are working very hard with our municipal partners — in this case, the City of Whitehorse — to improve recycling. The two go hand in hand.

As a society, we are producing tons of garbage, and we have to do more to actually divert it from our landfills, because commissioning and decommissioning landfills is a very expensive proposition. The more we keep out of those landfills, the longer they will last and the better it is for everybody and the cheaper it will be for all municipal citizens.

We are working very closely with our partner, the City of Whitehorse, to improve recycling in the City of Whitehorse. This was brought about because Raven has decided to move away from the free public drop-off, and that opened an opportunity for the City of Whitehorse and the Yukon government to move into a polluter-pay model for recycling in the City of Whitehorse, and we are going to pursue that with the City of Whitehorse, our partner.

Ms. McLeod: It's clear that, since the minister made this announcement, the City of Whitehorse has been left hanging and trying to understand what it will mean for them. The mayor has been quite clear that there are many unanswered questions about both this funding and the program that it is intended to fund.

First and foremost is how much additional funding will be required by the city to pay for this new program that the minister has announced. City officials have expressed concerns that municipal taxpayers will have to make up the shortfall between the funding offered by the minister and the actual cost of that program.

Can the minister tell us how much municipal taxes will need to increase to pay for this new program that the Liberal government has announced?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We understand from our ongoing discussions with the City of Whitehorse that one of the barriers to starting a curbside recycling program in Whitehorse was that the start-up cost of offering a new municipal recycling program and bridging the funding gap between when the Raven ReCentre moved away from their free public drop-off and extended producer responsibility begins in the territory — that was the gap, that was the delta. The Yukon government — the Cabinet — met, and we agreed that we would support the City

of Whitehorse to the tune of up to \$2.4 million, which includes \$800,000 a year in actually diverting money — subsidies — directly to the citizens of Whitehorse for the new program. That also includes some of the diversion credits that the Raven ReCentre currently gets for handling the garbage.

That's where the \$2.4 million number came from. We explained this in a letter to the City of Whitehorse. The letter was sent quite a while ago. The city now has to make a decision about what they are doing for the curbside recycling program. Curbside recycling is a City of Whitehorse responsibility. I fully respect that. We are just stepping in, as we have done for decades now. We are providing some support for recycling in the City of Whitehorse.

Ms. McLeod: Now, another concern expressed by the mayor relates to the Liberal government's proposed new extended producer responsibility program.

The government has said that it will be up and running by the end of 2025, so the city has questioned why they would start a curbside recycling pickup program only to have it replaced in less than two years.

What response does the minister have to the concerns expressed by the City of Whitehorse about the timing of the EPR program?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I will tell you. One of the questions that I get more than any other in the territory — I mean, versus wildfire protection, of course — the second most requested information I get is: What is going to happen with recycling in the City of Whitehorse? People do not want to get rid of their bottles. That is a benign substance. People are still bristling with the fact that we don't have bottle recycling anymore, and now they are worried about what they are going to do with the rest of their recycling. This is an issue that the City of Whitehorse is going to have to deal with as part of its waste and recycling responsibilities, and the Government of Yukon has stepped into that field and said: Here is \$2.4 million, Whitehorse, that you can use to launch a curbside recycling program. This is money that we have committed to make sure that citizens of Whitehorse have a place to put their recycling until the extended producer responsibility comes up. It is fully on the City of Whitehorse to accept or reject the money that we put forward. I certainly hope that they have good discussions on this matter.

I look forward to what their decision is. It is a City of Whitehorse decision that they are going to have to make in the near future, but we, as a government, are committed to improving the way that we deal with waste and recycling in the territory, and this is how we are doing it.

Question re: Residential lot development

Ms. Clarke: We continue to be concerned about the slowing pace of residential home construction in the Yukon. On March 7, the Yukon Bureau of Statistics released their building statistics, which show that, from January 2023 to January 2024, residential construction was down 2.6 percent and that overall the value of residential construction was down over 22 percent in 2023. This is largely due to a lack of available lots.

So, we would like an update on the minister's work done to date to get residential lots into the hands of home builders. Since he became the Minister of Community Services in 2021, how many residential lots have been released?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Do you know what is refreshing, Mr. Speaker? To stand in the House and hear questions or to sit here and hear questions from the Yukon Party about housing, because this is a file that they showed very little interest in while they were in power. Now they suddenly have the bug. They suddenly understand that housing is an issue for Yukoners. It has taken them — I don't know — 10 years now to actually understand this, and I am certainly glad to hear that it's finally a priority for the Yukon Party.

It has been a priority for our government right from the get-out, because I was talking to my good colleague the Minister of Economic Development, now the Premier, and my good colleague the Minister of Community Services. They all knew how important housing was and were flabbergasted at how little activity had happened in the territory prior to us coming into office.

We have committed and have spent tens of millions of dollars on housing development. We are going to continue to spend tens of millions of dollars on housing development and housing initiatives for Yukoners, because we know that Yukoners care about this, we know that Yukoners need a place to live, and we know that we have lots and lots of people moving to this tremendous territory that we all love so much. That is our priority, and we are going to continue to make those strategic investments so that Yukoners have safe, affordable housing that they can count on.

Ms. Clarke: Well, I'm afraid that was not specifically what I asked, Mr. Speaker. I had clearly asked how many lots were released since he became the minister in the spring of 2021. I would like to focus specifically on the 2023-24 budget year. According to his briefing note from the Fall Sitting, the department was targeting the release of over 300 lots in my riding alone last year.

Can the minister update us on the actual number of lots between last year's budget and today?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: So much to unpack there, Mr. Speaker, so much to unpack. First of all, the interest is great. The second thing is that the member opposite brought up the fact that she had a briefing note. You know why? It is because this government made those available to the opposition and to the public. That was part of our ATIPP act changes: to make more information before the public and before the opposition. That is something we did.

The third thing is that the member opposite asked about the budget and all the money and stuff we did in the budget — the budget that they voted against, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to seeing whether they vote with Yukoners or against them in supporting this budget when we come to a vote on the budget this session.

Ms. Clarke: In the Minister of Finance's budget speech, he reiterated the Liberal government's commitment to releasing 1,000 lots during the current mandate. However, it was notable to everyone that the budget speech referenced the 800 lots

released since 2016. This caught the eye of many Yukoners, because the Liberals' promise was to release 1,000 lots between the last election and next election. It seems that we are nowhere near that goal.

Can the minister tell us if the government is now backing away from this commitment?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Whitehorse is a growing community, and we expect long-term demand for housing to continue. This is not a surprise to anybody. It is something we knew even before we were in office. It is something that the previous government failed to address, and we are working on that.

The Land Development branch works with the City of Whitehorse to create neighbourhoods that meet demand, including the beautiful and vibrant neighbourhood that is Whistle Bend. We also work with the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and support their land development objectives, like Range Point Road. We are working with the Town of Watson Lake on their Frances Avenue. Haines Junction has a new development that we are working on as well.

We have tens of millions of dollars in lot development going on. Again, in rural lot development this year, we have \$6 million committed, with change.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to continue to do the hard work to work for Yukoners to provide them the housing spectrum that they expect their government to provide and that they need. We are going to make sure that there is affordable housing, that there are lots for people to purchase, that there is development lots for commercial interests. We are going to continue to do the hard work, and we are spending tens of millions of dollars — more than \$30 million this year — on that. I certainly hope the opposition votes with the budget to give Yukoners the lots they deserve.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 214: *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2024-25* — Second Reading

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 214, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I move that Bill No. 214, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2024-25*, be now read a second time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 214, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2024-25*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Today, I rise in support of Bill No. 214, otherwise known as the *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2024-25*. If passed, this bill will provide spending authority for the first two months of the fiscal year. As with previous years, this funding will ensure that the government has the

necessary appropriations to fund programs and services that Yukoners expect and reply upon as members debate the main estimates in the Assembly.

The 2024-25 interim supply bill will grant spending authority to departments for the months of April and May while this process is underway.

The total value of the *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2024-25* is approximately \$458.3 million. This includes \$373.1 million in operation and maintenance spending, and there is \$85.2 million in capital spending.

Mr. Speaker, the main estimates for 2024-25 show a government continuing to invest in critical areas for the territory, including health care, the development of our communities, affordability, and ongoing contributions toward reconciliation.

It also shows continued progress on key priorities for this government, including advancing work on commitments outlined in *Putting People First* and in *Our Clean Future*. This interim supply bill supports government as we begin working toward these initiatives in 2024-25. It provides critical operational funding in order to allow departments to meet their financial obligations at the start of the fiscal year. The bill ensures that government services continue and that employees, Yukon businesses, and government contractors continue to get paid until the 2024-25 main estimates receive assent.

As in previous years, the majority of the funding includes one-sixth of the forecast budget as well as large payments due early in the fiscal year for items such as the comprehensive municipal grants, the Yukon Hospital Corporation contribution agreement, the Yukon University contribution agreement, social assistance payments, and funds for universal childcare expenses.

The Yukon's comprehensive municipal grants are paid out on April 1 of each year. This bill will ensure that organizations, corporations, and other levels of government have the money they need to fund their operations. It also includes the first instalment necessary for the operation of Yukon schools, as well as funds for fire management to support potential needs for fire suppression and also flood response.

While some of the numbers reflect more than a sixth of the government budget, I will explain in further detail how these figures are determined during Committee of the Whole. The *First Appropriation Act 2024-25* provides spending authority for the full year.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, as always with budget bills, since this is a confidence vote, we will be voting against the Liberal government. We know that 80 percent of Yukoners want a change in government. Yukoners are done with this Liberal government. So, this afternoon, my colleagues and I will vote for Yukoners, for an election, and against this Liberal government, which has no mandate from the public and a Premier who has no mandate from the public.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, it is important that government be able to continue on during times of budget debate. It's important that services are offered and people are paid. I don't

want to say "the lights are on", but essentially, the lights are on. So, we will be voting in favour of this regardless of the situation that we find ourselves in. Thank you for the time.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Leader of the Third Party for her comments about the interim supply bill and also the paid endorsement from a paid survey from the Yukon Party as far as percentages of concern. I look forward to the Committee of the Whole debate.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Speaker, 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: Disagree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Ms. Clarke: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 10 yea, eight nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for second reading of Bill No. 214 agreed to

Bill No. 35: Coordinated Vaping Product Taxation Agreement Act — Second Reading

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 35, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 35, entitled *Coordinated Vaping Product Taxation Agreement Act*, be now read a second time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 35, entitled *Coordinated Vaping Product Taxation Agreement Act*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this afternoon to begin debate on the *Coordinated Vaping Product Taxation Agreement Act*, otherwise known as Bill No. 35. This bill in front of the Legislature today is quite brief. In a nutshell, it authorizes me, as the Minister of Finance representing the Yukon, to enter into a coordinated vaping product taxation agreement with the Government of Canada.

The agreement that we intend to sign is fairly straightforward. Under the authority of the *Excise Act, 2001*, Canada currently taxes vaping products. When a province or territory signs a coordinated vaping product taxation agreement, Canada will apply an additional duty to vaping products in that jurisdiction. The additional duty is collected by the Canada Revenue Agency and remitted to the participating provinces or territories. In return, a participating province or territory must commit that it will not impose its own tax on vaping. That is essentially the commitment that we are being asked of in the Assembly today.

Mr. Speaker, I will briefly describe the history of how we got here. In 2021, Canada announced their intention to introduce a new federal taxation framework for the imposition of excise duties on vaping products as part of their annual budget.

The Government of Canada also stated that they would work with any provinces or territories interested in a federally coordinated approach to taxing these products a year later. In budget 2022, Canada presented details on how the tax would work as well as initial estimates of the revenue potential for the new tax. I will explain how the tax will work in detail in Committee of the Whole, but I will also provide some high-level information in a few minutes here.

First, Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that 10 out of 13 provinces and territories have either joined the federal government's coordinated vaping products taxation framework or have announced their intention to do so. This includes the Yukon. Only Newfoundland and Labrador, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia will not be participating in the coordinated regime, as they all have their own existing vaping taxes already.

Canada is enrolling with 10 remaining jurisdictions in batches based upon when each province or territory had the legislative ability to sign the agreements. The first batch consisted of Ontario, Québec, Nunavut, and also the Northwest Territories. These four will be participating as of July 1 of this year. The remaining six jurisdictions planning on participating in the coordinated regime will have an effective date of January 1, 2025, and that includes the Yukon.

Given the coming-into-force date, we are only showing a modest revenue for the upcoming year. However, for subsequent years, we are estimating that this revenue source will eventually rise to approximately \$780,000 in annual revenues. This is still less than the recent declines in our tobacco revenue, but is still a significant amount.

Secondly, I would like to discuss what we are seeing as a trend across Canada, and that is the decline of tobacco revenues for all governments as a shift toward vaping contributes toward smoking cessation. This shift toward vaping is primarily happening with younger Canadians. Health Canada indicates

that vaping is less harmful than continuing to smoke. However, it is not harmless and not intended for young people. Youth are especially susceptible to the harmful effects of nicotine because brain development continues through adolescence and into early adulthood.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to discuss the issue of youth vaping for a moment, if I may. Research has shown that approximately one in five Canadians aged 20 to 24 and one in seven youth aged 15 to 19 reported vaping in the past month in 2022. In 2022, one in 10 Canadians aged 20 to 24 and one in 15 youth aged 15 to 19 vaped every day, compared with one in 50 Canadians aged 25 and older.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, in Committee of the Whole, I look forward to elaborating on how Canada structures the tax, both to recognize that vaping is less harmful than cigarette smoking and also to address the particular concern of youth adoption. I am looking forward to remarks from the members during the second reading and also to continue answering questions during the Committee of the Whole debate.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, while considered less harmful than smoking, vaping is, of course, still harmful. It is concerning to see the increase in vaping, especially among young people. Like with tobacco, I think it's fair to say that generally there is a widespread public consensus that there should be a tax on these products. We will be supporting this at second reading.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, from the briefings and the Premier's comments, we understand that the primary goal of this legislation is to reduce vaping, particularly among young people. That is a goal I think we can all support. As has been said, vaping does have harms, although I think its role in harm reduction for people who already smoke is a little bit unclear. But it is clear that we don't want people to start vaping, especially that we don't want youth to start vaping. We want people who are already vaping to find other — to be able to quit, and we want to support them to do that. That is especially important for youth who are already vaping — that they have support to quit.

What we are going to be looking for in the debate is for the government to make the case that this legislation will do that, because there are potential harms associated with this legislation. Most people who smoke and vape don't do so by choice; they do so because they quite literally have an addiction, which is a very difficult thing to change. Increasing the taxes on vaping supplies means that people who are addicted to nicotine and who vape as a harm reduction method will pay a great deal more.

It is well understood that the risk of smoking is correlated with lower socio-economic status, so people with lower incomes are more likely to smoke. It is probably not surprising that I think it's generally understood to be the same for vaping. So, we are talking about people who are already often living in or close to poverty, and we are talking about taxing them more for their addictions. That is something that we need to do very carefully.

According to a report from Public Health Canada called *Tobacco and Vaping Use in Canada: Moving Forward*, which was published in 2021, there is some evidence to suggest that the relationship between taxation and tobacco use is inelastic. That is, demand doesn't change as taxes go up. That is, people don't buy or smoke less when taxes go up. It's not really clear how that applies to vaping yet. I am looking to the Minister of Finance to present evidence that he believes that this tax will prevent people from vaping or help people stop.

I also hope that the government has talked to people who vape — and in particular to young people who vape — as they prepared this legislation to bring forward. I do understand — I believe — that it has come forward fairly quickly, so if time constraints have limited that outreach, then I hope that they can point to research that does share the perspectives of young people who vape on what would be helpful to them, what would help them not start vaping or stop if they already do.

It would be a pretty problematic situation for a bunch of people in this room, none of whom qualify as youth — I think I am the youngest Member of the Legislative Assembly, and I don't fall into any of the categories mentioned. It would be pretty strange for us to sit and decide what young people need without ever talking to them. I certainly hope that's not what's happening now.

Finally, I want to hear what other plans the government has to support young people and adults from vaping and to support them to quit if they already do, because that is a goal that we all support. We know that it's important — for both personal health and for public health — that people don't smoke and vape.

According to the Canadian Lung Association, the gold standard is — and I will quote: “Based on the available evidence to date, the best approach to quit smoking is through behavioural support and approved pharmacologic aids...”

According to them — at least with smoking — I imagine it would be similar with vaping — the things that best help them not vape or not smoke is behavioural support and pharmacologic aids.

I would like to hear about what level of supports on those fronts is already being provided in the Yukon, if the government believes that to be adequate, or whether they have plans to increase those supports that are available. What other fronts are they working on in order to promote public health in this way?

Just to recap what I have said, I think we all agree with this goal of preventing vaping, particularly in young people, and supporting young people to stop vaping and supporting adults to stop vaping. What I will be looking for in Committee of the Whole is to hear the evidence that increasing taxation will prevent or reduce vaping, particularly among young people. I will be looking for what the economic impacts of increasing costs to people who vape might be. I will be looking for what perspectives from young people who vape have been considered in this legislation, and I will be looking for information about what other approaches the government is taking to address the harms of vaping.

I will just note that I did flag this in the prior briefing with department officials. I look forward to the debate in Committee of the Whole.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the members opposite for their comments in second reading here on a very important subject. I don't know if I will be able to provide all of the medical responses for the member opposite, as far as the scientific proof of whether or not vaping is helping, for those who used to smoke, now becoming smoke-free. I am also not sure, with the limited amount of time that people have been actually vaping, if there are actually statistics to prove a lot of the things that the member opposite is looking for. But what I do know is, if there is a new option compared to smoking and if we are taxing smoking and if that money goes toward programs and goes toward services and goes toward supporting a government that deals with the health and social services fallout from people who smoke — even though there are these big messages on smoking and vaping as far as the harms that it attracts — I think that it is a responsible thing for the federal government to do and for provinces and territories to tax that habit — therefore, taking that money into the health care system so that general taxpayers aren't burdened with the over-costs in our medical systems.

The specific ones, I will confer with my department officials before they come into Committee of the Whole to see how much of that they have been able to digest. Remember, we are the Finance department; we are not the Health and Social Services department. I think that any of those questions that I can't answer in Committee of the Whole, I will commit to members opposite to a briefing with Health and Social Services or other departments if there is something in Committee that we don't get to, that doesn't respond to the specific questions from the members opposite.

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. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

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

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for second reading of Bill No. 35 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 214, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 214: *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2024-25*

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 214, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Madam Chair, I am pleased to rise in Committee of the Whole to speak to Bill No. 214, known as the *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2024-25*. If passed, the bill will provide the spending authority for the first two months of the fiscal year. Members will be familiar with this bill, as it includes funding that will ensure that the government has the necessary appropriations to fund programs and services Yukoners expect and rely upon as we debate the main estimates.

As with previous years, the 2024-25 interim supply bill will grant spending authority to departments for the months of April and May while this process is underway. As I mentioned during second reading, the total value of the *Interim Supply*

Appropriation Act 2024-25 is \$458.3 million, or 22 percent of the total government budget. This includes \$373.1 million in operation and maintenance spending, and there is \$85.2 million in capital spending.

This interim supply bill provides critical operation funding in order for all the departments to meet their financial obligations at the start of the fiscal year. This bill ensures that government services continue and that employees, Yukon businesses, and government contractors continue to get paid until the 2024-25 main estimates are passed.

The majority of the funding includes one-sixth of the forecasted budget, as well as large payments due early in the fiscal year for items such as the comprehensive municipal grant, the Yukon Hospital Corporation contribution agreement, the Yukon University contribution agreement, and expenses for universal childcare needed at the start of the fiscal year. It also includes funding for fire and flood management should it be required early in the fiscal year and also funding for the RCMP, the government's 911 contract, and several contribution agreements across multiple departments.

The Yukon's comprehensive municipal grants are paid out on April 1 of each year. This bill will ensure that organizations, corporations, and other levels of government have the money that they need to fund their operations. It also includes funding for the Yukon's schools for the first two months of the fiscal year. Madam Chair, I would be pleased to provide members with an overview of what specifically is included from a numbers perspective.

I mentioned legislative grants. This year's interim supply bill includes \$41.8 million in that area, the largest of which includes \$24.6 million for the comprehensive municipal grants, \$10.5 million for grants-in-lieu of property taxes for municipalities, \$4 million for social assistance payments, and \$932,000 for post-secondary student grants and childcare subsidies. There is also \$600,000 for the Yukon seniors income supplement payment and \$900,000 for medical travel subsidies. Beyond these grants, contribution agreements to the Yukon Hospital Corporation and Yukon University make up \$44 million and \$7.8 million respectively. Non-governmental organizations also depend on these payments to continue their operations without interruption.

Under Health and Social Services, this bill also includes one-quarter of the grants and contribution agreements with NGOs, worth \$15 million. There is also \$10 million for the RCMP and 911 contracts, which I mentioned, included in the interim supply bill.

Finally, there is \$10 million included in this bill as part of funding for universal childcare and \$15 million to meet agreements, purchases, and contracts in Yukon schools.

This is just a snapshot of some of the most significant items that are included in the interim supply bill and that may fall outside of the one-sixth allocation fraction. As in previous years, the remaining amounts are largely operational and fall under a standard two-month distribution of funds. The *First Appropriation Act 2024-25* provides spending authority for the full year.

While I welcome questions related to the interim supply bill, I hope that members will direct questions about the first appropriation act to the debate where departmental ministers will be happy to provide responses. With all that being said, passing this interim supply bill helps ensure that services are still provided to Yukoners while we have that thorough discussion here in the House.

Mr. Cathers: I would just note that, as the Official Opposition Finance critic, we will be saving our questions related to spending for debate during the budget itself. We recognize the need for interim spending to be in place and, as I noted earlier, since the vote is a matter of confidence, will vote against it at second and third reading.

I would like to thank the Deputy Minister of Finance and Finance officials for their work on the budget and for the briefing. With that, I will turn the floor over to the Third Party.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Where are my manners, Madam Chair? I forgot to welcome Deputy Minister Jessica Schultz to the Legislative Assembly — no stranger to the Legislature.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Bill No. 214, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2024-25*?

Seeing none, we will now proceed to clause-by-clause.

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all clauses, schedules, the preamble, and the title of Bill No. 214, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2024-25*, read and agreed to.

Unanimous consent re deeming all clauses, schedules, the preamble, and the title of Bill No. 214 read and agreed to

Chair: The Member for Takhini-Kopper King has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all clauses, schedules, the preamble, and the title of Bill No. 214, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2024-25*, read and agreed to.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

Clauses 1 and 2 and Schedules A and B deemed read and agreed to

On Preamble

Preamble agreed to

On Title

Title agreed to

Hon. Mr. Silver: Madam Chair, I move that you report Bill No. 214, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2024-25*, without amendment.

Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Klondike that the Chair report Bill No. 214, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2024-25*, without amendment.

Motion agreed to

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 35, entitled *Coordinated Vaping Product Taxation Agreement Act*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 35: Coordinated Vaping Product Taxation Agreement Act

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 35, entitled *Coordinated Vaping Product Taxation Agreement Act*.

Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Madam Chair, before we begin Committee of the Whole debate on Bill No. 35, I would like to welcome, no stranger to the Legislative Assembly, Clarke LaPrairie here to the gallery. As far as public servants on this file, he would be at the forefront; that's for sure.

In second reading, I provided the House with the rationale for joining the federally coordinated vaping taxation agreement. I would like to remind the Committee that, in signing this agreement with the federal government, jurisdictions commit that they will not impose their own tax.

Here in Committee of the Whole today, I would like to speak a bit about what the federal tax looks like in its practical application. Given the expected start date of January 1, 2025, it's our expectation that, in the upcoming year, we will receive transfers from Canada representing two months of vaping revenue prior to the year's end, so we have included \$115,000 in our main estimates for this year to reflect that amount. On an annualized basis, we are estimating that this revenue source will eventually rise to approximately \$780,000 in annual revenues.

Madam Chair, I did mention in second reading that I would explain how the federal government has struck a balance between taxing vaping at a lower rate than cigarettes, given its harmful nature over traditional smoking, as well as creating a tax incentive to reduce youth adoption. The tax rate consists of the regular federal duty and a supplementary duty on vaping products. This supplementary duty represents the territorial share subsequent to joining the agreement.

The supplemental duty would depend on the volume of vaping substances contained inside the individual vaping product sold, and these are measured in millilitres or grams. The tax rate would be \$1 per two millilitres, or a fraction thereof, for the first 10 millilitres of vaping substance in a product, and then it is \$1 per 10 millilitres for volumes beyond that. This rate structure is designed to target closed systems such as vaping pods and other single-use devices.

Research shows that these devices are predominantly used by youth, whereas adults are more likely to use reusable open systems. While the balance of evidence suggests that vaping is less harmful than smoking and is an effective smoking-cessation tool for many, the long-term health impacts of vaping are still unknown, as I mentioned earlier today. Individuals using vaping products as a smoking-cessation tool are mostly

adults; however, it can make youth more likely to adopt smoking and it may have long-term negative health impacts, and these are still unknown.

I would like to repeat my earlier statement that the federal tax is designed to create a disincentive for youth to adopt vaping as a habit while at the same time recognizing that it can be a step for some who are trying to quit smoking.

The Canada Revenue Agency will administer the vaping tax. An enormous additional benefit for the Yukon is that any costs associated with the administration will be borne entirely by Canada. This therefore is by far the most effective or efficient method for treating and administering this tax.

Given the short nature of this bill, I will end my points here, and I will see if there are any questions from the members opposite.

Mr. Cathers: I would just note that we, as I noted before, think that there is generally broad-based public support for the concept of taxation on tobacco and vaping products, and I don't have any detailed questions at this point in time, so I will cede the floor to the Third Party for any questions that they may have.

MLA Tredger: I will start by thanking the officials for the briefing and for being here today. I would like to start by asking about the analysis done to decide if this would be an effective way of reducing vaping use, particularly among youth, and if they can point to any evidence that they drew upon for that analysis.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I will start by saying that, because this is a federal initiative, we are accepting their research as well when it comes to the national studies, the work that they have done on their modelling, and the decisions for the vaping taxation.

I will say that the Canadian Cancer Society, the World Health Organization, and public experts support taxation as a critical public policy tool to reduce vaping. The studies from the Canadian Cancer Society say that this will reduce vaping, especially among price-sensitive young people.

With that statement as well, the research also does say, because of the expense of the vaping products themselves, it's actually an opposite thing. You would think, from smoking, it's more of a target for the lower socio-economic status people, but in vaping, it actually has an alternative effect so that people with more money seem to be vaping more.

Just for that, this is the prevalence of e-cigarettes used in the past 30 days — Canada provinces in 2019 — you would see that household incomes of less than \$40,000 have a percentage of people who are from 15 to 17 years old of 18.2 percent; whereas, household incomes of over \$100,000 for the same demographic of 15- to 17-year-old individuals — that percentage is further than that; it's at 23.6 percent.

Again, as I did mention, this is pretty preliminary data. The habit of vaping hasn't been around long enough to make extensive comparison to smoking cigarettes, but I will also say that, according to the World Bank, jurisdictions worldwide have implemented vaping taxation. Several studies show that vaping tax decreases youth vaping use. According to an article published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, a

\$1 increase in a vaping tax led to a 12-percent decrease in teen vaping use.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the Minister of Finance. That is really helpful information.

Following up on the questions that I flagged in my second reading speech, what are the concerns about people who are living in or near poverty and how this will affect them? What sort of consideration has been given to that, and what are the expected effects?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I think all who are studying this will agree that, as long as the taxation is not more on vaping than it is on cigarette smoking, then that would be part of the variables to consider when it comes to people in lower socio-economic status situations.

MLA Tredger: I wanted to ask about how the perspectives of youth, who are really the target of this bill, have been taken into account. Has there been any conversation with youth in the Yukon who vape or have considered vaping or have stopped vaping? Can the Minister of Finance point to any of those perspectives that have been brought in from elsewhere?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Nothing specific to this particular initiative from the federal government, but there are existing, you know, programs and curriculum that are dedicated to health. For example, in the Yukon, we have the QuitPath, which offers the free personalization of one-to-one coaching from a Whitehorse Quit Coach. We have QuitPath's tips and tools, full hands-on tools and guidelines to becoming nicotine-free — so whatever method you are using. We also have 24 weeks of free nicotine replacement products, such as nicotine patches or gum, lozenges or inhalers, all part of the initiatives and the consultation that has been done previously to get us to these products and incentives. Extra or alternative support is also available through our Smokers' Helpline. Again, all of these initiatives are based upon, you know, evidence, other jurisdictions, and a desire to make sure that we are reducing the number of youth who are smoking and hoping to not incentivize them to pick up new habits.

MLA Tredger: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister for that. One of the pieces that often gets talked about in terms of reducing the harms of vaping for youth is flavoured vapes, and there is a call from a number of leading organizations to ban flavoured vaping.

In 2019 — I believe this was brought up by my colleagues the Member for Takhini-Kopper King and the former Member for Whitehorse Centre about this possibility and what it would do to help prevent youth from vaping. Is that something that is being considered as another method to reduce vaping in youth?

Hon. Mr. Silver: This is definitely a concern. The encyclopedia known as "Clerk", as we were coming down the stairs, talked to me about some of his research that he was doing on some of the different flavours. When you take into consideration the chemical combinations of materials — one material, they use on jet wings to make sure that it can glide through the air better — when you light these things on fire, when you put heat toward them, they actually result in very

toxic formaldehyde being ingested in the lungs. This is in the flavouring of these products.

We saw the federal government, with initiatives of the provinces and territories in the past with smoking, reduce and eliminate targeting advertisements for children. There was the very famous Joe Camel in the United States who was kind of like the predecessor of all those rules coming out in Canada as well — but also the flavours that were in a lot of the packaging for cigarettes. There was a bill in the Yukon that is already in place, which is the *Tobacco and Vaping Products Control and Regulation Act*, and does have this currently banned in schools, but again — open to the considerations and the consultation on this one as well but also the support of other jurisdictions as we go down this road.

MLA Tredger: I guess I hope that, as the government considers tools to promote health of Yukoners — and particularly young Yukoners — through reducing vaping, they consider these other calls as well as just taxation, which is largely a punitive measure, and look at other things like reducing flavoured vapes, which are often very appealing to young people. As the minister mentioned, they are really quite dangerous in lots of ways.

Just turning back a little bit to some of the other supports that are available, I appreciate that the list the minister gave. Is there a sense right now in the department as to whether it is an adequate amount of support — if people are able to access those supports in all communities in the Yukon and whether they are available to youth, if they are available through schools or if they have to go elsewhere for them? Are there any plans to expand that access, or is it believed to be adequate as it is?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Looking at numbers — decrease of smoking — whether or not the initiatives are adequate or not, the conversation goes hand in hand with the amount of taxation that has been happening. Again, as we debate this in the Legislative Assembly, I would urge members opposite to think about it in terms of — if we don't support this taxation, then we as a government will have less money to make sure that our targeted interaction with youth — we would have less money to make sure that these programs go further.

MLA Tredger: That is actually a really great point that I wanted to come to. Will the money raised from this tax go back into programs to support people to not vape?

Hon. Mr. Silver: We have had this debate in the Legislative Assembly on a few different items over the years. Money goes back into general revenues. Governments put money in budgets based upon mandates; mandates are based upon some of the political considerations of the political parties, and so the mandate determines the funding, as opposed to specific pieces. So, we put everything into a general revenue fund. From there, governments make their decisions of their priorities for health care and other supports.

MLA Tredger: Okay, so let me ask that in a slightly different way. General revenues will be going up by, I believe, approximately \$780,000 a year. Is there a plan to increase supports to youth around vaping of that amount or a comparable amount or any amount?

Hon. Mr. Silver: In mentioning the taxes, that is a helpful tool, but our track record here would be keeping supports at a certain level for awareness, for health supports when it comes to people who smoke cigarettes. Even though our revenue is coming down from that taxation, which is great because we are seeing fewer people smoke and less of a burden on our health care system — but we want to maintain those programs. So, having it attached to a tax is not necessarily for both sides of that argument of more or less, based upon the tax; it is more about the importance from evidence that we get from the departments and all of their non-governmental organizations that help them in particular areas of health and social services. That will determine how much money goes toward these things because, yes — it's the same with carbon pricing. If we are actually reducing our amount of carbon, then less money is going into that general fund and that is a good thing overall.

If we are seeing a reduction in the smoking tax, that is because the programs and services that we are offering are working. In my time, I haven't seen a reduction in those programs and services.

MLA Tredger: I actually really appreciate that point — that the supports shouldn't be tied necessarily to the revenue because we want to maintain those supports, especially if they working, probably.

But going back to my previous question, does the government believe that the amount of supports available for people who are smoking and vaping — particularly youth who are smoking and vaping — are currently adequate? Do they have plans to reassess the amounts of money they are putting into that, or are they planning to leave them the same?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, I would say that's a better question for the Department of Health and Social Services, as far as that support mechanism. We are here to debate the merit of whether or not we should join this federal initiative to collect the tax. Whether or not the programs and services — for, let's just say, nicotine in general, whether it's smoking or vaping — are hitting the mark or not, that would be a conversation for Health and Social Services as opposed to Finance, I would say.

MLA Tredger: I ask because the Premier said that we should support this bill because it will lead to more money for supports to not smoke and vape. It's hard, then, to be told that we can't ask about the supports around nicotine in this department.

I think I have the information that I was looking for. That will wrap up my questions. I really appreciate the work of all the officials helping make that happen and the answers from the minister.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Just two points on that — my comment about the revenue here is that, if we don't have a tax, then we have less own-source revenue. If we have less own-source revenue, then we can put less money toward programs and services — not necessarily saying that this particular tax would go to specific funds.

Also, it's not that you can't ask questions of the government; it's just that I am not the expert when it comes to those numbers as far as understanding how well our programs

work in the Department of Health and Social Services. It's not a no. If you want a more fulsome answer, the minister and her team are better set to answer those questions. I know that the minister is here listening, and so what a great opportunity to segue that into a conversation in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you very much to the members opposite for the thoughtful questions.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Bill No. 35, entitled *Coordinated Vaping Product Taxation Agreement Act*? Seeing none, we will now proceed clause-by-clause.

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all clauses and the title of Bill No. 35, entitled *Coordinated Vaping Product Taxation Agreement Act*, read and agreed to.

Unanimous consent re deeming all clauses and the title of Bill No. 35 read and agreed to

Chair: The Member for Whitehorse Centre has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all clauses and the title of Bill No. 35, entitled *Coordinated Vaping Product Taxation Agreement Act*, read and agreed to.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

Clauses 1 to 3 agreed to

On Title

Title agreed to

Hon. Mr. Silver: Madam Chair, I move that you report Bill No. 35, entitled *Coordinated Vaping Product Taxation Agreement Act*, without amendment.

Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Klondike that the Chair report Bill No. 35, entitled *Coordinated Vaping Product Taxation Agreement Act*, without amendment.

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

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

Chair's report

Chair: Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 214, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2024-25*, and directed me to report the bill without amendment.

Committee of the Whole has also considered Bill No. 35, entitled *Coordinated Vaping Product Taxation Agreement Act*, and directed me to report the bill without amendment.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 213: *First Appropriation Act 2024-25* — adjourned debate

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

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to continue to address the Legislative Assembly with respect to the Budget Address from the Minister of Finance.

I was speaking yesterday about the importance of critical community investments, including infrastructure investments. I was referring to the example of the Carmacks rink just as one small example. I was saying that 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 other community information and opportunities — gatherings and such — but, in fact, they are investments to address the substance use health emergency.

Such investments and programming build youth confidence; they provide healthy options; they encourage community pride, and it's absolutely critical that we recognize that, because it will be the umbrella of a substance use health emergency that brings communities together. It will be the umbrella of viewing those kinds of activities and investments in the community as supporting the substance use health emergency. It is critical that the opportunity for communities to take on these kinds of investments, challenges, and opportunities is responsive to the substance use health emergency.

I appreciate that this is a view that is describing the substance use health emergency and the strategy as a very large tent, because it is a large tent. These things that contribute to the health and wellness of communities contribute ultimately to less substance use and to the ability for us to address the concerns.

The *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy* truly represents our commitment to implement innovative and evidence-based initiatives to reduce and prevent substance use-related harms and support Yukoners in their health and well-being.

In August 2023, along with the Council of Yukon First Nations, the Government of Yukon released the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy*. In response to the substance use health emergency, we have developed many initiatives. To name a few, we have developed Car 867; we have increased opioid treatment services and access to safer supply; we have expanded the methods of consumption available and extended the hours of operation at the supervised consumption site; we have held two mental wellness summits; we have initiated a

paramedic response unit in the downtown core of Whitehorse and increased access to harm-reduction supplies such as Naloxone kits and drug-testing kits availability.

A managed alcohol program is a key action under the substance use health emergency. The 2023 arrangement and CASA commitment is being noted for the managed alcohol program. It is also being implemented in the spring of 2024.

The substance use health emergency, Mr. Speaker, is a territory-wide challenge that cannot be solved alone. We appreciate the work of our partners — Blood Ties Four Directions, the Yukon Hospital Corporation, Connective, the RCMP, Yukon First Nations, and all levels of government — toward addressing this public health emergency. Recently in the media, Grand Chief Peter Johnston said that we all have a role to play in addressing this unprecedented challenge. This, Mr. Speaker, includes members of the opposition.

The substance use health emergency was declared back in 2022, and in 2024-25, there have been investments since that moment, but in the 2024-25 main estimates, that includes an increase of \$1.201 million for six positions and individuals and a previously approved increase of \$267,000 for the Yukon *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy*, so it is an increase.

These amounts are both recoverable through the Working Together funding, which I had the honour of announcing this morning with the federal Minister of Health, Minister Holland, and the Working Together funding is supportive of our *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy*. There will be the development of an oversight committee that will be formed and led by the Assistant Deputy Minister of Community and Primary Care in Health and Social Services. The oversight committee will prioritize actions and provide decisions on the strategy's direction and maintain the implementation of the strategy going forward.

The *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy* implementation committee will include project partners who are responsible for carrying out the actions in the strategy. The committee will include representatives from the departments of Health and Social Services, Justice, and Community Services and from the Council of Yukon First Nations, Yukon First Nation governments, Whitehorse General Hospital, Blood Ties Four Directions, and the RCMP. This is, I daresay, unprecedented cooperation and unprecedented focus and attention on a situation that is a huge challenge for all of Canada.

I want to take the opportunity to remind individuals who are struggling with addiction and drug use to never use drugs alone. There is a poisoned drug supply here in the territory. The loss of even one life from poisonous drugs is too many.

I will just take this opportunity to note that we have truly all been touched by the losses in our communities. We must be vigilant. We must not accept anything less than our best efforts to combat this crisis. It is perhaps the biggest health care challenge that our Canadian communities have ever faced, so I will take the opportunity to remind individuals who are struggling with addictions and drug use to never use alone. The national opioid response service is at 1-888-688-6677. This is an anonymous service that will have someone stay on the phone

with you while you use drugs so that individuals can be linked to you in the event that there is a problem or an overdose. This is overdose prevention support that can also be linked in.

Opioid treatment services is an accessible, low-barrier program here in the territory. I encourage you to visit 210 Elliott Street or call (876) 668-2552.

Please check your drugs. You can get your drugs checked at the supervised consumption site — no questions asked — at the outreach van, or at Emergency Medical Services.

Please get naloxone and learn how to use it. Naloxone is free everywhere in the territory and you can find it many places in the Yukon.

Lastly, the rapid-access counselling is available to all Yukoners. Please call (867) 456-3838 to make a counselling appointment for rapid access.

The substance use health emergency is paramount in our minds. I take the opportunity today to speak about it because it is being addressed across the territory by so many organizations and by so many of our health partners that I have noted. It is worthy of mention here in my opportunity to address the budget. There are funds in the budget and in the federal announcement of almost \$86 million for health and social services here in the territory that Minister Holland and I spoke about this morning. There are funds there that are dedicated to the substance use health emergency and to the care and treatment of Yukoners as they need it.

I would like to just take a moment to acknowledge the two departments that I have the honour to represent here in the Legislative Assembly. As I see it, I work for them — the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Social Services.

With respect to the Department of Justice, I am pleased to recognize the leadership of Mark Radke. He is the Deputy Minister of Justice. Mark brings leadership skills based on a very long and productive career in law here in the territory. He decided to take on this challenge last year and has risen to the occasion with leadership of that department and ultimately is working to improve the services that it provides and the services that it has for its employees and officials.

The Department of Health and Social Services has two deputy ministers to reflect the enormity of the work on their shoulders, which is, of course, to make sure that Yukoners have the health care that they need on a daily basis and, on top of that, to transform Yukon's health and social services system and build a system that includes a health authority to better serve Yukoners and all of their needs. Yukoners are served amazingly well by Deputy Minister Ed van Randen and Deputy Minister Tiffany Boyd.

The dedicated department officials fully understand how their work serves Yukoners not just at the deputy minister level, but the teams that these deputy ministers have built and the work that we do together make it clear that our work is to serve Yukoners.

Yukoners are often being served by the departments that I have the honour to represent and work for at the most stressful times of their lives, as evidenced by the work done by the departments of Justice and of Health and Social Services. Those

individuals often don't see people at their best, which means that they must be compassionate, they must take care, and they must remember every day that their job is to serve Yukoners.

I would like to thank those deputy ministers and their teams for developing this budget, which improves the health and well-being of Yukoners and addresses their priorities. Each day, our dedicated staff go above and beyond for Yukoners, and we owe our gratitude to all of our front-line health and social services care providers and service-oriented staff.

This is from Continuing Care, to the Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services team, to Family and Children's Services, to our nurses and care providers, to our social workers, to our lawyers and our researchers, our drafters, our Court Services staff, our sheriff's office, our Corrections staff, our team's policy and communications people, our finance folks, and our human resources and IT specialists, just to name a few. I am honoured to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of them for the work that they do every day on behalf of Yukoners.

Mr. Speaker, as we continue to meet the challenges and the opportunities ahead of us, I would also like to express our gratitude to all of our health and social services system partners and justice partners for all of the work that they do to support Yukoners.

I have had the honour in the last couple of days here — yesterday when the gallery was full of health system partners who came for the tabling of the *Health Authority Act*, I explained — and our folks who were helping to arrange the visitors explained — that it is really just one sentence. It is the first reading; I just get to table the bill. But they wanted to be here. They know how much work that they individually and as teams have put into getting that piece of transformative law before this Legislative Assembly and are certainly well aware of the debate that will go on, but they wanted to be here as a first step in the journey that we are taking with respect to the development of a health authority act.

The two departments that I have, Mr. Speaker, overlap in many areas. Certainly, they overlapped during COVID-19. Certainly, they overlap with respect to legislative drafting and the substance use health emergency that I have taken some time to speak about and the sexualized assault response team, also known as SART, and the supervised housing and reintegration programs for both men and now women. Our one-government approach, of course, means that we all work together at all times to remove the barriers and coordinate programming, but there is no place perhaps more evident than when we look at the departments of Health and Social Services and Justice and when we look at the budget that has been presented.

My colleagues have spoken eloquently about how the budget priorities and the priorities that have been selected by this government entwine. I could speak with a lot more time than I currently have about initiatives in Justice and initiatives in Health and Social Services that are priorities and that are being supported through this budget. I will do so more when the budget debate is being opened with respect to those departments.

I will take just a moment to note some of the initiatives, because we have recently been focused on the *Health Authority Act*, on the funding that will support so many programs in health with Minister Holland.

I will take a moment to just highlight a few of the innovative pieces of work that are happening at the Department of Justice. There are a number of new initiatives and other initiatives that are being brought forward under the leadership at the department that will support Yukoners. There is integration, of course, of the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy* and there are reflections of those priorities in the budget. There are reflections of the priorities for the RCMP, who will engage new members, which increases their capacity to expand to drug-trafficking enforcement. While we have been here in the Legislative Assembly, the RCMP have announced publicly this afternoon that the largest cache of drugs, cash, and alcohol perhaps ever taken in the Yukon was brought into the custody of the RCMP when they recently executed warrants in Dawson City. There is more than half a million dollars in cash. There is somewhere just north of five to six kilos of cocaine in brick form and cut. There are restricted firearms, all of which have been taken into custody and charges laid with respect to several individuals.

I note this important announcement by the RCMP because it does serve our communities. It allows community leaders to have confidence in the work that is being done by the RCMP. We are working — in addition to the new officers noted and the budget increases noted by the Minister of Finance — with the federal government to expand First Nation policing, support through the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program, which you have heard there are funds for. We have feedback from First Nation communities on policing, and it has been recognized that our government supports culturally responsive policing. This is an opportunity across Canada for Canadians and other communities to learn how this work is done here in the territory. They ask, on many occasions, to make sure that, in fact, they learn from our First Nation policing programs here but also from our community safety officer programs that are supported by Yukoners and Yukon communities.

Community safety initiatives such as the community safety officer program developed at Kwanlin Dün, for instance, which is a very successful opportunity — and I note that Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the officials and experts in that government are often asked to make sure that they educate others across the country about how these things are so successful and what they could do to help other organizations and other communities across Canada deal with community safety programs, community safety officer programs, and how they could be increased and the importance of those.

I look forward, during the opening of budget debate on Justice, to speak more about the restorative justice program, the success of that here in the territory, and the success of that work built on First Nation government support and relationships with First Nation communities. I'm very proud of the work of restorative justice.

Mr. Speaker, you have heard that we have increased the RCMP budget this year for several initiatives, and one of those

is the federal initiative to take action against gun and gang violence. There was a question last year about the ending of a program. It has been continued and will be supported here in the territory — funding that will also support the ongoing maintenance and renovation of RCMP infrastructure. Over \$3 million annually goes to the renovation and replacement of RCMP-owned policing infrastructure in the territory. I understand that Old Crow will be the next detachment for renovation or replacement. Those are chosen by the RCMP.

Our government has been committed, since the very first day, to listening to Yukoners and working and responding to what they have told us on the doorsteps, through public engagement, or through our partnerships of working with Yukon First Nation governments, municipalities, community groups, and Yukoners directly. We have built partnerships because we know that collaboration works, that listening to one another works. We also know that we don't always agree but that we will come to the table, we will work together, and we will move forward and move the territory forward in a way that is cooperative, because it is critical in order to do so.

This budget, like every budget we have tabled — I think this is eight counted — and each and every one of those budgets has reflected our approach, our values, and our attitude that our government is fair, efficient, and accountable. It ensures that priorities that exist in every corner of this territory are addressed, and it ensures that service to our constituents — and by that, I mean all Yukoners — is fair, efficient, and accountable.

Mr. Speaker, the challenges before us are great. I daresay no one in this Legislative Assembly or who was elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly back in 2016 or in 2021 — I suppose we had a bit more information in 2021 but in 2016 — ever believed we would be living through and responding to and being responsible for the safety of Yukoners through a world pandemic, but that presented itself. That presented challenges that we, as a government, as a Legislative Assembly, had not had before and I daresay that no one has had for more than 100 years. We are working to move the territory forward. We have shown in this budget that there is recovery from the COVID years, that there is recovery that we want Yukoners to benefit from, and that we have put forward a budget that responds to the needs of Yukoners, and we have listened.

We want Yukoners and communities to be aware of the resources that are offered and the work that is being done to expand the services on their behalf. In the face of transforming the Yukon's health care system, supporting the substance use health emergency, providing care, and meeting the needs of Yukoners — both through the Justice system and through the Health and Social Services system — it is incredibly challenging work, but we come every day and roll up our sleeves and face those challenges head on, because that is what Yukoners have asked us to do. That's what we, as a team, have dedicated our energy toward doing, and we will do that going forward each and every day, keeping in mind the people whom we work for.

I would like to take an opportunity to express my gratitude to the people of Riverdale South. It is an honour for me to be

elected a second time and to be here to represent each and every one of them and to bring forward their concerns and to serve Yukoners in the way that I have described here today.

I would like to reiterate my gratitude to all of the members of the departments of Health and Social Services and Justice for their ongoing commitment to serving Yukoners and to their support of the work that we have prioritized and the work that we are doing.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank my colleagues in this House, who are an extraordinary group of people. They work hard every day to serve Yukoners. My family and friends do the same every day to support me, and I cannot thank them enough. Everyone who has done this job knows of the demands on your time and your energy and knows that your family must necessarily lose out on time with you, on opportunities to be together, and must respond to the demands that Yukoners, rightly so, place on us.

I was asked recently, when I was speaking with the Grand Chief last Friday on *Rock the Talk*, which is recommended to all — it is a very fun opportunity and a great opportunity to talk to Yukoners. He asked me about balance. I won't speak for all of my colleagues, but I think I could — to say that I know that we try, but I know how hard each and every one of us has worked and continues to work, so balance escapes us and will likely continue to do so in service of Yukoners.

Thank you to the hundreds of people who have reached out to me and, I know, to my colleagues with words of support and encouragement as we do these jobs and as I do mine, again, in the service of Yukoners.

It is truly my great honour this Sitting to bring forward a new law, the *Health Authority Act*, to take the first step to transform the lives of Yukoners. We have an opportunity here, Mr. Speaker. The health system in this country, which is second to none, has been developed probably 70 or 75 years ago, and we have a chance — through this process, through the development of a health authority and the *Health Authority Act* and its development in cooperation and collaboration with Yukon First Nations — to design something that is to the benefit of all Yukoners.

It is an extraordinary opportunity. We look forward to the *Health Authority Act* transforming the lives of Yukoners. It is my honour to have brought forward this law and brought forward many other laws while I have been here.

As a lawyer, being responsible for the making and enforcing of Yukon laws and working with my colleagues and all of our hundreds of partners to make life better for Yukoners is a privilege and the greatest responsibility of my career. We listen to Yukoners, and we are working to do what they have asked us to do on their behalf. It is an honour to do so, and it is an opportunity that is not afforded many individuals. I know that we are, each and every one of us, thankful for that work and for that opportunity to be here.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Legislative Assembly today in response to the budget speech from my friend and colleague the Minister of Finance.

MLA Tredger: I will start my comments today by talking about my constituents — the people who live in downtown Whitehorse. They are so great. I see them all the time when I'm out walking the dog, when I'm at the grocery store, when I'm coming to work, and when I'm going to events all over downtown. It's always a joy to see your neighbours, your friends, and your constituents and have conversations about what is going on for them, what is working and what is not. It is a real honour, so I want to say thank you to all my constituents for continuing to trust me with this job, for bringing me your stories of good times and hard times — of the things you need, the things that are happening that should be happening, the things that are happening that should change, and the things that aren't happening that need to happen — so I just really appreciate that.

I was reminded of what an engaged, knowledgeable, and passionate group of people they are at a meeting I attended recently hosted by the Downtown Residents' Association.

It was about bylaws around building heights, which is a municipal issue, but as is often the case, they tend to bump into territorial issues quite a bit. Someone said: Why are we encouraging people to live downtown if there is not going to be an elementary school downtown? What is happening with that, anyway?

It really struck me that so many of the issues of downtown can't really be allocated to one government or another. Some of them squarely fall on one or the other's purview, but they are all connected. It really made me think a lot about the challenges of dealing with a growing population in the time of climate change and how we talk a lot about active transportation. We talk about making sure that cities are accessible and that people can walk to what they need. Those are all really important things, but they don't make sense without communities being able to thrive downtown. We have heard over and over again from my constituents that part of thriving downtown means an elementary school.

It has been just about exactly a year since I brought forward a motion in this Legislature calling on the government to ensure that there is an elementary school downtown, and that motion passed. I want to thank my colleagues from the Yukon Party for voting for that with us. I was really happy that it passed, because that was one of the days when the gallery was full of people who came here to watch the debate. I tabled — I don't even remember — more than 50 letters of support for a downtown elementary school. At the time, we were told: Well, the door is not closed to that; we are still deciding; we are going to see.

It has been a year and we haven't heard anything more about that. We have heard more about the development of what is happening in École Whitehorse Elementary School, which is being relocated to Takhini, but we haven't heard anything more about whether there will continue to be an elementary school downtown, as has been expressed to be the will of this Legislature.

Last week, I tabled a motion asking for an update on that for my constituents, because that is probably the number one thing that I hear about from my constituents when I am walking

the dog and stopping to talk to people. What is happening with the elementary school downtown? They tell me how important it is to them. They tell me how they chose to live downtown so that their kids can walk to school and that they can really embody those values of active transportation and being part of their community where they live.

I hope to hear more soon. I hope that, over the next couple of months, we hear more from the government about that elementary school and the future of one downtown. I want to assure my constituents that I won't let it go, that I am not going to take "sort of" answers and hope that things change. I will keep bringing it up, so I guess that's my warning as well. I will keep bringing this up, because it is so important to so many of my constituents.

Another thing about downtown that we have been talking about a lot has been safety. There was a lot of talk about that in the fall legislature and that wasn't a new topic. Actually, to be really clear, that was not something that people just started talking about last fall; they have been talking about it for years.

We had been hearing for years that people accessing the emergency shelter downtown didn't feel safe going there. We had been hearing for years that people who lived in the area and people who worked in the area were having all kinds of challenges, that they were feeling very unheard. It's so sad to me that it wasn't until a business closed that things changed — or started to change, I should say.

All those conversations, all the people saying that they don't feel safe here and any of their perspectives were kind of ignored until a business closed its doors. I'm glad that things changed then and we started to hear that things started to be taken seriously and we started hearing about actions happening. I'm really optimistic about some of those actions; I'm really hopeful about the Moccasin van being run by CYFN. I have high hopes that it's going to be something that will really help people on the ground, some of the most vulnerable Yukoners who desperately need it. But it's sad — it's really sad to me that it didn't come until a business closed.

So, I want to talk a little bit more about the budget and some of my portfolio areas and what I'm going to be looking for as we discuss the budget. We get this giant binder, and it takes a while to digest it and figure out what this is actually going to translate to and what this is going to look like on the ground. As the critic for Women and Gender Equity, I'm thinking a lot about what this budget will do to support gender equality. Gender-based violence is a constant reality. We have a lot of organizations really working to support women and gender-diverse folks in the Yukon and they do pretty incredible work. They need support. I'm really excited to dig into the national action plan for gender-based violence funding and what that's going to look like and how that will support the people doing the work here in the Yukon and how it will support the Yukoners who really need it.

I think a lot about the 2SLGBTQ+ community that I'm part of. There are so many exciting things happening in our community that I'm so proud of. The film festival is back this year; we're all pretty excited, I think — lots of really cool stuff

happening and lots of community spaces that are feeling really welcoming.

There is also a lot of fear, and I think that fear is really justified. We're seeing really virulent transphobia across the world and across our own country. It's so often targeted at some of the most vulnerable members of our community: our young people. We've recently been talking about it here in our own community. Last week in the Legislature, I brought up a letter from concerned parents at a Yukon school who talked about homophobic teaching that has been happening for years with nothing changing. Since then, I have heard, sort of in a roundabout way, that the textbook in question has been removed and I'm glad to hear that. That absolutely needed to happen, but it's so important that, when we talk about harm that has happened, we don't just fix the immediate problem and stop there. We need to understand how it happened. That's so important so we can prevent it from happening again.

According to this letter, this has been going on for years. That should never have happened. That should never have happened — that a homophobic textbook was being taught for years in a Yukon school. I have to wonder: Who knew? Who in the department knew? Who in the school community knew? Who was in a position to do something and why didn't that happen? We need to understand this if we are going prevent it from happening again.

We also need to look at addressing the harm that has been done. I think about the students who had to sit through that in their classrooms, who didn't feel safe — very justifiably — in their classrooms. What is being done for them? What is being done to make that right?

Is there going to be an apology to those students? Are people going to go to them and ask them what they need to repair this relationship? What do you need to feel good about your school again? Those pieces are just as important. I intend to make sure that they aren't forgotten.

Another one of my portfolios is Environment, which, combined with Yukon Energy — a big theme of that is climate change. Usually, we discuss the update on the *Our Clean Future* action plan in the Fall Sitting each year, but this year it wasn't tabled until well into December, so we couldn't actually talk about it last fall. We are going to have wait until now, 2024 in the spring, to talk about what happened in 2022 for climate action. That's okay. We are going to talk about it. There is lots to talk about. We have some enormous problems facing us as a territory.

When I think about the news that the Atlin hydro project is delayed indefinitely — that's huge loss. That's a major change in course and we are going to need to find other ways to have green energy. I look forward to the conversations about how we are going to pivot to do that. We, of course, have heard of things like the microgeneration home solar program being cancelled. We heard that at the end of the last Sitting and there has been discussion about that through the winter. There will be more, because it's always pretty concerning when we start to hear about renewable energy programs being rolled back or being paused, especially when there is no end date to that pause. That's something we are going to be talking about in this

budget, because it is critical. If we are going to survive climate change, we need to be taking climate action really seriously. That's an enormous challenge and that's what I intend to hold the government to. I am looking forward to discussing that.

I will be talking about another of my portfolios, which is Yukon Housing. It is probably the number one thing I hear about when I go to parties, when I am at events, when I am talking to people in the grocery store. I hear about people struggling to find places to live, and that's true across the spectrum. We heard in the economic update that, in terms of buying houses, prices have cooled in the Yukon, which should mean that they have come down, but interest rates have also gone up. So, in terms of affordability, it's still very hard to buy a house and it's still very hard to find a place to rent and very expensive to do so.

I often hear about people who have moved within the Yukon multiple times a year for multiple years because they keep finding something and then it doesn't work out, and they keep finding something and it gets turned into an Airbnb, and they keep finding something and then it gets sold. That's a really tough way to live.

Of course, then there are the people who just can't find housing at all and are still relying on the emergency shelter. When we talk about the emergency shelter, it's important to remember that, by the time people get there, everything else has failed for them. That is a last-resort system. There are people who have been living there for years and that's never what it was meant to do. We have to change the way housing is done in this territory so that everyone can find a stable home.

Things have changed a lot for renters in the last few years with bringing in the ban on no-cause evictions and the cap on rent increases from the last CASA. I'm enormously proud of that. I used to say that the worst part about this job was when people called me and said: My landlord said I've been evicted, but they didn't give a reason; that's not okay, right? I had to say that there's nothing; there are no legal protections. I am so proud that when people call me and say that their landlord has tried to evict them without a reason, I can tell them that it's not allowed anymore. I'm so proud of that.

I have heard from many people that it has changed a lot for them. I have gotten a lot fewer desperate and panicked phone calls in my office about people facing enormous rent increases, unfair rent increases, and unfair evictions, but I still hear a lot of people who struggle with an unbalanced residential and landlord tenancy act. I still hear frustration about it being impossible to find a place, about unreasonably high rent, and the difficulty of enforcing the rights that people do have.

I have been talking to a lot of people as the public-facing side of the review of the *Residential Landlord and Tenant Act* that has been happening. There are some changes that I'm hopeful to see in it and that I'm really excited about. There are some things that haven't been part of the conversation that are very important and I'll be bringing them forward.

That's some of what I will looking for in the budget, asking about, and talking about.

I want to finish this speech today with a thank you to everyone who reaches out to me in my office, because usually

by the time people come to our office — not always, but usually — it is because everything else hasn't worked. It takes a lot of trust to come to someone when you're in a crisis and say: Can you help me? This is not working. I really appreciate the trust that people put in us when they come and tell us those stories. So, thank you to everyone who comes to us with your stories and thank you to everyone who trusts us with your stories so that we can try to make the system that we all live in better. Again, a huge thank you to my constituents. It is an absolute privilege to live downtown and represent Whitehorse Centre.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I think that there were two players left in the game of chicken, and I salute the Premier on definitely winning that one. I thank everybody else for their comments.

Yesterday, the Minister of Health and Social Services said that she was concerned that the people on this side didn't have anything to say. I think that maybe it's just that we are patient and we are just waiting to hear what everybody else had to say. I also thought it was really interesting yesterday that the Minister of Community Services talked about how we are Yukoners, just like you from that side of the bench. But one particular Yukoner on that side in 2021 told me that an increase to minimum wage was irresponsible and showed my lack of understanding. Yet here we are, on April 1, it's \$17.59 for an increase to minimum wage. That is something I am deeply proud of.

It is probably good that I didn't respond initially and that I gave it some time, because the first thing I thought was, "Well, I am frustrated, so I'm going to go out, guns blazing." Then I realized that there are so many things that are really great. I was glad that I was able to reign in my frustration, because I'm going to really focus on the fact that I have been in this Chamber for a really long time. According to some, I might even just about be a career politician at this point, but who knows? I don't really know what that metric is. For a long time, I think we've talked about it — that referring to myself even as a politician was deeply uncomfortable, because we all know about the stereotypes; every single action movie has a politician who is leading toward world-ending consequences. I like to think that we in this Chamber do a better job and that we are not necessarily going that way.

So, I thought what I would do is focus on the positive today, because that's really more my jam, anyway. I refer to myself as a national cheerleader. I like to celebrate the successes. In all the time I have been here, I remind folks that I started off — and it was a Yukon Party majority. During the 2011 election campaign, at that time, I actually really believed when the then-Premier said that good ideas came from all sides. I was so naïve; I really was. It was my first opposition Wednesday where I learned the power of language, and it was soul crushing, and if I didn't have to apologize to the 1,500 or so people whose doors I had knocked on to say, like, "I don't think I can do this job," I probably would have walked away. But the idea of going back and saying, "I can't do it; I'm sorry" after you voted for me was just more than I could handle.

So, that started the realizing of what I didn't want politics to look like — what I didn't think the situation could look like. It's interesting, because the colleagues to my right were on the other side at the time. I remember; I do. I remember a lot of different things, and I guess it will be up to me to remind folks going forward about some of the actions and decisions that were taken.

But in 2016, there was a change, and all of a sudden, I was in opposition to a majority Liberal government, and I was told again that, like, we could work together and that good ideas came from all sides. I'm going to tell you that it did not feel like that; it did not feel like that at all. It didn't — it didn't. It was still — I mean, committee work was wild. There was no working together there. Every single vote was called division. It took nine minutes at a time to try to literally vote on every single thing. There was so much time. There was so much time. I mean, we could talk about the 200-plus ministerial statements that I had to respond to. That was a lot.

So, the reason why I am bringing up those things is because there were things that, like, didn't work, but I will tell you that, after 2021 when the election happened, we got to see something really unique here in the Yukon which hasn't happened in very many places in Canada, and it has solidified something for me. I really believe that politics can be done in a different way, and that means no false majority governments — right? If a government wins with an honest majority and they have gotten the most votes and the most people and all of those things together, so be it, but I haven't seen it yet.

In my time here, neither of the majority governments were true. It was not reflective of what folks had said. So, after 2021, there was the reckoning. It was having to do things in a different way. I thank the Member for Klondike, because it started with me and him. It started with a conversation and then a lot of things — a lot more conversation. It led to the initial confidence and supply agreement. The confidence and supply agreement really laid out what those changes could look like and how we could work together. We saw some things that were wildly successful and some things that were less successful. There were some really big issues that still needed to be sorted out in my mind. So, when there was a change of leadership on the Liberal side and there was a new Leader of the Liberal Party, the conversation started again. It was an opportunity for the Yukon NDP to bring forward and highlight really big concerns and priorities for us.

Instead of going out guns blazing about the things that I don't like, I really want to talk about the things that I do like, because there are so many things included in this budget that come directly from the confidence and supply agreement and that really come directly from the experiences of Yukoners. Like my colleague from Whitehorse Centre said, it's people who share their stories with us.

There is something that all of us in this Chamber should be proud of, and that's the Yukon dental program. We should all be fiercely proud of that. It is a leading program. It far exceeds what the federal program does, and it is changing lives. It has done so much good. So, to know that, in this budget, there is \$5.4 million budgeted for the dental program, that's

\$5.4 million that is literally changing the lives of Yukoners — and gosh, that is great.

I also think about one of the things that we negotiated in the confidence and supply agreement, which was a supervised consumption site. I am going to point this out — that it's really important to note that there was a Liberal majority prior to 2021. So, when I get told things like how this was a Liberal priority, I think that is interesting, because it wasn't prioritized prior to 2021; it only got prioritized after the confidence and supply agreement was signed. A supervised consumption site — that's something to be proud of. This year, it has \$1.1 million to it. I think that's fantastic.

I regret in 2021 not including a managed alcohol program in the confidence and supply agreement. To be honest, I didn't think that I needed to, because I thought, at that point in time, that the previous minister had been very clear about her thoughts that yes, we did need to move toward a managed alcohol program. My assumption was that it would just happen because it was the right thing to do, and it didn't happen. That is the lesson; it didn't happen. But it was included in the 2023 agreement, and I am incredibly pleased to say that, this year, a managed alcohol program will be opening, and I think that is really important and we should all be proud of that. It is my understanding that the first program that is going to open is going to be a live-in program, but I am going to say that I think that we have to go further, and maybe we are going to start there. We are going to start with that program. But having gone to see the drinkers' lounge in Vancouver, which is run by members and a not-for-profit organization, or to have done lots of research and watching what is happening with the Boyle Street program in Edmonton, or we could look to the Shepherds of Good Hope in Ontario — is that we do need to expand it, because alcohol consumption in the territory is dangerous, and it is killing people left, right, and centre and not in the same way — because we can't see it so apparently as we can with the toxic drug supply, but every day, people are dying because of alcohol addiction. I hope that we don't limit ourselves to the residential program for managed alcohol.

Yesterday in Question Period, I had a question about a walk-in clinic. Again, that was included in the 2023 confidence and supply agreement. Full credit to the government — they opened it before the January 2024 deadline, and that is also changing lives. Land-based healing — money was included in that, earmarked from the confidence and supply agreement.

You know, we think that it is really important, when we talk about the retention and recruitment of health care professionals — and there is money included in that, but we think that it should go further. I have talked before about education. I have talked before about the importance of investing in young people here, and had that really started earlier, we could be recruiting those folks now. The temporary sick leave program has been extended. We all recognize the importance of staying home when we don't feel well, giving that opportunity to heal and recover and also the importance of not making each other sick.

Think about the importance of the social assistance increase so that, in 2023, that was included — a \$100 increase

per month for folks currently on social assistance. The review is ongoing, but we hope that comes out soon so that there are permanent changes.

We are seeing real changes when we talk about the child benefit increase. The child benefit has been increased, and then it's tied to CPI. That's really important. And that's something we did together.

It's important that when we look at other things, we understand about education and the recruitment of rural education professionals and their retention, but I would caution that a \$2,000 bonus is maybe not what rural teachers need. I hope that the government is open to having those conversations and exploring that, especially when we know that was a far cry from what rural nurses got. We are talking about how important education is and how important schools are in rural Yukon, and it's true. Kids depend on schools.

There is \$1 million included for mental health outcomes for youth. I am interested to know where that is spread out, but it's important. We know right now that youth are facing all sorts of challenges that we in this Chamber — well, most of us, not all of us — didn't experience with the onslaught of social media and the Internet or climate dread. We think about the importance of making sure there is additional education assistants and learning assistant teachers in schools and how important that is, but we do echo the concern that has been brought up about the unilateral changes made by government to the allocation. We have heard that from schools.

Wellness counsellors — I am looking forward to that conversation with the Minister of Education, because I would like to know how many of those positions have been filled. I don't think it is all that many yet, and that's a concern. Right now, again, kids in school are struggling in a way that they need the support; they deserve the support.

We can look at investments across as far as climate action and the additional \$5 million a calendar year, and we have been told that there is the Tuchtua solar project for \$2.4 million and the Blanchard camp solar installation for \$2.8 million are included because of that. That's something we should be proud of — everybody.

I had the real pleasure of working alongside my mentor, Elizabeth Hanson, who was in this Chamber. She was elected in 2010 initially as the previous Member for Whitehorse Centre. She came from an incredible career of public service, including having been on the negotiation teams for land claims from the federal government perspective side. She was so clear about the importance of successor mining legislation. She said that we had a commitment — Yukon had a commitment — to completing that, and I'm really proud that was included in the 2021 confidence and supply agreement.

Now, it's new minerals legislation, and it's still going forward, and it's being done in a way that we should all be proud of. You know, I think a lesson was possibly taken from the *Child and Family Services Act* review. It has been done in a real comprehensive and inclusive way with First Nations driving it. So, full credit to the Minister of Health and Social Services and her team who have led that way.

There are some times, though, where, you know, I think about rural Yukon. Yesterday, someone said that all communities matter. I'm sure that people might be able to figure out who that is. I thought, "Well, I guess, unless you live in Johnsons Crossing, Silver City, Braeburn, or Keno." Those communities — Keno has a workable solution right now, but they're terrified that, if the mine leaves, what happens to them and their waste? But Johnsons Crossing, Silver City, and Braeburn still have concerns about a transfer facility and what they're supposed to do and how that is supposed to work. You know, I hope that when we say that all communities matter, that is a real thing.

I was having a conversation recently with the Association of Yukon Communities, and I had the ability to ask about the report they put forward about the comprehensive municipal grant. It's interesting, because the new landfill agreement says that, for the population of the communities that sign on to it, it's reflected as \$200 a person, but the comprehensive municipal grant is only \$45 a person. Right now, municipalities are doing an awful lot of work, right? They do all of the front-line stuff, so they want to work on that. They want to revise that; they want to make sure that it is able to cover what they need.

Then I think about the *Health Authority Act* that has been tabled by the minister, and I wonder if it was just an oversight that francophones are not included as named representation on the board, because it's important to note that francophones have protection under legislation — under language rights/language holders. I'm hoping that was just an oversight and that when the time comes, we can take a look at it, because I think that is something that needs to be looked at.

So, when I look at the budget speech that was presented by the Minister of Finance and the line that says, "... we hold fast to our Yukon Liberal values by protecting struggling families with increases to minimum wage..." — confidence and supply agreement — "... introducing a made-in-Yukon dental insurance program..." — confidence and supply agreement — and the Yukon child benefit being increased — confidence and supply agreement — "... improving our social assistance programs..." — again, the confidence and supply agreement.

So, instead of focusing on the things I don't see in this, like the ability to fund supportive housing so that when we are talking about housing — in some cases, it's housing that needs supports — that we are just missing some of that or the fact that I was told — we were all told in the fall — that there was a critical nature, the absolute need to pass a \$21-million line item for the Skagway marine platform, which seems to have disappeared. Instead of focusing on those things, I am going to focus on the things that are positive.

I would say that there is an opportunity to work together in a way that we haven't seen. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and I spent 18 months hearing from Yukoners, along with the Member for Lake Laberge, about electoral reform. The citizens' assembly is up and running. There is a chair. It's out of our hands and things are going forward, but I would say that, right now, the situation that we're in is showing that we really can work together. Sometimes, it might be less than

comfortable. I get asked all the time where the line in the sand will be, and I don't know what that answer is, but this is an example that political parties can work together for the benefit of the people we represent.

I appreciate that the things that the NDP have always held close are now viewed as Liberal values. I think that is awesome, because it's benefiting Yukoners. There is an example that we can work together, that things can look different, and that, although there were so many days when I thought that it would just be easier to roll over, I held on to the fact that I believed that politics could be done in a different way, and we're seeing part of that right now. I think that's really important.

I'm glad that I waited it out and I didn't respond when I was frustrated, because instead of talking about how we could do things differently, the other side would have come out. So, I think that there is a lot for us to be pleased with and proud of. I think that there are a lot of questions, though, because again, budgets are priorities.

I look forward to the Liberals telling us the things that they view as important and that they funded, because I have just highlighted some of the NDP priorities that have been funded in this budget.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely honoured today to rise in the Yukon Legislative Assembly to speak to the 2024-25 budget and the work that has been done to date by the government. I will start by thanking officials who have worked tirelessly to prepare this budget. There is a lot of rigour, of course, that goes into this process. I want to thank the Department of Finance, the Minister of Finance, and colleagues who really spent significant time making sure that we could prepare a budget around the guidelines that we had set out. We thought that it was very important as government to ensure that this budget reflected many common-sense decisions. It was important to ensure, as we saw governments across Canada move toward long-term debt options, that we stayed on the course we were on and did not look to acquire these types of tools, making sure that our financial framework stayed within the resources that we had available to us, and I think that this has been accomplished.

Of course, we had a number of pillars that we wanted to focus on, going back to January 2023. You can see in the spending here that those priorities have been reflected with a focus on health care, housing, and making sure that education has the tools they need. It's also important to amend those three pieces and pillars with a continued focus on investment in infrastructure. There is a significant capital budget here — a number of projects that we will continue to work to complete and then a number of projects that are being started. Really, there is activity across the Yukon from, as we have said, Watson Lake to Old Crow and all points in between where we will see significant activity when it comes to construction.

I will take a moment and also just thank the constituents in Porter Creek South. They have always given good advice, and I continue to work with a number of community members right now and spent time in the last couple of weeks on a few different projects. I appreciate the support and advice

throughout the time period of getting a chance to represent and sit in the seat that belongs to the individuals from Porter Creek South. It means the world to me. I really want to thank them and I hope that we have been able to take many of those voices forward over the last number of years.

Also, to colleagues — again, the continued support from colleagues. I want to thank the team that we have going into this spring. There were lots of comments that we hear, of course, in the political ether, and when I think about the teams that are coming into this Spring Sitting and understanding where my colleagues are — levels of energy, levels of work, levels of output, what we have seen in preparation for the budget — I feel very confident in the group of folks who are here. They are very focused on their work and have been working very hard to prepare for the spring session and to continue to take on the responsibilities that they have been given with their portfolios.

Maybe, going back to the budget, it is important to state that, as we were preparing, we were, of course, trying to make sure that we have listened to our key stakeholders and, I guess you would say, your partners or your organizations that are key to some of those big pillars.

When looking first at health care, I want to commend the minister for the level of dialogue and collaboration that has happened with the Yukon Hospital Corporation and I am thankful to have been invited to a couple of those conversations and meetings, really, as we prepared to understand that we wanted to focus on making sure that the tools that are required, especially for our health care system and for the Hospital Corporation, were in place.

I think that there have been a few comments made by the Finance and Health and Social Services critic, and we will leave it to the Hospital Corporation to identify the mistakes in those comments — and really being able to understand that the conversations that happened with this government getting ready for this budget was to ensure that they had the resources that they required. We will see. I think they have a budget that will probably pass here in the next 60 days. We will probably have a further opportunity to hear from them.

When looking at the transformation, I think that it's really important to understand how this affects people on the ground. The *Putting People First* document that was released encapsulated the conversations and the feelings of many Yukoners. Maybe if you are not somebody who has been subjected to the institutional racism that has existed in many of our organizations, it may not seem a priority for you, but for many people and many Yukoners, that is not the case. When I think about why we are doing this, I think about a conversation I had with an auntie two years ago. We didn't have the luxury of having her with us this year at Christmas because she has passed, but the Christmas before, we spent about an hour or two after Christmas dinner and she reflected on the fact that she had an experience with the health care system. She had worked with the Yukon government for an entire career — with the Justice department. When she was in need and went to seek support at the Whitehorse General Hospital, she reflected on how she was treated in that experience as a First Nation woman — she had

just retired from working for the Justice department here — and how the individual who was in the bed next to her was treated. They were two totally different experiences. The questions she was asked, the experience she had — and that was a person who was looking at you saying: Please, this is not how our health care system should work.

We have to ensure that there is a transition that is made. I think the more that people see themselves in the health care system, they know they are going to have the appropriate respectful supports. That, of course, is going to improve our engagement with the citizens for whom we need to provide health care services.

As the Leader of the NDP just said in her statements, maybe if we started this work to try to get individuals from our community trained to work in this sector — that has been going on for a long time. One of the first initiatives that I remember was almost 15 years ago. The Council of Yukon First Nations and the Yukon College at the time worked to ensure that there was an educational approach to making sure that children in every community — it was funded by Health Canada.

It was a focus on ensuring that every community in the Yukon had somebody go and chat with the youth in those communities and then had all those youth come to Whitehorse and spend time and understand where the opportunities were, but you weren't seeing a great uptick. There is a lot of work to be done. There are great resources here, whether it's through the Yukon grant that has been in place — or many of our First Nation governments do an exceptional job of providing funding for training. Of course, you have seen resources coming out for us to see more Yukoners see themselves in that type of work. I think it's extremely important. It has been going on, but I think that, with a transition of our system, you will be in a position to see yourself in that type of work, and hopefully, that will make sure that there are more Yukoners who are part of our health care system.

On the social services side, of course, there are a number of tools that are here. The financial supports that are required to not just deal with some of the longer term supports that have been in place — some were discussed today, whether it's folks who are getting support through social services, whether it's folks going for addictions treatment, or you name it. There is a body of work there that is so important, but I think there are also the funds in place to ensure that we deal with some of the challenges that we have seen in 2023. That, of course, is the work in the downtown core, and there is a lot of work to be done. It's not just about 405 Alexander; it's not just about activities in that particular area. There have been a lot of challenges in the downtown and there are challenges in many communities across the Yukon. That is going to be a key area for us to be able to help fund mental health hubs, addictions support, and counselling — really, some of the key pieces — making sure that people have the opportunity to go to land-based treatment if that's what they choose and making sure that there is aftercare. All of those are really important things that are part of the work of Health and Social Services.

I think it's important to state — yes, there is a line about Liberal values in our budget, and there is a bit of a challenge

here today saying, you know, these values or those — I would like to believe that — I speak for myself.

I think that looking after people who are vulnerable, supporting people in our community who need help, especially when we are in a very enviable position in the Yukon generally speaking, with the resources and infrastructure that we have even in the north, comparable to other places — did anyone watch last night and think about the conversation? We heard a really eloquent, heartfelt conversation with a police officer in Belleville, Ontario talking about the experience there, looking as they identified the resources that are in that community with a similar population as us. We think about the things that the Government of Yukon, non-profit organizations, and First Nation governments are trying to ensure are out there to support folks. I think that I can say that — I'm not going to call it a political value. I think that, hopefully, you grow up with those and get mentors to grow up with those values to look after and support the people who need it.

Housing has been a key conversation. It was brought up today. The MLA for Whitehorse Centre touched on it. I want to thank the Yukon Housing Corporation team, which did a tremendous amount of work. We have had a lot of dialogue. There have been critiques and criticism coming my way because I kept that portfolio. Some of that is about a delay of a project or the cost of a project, but I'm looking forward to debating in the House around each and every one of these projects that we're funding. We have had an opportunity to sign an agreement, and hopefully, we will see the resources in this budget, but it's the largest affordable housing project in Yukon history and then some very specific investments that we have had an opportunity to make in partnership.

I have said this before — and it's going to be really important moving forward — but for any government to want to stand on their own and build out the infrastructure that's required for affordable housing or for vulnerable populations — it's not something that I believe a government can do on their own. You have to have partners on it. You have to have partners that can go out and leverage other funding sources. Just from a financial perspective, you need to be able to share the costs and risks on many of these projects.

I will just quickly go through a few things, Mr. Speaker. In May 2023, there was the elders complex in Old Crow, nine units for elders in Old Crow. A number of pieces of work were done as well with the Yukon government in that project.

The tenplex completion — I will have to get back to you on when occupancy is, but on other housing — the first of its kind in Old Crow — completed; the men's shelter in Dawson City — another 12 beds — a really strong project led by Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in but with a number of opportunities for the Yukon government to support; and an accessible, affordable duplex in Carmacks. I have touched on this in the media a little bit — expensive to build, \$1.2 million — gone through a public tender process — great private sector partner, but they are expensive in the end. I was there for the opening day, and it is a good addition, and we need, of course, to see more of these in our communities.

Accessible, affordable duplex in Mayo, August 2023 — again, multiple sources of funding — a great local leader in the private sector building that project out as well. Ross River emergency housing — in conversations last year in May, I had an opportunity to sit down with chief and council and community members, and one of the questions was as much housing as you can move on. So, that is something that we see right now, but there is also work with the Government of Canada to make sure that we have their appropriate land tenure in place so that there can be additional housing opportunities to work with the federal government and Yukon Housing Corporation there.

The board, of course — which we don't get to talk about too much — of the Housing Corporation, I want to thank them. They were at our housing summit — most of the board members and the chair, Doris Bill. *Creating Home*, which is their five-year strategy, has been completed. I know that they put a lot of work into it. I have met with a couple of board members in passing, and I know that they were extremely excited about this work. It is a very competent group of individuals who have come together with a good vision for the Housing Corporation, and I thank them for the work that they have completed and their plan moving forward.

I think that for this springtime, we will probably have some questions: Watson Lake Housing First tenplex — again, another what we think is a very important piece, just one of the pieces — there are many things. I know that there is lot development being done as well between the Liard First Nation and the municipality, but we think that is a really important additional piece of infrastructure.

Duplexes in Faro and Dawson City and now coming back to focus on some of the work here — so, the Winter Crossing project, which we spoke to in the media and will be discussing here, is the project with the largest affordable housing build in the history of the Yukon, and it represents a significant investment in affordable housing, and it is supported by an Indigenous housing provider that is committed to supporting Yukoners.

The intent of the new construction project at Winter Crossing is to adopt the existing design of the River Bend building and benefit from the use of the same construction company. The Yukon Housing Corporation intends to lease 75 units with a blend of rent-geared-to-income clients — 32 units — and there will be 43 units at market rate for mixed income — another great project.

We have about 290 people on our wait-list right now. For anybody who will be asking questions, we are at about 289. I think about where we are at and I think about the hundreds of units that are rolling out, with most being substantially completed in 2024-25, and then you think about the by-name list, which is about 200 — this will have really significant impact on what we have seen on our wait-list over the last number of years — so going from, I think, a high point of 510 now down to 280 and then seeing some really significant work done and progress here.

In August 2023, the Yukon Housing Corporation awarded a \$719,398 design contract to Kobayashi and Zedda, and this is

for a 34-unit community housing project at the former Korbo lot in Dawson City. That contract includes the design, the engineering, and the contract administration for the project. We are looking as well to see that become a reality in Dawson City. We think that is a very important project as well. We consulted with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, the Klondike Development Organization, the City of Dawson, Chief Isaac, and others to make sure that we are on the right track.

Other such projects that are expected to be moving forward this year are a 45-plus-unit building on Sixth Avenue. If you see where the new hotel is being built at the end of Main Street, you will see, just behind there, Yukon Housing cleared a lot, and now we are moving toward getting that built as well. It's the Ryder Apartments, as many people will know.

There are 10 units to be built. We are looking at Mayo. We have projects in Teslin, Carcross, Haines Junction — triplex — so, again, this is by far the largest investment in affordable housing we have seen in the history of the Yukon. We know there have been some fits and starts on some projects. I think as well that we are pretty excited here, over the next couple of days, getting ready to talk about private sector investment as well. We think private sector investment and private sector leadership is going to be really key when it comes to housing solutions and how we move on some of those projects.

I want to thank those who organized the housing summit. It was very well put together. I think that the City of Whitehorse team worked with the Yukon Housing Corporation to ensure that we had everyone at the table — Chu Níkwän from Kwanlin Dün, CYFN, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition, Safe at Home Society, Government of Yukon, just to name a few folks who had an opportunity to attend.

I will take an opportunity — for anyone who has an opportunity to listen today, please, we did have an opportunity to work in concert with the federal government. It's a new program. We talked a little bit about it last week, not specific to this. But please, any MLAs who are here, share this with your constituents. It's a program for homeowners. It's a one-time opportunity that we've been able to put together with CMHC. It's structured so that, if you are in rural Yukon, you get a larger benefit. It's \$1,500 for rural Yukoners, and it's \$1,000 for those inside of Whitehorse. This, of course, is just pending your financial situation over the last couple of years, but it's a significant benefit that we think will be well-received by many.

I want to congratulate Safe at Home. I know that there have been a lot of conversations in the media about it regarding costs. When I think about Safe at Home and the work that they are doing — I will share this with those in the House today. We went back and we did some analyses on the Safe at Home project. When we look at the amount of money that we are providing, the Yukon government is providing to the project, and we look at the livable space that is being built, we are at about \$329 per square foot. We are at \$257 in total for the project. I would challenge many projects, when you take a look at that, understanding that even when we went out to public tender and took the best price that was presented for our project

in Watson, still, we were at a much greater cost than what we're seeing on this particular project.

To those who are listening, today I want to thank our partners on not just the housing piece, the Safe at Home team, but those with lived experience who have been great at making sure that we stay grounded in our understanding of what individuals need and know about where some of the challenges that we are seeing in our housing market are.

I think it's important to touch on some of the bilateral relationships as well and how those will lead to the work ahead and, of course, the budget will support that. We finished up in November here, and that was an opportunity to just refocus the work from the Legislative Assembly. I have to say that the work — it is extremely invigorating being able to sit down with Yukoners and understand what they want to see, what their hopes are, and where you can work with them to help them on the projects in front of them and the challenges they may have.

We had a good opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to go out and meet with First Nation leaders in a number of communities. Our real focus was the Kluane area as well as south Yukon, and it was a great chance to sit down and understand exactly what particular First Nation governments want to focus on. Our teams at Aboriginal Relations through Executive Council Office are probably as busy as they have ever been. They are working on accords with a number of organizations and they're working on following up on some of the work that we had a chance to focus on between sessions.

We also had an opportunity to sit with a number of municipal leaders. I appreciate their candor; I appreciate their advice. The Minister of Community Services was there with me, and I thought that there were so many highlights touched on but also so many good pieces of advice going into this upcoming year, understanding that we could be in, again, a sensitive scenario when it comes to floods and maybe mudslides, if we think of the Klondike area, and then how do we prepare appropriately for a fire season knowing that our surrounding neighbours still have fires going from last year's season? Sitting with the mayors and sitting with the minister and seeing that dialogue was an extremely positive interaction. That was something we had an opportunity to do.

The conversations in Ottawa in early December when we travelled with First Nation leaders — and we had an opportunity to reflect on the last 50 years of *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* and the implementation work that has been done, the bilateral conversations with federal ministers where we talked about many of the key items, whether it be land planning, legislative requirements and requests, understanding where infrastructure spending is going to go and what we are going to see in the 2024 budget, what we are going to see in the 2025 budget — all those different pieces were part of the dialogue and were very important. I also appreciated the opportunity to have been part of something that was historic in nature and seeing individuals who were there who tie right back to those days 50 years ago — it was pretty incredible to hear from them.

We are going to continue to make sure that we can speak directly to the federal government over 2024 on things that we

believe that they need to consider when it comes to issues around Arctic sovereignty and Arctic security. It is a conversation that continued with the governor of Alaska. There were lots of parallel priorities from both the state and the territory. I want to thank Governor Dunleavy — the support that is in place right now around what would normally be Shakwak spending — but an opportunity to leverage through other funding opportunities and other sources, I think, will bring happiness to many Yukoners and Alaskans. It is a different route that has been used compared to the appropriations that were done before. So, we look forward to seeing a positive outcome in that work and a funding pot that we can use to ensure that this extremely important transportation route continues to be supported and maintained.

The conversation also focused on a number of other things that there will be continuing conversation around: wildlife, opportunities for development corporations to work together, the opportunity to look at infrastructure-sharing, and the opportunity to understand how to maximize the sharing of fire resources. There are a number of things. There will be teams coming in almost every month going into 2024 — and going back and forth to Alaska. I think it is something that we can really see a lot of opportunity in. I think that the Alaskans feel the same.

The work that we'll continue to do through the Executive Council Office around Arctic sovereignty and the conversation — we'll closely be watching what happens and working with Canada as they have a dialogue with the US around boundaries. We will continue to ensure that there is a conversation happening with Yukoners and the private sector throughout the north when we look at what's going to happen with NORAD spending. We think it's really important. What I've echoed to Canada is that it's really important that individual businesses, the private sector, and development corporations have a keen understanding about what the opportunities are on that Department of Defence spending so that they can properly prepare for those opportunities moving forward — and then understanding if there is any new spending that will happen.

There have been conversations happening with a couple of ministers here around that dialogue, but we'll have more to share. We're going to have a broader conversation with Yukoners and there will be a significant document released later in 2024. That will be some of the work that we do through Executive Council Office.

We have tried to make sure that we have the tools that we need for our bilateral conversations and agreements with First Nation governments through Aboriginal Relations in this budget. I think we have the tools that we need right now to continue to execute on the work that we have committed to, so you will see that debated here in the House. That is extremely important, because there are so many different areas that we're going to have to cover, and that's everything from land planning to continued work on the mineral legislation through to work on the lands act and then, of course, the accords that have been discussed and spoken about.

We did do an expression of interest that I want to touch on — just shifting gears a bit — the expression of interest to the

private sector around housing. It was really at a time when we were looking to see if there were any units that had been built and had been on the market for a while that we, as the Yukon Housing Corporation, could acquire. We are going to be finalizing that after we hopefully get support here for the budget — we can have the budget passed — and will have some of the funds we need for those acquisitions.

It's going to be very interesting, because it's going to give us a sense — to see what we are paying for units after they have already been put on the market versus organizations responding to government RFPs. I can say that the early indication from the technical teams is that there is a significant difference in pricing from what we are seeing through the expression of interest through to how we would respond to an RFP. I think that is going to be educational for all of us — for anybody who has been involved with the Housing Corporation either here on this side or on the other side of the House. It's something that, really, we haven't tried or contemplated before. I think that is going to be something that is really important.

Continuing preparation for the summer with the contingency fund is something that should just be part and parcel of all budgets in the Yukon government moving forward for decades to come. This is something that is proper preparation for what we believe — that we will not get to September without some level of impact from nature. Again, it could be a mudslide, it could be a flood, or it could be fire, but having the financial means to be able to respond to that is always appropriate and is something that we just have to build into our financial modelling now as we move forward.

The capital budget, I think, is going to see us continue to invest in really important projects. We do have lots of fun debate here in the House around certain projects, but the reality is that there are some big projects that have been undertaken and they are complex. When you contemplate the fact that you are trying to build these projects either in the middle of a pandemic or at the end of a pandemic, it even adds more rigour. Then you think about the supply chain pressures that came out of that entire global experience, and you are still trying to do work. When I think about the teams, again, that are doing the fibre project — almost 800 kilometres, 1,100 water crossings, directional drilling under the Mackenzie Delta to ensure that Canada has — as the only country in the circumpolar world that didn't — proper redundancy when it comes to your fibre optic network, understanding that future investment in the Yukon when it comes from the global mining sector is looking to see these things — that project is something that we dug in on. It took a lot of work. It was negotiation — from the funds to Canada with Northwestel right through to the work. We will see that coming to completion. It is actually a nation-building project when you contemplate the importance of it and what it's going to mean for the three territories and for the future of how we look at securing and supporting the north.

The work on the Nisutlin Bay bridge will continue. There's the airport. These are big items that were required and requested, but we're not leaving some of that smaller work. I am looking forward to seeing the work of Highways and Public Works this year when it comes to some opportunity to work on

the North Canol, south McQuesten — using their existing maintenance budget, making sure that some of our industrial activities and exploration that is happening have investment there — as well as the future work around infrastructure through Resource Gateway and the work between here and Dawson City. There are some key investments that we have seen happen.

In closing — I know we only have a couple of minutes left — I am looking forward to the work around our labour market strategy in Economic Development. It's going to be something that needs to be renewed. It will give us a clear path on where we need to see improvements and focus on our labour market. We have talked in the House about a need for certain professions — education professionals, health professionals — and also about how we make sure that we have a future labour market.

We were lucky two years ago — when you think that, all of the sudden, walking through the downtown of Whitehorse or other places, you would have seen places only open four nights a week or five nights a week. I would say, as minister responsible for Economic Development, that the two things that kept me up were: How are we going to deal with the housing challenge, and how do we deal with the labour market, understanding that the labour market fix may exacerbate the housing challenge?

We have been lucky enough to continue to see units go out — hundreds and hundreds of units that we have been able to support. We have seen key investment. I am going to challenge some of the remarks that were made earlier today — the numbers that were presented by the Yukon Party. We will do that tomorrow. We will just disseminate the misunderstanding of what has really been invested in housing. We will, as well, be able to discuss having seen our labour market bounce back. We see businesses running at full hours. We appreciate the folks in the private sector who have been able to hire individuals to take on that work. That will be very key.

The credential recognition — I am excited to see Yukoners being able to get into those jobs that they were trained for in other jurisdictions and get them back into the work they need.

Our immigration strategy work — I had a chance to speak to that publicly in 2024. We will continue to make sure that we are doing investment attraction. We will continue to support tourism, as we hope to see that again bounce back and it seems to be trending in a very strong way. We will stick to the commitments we made around working around 405 Alexander, working around downtown, working in our health areas, making sure that we get our housing projects out the door and finish the infrastructure projects, all the while making sure that we understand that we have to make the right decisions when it comes to the finances of this government. We have to make sure that we're not doing things where we're borrowing large sums of money with no plan to pay the principal back and leaving it for other generations. We won't do that. That has been done before. We have to learn from those mistakes and we have to make sure that we put the trajectory of the finances on the right path for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, thanks again for giving me an opportunity to speak to this today. I truly do look forward to a vigorous debate and a chance to understand the values of all of those who get to spend time here in the Legislative Assembly.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Silver: To those who have participated in the second reading budget debate, I thank them for their comments, questions, and issues that they brought up, as I believe that this is an important opportunity for every MLA to not only address concerns from a budget perspective but also to speak from the heart to their constituents. It's a great opportunity for everyone to take.

I'm very pleased to be able to rise to speak to the second reading on Bill No. 213, representing the appropriation act for the 2024-25 fiscal year — the main estimates. I am going to start by extending my gratitude. I want to talk specifically about the incredible public servants in the Department of Finance who have shepherded this year's budget and the just as incredible public servants throughout the government who have done incredible work with these main estimates. They do incredible work in the rest of their duties of the day in my experience over eight budgets. Yukoners are very fortunate to have such a professional, committed public service. The government is very, very grateful for all of their work.

I get the opportunity to watch as the departments coincide together and work weekends and evenings — from period 4 variance reports all the way through to Vote 12 and all the steps in between. Budgeting is a 365-day experience. To see all of the advancements that we have made from the Yukon Financial Advisory Panel guiding us in my earlier years through the calamity of a global pandemic and then here we are today with perspective from other jurisdictions to be able to compare and contrast — the work that we have done with the index of well-being to, as a government, have more than just the GDP as a consideration as to how well we are doing. I am very proud of the work not only on this budget but also over the years to get us to where we are here today.

I also want to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my constituents in the Klondike for entrusting me with their support as I continue to represent the beautiful region here in this Chamber. It is definitely an honour to represent my home town of Dawson City since 2011. Representing your home and also your neighbours, friends, elders, and role models is absolutely the privilege of a lifetime. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I will say thank you to Dawson City.

I am going to turn things over to conversations about some of the comments here that we have heard from a couple of folks who have responded to the second reading. First, I would like to briefly speak to the characterization of the government's net debt position. As I frequently do, I would once again like to remind everybody in the Assembly and those listening at home that net financial debt is not a measure of government borrowing. Rather, it reflects the differences between the

government's total liabilities and its financial assets. With most of the government liabilities being long-term items that will not be realized all at once — for example, post-employment benefits — net debt has increased in recent years to help support major infrastructure investments. During the pandemic, it was critical that we continued to support Yukoners and the economy.

It was extremely important to make sure that we had the financial wherewithal to do so, to begin with. This was particularly achieved through significant investments in infrastructure and capital projects throughout the pandemic. While this injection of stimulus spending kept Yukoners working through the pandemic and also made some great strides to address the gaps in our infrastructure needs, it also contributed toward increasing net debt. Budget 2024-25 projects that net debt will increase to \$488 million by the end of 2024-25. At the same time, the fiscal and economic outlook shows a stabilization and subsequent decrease in net debt as capital expenditures begin to moderate from recent historic highs and revenue growth remains very, very strong.

Net debt is projected to reach a peak of \$521 million in 2026-27 and existing and identified projects are completed before declining to \$375 million by 2028-29. It is important to note that the Yukon is in a very strong fiscal position. This is evidenced by the Yukon government's AA stable credit rating and also its low net-debt-to-GDP ratio. A net-debt-to-GDP ratio is a useful measurement of government's ability to meet its long-term financial obligations. In the most recent data from Stats Canada, the Government of Yukon has the second lowest net-debt-to-GDP among Canadian provinces and territories. The Yukon has a ratio of negative 17.6 percent. That negative feature reflects the fact that the Yukon was in a net financial asset position on a consolidated basis.

I would also like to briefly speak to the opposition's narrative around funding for the Yukon Hospital Corporation. I know that the minister responsible did a great job of doing so already today. Just to reiterate, in the past few days, the opposition has claimed that we are providing less funding than last year for the Yukon Hospital Corporation, which confuses a lot of people in Finance and in the Department of Health and Social Services as well.

In budget 2024-25, we are providing \$110.4 million in operating funding to the Yukon Hospital Corporation, which is an increase of 18 percent over the 2023-24 main estimates. This funding increase will support the hospital's growing core funding needs, new recruitment and retention initiatives, and address wait times as well. This includes funding for 1Health, a modernized health information system that will improve health care across the Yukon by enabling timely and secure access to medical records. It also includes an increase in funding to the First Nations Health Programs to deliver a number of integrated programs and services for Indigenous patients accessing care.

Another interesting stat is that, between 2017-18 and 2024-25 — of course, I am talking fiscal years here — operational funding has increased from \$70.6 million to \$110.4 million. That is an increase of 56 percent. We are also

providing \$5.07 million in capital funding in 2024-25 to complete the construction of the mental wellness unit at the Whitehorse General Hospital. Once complete, this new facility will provide 12 beds and three separation spaces for individuals with a mental health diagnosis that is disrupting their daily functioning or negatively affecting their own safety or the safety of others. It will also free up existing hospital space to expand a number of inpatient beds at the Whitehorse General Hospital, so that's some exciting news.

Mr. Speaker, the changes in funding in the Yukon Hospital Corporation in 2024-25 compared to the previous year's supplementary budgets are driven by a combination of increases and non-renewal of time-limited funding. This includes things like \$16.3 million in one-time funding in that 2023-24 timeline for a number of non-recurring initiatives, which are attributable to costs for items like agency nurses, which are anticipated to be lower in 2024-25, or pension solvency funds, which is not anticipated at all for 2024-25 — also really good news.

With all those things said — again, we will get into more debate in Committee of the Whole, which is great — but in closing, I just want to reiterate how this is a budget for Yukoners, as I mentioned in my budget speech. This is a budget that makes the day-to-day lives of Yukoners more affordable, more equitable, safer, healthier, and creates a brighter future for everyone in the territory. In the years ahead, we look forward to working with our partners to implement the priorities outlined in budget 2024-25.

I want to thank the members for their comments about the mains — well, those who actually commented about the mains — and I also look forward to any questions and comments to come during Committee of the Whole as well. Mr. Speaker, shāw nítān; Mahsi' cho; gūniltshish; merci.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Member: 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: Disagree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Ms. Clarke: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 10 yeas, seven nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for second reading of Bill No. 213 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

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Unilateral changes to educational assistant staffing and school allocations, letter re (dated March 6, 2024) from Stephanie Hammond, Executive Director, LDAY Centre for Learning; Melanie Bennett, Executive Director, Yukon First Nation Education Directorate; Katie Swales, President, Autism Yukon; Rebecca Fenton, Executive Director, Autism Yukon; Ted Hupé, President, Yukon Association of Education Professionals; and Sandra Henderson, Chair, Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees, to Hon. Jeanie McLean, Minister of Education (Kent)