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HANSARD

Thursday, March 14, 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
Thursday, March 14, 2024 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of a change made to the Order Paper. The following motion was not placed on today's Notice Paper, as the motion was not in order: Motion No. 895, notice of which was given by the Member for Lake Laberge.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, for the tribute to Yukon engineers today, we have in the gallery — I apologize: I have five names and there appear to be four people. In any event, we are welcoming, from Highways and Public Works, Luke Wadey, Lucas Knowles, Mark Pollard, Sarah Dominie, and/or Loreena Dobson.

As well, I would like to acknowledge the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes, who is also a member of the engineering community.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Pi Day

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of all members of this Legislative Assembly today, March 14 — 3.14 — to pay tribute to Pi Day. Pi Day — it's a little bit metal.

Pi is a Greek letter, the 16th letter in their alphabet, which is the equivalent to our letter P. We use pi as a symbol to represent a number, a mathematical constant. That number is the ratio of the circumference of a circle to the diameter of that circle, and somehow this simple, little ratio appears in so much of the world around us.

Pi is an irrational, transcendent number, which means that its digits go on forever. By the way, the current record for the number of digits for pi is 62,831,853,071,796 digits, which is still only an approximation — just saying.

The next time some sort of online scam asks me for my credit card number, I'm going to just tell them that they can find my credit card number in pi.

Pi Day is time when we celebrate the ideas of mathematics and discovery. It's a day to sing the praises of numeracy and to give a shout-out to our math teachers and all the folks who love math, to wax philosophic about the stunningly complex

simplicity of numbers which beguile us with their beauty and describe our world in delightful and dizzying ways.

Pi Day is a day to take 3.14 minutes or so to celebrate our inner geeks. Mr. Speaker, when I mentioned that I stood up to make this tribute, I should point out that it was not far for me to rise because I was already on the edge of my seat. It turns out, I have a lot of inner geek.

Pi is a metaphor for curiosity, a semaphore of velocity. You can find pi in music, logic, quantum mechanics, biorhythms, the measurement of time — pi is everywhere. Pi is like a spark that suddenly illuminates whole other worlds.

So, Pi Day becomes a day that kind of stands for aha moments — you know, when you say “Whoa” or “Wow” or “What the...?” In the words of Gangstagrass, a bluegrass hip-hop fusion band — here we go:

Irrational, non-fractional

Find circumference when multiplied by diameter

A never-ending number that you can't even tally up

Represented by the letter in your calculus

Use it to calculate the space in cipher

The volume inside your sphere or otherwise

Any geometric shape that has a circular element

Cones, cylinders, capsules — all relevant

A lot more than 3 point one four

Short the right amount of places, your mission could be done for

Approximate it with care but keep it constant

Switch it up in the midst you're running into problems!

[...]

3.14 so on and so on

Goes on like me on a track when I float on...

Mr. Speaker, as a number, pi uses the digits 1 through 9 and zero, which makes 10, plus the decimal point, which makes 11.

Pi Day, Mr. Speaker — it's a little bit metal.

Applause

In recognition of National Engineering Month

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, the engineers whom I am paying tribute to now have certainly employed pi in their careers — I am virtually certain.

I rise today to pay tribute to engineers, as March is National Engineering Month. Every March, we celebrate the ingenuity, dedication, and impact of these hard-working professionals. Today, I would like to thank engineers across the Yukon who have made remarkable contributions across all of our communities.

Please allow me to share three unique examples of the work of engineers on our projects. First, I will begin with the Dempster fibre line project. This project is installing fibre optic cable from Dawson City to Inuvik, Northwest Territories. One engineering challenge has been getting the fibre optic cable across rivers. Their solution was to drill sideways underground and feed the fibre optic cable under the ground and under the rivers. In one case, for the Mackenzie River, that horizontal drilling covered more than one kilometre of distance. I would

like to thank the geotechnical engineers, the hydrology engineers, and skilled technicians who made that happen. Like many achievements, Mr. Speaker, in engineering, the end result will likely never be noticed by people travelling nearby. They will, however, enjoy faster and more reliable Internet.

My second example is far more visible. It is the Nisutlin Bay bridge replacement project. While the civil engineers work with concrete and steel at a grand scale, environmental engineers are working to mitigate the impact on fish and wildlife. One example is the use of what is called a “bubble curtain”. This technique involves creating air bubbles underwater to mitigate noise from construction. Thanks to this technique and the engineering science behind it, the construction of the Nisutlin Bay bridge is proceeding with minimal disruption to fish and wildlife of the bay.

Last, I would like to draw your attention to a less conventional example of engineering. Last fall during reconstruction of the north Klondike Highway, travellers might have noticed a bright green substance sprayed alongside the road. That mixture was a collection of local plant seeds and plant food. One of the many specializations within engineering is bioresource engineering. In the case of the north Klondike, engineers are using local plants to prevent erosion and landslides. They are harnessing the power of nature in order to strengthen our infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, as we mark National Engineering Month, let us extend our heartfelt appreciation to all engineers in the Yukon. I would also like to thank all of the mentors and educators who are doing their part to inspire the next generation of engineers, nurturing their passion for this important profession. To all engineers, no matter your specialization, thank you for your service as we celebrate National Engineering Month. Your dedication and expertise are instrumental in building a better tomorrow.

Applause

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize March as National Engineering Month. Engineering is the practice of using science and mathematics to solve real-world problems — to create, fix, expand, and innovate.

While there are six or so major branches of engineering, there are hundreds of subcategories of engineering under each branch: civil, electrical, mechanical, chemical, and mining. Those are some of the main types of engineers that you might find in a place like the Yukon.

This month, we celebrate the contributions of engineers to our communities. Their skills and knowledge are what help to build our buildings, infrastructure, and neighbourhoods in a safe and efficient way and to help us to improve our technology, ensure clean drinking water, reduce carbon emissions, and work to create efficient transportation networks. In fact, Mr. Speaker, engineers have a hand in almost every aspect of our daily lives. They are problem-solvers, innovators, leaders, and community builders. Our children are learning the building blocks of engineering through play at home. Think about the

countless hours you might have spent doing puzzles, building with blocks, or making Lego. This is how it begins.

STEM is introduced in primary school and fine-tuned throughout a child’s years in school. Many will go on to specialize and hone the skills learned from an early age, and some will, in fact, become engineers.

I would like to thank all Yukon engineers and all those individuals and organizations who help to educate the next generation of engineers. A special shout-out to my favourite engineer — yes, Jamie, that’s you. Unfortunately, she wasn’t able to be here today because she’s in a meeting down at Stantec, so thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to National Engineering Month. Engineers solve some of our most complex problems. They build the world around us as they invent new technologies that make our lives safer and easier. From bridges to microchips, we rely on the expertise and skill of engineers to make our world work. Engineering requires imagination, attention to detail, innovation, and perseverance. I want to give my thanks to all the engineers who have imagined, designed, and built the world around us, from the building we’re standing in to the microphone I am speaking into. Thank you for making all of this possible.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling a legislative return in response to Written Question No. 33 with respect to the Safe at Home Society’s purchase of the Coast High Country Inn.

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling the value of building permits bulletin released by the Yukon Bureau of Statistics on March 7, which I quoted from earlier this week and that the Premier believes is inaccurate.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?
Are there any petitions to be presented?
Are there any bills to be introduced?
Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House supports the new Spark Tourism micro-grant program to encourage growth in the tourism sector by supporting new and emerging entrepreneurs to develop and launch their visitor experience or service.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to make public any and all reports, studies, or analyses conducted on the costs of establishing a new health authority.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to make public any and all reports, studies, or analyses conducted on costs associated with pensions in relation to the creation of a new health authority.

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Canada to halt the planned increase to the carbon tax scheduled for April 1, 2024.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to introduce any required legislation and regulations to allow for the establishment of one or more credit unions in the Yukon.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to withdraw its judicial review of the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board's decision on the Michelle Creek mining project.

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

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Educational assistants

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, we asked the Minister of Education about a letter sent to her by several education stakeholders that said that the recent changes made to the educational assistant allocation policy are harmful, inequitable, and would result in less support for vulnerable students. The minister flatly dismissed those concerns. She said that these were just minor administrative changes and that the groups raising the concerns were just confused.

Mr. Speaker, the president of the Yukon Association of Education Professionals didn't sound confused in his interview with CBC Yukon yesterday. He said that the policy had changed — quote: "... so dramatically that students this year that are getting support would not be eligible for support next year."

So, Mr. Speaker, is the minister standing by her comments from Monday?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise today to speak about the work that we are doing in the Department of Education, particularly when it comes to supporting children. That is the focus of the work that we do in the department — to ensure that we have the right supports and interventions for students to better meet their learning needs.

Through the reimagining inclusive and special education initiative, we are examining how we allocate educational assistants and other resources to students. We have added a tremendous amount of resources just this year alone. I am sure I will have an opportunity to speak a little bit more about them.

Over the past year, the Department of Education has met both individually and with groups of educators and partners, including the superintendents and school board executive directors, to inform the EA allocation process. I would like to take a moment to clarify that the total number of EAs is not decreasing as part of our work; instead, the total number of EAs is actually increasing through our recent CASA.

We agree that EAs are an important part of the broader supports for Yukon learners, and we are working to ensure that the appropriate wraparound supports are available across the territory. This is very important work, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, it's not about the total numbers; it's how those individuals are allocated throughout the education system. During the interview, they played a clip of the minister's comments in this House from Monday saying that the changes were minor and that it wouldn't affect how EAs are allocated and then asked the president of the Association of Education Professionals to respond. He said — quote: "I have to laugh. Because it's profound change." He went on to say that the change they have made may be bureaucratically simpler but — again, I'll quote: "... it doesn't address the needs of children."

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the changes that the minister made to this policy are not minor or beneficial to the students, so why won't she agree to cancel the changes and go back to consult with these five groups and other stakeholders to come up with a policy that actually works for students?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I do not take lightly any of the work that we are doing to support students. I don't believe that anything that we are doing to support our children who are most in need in our education system is laughable.

We have undertaken all of these efforts with the goal of meeting the needs of children. This is at the heart of the work that we do. Partners and stakeholders asked us to take urgent action to implement the RISE agenda, and this included conducting a review of the current EA allocation process.

In the fall of 2023, we utilized an outside consultant with a proven track record to work with us. Updates to the current process include better sharing of information with educators and administrators, including increased transparency in the EA allocation form by clearly noting how the holistic needs of the students are being considered. This includes the safety of a child, independence, communication, academics, and socio-emotional skills. Our updates to the base allocation were informed by those conversations with stakeholders in the fall. Any substantial changes to the EA allocation will take time and we will be working with our partners to do so.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, the president actually said RISE was a facade, but we will get to that later.

Here's how the interview with the president of the YAEP concluded, Mr. Speaker — and I will quote again: "They're trying to divide us. They're trying to have sidebar

conversations.” He then continued — and I will quote again: “... we need a better process, and we need better dialogue between the stakeholders who are very, very, very invested in education, and the department, and we’re not going to sit quietly. We can’t. We’ve got too many vulnerable children whose futures are at stake. And I think that’s what they have forgotten.”

It’s clear that these five groups are not satisfied with how the Department of Education and the minister have been operating so far, so I will ask again: Will the minister agree to set these policy changes aside and convene a meeting of these groups to find a solution that actually meets the needs of Yukon’s most vulnerable students?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, over the past year, the department has met extensively with all of our partners. Any substantial changes to the EA allocation process will take time. We are committed to working with our partners, including the Yukon Association of Education Professionals, for any substantive changes.

The department will continue to monitor the results of these updates and, where necessary, make further adjustments in the process as we analyze the recommendations. We are reviewing the report that we have now internally and plan to share it with our partners in the coming months. That will inform some of the decisions going forward.

Mr. Speaker, our government is investing in children. We have made substantial investments even just this year. We have added, in 2023, 40 new positions to our allocation. Several of them are educational assistants, learning assistance teachers, and wellness counsellors, and we will continue to make those investments over the next years to come.

Question re: Government relationship with education community

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, as concerning as these unilateral changes to the EA allocation policy are, they are just a symptom of a larger problem. There seems to be a growing rift between this minister and the educational community.

Here is what the president of the Association of Education Professionals said on Wednesday: “... the Minister is ill informed and is using marketing language that will not help students or the education system. She’s playing politics, and it’s not going to help our children.” Mr. Speaker, that is a devastating assessment from the president of the YAEP. It is clear that there is a major problem here.

What is the minister going to do to repair the relationship between her and the educational community?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I have worked very hard to build trust with our education partners. Our government is absolutely committed to reshaping education in the territory. We have worked extensively on early learning and childcare. We have reshaped the whole system to better meet the needs of our youngest Yukoners. We are making historic investments in our youngest Yukoners by \$42.5 million this year and over \$43 million last year.

There is so much to talk about within that area of education — K to 12 — and schools. We are updating policies and

ensuring that our schools are inclusive. We have introduced ready-to-learn school programs in many of our schools, with the aim of actually introducing that method into all schools in the Yukon. We are investing in that important work. We have introduced a First Nation School Board in the Yukon. We are working collaboratively with all of our partners. We are working on our relationships and —

Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, while the minister may have some nice speaking notes about this, there is clearly a disconnect between her, those speaking notes, and the educational community, because I know that the decision to send the March 6 letter was not one that any of those groups took lightly. When a group like this — when the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, Autism Yukon, Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon, the Association of Yukon School Councils, and the Yukon teachers’ association themselves all felt that they had no choice but to send the Minister of Education a letter like this decrying policies that they feel are being unilaterally driven by the department that are harmful, inequitable, and will diminish support for vulnerable students, that is a symptom of a much bigger problem, Mr. Speaker. It is clear that the minister needs to change her approach.

So, what is she going to do to repair the damage between her and the education community?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, again, I stand by my approach in working with all stakeholders and partners in the territory. I think anyone with whom I have worked over the years will know that I work in a collaborative way. It’s the only way I know how to work.

We have a few key bodies that we work with, and I know that the members opposite know this. The Department of Education is committed to enhancing community involvement. We work with the Yukon Advisory Committee for Yukon Education, which is made up of system-wide education professionals whom we work with on a regular basis to bring forward the work that we are doing within the Department of Education.

We also have key advisory groups through the Yukon First Nations Education Commission that we work directly with. We also work government to government with Yukon First Nations. I work with the Chiefs Committee on Education and many, many other groups. I have made myself very available. I will continue to do that and continue to do the good work to reshape education.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I don’t think that I or anyone else doubts the minister’s intentions, but what we are talking about are the actions of her department. It’s clear that the status quo cannot continue. Anyone who has read the letter from these groups and heard the interview with the president of the YAEP will realize that there is a much bigger problem here than just a policy change gone wrong. It’s clear that the relationship between the minister and these education partners is at an all-time low.

My question is this: What concrete changes is she going to make to try to address the obvious rift between the minister and the education community?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I am just going to go back a little bit and again talk about some of the important investments we are making in education in terms of even just this current fiscal year that we are in. We have added 40 new staff to our department to work directly within schools. These are direct services to children. In the next fiscal year, 2024-25, we are adding 21 more supports and 20 more supports in 2025-26. I will continue the hard work of working with our partners through the Department of Education to address the issues in our education system.

It is interesting to hear, of course, from members opposite who had such a long time to really address the issues in education. They had several failed attempts to work with the issues that we are diving into now. These are not easy issues, Mr. Speaker, and I am committed and our government is committed to reshaping education and to addressing the issues that we have faced within our education system.

Question re: Short-term accommodation rentals

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, wherever I go, whomever I talk to, people are worried about housing, but meanwhile, the Yukon Liberals are bankrolling short-term rentals that take homes away from Yukoners. The Liberals recently gave \$180,000 to the Yukon's version of Airbnb to create an app for its short-term rental business. That money came from the territory's economic development fund, for which the guidelines call for projects that — quote: "... provide long-term, sustainable economic benefits to Yukoners and Yukon communities."

It is hard to see how boosting short-term rentals will provide long-term, sustainable economic benefits to the many Yukoners who can't find affordable housing, or the Yukon businesses that can't house their employees, or the Yukoners hurting from the shortages of doctors, nurses, and teachers that can be tied back to a lack of housing.

Can the Premier tell Yukoners caught in the housing crisis how they will benefit from another short-term rental app?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I will stand — and I think that it is important to share with Yukoners and Yukon families who want to see a good response when it comes to investment in housing — just going back over to the \$27.3 million that is here for building affordable homes.

We were very pleased to be able to come to an agreement with Da Daghay Development Corporation on Yukon's largest affordable housing initiative that we have ever seen — over 100 units. We have seen mixed support — in some ways, detractors here — on the Safe at Home project, which is almost 70 units for some of the most vulnerable individuals in our community.

I commend Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in on their work to build a men's shelter. It was supported by Yukon Housing and our team as well. I appreciate their work when we talk about vulnerable Yukoners. I also think that it is important to touch on the work at the Council of Yukon First Nations and their work for some of the most vulnerable folks in our community

and their new work in Whistle Bend and our opportunity to work with them.

One thing I will state is that we always want to support entrepreneurs. In this particular case, I would urge the member opposite to sit down with the Council of Yukon First Nations and get a real understanding of how they have worked in partnership with the company that has been mentioned to make sure that the most vulnerable individuals in our community have supports and a place to stay.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to supporting small local businesses, short-term rentals are hurting, not helping. We all know about the staffing shortages that are hitting everyone from hospitals to restaurants. I hear all of the time from business owners and managers who work for months to recruit new staff, only to have them leave because there is nowhere for them to live. Even Yukoners who have lived and worked here for years tell us that they are leaving the territory because they have been forced to move over and over again. They love the Yukon and they don't want to leave, but they can't bear to keep up their endless search for an affordable place to live. When Yukoners are leaving the territory because they cannot afford a home, it is not the time to invest in short-term rentals.

Can the Premier tell Yukoners why he is making the housing crisis worse by boosting short-term rentals?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I think, for anybody, that comment is definitely a stretch.

What I would have done today is take the opportunity to come and talk about how we are improving the housing situation. We had a ministerial statement on an announcement that will be later on today. It was shut down by both opposition parties. It would have been an opportunity to answer those types of questions, to talk about exactly where there was a need for rental housing, and we were in a position within that — we had an opportunity to provide some information.

Anyway, I will leave it to the member opposite to take a look at some of the information that comes out later today, after 3:00 p.m., with a multitude of great Yukon companies, great Yukon partners, and an ability to come up with solutions here for long-term rentals — for just those needs actually that the member opposite has touched upon.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has talked about the tens of millions of dollars that he has spent to get more rental units on the market. What if I told you that we could put up to 212 units on the rental market for free, more or less immediately? That seems like an offer that even the Yukon Party might be interested in. Well, that is how many units are currently being used as short-term rentals in Whitehorse. Those are 212 potential homes that could be used for Yukoners.

If this government had the courage and the vision to regulate short-term rentals, much like the BC government has already done — we already know that they aren't going to do that. But if this Liberal government doesn't have the courage to make the short-term rental drain on homes better, you would hope that at least they would hold off on making it worse. Instead, they chose to give \$180,000 to a short-term rental company.

Does the Premier still think it was a good idea to give almost \$200,000 to a short-term rental company while the Yukon is in a housing crisis?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: What we will continue to do is to look at a series of different approaches to helping the housing situation, whether it's to invest in affordable housing, whether it's to look at wraparound services, whether it's to put a program in place — which we have had an opportunity to do today. I will just say to all homeowners that, if you are in a position where the gross income is less than \$100,000, there is potentially \$1,000 available to you right away this spring. If you live in rural Yukon, it's \$1,500. I think that's something we really want to see. If you are a renter and you're having some challenges through our housing benefit, you can either get \$200, \$400, \$600, or \$800 that can offset your rental costs. We think that's a very strong program and we should have more news about the expansion of that program here in the near future as well.

Today, we are very excited to bring together a number of folks from across the Yukon to come up with a great solution. I would say to the member opposite to have the courage — you have the courage — to get the facts. To get the facts, you should reach out to the Council of Yukon First Nations. I think you should sit down with the Council of Yukon First Nations and speak with their executive director and get a sense of how they are working on short-term rentals for the most vulnerable folks in the community. If I am wrong, then come back and we will have a deeper discussion about this, but I think you don't have all the facts at this particular time.

Question re: COVID-19 vaccination adverse effects

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Health and Social Services wrote to the Public Accounts Committee on February 12 as part of the COVID vaccine rollout audit. In that letter, the department stated that the Yukon's rate of adverse effects to the COVID-19 vaccine were — quote: "...considerably higher than the Canadian rate." A chart provided by the department explained that the Yukon's rate of adverse events following immunization, or AEFI, was more than nine times the national average.

The department went on to provide two specific reasons to explain this data, but we would like to ask whether any further study has been done to explain why the Yukon's rate of AEFI was so much higher than the rest of Canada.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I always enjoy the opportunity to speak to Yukoners about vaccinations and the importance of vaccinations. Our government, of course, is committed and has supported access to vaccinations during COVID-19. We were, if not the first jurisdiction, one of the first jurisdictions to have vaccinations in arms when they were ultimately developed and available. We worked extremely hard with the federal government to make sure that vaccinations were available for Yukoners. We also made sure that, once they were here on the ground, they were distributed through just an amazing network of work by the Department of Health and Social Services to communities first — to Indigenous communities first that are remote from Whitehorse. The

opportunity there was taken up well by individual Whitehorse and community members.

In 2023, just by way of an example — that's after the vast impact of COVID — Yukon health care providers administered an estimated 38,929 vaccines. The rate that the individual across the way is speaking about is probably related to the fact that we have —

Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, there is a disconnect between what the minister's department said and what she just said here, and she did not answer the question.

The Department of Health and Social Services noted that they don't think there is a reason for concern, and they provided two reasons to explain why they believe the Yukon's rate of adverse events after COVID vaccination is more than nine times the national average.

While the department does indicate that they may have had a higher sensitivity in their definition of an AEFI in the early part of the pandemic, the number of reported AEFI per 100,000 population is still over nine times the national rate, which certainly caught the eye of many Yukoners.

Has the government considered working with the Government of Canada and the vaccine suppliers to look further into the reasons or causes of this extremely elevated rate in the Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the attempt of this question is to have me say something different from what the department said at Public Accounts. I am certainly supportive of the department and their information provided at Public Accounts. We respect that process immensely, and the department individuals who were present — I was not one of them — to answer those questions would have provided the very best information to Public Accounts that they had available.

I can look into the individual's questions, but I think what is most important is to remind Yukoners that they have access to free vaccines here in the territory for COVID as well as for many ailments. Routine, publicly funded vaccines will continue to be offered here in Whitehorse at the health centre at 9010 Quartz Road, with the primary focus on clients under five years of age at that location. Vaccine prioritization is informed by the guidance of the chief medical officer of health, our staffing capacity, and the evolving demand for all types of vaccines, including COVID-19.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the minister keeps dodging the question.

I have also heard from some employees — or former employees — of the Yukon government who experienced adverse reactions or impacts that could have been a result of the vaccine. Despite this, in the fall, the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board witnesses confirmed that they hadn't accepted any claims from people related to an adverse reaction.

We are aware of a case where a person is dealing with an injury, but even though correspondence from a doctor makes it clear that he can't rule out the possibility that it was caused by a vaccination — since they can't confirm the cause, the

Workers' Safety and Compensation Board isn't helping the person.

Will the minister commit to having that policy changed to err on the side of helping workers who have been injured when vaccination required for work can't be ruled out as a possible cause of an injury?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to get up this afternoon and talk about workplace safety, which is really what the Member for Lake Laberge's question has morphed into. It actually sounds like a new question, but I'm happy to get up and talk about workplace safety and the work of workers' compensation, because really, what we're striving for in the territory — and it has been for many, many years — is to make sure that we have zero injuries. That is the goal and we take that very seriously.

Now, adjudicating cases from the RCMP or anything else is a very, very difficult process. It takes in a lot of science from medical experts and from the claims process. I'm not going to get into that on the floor of the House today. I have the utmost confidence that, in workplace safety claims — that the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board takes those cases very seriously and will make the right choice, given the evidence that they have before them at the time that the case comes in.

Question re: Bail system reform

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents were shocked and scared when they learned of an armed break-and-enter in Whistle Bend last year. This week, local media reported that the man charged with that break-in was found not criminally responsible. CBC Yukon reported that he is now living in Whitehorse while awaiting the Yukon Review Board process.

Some of my constituents have reached out to me because they are worried. Can the minister of Justice please tell us what protections are in place for public safety when someone is found not criminally responsible for a violent crime?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, the process by which an individual appears before the review board comes following a court finding. That court finding, of course, is independent of any of the work that is done by the Department of Justice with respect to an individual's particular situation. The court has made that finding; the individual, as I understand it, will appear before the Yukon Review Board.

The Yukon Review Board is an independent board set up pursuant to the *Criminal Code of Canada*. The individual will appear before that review board. They will take into account an assessment of an individual situation and require the individual to abide by a ruling of that board.

Ms. Clarke: On January 3, 2024, the *Victoria News* reported that this violent offender travelled to Penticton, breaching bail conditions. There he was charged with vandalism and resisting arrest stemming from incidents last September. Changes made by the Trudeau Liberals have weakened the bail system and made it hard or impossible for police and prosecutors to keep dangerous offenders from being released on bail. It got so bad that all 13 premiers signed a letter

urging the federal government to reverse the worst of those changes and to take immediate action to strengthen Canada's bail system.

Is this Liberal government doing anything else to push the federal government to fix the justice system and keep dangerous criminals off the streets?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I caution the individual across the way of characterizing the person she is talking about as a "dangerous offender". That is, again, a ruling that can be made by a court. I should also note that this person has been found not criminally responsible, which is a different and quite separate category, and her using that example — if she has a question about bail reform, let's talk about bail reform, but let's not mix up the individual whom she is talking about in this process, because it is quite a separate process and one that needs to be respected by this Legislative Assembly.

On January 4, 2024, the Government of Canada's amendments to the *Criminal Code* bail provisions came into force through Bill C-48, and these amendments aimed to strengthen public safety by targeting repeat violent offenders and serious offences committed with firearms and other dangerous weapons. They will also work to shift the burden to the accused to demonstrate that there is no reason warranting their detention. This is called "reverse onus". That work is underway to implement it in each and every jurisdiction. The requirements of courts — and, of course, including here in the Yukon — are to abide by Canada's federal criminal laws.

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, media reported that this offender was also charged with several counts related to breach of bail conditions. My colleagues and I have heard from RCMP members who are frustrated by the fact that they arrest criminals only to see them released on bail the next day. Federal action is needed to fix the broken bail system and protect the public from repeat offenders, but so too is action by provinces and territories. That is according to the National Police Federation, which is the union representing RCMP members.

Can the Minister of Justice tell us what, if anything, this government has done to tighten up the system and keep repeat offenders off the streets?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I am hoping that the member opposite understands the role, the distinction, the authority, and the jurisdiction of the Attorney General and the court system, which is quite independent from government — an independent branch, of course, of government and one that must therefore be respected.

Work is happening with respect to Canada's adoption of Bill C-48 and the requirements to strengthen public safety that come with that. The matter of repeat and violent offenders and the bail system involve many complex factors, and amendments to the *Criminal Code* are only one part of that solution. Our work is to monitor the effectiveness of the impacts of Bill C-48 within our jurisdiction as we remain mindful of the potential impacts of these measures on groups who are overrepresented in the justice system, such as Indigenous people, black, and other racialized people and marginalized groups.

The solutions to repeat violent offending and random acts of violence lie in addressing the root causes of crime, including improved access to mental health services, substance use treatment, and social supports such as supportive housing — all things that this government is funding in our budget.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Government House Leader's report on length of Sitting

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 75(4) to inform the House that the House Leaders have met for the purpose of achieving agreement on the maximum number of sitting days for the current Sitting. I am informing the House that the results are that there shall be a maximum of 32 sitting days, with the 32nd sitting day being Thursday, May 2, 2024.

Speaker: Accordingly, I declare the current Sitting shall be a maximum of 32 sitting days, with the 32nd sitting day being Thursday, May 2, 2024.

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair (Ms. Blake): I will now call Committee of the Whole to order.

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 12, Department of Finance, in Bill No. 212, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 212: *Third Appropriation Act 2023-24* — continued

Deputy Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 12, Department of Finance, in Bill No. 212, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any general debate?

Department of Finance

Hon. Mr. Silver: I am pleased to rise today to speak to the supplementary budget for the Department of Finance or Vote 12 as we call it in this neck of the woods. I would like to start again by welcoming Deputy Minister Jessica Schultz to the Legislative Assembly. I will get started here right away.

The amounts included for the department are limited to the operation and maintenance budget as well as revenues and recoveries. The only O&M change stems from an increase of \$2.4 million under the financial operations and revenue services division for estimated interest expenses on the Government of Yukon's general operating line of credit.

As members are aware, the Government of Yukon has had access to a line of credit with its banking provider for decades, which is used to manage temporary or short-term cash-flow needs throughout the year. Interest rates related to the line of credit usage have historically been nominal and have not been included as part of an annual budget. The Government of Yukon made use of this tool in 2023-24 and is expected to continue to temporarily make use of this tool to meet operational requirements. This appropriation sits within the Department of Finance; however, the line of credit is used to pay for programs across all of government.

The timing of the payments to vendors and the timing of receipts from capital and O&M recoveries influence the amount of interest incurred. As the timing of the recoveries can fluctuate based on many factors, actuals for interest will continue to shift.

The estimated interest expense is based on trends and known data for cash expenditures and cash receipts. Actuals will differ and may be higher or lower, depending on the timing of the payments to vendors and the timing of receipt from capital and O&M recoveries in conjunction with annual interest rates in effect during the period.

There are no changes in the capital budget in this department.

I will move on to recoveries and also revenues. The supplementary estimate reflects a decrease in revenues of \$7.6 million. The tobacco tax revenue fund forecast is being decreased by \$2.1 million to incorporate reduced tobacco sales, as we spoke about yesterday. Tobacco tax revenues saw a steep decline in 2022-23, which resonates with the nation-wide trend of all jurisdictions in Canada reporting a decline in legal tobacco sales. There are two components to this decrease. The first, and the one which we continue to investigate, is the degree to which vaping is replacing the use of tobacco products. We are monitoring this shift, and this reinforces the need to join the federal vaping coordination tax agreement.

The other factor impacting the reduction in revenue is the success of smoking cessation campaigns within and outside of government — programs like Quitpath, for example, supporting Yukoners who want to become tobacco-free.

An additional contributor to the revenue decrease is the annual reconciliation to a line departmental forecast with actual 2023 corporate income tax filings resulting in a decrease of \$8.5 million for corporate income tax revenue. As is historically the case, corporate income tax revenue is highly

variable from one year to another, and this adjustment is within the normal historic variability.

Decreases to estimates for tobacco and corporate income taxes are being offset by an increase to personal income tax. Revenues from personal income tax are expected to go up by \$3 million, resulting from the annual reconciliation to align department forecasts with the actual 2023 personal income tax filings as well as strong labour market performance, which increases individual taxable incomes. In essence, as Yukoners earn more, more revenue is also collected from income tax.

Slight adjustments are being made in the department's projections for transfers from Canada. These adjustments include decreases in the Canada health transfer of \$197,000 and the Canadian social transfer of \$66,000 due to a slight decline in the Yukon's share of Canada's population based on July 1, 2023 estimates.

These minor decreases are being offset by an increase to the cannabis transfer of \$317,000. The market for legal cannabis is relatively new, so the rate of growth continues to be challenging to predict, with a high level of certainty, and this increase is due to higher than expected year-to-date revenues.

This concludes my remarks for the second supplementary estimates for the Department of Finance. I look forward to questions from members opposite.

Mr. Cathers: I appreciate the information provided. I would like to begin by asking the Minister of Finance if he could clarify — of the major transfers, as he knows, the territorial funding formula is the largest one, and that, of course, is received from the Government of Canada. Could the minister just clarify for the record what the total amount of the TFF is for the fiscal year that we are wrapping up right now? Also, could he explain what that looks like on a per capita basis?

I know that the population is only one of the factors used to calculate it — but if the minister could just explain in layman's terms what that amount is per capita under that for the current fiscal year that we are just wrapping up.

Hon. Mr. Silver: The TFF, or the territorial financing formula, makes up roughly 80 percent of the Yukon's revenue. The calculation in general — and this algorithm is very complicated. It is calculated as: grant is equal to the gross expenditure base — GEB, we call it — less the fiscal capacity. So, the GEB is an approximation of Yukon's annual revenue requirements. The GEB is adjusted annually to account for growth in population and provincial, territorial, and municipal government expenditures across the nation.

The fiscal capacity is an estimate of the Yukon's ability to generate our own-source revenue, and it's calculated as a total revenue that the Yukon could raise from its largest non-transferred revenue source if each source were taxed on a national average tax rate for that source.

As the members opposite know, when it comes to things like resource royalties — if we, in one year, get past \$6 million for an eligible resource royalty revenue, any money over that becomes net from that grant. So, if we, in a certain particular year, make \$10 million for our resource revenues, then four of those would be clawed back on the TFF.

There is also the global resource revenue offset, which has not been applied in recent years because resource revenues have been below \$6 million. The exception was revenues — in 2021-22, they were about \$10.2 million. That is why the analogy — and that was due to increased production from the Eagle Gold mine. That impacted the grant of the 2023-24 budget because there is going to be a time lag between those calculations. So, it's not an instantaneous thing. It gets complicated, for sure, over the years.

There are no foreseen offsets for the next two fiscal years due to a downward revision of the estimates from Victoria Gold's royalties. Beaufort historical payment, as well, if it's received in the fiscal year 2024-25, would result in an offset in 2026-27.

Before I get into the specifics about the TFF, I will just remind Members of the Legislative Assembly that we receive four major transfers from Canada. We have the grant from Canada, also known as the TFF, but we also have the Canada health transfer, the Canada social transfer, and the cannabis transfer as well.

The TFF is a legislated federal transfer that is renewed every five years. Recent legislation extended the TFF for the period of 2024-25 to 2028-29 under essentially the same terms as the previous five years.

The member opposite asked about per capita — I guess that would break down to about \$28,000 per capita, and that would be based upon 45,000 Yukoners. I think that answered the member opposite's question.

In December 2023 — this is the last thing that I will add and then we'll see if that answered the member opposite's question — the federal government advised us that the transfer this year would be \$1.35 billion. That is an increase of roughly 7.8 percent over the previous fiscal year. That grant consists of, as I mentioned — minus the resource offsets. However, there are currently no resource-related offsets for this particular year.

Mr. Cathers: I appreciate that information about the per capita breakdown of the TFF. That indeed is what I was looking for, recognizing, as the minister stated, that the formula is more complicated than just population. It is an easy way that has been used for many decades to quantify and put it into layman's terms for Yukoners to be able to understand what that amount is on a per capita basis.

Moving back to the issue of line of credit, we know that the minister indicated that the government has a \$200-million line of credit. That is, of course, in addition to Yukon Energy Corporation's line of credit, which, according to a recent letter from the minister, was a \$100-million line of credit. The \$15 million for Yukon Development Corporation's line of credit — they indicated that this is actually two lines of credit that make up that amount.

Can the minister indicate: In addition to that, what other Yukon government corporations or bodies currently have a line of credit, and can he provide us with information about what the amounts of those lines of credit are?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Of course, we are talking about consolidated versus unconsolidated. In the Legislature today, we are talking about the non-consolidated budgeting through Finance, so that would be for all the departments.

If we are talking about a line of credit for these departments, then that is the money that we are talking about here — that I spoke to in my introduction. It's in the line items in Finance. That would cover all of the other departments. I will leave it at that.

Mr. Cathers: I didn't get the information about the corporations that I had asked for. I would ask the minister if he could provide that. I would certainly hope that the government is aware of it, because all government entities — the corporations and bodies like the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board — ultimately show up in the government's consolidated books and in the amounts that they borrow; even if it is through an unsecured method like a line of credit, it is ultimately something that the government and the public have as a collective obligation from the Yukon Territory and ultimately, were there a problem in any one of those entities, would be responsible for making good on that amount.

It is concerning to us that the government is increasingly making use of lines of credit to cover costs. We do recall that this is unfortunately not the first time in the Yukon that we have seen a Liberal government paying interest charges just to meet payroll because they were borrowing money to cover those payroll costs.

The minister indicated that this year, as shown in the supplementary budget for this fiscal year, they are adding an additional \$2.4 million to the Department of Finance, all related to interest charges on that line of credit. The minister also made it clear that when departments individually are borrowing money, it shows up through the Department of Finance on that line of credit.

The minister mentioned that they started using the line of credit in October. Could he tell us which departments were responsible for the Government of Yukon dipping into that line of credit?

Hon. Mr. Silver: So, again — not being the Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation, the Hospital Corporation, the Housing Corporation, and Yukon University and representing a non-consolidated budget here today on Vote 12 — I don't have those numbers of the interest rates being charged through the line of credit through the departments. I do have the numbers of the borrowing that the corporations did over the years. The Development Corporation borrowed — the borrowing room that we have — of course, \$800 million is the amount that we can borrow. So, we know that the Yukon Development Corporation, on the books right now, has borrowed just over \$205 million; the Hospital Corporation borrowed \$23.6 million; the Yukon Housing Corporation is at \$791,000; and Yukon University is just under \$1 million.

There would be accrued interest and capital lease there of about \$3 million. We know that when the Yukon Party took some of these debts out, their commitment was not to pay back

any principal but to only pay the interest. That borrowing is left for next generations and governments to grapple with.

I would have to get back to him, I think — where exactly the line of credit is today with the Yukon Energy Corporation or these corporations. As they appear as witnesses, this could be something that they could also prepare for him. I will look to see if that is information we could garner directly.

The Yukon government will manage the cash and will use the line of credit at a corporate level, so it wouldn't be specific to departments pushing into that line of credit; it would be more of a consolidation of that interest that we would then pay to the loaner.

Mr. Cathers: I do appreciate the information, which was a partial answer to the question, but I do note with concern that I do believe that it is important for government — including the Minister of Finance and indeed the Premier and Cabinet — to have a good understanding of the total indebtedness, including short-term debt, of the government as a whole.

There have been issues in the past where government — I will give the example of when we were in government and stepped in to assist the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the Yukon College, as it was at the time, with the pension solvency deficits there — may need to actually step in and assist a corporation or other entity. That is just one of the reasons why it is important to understand what those amounts are.

It is also concerning that we are seeing the government — despite having unprecedentedly high revenue from the federal government and growing at a significant rate per year — as you may know, Deputy Chair, the rate of growth in the major transfers from the federal government for the 2024-25 fiscal year — it's growing by over \$101 million compared to the previous year.

The year before, there was an \$83 million growth, year to year. It's a significant annual increase that the government is going beyond this. Dipping into the lines of credit just to meet payroll is concerning. It's also a political decision that is directly contrary to what this Liberal government, early on in its term, indicated it was going to do.

When a line of credit is used, unlike borrowing through a loan — whether it be done by the Government of Yukon or by individual corporations — those amounts show up clearly in the Public Accounts and annual reports at the end of the year, whereas the line-of-credit borrowings do not show up. So far, we have found government unwilling to give us a breakdown of the amounts related to borrowing in the case I would say specifically of Yukon Energy Corporation's line of credit.

My colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition had asked for information about the balance of that line of credit and the projects on it, and the response from the minister indicated that they were using roughly \$50 million out of that \$100-million line of credit, but he did not agree to provide a breakdown of those projects, which is a disappointing lack of disclosure. I would note again that this is a decision made entirely at the ministerial or Cabinet level, so it is something that is concerning for us because we simply don't know. For anything that is out there, since the minister has declined to

state the balance that they're currently using on the \$200-million line of credit, we don't know if the balance is zero or if they have borrowed \$200 million and we don't know what the breakdown is.

We can — reverse engineering — how much they are anticipating spending in interest for the upcoming year — and the minister's indication that they're dealing with a 7.2-percent interest rate. We can see that they expect to have an average borrowing on a monthly basis of about \$50 million, but we don't know how that might fluctuate throughout the year, higher or lower, and we don't know what it would be used for.

Jumping back to the current fiscal year, we have not had indications from the government of the reasons why they had to run up an unprecedentedly high bill for interest charges on a line of credit, and that is concerning. I would note that there is an easy solution, which is that the Minister of Finance and his colleagues provide us with more information about that. I will turn the floor back over to him and give him the opportunity to provide us with more details about this.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I would start by saying that the Department of Finance works inside of the laws of the land to make sure that they are accountable to showcase the amount of money that we're going to need to borrow. For example, we are putting aside \$2.4 million, as an estimate, as to what type of interest that we are going to have to pay for this year. Now, because of the growth that we're doing with projects and making sure that we have assets ready for Yukoners to use and making sure that we are modernizing the catch-up and keep-up, we will at certain times have to rely on this line of credit. But to say that there is an average — what the member opposite is talking about — that just simply won't be the case. Again, these numbers will come out. The numbers are based upon evidence. I would say that the people in Finance who make these determinations of the \$2.4 million have done so based upon — well, they work with the Public Accounts; they don't want to see Public Accounts that are going to look different from their estimates, so they are going to put a lot of diligence into those numbers.

For the member opposite to ask us to calculate what he wants us to calculate on a regular basis like this is just not in the best interest of all of the work that the Department of Finance and the department of statistics has to do, especially when, at the end of the day, these numbers will, regardless of what the member opposite said, be in the Public Accounts. We have a line item here for \$2.4 million in interest rates. That will be challenged in the Public Accounts, and we will see at the end of that time frame whether or not we hit that mark. We also have numbers that are forecasting us to be able to — you know, in a post-pandemic world, right — again, we keep on hearing a certain part of the narrative from the members opposite, but we keep on forgetting about the fact that we just went through a global pandemic.

Yes, it would be great to not have to spend money on interest right now for the advancement of capital projects and maybe even in a Keynesian economics kind of situation that we found ourselves in during the pandemic, but I would ask the members opposite which one of those projects that they would

not have funded at that time. You know, it was tough. Even during inflationary times, you need to provide money for the GDP of the Yukon when businesses probably can't, and yes, I will take that on. That was a decision that we made. That was a political decision that we made. I think it was the right decision, because our economy is still booming, and we have a plan to get ourselves back on to a cash reserve system that makes sense in a couple of years. Our revenues have put us in a situation so that we can do that.

So, with all that being said, I think that is important — also that the long-term borrowing interest rates are going to be published, right? They will be published in the Public Accounts. I think that answers the question as much as possible.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Deputy Chair, it doesn't answer the questions as much as possible, but clearly, the Minister of Finance and his colleagues are not prepared to share more information, which is unfortunate. I would remind the minister that he is blaming this on the pandemic, but in fact, we have seen the growth in government spending, both through capital and O&M, increase significantly.

We have seen a growth in personnel costs under this government. Since they took office, it has increased by about a third — going audited Public Accounts to audited Public Accounts. Contrary to what they typically like to suggest, most of those increases are not in health care. In fact, as the minister should know, in the last audited Public Accounts, the growth of general government was in excess of 10 percent, while the rate of growth in health-related areas was lower than the rate of growth of general government.

I could go on at great length on this, but we do have other questions in other areas where we would like information. I do again have to emphasize for anyone listening or reading this in Hansard that I would encourage them to look at the Public Accounts and look at the rate of growth, particularly of operational spending. You can see that the growth of O&M has been unsustainable. In capital projects, there are some significant ones, such as the incompetence of the Liberal government in handling the Nisutlin Bay bridge through political decision-making. The cost growth was dramatic in that area. That is an area, to the minister's question, that we would have avoided putting that out before the water licence was in place. Another project he asked me to point to, what we would have not done during the pandemic — we wouldn't have spent \$2.7 million repaving the parking lot of this building so that ministers don't have to step out into a puddle when they are entering and leaving their vehicles.

I would hope to receive more information in the future about the lines of credit. Clearly, the minister is not willing to provide that information today. I would just note again — thanking the officials for the information and emphasizing the fact that we realize that the decision about what to disclose or not to disclose in this area — beyond what is legally required through disclosure requirements of the Public Accounts — we recognize that the decisions about sharing information or not sharing information are made at a ministerial level, not a departmental level. It is just unfortunate that the minister is not

living up to their original commitments around openness and transparency.

Hon. Mr. Silver: That's a lot, I guess, to take in. It sounds like the member opposite, with his concern about the FTE count — it sounds like he's talking about maybe getting rid of some of these public servants whom we rely on. We have asked this before: Which ones would he cut? A lot of the positions —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Silver: It's interesting. As the member opposite yells insulting comments from the other side, we will try to keep the debate a little bit more civil than the Yukon Party will, obviously.

But again, when you take a look at the work we have done to make sure that, as we advance health and social services, as we advance education, and as we prioritize housing — it's very interesting to take a look at other territories and their growth. Look at what is happening over in the Northwest Territories right now. My colleague Minister Wawzonek is doing her level best to make sure that they are reigning in the costs of the Northwest Territories. We have seen an article in *The Economist* saying that comparatively we are doing a lot better. When you take a look at the percentage of growth under our time compared to the Northwest Territories, it's extraordinary, the differences.

So, we will keep our track record on FTEs and be proud of the fact that we are hiring a sophisticated public service. I think that most people who listen to this debate are public servants. They must be interested in hearing that the member opposite for Lake Laberge is interested in curbing some of those FTEs, but I will leave that for later.

When it comes to the interest charges as well, we are being very open and accountable as far as what we believe we will spend this year in interest rates. We believe that it's \$2.4 million. We also believe that is an important part of a growing government, to make sure that we understand the needs of Yukoners. We inherited a deficit of assets and infrastructure. You can ask the Office of the Auditor General about that. There wasn't a lot of catch-up or keep-up on the buildings we had, so we did spend a lot of money, even before the pandemic — that's correct — but we spent money in a very fiscally responsible way and an important way, making sure that this territory grows and has the economy and environment necessary for the next generation of people. Public Accounts will prove out as to whether or not our estimate on that interest rate is correct.

Mr. Cathers: I wasn't originally planning on standing again, but some of what the Minister of Finance just said does need to be corrected. I would point out to the minister, as he has indicated before — flashing back a few years — at the time, he indicated that the number he would admit to that he and his colleagues had added in terms of new full-time-equivalent positions to government was 568 positions. In the supplementary estimates, as the minister himself indicated, just since last fall, the Liberal government is adding 42.5 new full-time-equivalent positions.

To be clear, and for any public servants listening, what we have suggested and what we are suggesting is restraining the rate of growth. Unfortunately, what we've seen under this Liberal government is that, even with unprecedentedly high rates of growth in the federal transfer, they are finding a way to spend beyond the additional large increases in the transfer payments and are having to borrow money from the line of credit, paying an unprecedented amount of interest on the line of credit, just to meet payroll, and that is concerning.

Since the minister made specific mention of it and phrased it in a way that was not accurate, I would just note that when the minister asked who we would fire, I quipped off-mic: "The minister of health" — and that was the extent of that, Deputy Chair.

I would remind the member that this Legislative Assembly, in fact, passed a motion that the member should not be in Cabinet, and that is why it is sometimes joked about in this Legislative Assembly — but unfortunately, the mismanagement in that area of government, the mismanagement in the Department of Education under the minister there, and the continued rate of growth of spending and the continued hiring spree of the Yukon Liberal government is concerning, and they are not living within their means.

They are unfortunately continuing to grow government in a way that adds to both the housing crisis and the health care crisis, because all of those people — all of the 152 positions that they plan on adding to government in the upcoming fiscal year, according to the information the department provided — all of those people need somewhere to live. So, this government is continuing to make the housing crisis worse and continuing to make the health care crisis worse, while under-resourcing the Yukon Hospital Corporation, typically.

Again, I was not originally planning to say more at this point. I don't think that the minister is going to offer up more information, but I could not leave his disparaging remarks uncorrected, especially since they could lead others to draw inaccurate conclusions. Again, as I noted, what our message has been and will continue to be is that the government needs to rein in the rate of growth and to live within its means.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Yes, I do remember the motion, which was based upon some misinformation from the members opposite, which we asked them to stand and correct the record on — something about an addendum to a briefing note that didn't actually exist, that an independent panel confirmed; yet the members opposite did not correct the record on that.

I will stop there, and I will go back to — the member opposite talked specifically about efficient ways of growing FTEs. In 2023-24, *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* included an additional 42.6 FTEs — the member opposite is correct.

What he didn't mention — because this is always the member opposite — partial information — 29.1 of those are term positions. Also, 73 percent of those are fully recoverable from Canada. So, where the Yukon Party would leave federal money on the table all the time, we are using those recoverable dollars to make sure that we provide the programs and services necessary for Yukoners.

Ms. White: I honestly hadn't planned to wade in today, but I have been here for a while, and I have seen different things. You know, I look at the 42.6 positions, and I think: Oh, eight permanent positions for a walk-in clinic; it is pretty important. Or I think about 5.6 permanent positions for schools, based on children's enrolment, and I think that is pretty important too.

So, there are so many times since 2021 where it has been deeply uncomfortable at times to have to agree with budgets, because it is a vote of confidence, but there are so many things within budgets that are important. To be honest, there were things before when it was the Yukon Party in government and I was still in opposition — there were things that I did appreciate; there were things that made sense.

So, to have to sit here and again hear the revisionist history about how everything is wrong and nothing makes sense — I disagree. I sit on Public Accounts. I look forward to seeing those line items and seeing that go forward, so I will just take this opportunity to thank the Department of Finance for the briefings, and I do look forward to the conversation on the mains for 2024-25.

Deputy Chair: Is there any further debate on Vote 12, Department of Finance?

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

Ms. White: Deputy Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 12, Department of Finance, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 12, Department of Finance, cleared or carried

Deputy Chair: The Member for Takhini-Kopper King has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 12, Department of Finance, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$2,400,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of nil agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$2,400,000 agreed to

Department of Finance agreed to

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 212, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 212, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Education

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Madam Chair, I would like to first start by welcoming our officials to the Legislative Assembly today. They will be helping us with the debate on the Department of Education. I have the Deputy Minister of Education, Mary Cameron, and the Department of Education director of finance, Andrea McIntyre.

It is with great responsibility and commitment to the future of education in the Yukon that I rise today to present the Department of Education's *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* budget for 2023-24, also known as the *Third Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

As we continue to transform and enhance our education system, our focus remains steadfast on creating environments that are inclusive, safe, and responsive to the needs of Yukoners. In this supplementary budget, we will build upon our established foundations, advancing initiatives that further our goal of inclusivity, safety, and excellence in education.

Recognizing the critical role of educators in shaping our future, this supplementary budget includes an increase of \$456,000 for additional teacher staff hired, based on student enrolment.

In a significant step toward fulfilling one of our key confidence and supply agreement commitments, we are dedicating a total of \$2,573,000 to an increase in educational assistants, learning assistance teachers, and wellness specialists. This represents \$2,225,000 for Yukon Education schools. Yukon Education operates 21 schools, with a total of 4,777 students. There is \$307,000 for the Yukon First Nation School Board, which operates 11 schools, with 840 students. There is \$41,000 for the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon, which operates two schools, with 379 students.

This investment underlines our dedication to ensuring that every student receives the support and attention they need to thrive. This is part of our commitment to create 81 new positions over three years. These roles include school wellness specialists, educational assistants, and learning assistance teachers, each playing a vital role in enriching our educational landscape. A key aspect of this work is the creation of the school wellness specialist position.

Classified within the Yukon Employees' Union, or YEU, bargaining unit, these specialists are set to provide a wide array of direct supports to students, families, educators, and our communities. Their responsibilities will be diverse, ranging from assessments, counselling, and consultation to programming, case management, and education support tailored to meet the unique needs of each school and community.

We launched the recruitment for the first round of school wellness specialist positions in the fall of 2023, and these efforts are ongoing. Recruitment efforts are moving forward at a steady pace and are prioritized to ensure that suitable candidates are hired. To date, we have offered four positions, and we continue to seek dedicated professionals to fill all of the vital roles. In collaboration with the superintendents and school board executive directors, we are prioritizing the implementation of school wellness specialists over the next two years. This prioritization reflects our understanding of the crucial role that these specialists play in fostering and nurturing a supportive educational environment.

Additionally, we are working closely with the school board executive directors and superintendents to increase the number of educational assistants and learning assistance teachers in the schools. We are committed to attracting and retaining skilled professionals who are passionate about making a positive impact in the lives of our students.

For the 2024-25 school year, we are taking many strategic actions to support our recruitment efforts. We have posted positions earlier to be more competitive with other jurisdictions. We have placed advertisements on YuWIN, Employment Central, LinkedIn, Facebook, Google, YouTube, and through Canadian universities. Our human resource consultants have attended five in-person, educational career fairs in five provinces and have visited three universities.

I will move on to Yukon University. Our university is a cornerstone of higher education and vocational training in our community. They will receive an increase of \$1,082,000. This increase in funding is a result of their renegotiation of the university's collective agreement. The university hybrid institution offers a diverse array of programs from degrees to career and trades training. In the 2023-24 mains budget, we allocated over \$34 million to support its core strategic initiatives. Our partnership with Yukon University is reinforced through a strategic senior oversight committee and collaborative efforts to develop an accountability framework.

We recently completed a series of engagement meetings with Yukon First Nations on the framework and expect a final report on the engagement by the end of the month. The accountability framework should be in place later this year.

Yukon First Nation governments are essential partners in supporting First Nation students and in teaching all Yukon students about Yukon First Nation ways of knowing, doing, and being. We continue to work with individual Yukon First Nation governments on community-level education and funding agreements to improve educational outcomes for their citizens and learners on their traditional territories at local schools.

In line with our dedication to inclusive education and honouring these agreements, we are allocating an additional \$195,000 to the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in education agreement supporting culture and language programming. We are committed to continuing our work with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in on the shared responsibility to design, deliver, and administer education within their traditional territory, advancing the section 17.7 provisions under the *Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Self-Government Agreement*.

The total request for this supplementary budget amounts to \$2,541,000. Each dollar represents our unwavering dedication to providing a world-class education system in the Yukon. This budget reinforces our commitment to students, educators, and all of our partners, ensuring that we continue to shape an education system that is adaptable, diverse, and focused on the well-being and success of every learner. I extend my gratitude for your support as we work together to foster a future where every individual in our education community thrives.

Thank you for joining us here today — again, the officials — and for all of the work that the Department of Education has been doing in the Yukon to create a nurturing environment that is based on cultural values, diversity, empathy, and understanding. I look forward to the debate today on this *Third Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Mr. Kent: I would also like to welcome the officials as well as thank them for the briefing that they provided to me and the Member for Takhini-Kopper King, the Leader of the New Democratic Party, yesterday. It was very informative. Some of the questions that I ask today will be repeats of questions that I asked yesterday to get the minister on the record with respect to some of those issues that we discussed yesterday. I will walk through the supplementary briefing. I have a few questions about capital projects that are underway in the existing fiscal year, the 2023-24 fiscal year that we are talking about here today. Then, of course, I have some questions with respect to the educational assistant allocation issue that we discussed a couple of times in Question Period this week and that was the subject of an interview yesterday on CBC with the president of the YAEF, the Yukon Association of Education Professionals.

The first question that I wanted to ask the minister was about the FTE count in the department. The *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* briefing document — at the bottom, it said that full-time equivalents are 1,233.5 in the 2023-24 mains, and then we jump to the 2024-25 mains and it says that the number is 1,253.5, but I believe that officials told us at the briefing that there was an increase of 66 FTEs. I'm hoping that the minister can clarify the math a little bit. The 2023-24 mains to the 2024-25 mains show an increase of 20 FTEs here, but that doesn't match what officials told us yesterday. I'm just looking for a clarification as to exactly what the increase in FTEs was from last year's mains to where we are currently in the budgeting cycle, which is at the *Supplementary Estimates No. 2*.

Hon. Ms. McLean: The increase in FTEs from 2023 to 2024 to 2025 is 66. I will break it down. We have: the Whistle Bend Elementary School administration staff for two positions; for learning assistance teachers, there are 23 positions; educational assistants, 23 positions; educational staff in Dawson, 4.4 positions; and library clerk for CSFY, 0.2 positions. That adds up to 52.6. Then we have the additional wellness specialists and there are 15 positions. The number adds up the 66 because we are taking away an ATIPP personnel position that will be reallocated to Highways and Public Works and also the removal of one time-limited director for the reimagining inclusive and special education.

Mr. Kent: Maybe it is better for me to dig into this one when we are in the mains. The 2024-25 mains say 1,253, so perhaps that increase will be realized as we approach *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* and a potential *Supplementary No. 2* in this upcoming fiscal year, but we can get into that when we get into conversations about the main estimates. I want to focus on the 2023-24 fiscal year here this afternoon.

I will ask just one quick question. Of the staff that is currently in the Department of Education — obviously, there are some who work at the main department office on Lewes Boulevard here in Whitehorse and then others who are scattered throughout the different school systems. So, can the minister give us an idea of how many are currently working within the department and how many are currently in the school system?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I just want to be clear about what the member is asking — or about the numbers that I just provided for the 66. I can confirm, if that is the case, that the first set of numbers that I gave — the 52.6 FTE positions are in schools. The others are added to departmental staff, so they are assigned to schools, but they are Department of Education staff.

Mr. Kent: I'm sorry that I wasn't clear. The numbers that I was looking for were how many of the total FTE count — so, in the 2023-24 mains, it was 1,233.5. As I mentioned, it is 1,253.5 in the 2024-25 mains, so I will let the minister pick whichever of those numbers that she would like. I'm just looking for how many staff are working in the department and how many are working in the school system.

Hon. Ms. McLean: It's very difficult for us to answer that specific question on the floor today. What I will commit to is bringing that information back as we move into the mains Committee of the Whole debate. I will bring that information back then.

Mr. Kent: Thank you very much, Madam Chair; I appreciate that, and we can revisit that question when we get into debate on the mains — or if the minister wants to send a letter or provide a legislative return before that, it would also be great.

I will take the minister to the document that we were provided yesterday by the department officials. It's a couple of slides on the Education 2023-24 *Supplementary Estimates No. 2*, Vote 1. I know that the minister mentioned some of this in her opening remarks. There is an increase of \$4.306 million due to the following: the first, as was mentioned, is an increase of \$456,000 for additional teacher staff hires related to student enrolment, and there are 5.6 FTEs associated with that. I flagged this for officials yesterday, but I'm curious where those additional teacher staff will be deployed throughout the school system. Which schools will they be going to?

Hon. Ms. McLean: These additional teaching staff, again, amounting to \$456,000, will be or have been assigned to the following schools, and the allocation adds up to 5.6 FTEs: there is teachers on call, 0.1 — so that's part of that allocation for teachers on call; Holy Family Elementary School will get 0.5; Elijah Smith Elementary School will get 0.4; St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Secondary School, 0.2; F.H. Collins Secondary, 0.9; Golden Horn Elementary School, 0.5; CSSC Mercier, 0.4; and St. Elias, 2.7.

Mr. Kent: Is the teacher-on-call position of 0.1 — is that for the Whitehorse area? Is that what that is for? I am just looking for some clarification.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I will have to bring that information back.

Mr. Kent: Just moving on to the next issue, there was an increase of \$2.573 million in personnel costs related to the 28 FTEs added in *Supplementary No. 1*. That, I believe, is 13 EAs and 15 LATs, and then there are 12 additional wellness specialists. I understand, and I believe that the minister mentioned it as well, that four of the 12 wellness specialists have been offered. I think that the commitment in the confidence and supply agreement was to have a wellness counsellor in every school, so I am looking to get a sense for which schools these four offerees will be assigned to and when we can expect the balance of wellness specialists in the schools — that was the commitment in the CASA.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, this is an important part of our confidence and supply agreement and one that also relates directly to the work that we had been doing on reimagining inclusive and special education, and we continue to work with all of our partners around that important work.

We have created the wellness specialist position. The role of the wellness specialist position will be to provide a variety of direct supports to students, families, educators, and communities, which may range from assessments, counselling, consultation, programming, case management, and education, depending on the specific needs of the individual school.

As I stated earlier, the job advertisement was first placed in the fall of 2023. The recruitment does continue. We are working with the superintendents and the two school board executive directors to prioritize the school wellness specialist implementation over these two years. We are working with the school board executive directors and superintendents on additional needs in schools, but in terms of — we have been able to hire four — or we are in the process of finalizing those four positions. We are working directly with all three school authorities to prioritize — once those hires are done — where the individuals will go and what the best suitability will be for the positions as they are hired.

That is something that we are working directly with all three school authorities to achieve. If we have those assignments finalized, or as they are finalized, I can commit to bringing that information back to the Legislative Assembly, but that is how we are working collaboratively with all three school authorities.

Mr. Kent: Sorry, just to get — I think I heard the minister correctly. So, of the four positions that were offered, they weren't offered to be specific to one school. They are sort of — I guess, for lack of a better term, they are floaters — is that what — or were they — when the jobs were posted, were they not posted for specific schools, I mean, in communities, for instance, or other schools? I'm just trying to wrap my head around the recruitment process here, because I believe that the minister said that they haven't assigned those individuals to particular schools yet. They are going to work with CSFY, the First Nation School Board, and others just to get a sense of

where they are most needed. Again, I'm just looking for some clarification.

I guess one other quick question with the recruitment process is: Can the minister tell us what pay range there is or what level those individuals are being hired at, as far as pay goes? We have heard some comments from some in the education community that the pay range may be a little bit low, but I wanted to give the minister an opportunity to tell us here today what exactly that pay range is.

Hon. Ms. McLean: As I have stated, the recruitment started in the fall of 2023. We have worked closely with the other education authorities. The First Nation School Board is working — within the 12 that we have for this 2023-24 year — by community. CSFY would be working, of course, for their two schools in Whitehorse. The Yukon government is moving more toward — as their positions are hired, we would then be working on a needs basis.

The other part of this is that we also have identified an additional \$1 million in funding that can be used for other types of services and supports if required, so that's another area that we're working on with all three school authorities to achieve. I can certainly bring back more information on this to bring some clarity around it.

Just in terms of these positions, they are classified as an SS15 and the range is \$89,704 to \$104,043 for that pay range.

Mr. Kent: I am just going to ask about the names used here, then. When I read the confidence and supply agreement, it was a "wellness counsellor". Then the language changed to "wellness specialist". Is there any reason behind that? I don't want to say it's a downgrade. I am not sure exactly what the reason was. I am just curious why the name had changed from "counsellors" to "specialists". Did it have something to do with the Public Service Commission and the classification of the job? I don't want to make assumptions, so I will just turn this back to the minister to give us some information with respect to that, if she has any.

Hon. Ms. McLean: In terms of the wellness specialist position title, through work with classification, this is the position title that was identified. This position title is reflective of the role that they will play in supporting students in their schools and was informed by conversations with schools and stakeholders about how this role will be used in schools.

The role provides a variety of direct supports to students, families, educators, and the community.

Mr. Kent: Does the minister have any idea how the SS15 — I believe she said — classification and the pay range of \$89,704 to \$104,043 — which is what I believe she said — compares to clinical counsellors or counsellors in other government departments — for instance, Health and Social Services — or counsellors who are working in the school system now?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, the role of the position provides a variety of direct supports to students, families, educators, and community. Based on the classification of the work that will be done by the specialists, the pay range or the classification for similar work is parallel to that.

Mr. Kent: Perhaps when the main estimates comes back and the Department of Education comes back, we can dig in a little bit more on how that classification compares to counsellors who are in the school system as well as counsellors who are in other departments in the Government of Yukon, such as Health and Social Services.

I did want to just ask if the minister — and if the minister doesn't have these numbers, she is welcome to get back to me or perhaps we can talk about it when we get into the mains. When it comes to CSFY and the First Nation School Board, where did the total funding end up? I note that there are increases in here for personnel, but where did the total funding end up for the fiscal year for both CSFY and the First Nation School Board? What was the total amount that we ended up with after the second supplementary estimates were done?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, we will have to bring those specific numbers back either through a legislation return or through a letter, but we will commit to providing those specific numbers on the allocation for 2023-24 to CSFY and the First Nation School Board.

Mr. Kent: I guess in that same return then perhaps the minister can also provide the K to 12 — the schools that the Department of Education still has responsibility for and where the total funding for those schools ended up for the 2023-24 fiscal year.

Again, I won't touch on it, but I thank the officials for the information with respect to the additional \$195,000 to support culture and language programming and the increase of \$1.082 million for the collective bargaining increase for Yukon University. I understand that there were some internal budget transfers that had a net-zero impact.

I just wanted to touch briefly on some of the capital projects that were in the last fiscal year just to get a sense of how much ended up being spent in this current fiscal year.

The Burwash school, according to the briefing documents in this supplementary, sees a decrease of \$1.5 million due to lower expenditures than expected and deferred to future years. There is no change to the overall project cost, but in the 2023-24 mains, it is stated that there will be \$3.5 million spent on the Burwash school. So, was the total envelope expenditure this year \$2 million or did it end up lower than that? I don't have the *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* in front of me. I guess I'm just looking for the total expenditures on the Burwash school in this fiscal year.

Hon. Ms. McLean: The project that we're working on with the Kluane First Nation and the Kluane area is the Kêts'ádañ Ku project. We are happy to be moving forward on this; moving the current Kluane Lake School from Destruction Bay to Burwash Landing has been a long-standing request of the Kluane First Nation. The Government of Yukon and the Kluane First Nation continue to uphold a memorandum of understanding which outlines shared commitments to plan and construct the new school in Burwash Landing. It is a very exciting project for both governments and will serve many generations to come.

In terms of the specific numbers, we have to date spent \$1.2 million this year, and we are targeted to spend

\$1.4 million. When you look forward to the 2024-25 mains, we have allocated \$13,025,000 for the work for 2024-25. It will be a significant year for this project.

Mr. Kent: If I heard the minister right, they are estimated to spend \$1.4 million in the current fiscal year. This second supplementary budget decreases it by \$1.5 million, so that is \$2.9 million. Then the overall 2023-24 estimate was \$3.5 million. I'm just wondering — the \$600,000, would that have been addressed in the first supplementary estimates, or I guess, will it come in a future variance? I guess that would be the question.

And then, just before we leave that, the minister mentioned that obviously once the new school is built in Burwash Landing, the existing school that is located in Destruction Bay will no longer be needed. I am just wondering if there is any plan for that education reserve at this point? I know that my colleague the Member for Kluane will have had questions from his constituents on what the plans are for the building and the land where the existing school is situated.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, given where we are at with the project, we're working with the community to advance the project. Any dollars that may not be spent would become part of a future supplementary exercise and could be deferred to outer years for the projects.

Mr. Kent: Sorry, and then the plans for the existing school site in Destruction Bay?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, the second part of your question was about the existing school. We will continue to work with Highways and Public Works, the Department of Education, and our partners. We have certainly had some expression of interest around what will happen to the existing building and the education reserve, so we will have a number of partners and stakeholders to work with through that process and, of course, working with my colleague in the Department of Highways and Public Works.

Mr. Kent: I would just look to get a commitment from the minister then that the process for whatever the future of that existing school in Destruction Bay is will involve a community meeting and discussion with community members in Destruction Bay, because I'm sure they have some thoughts as well with respect to what that site becomes.

I did want to move on to the Ross River school. When I looked at the 2023-24 main estimates, it stated that there was to be \$3.562 million spent on the Ross River school remediation. The 2022-23 forecast was for \$4.337 million, which was quite a bit above estimate — more than twice as much as the \$2 million estimate for that fiscal year.

I have just a couple of questions with respect to the Ross River school remediation. Was the entire \$3.562 million spent in this fiscal year? I asked this yesterday at the briefing, and the numbers may not be back yet. I am curious if the minister has information on how much has been spent so far on the Ross River school remediation since this project started a number of years ago.

Hon. Ms. McLean: We again continue to work with the community through Highways and Public Works and the First

Nation School Board. This is one of the schools that they have taken operation of. We work directly with them as well.

Prior to 2019-20, the budget for the actuals were included in the Department Highways and Public Works, so that is prior to that time. For the period from 2019-20 to 2022-23, there has been \$6,377,931 spent toward this project. The actuals in the 2023-24, up to the end of December — so, it doesn't include all the way up to where we are now — are \$1,615,961. This brings the total to \$7,993,892.

Mr. Kent: So, for this fiscal year, we are quite a bit short. I think the number the minister said was around \$1.6 million for this fiscal year out of the main estimates of \$3.5 million last spring. I just wanted to confirm that.

While I am on my feet, I will just ask another quick capital project question, and that is with respect to the École Whitehorse Elementary School replacement in Takhini. I think the number that was in last year's budget is under school replacement.

I think that is where that is — it is \$200,000. If the minister can just confirm that is the line item. Was that to cover the report that was commissioned by a local architecture firm to study the potential new site and to determine where on the site the best position for the school would be or if it was indeed feasible to put the school there or not and whether or not Takhini had to be torn down — I think was the other part in that terms of reference.

So, yes, just a couple of questions. I just wanted to get a sense if there was \$1.6 million of the \$3.56 million for the Ross River School and if that \$200,000 under school replacement is for the WES replacement and when that report will be available publicly. I understand from officials yesterday that it is being shared with the school advisory committee at this point, but just wondering when that will be a public document.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I will work backward a bit. In terms of the Kluane school, certainly, we will have public meetings and ensure that is part of the process when we are determining next steps or options for what will happen to the building and the education reserve for the existing school for Kluane.

In terms of the Ross River school remediation, when we work with our capital budgets, if we are not expending all of the dollars allocated on a project, we do have the opportunity to reprofile those dollars. We have a number of significant work that is underway in major capital, and we work closely with Highways and Public Works around that work. As the member has noted, this is a significant project, but we also are completing the building of a new elementary school in Whistle Bend. We are starting the planning on the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary, and we have a number of other projects that are underway in the five-year capital plan. Oftentimes, if there are needs, we can reprofile dollars to go toward other projects or put them out to outer years, so that is a normal part of our planning.

In terms of the École Whitehorse Elementary replacement, that project is underway. As the member is aware, École Whitehorse Elementary was originally built in the 1950s and is a top priority for replacement among the Whitehorse schools. The current facility is not able to meet the current or future

programming and community needs, including access to spaces for innovation, inclusion, and experiential learning.

As noted, the Takhini education reserve is a central location that can accommodate the building of this new school. In August 2023, the department contracted Kobayashi and Zedda Architects Ltd. to become the prime consultant for the École Whitehorse Elementary School replacement project, through a public tender, to analyze the site and test-fit assessments to determine suitable locations on the site. We have been working with those parameters. Phase 2 of the contractor's work — we will move forward on that sometime soon.

The next steps — so, in terms of where we are at today, the government has determined that the Takhini education reserve is a large enough parcel of land. It is serviced, is appropriately zoned, and provides a central location that has better access to greenspace. An initial step in this work is to identify potential locations for the future school on the Takhini education reserve, at which point, engagement with the First Nation School Board and other partners, of course, will happen.

The next steps will be to meet with the project advisory committee to discuss the location on the education reserve land and outline next steps in the design process.

One point that I would like to make while I am on my feet speaking about this is that Softball Yukon has been advised that there will be no impact to summer programming this upcoming 2024 season.

Again, working closely with our partners — just a reminder to folks that on the project advisory committee, we have the Whitehorse Elementary School Council, the Whitehorse Elementary School administration, City of Whitehorse, Government of Yukon, the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, and Kwanlin Dün First Nation. The two First Nations are there more at a technical level. We still work directly with them, as this new school will be built on their shared traditional territory. We also now have a designated seat with the establishment of the new Takhini Neighbourhood Association.

I believe that answers the question.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate that response from the minister. I will go through the Blues or Hansard, and if I have any follow-up questions, I can address them when we discuss the mains later on this Sitting.

I did want to jump to some of the comments made in a CBC interview yesterday by the president of the Yukon Association of Education Professionals. It was with respect to the allocation process for educational assistants. One of the first parts of the interview that the president discussed was with respect to the reimagining inclusive and special education or the RISE program.

The president mentioned that the only thing that has been done so far as part of that is the Ready-to-Learn initiative, which was actually initiated with the schools. It was with Takhini Elementary, he mentioned. He mentioned that it is still underfunded. I just wanted to get a sense from the minister what exactly — can she give us a progress report with respect to the RISE initiative and what has been done beyond the Ready-to-

Learn initiative, if she has a different opinion than what was offered by the president of the teacher's association yesterday?

Hon. Ms. McLean: This has been an important part of the Department of Education's work. I think I have stated several times how we got to this place of this particular focus and branding of this type of approach of reimagining inclusive and special education. The acronym is known as "RISE". It came directly from the 2019 Auditor General's report. We then worked from that point with Dr. Nikki Yee, who wrote a very in-depth report on inclusive and special education. Of course, we also had the attendance review from the Child and Youth Advocate that has informed this work as well.

We set out from the onset to work with all of our partners and stakeholders around this work. In fact, when we received and released that report from Nikki Yee, we did it in Carcross and it was done in ceremony. It included the entire Advisory Committee for Yukon Education. It included Members of the Legislative Assembly. It included the First Nations Education Commission. I recall having the Leader of the New Democratic Party there in attendance along with a number of other partners and stakeholders. It was done in that way for a very specific reason: to set an intention going forward on how we would work together to address the significant issues and systemic issues that were pointed out by Dr. Nikki Yee in that in-depth look into our education system in the Yukon.

We continue to work with our partners and stakeholders around this reimagining and creating schools that are safe, inclusive, and build on students' strengths to ensure that every child feels connected and supported to thrive. This is not easy work; it's system change. It includes developing a comprehensive mental health and well-being approach that aligns with *Forward Together — Yukon's Mental Wellness Strategy*. That is part of the work. The approach will include prevention and development on clinical responses and will improve connections to mental health and well-being — supports provided by partners and stakeholders.

In November 2021, the First Nations Education Commission and the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education approved the reimagining inclusive and special education work plan, which addressed the review of inclusive and special education as well as the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate's review on attendance. I will point out that the Yukon Association of Education Professionals was part of that work. To further the work over the next few years, we committed to following this work plan, guiding our collective efforts to transform the education system. We will do this work in a good way. We have always aimed to do that as we work to significantly improve education outcomes for all students.

We are working with all of our partners to support the experiential learning opportunities in schools. Key initiatives that launched in fall 2023 include the Ready-to-Learn Schools based on the groundbreaking work of Dr. Bruce Perry and the neurosequential model. I will get a little bit more into that as we move forward, but I am just going to say that we have worked closely with our partners around implementing this work plan.

We have a number of initiatives that are underway. I know that folks will recall me talking about — in May 2022, the department hosted a conference for members of the communities of inquiry. This was an approach that we undertook following the November 2021 summit that included over 600 participants.

We set up from that point on a number of communities of inquiry. All of that work included the First Nations Education Commission and the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education. The communities of inquiry have had a variety of representatives from First Nation governments and non-governmental organizations such as the Child Development Centre, Autism Yukon, the Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon, school councils, and school-based and central administration staff. Membership varied by communities of inquiry. This community of inquiry approach respects the collaborative nature of the inquiry process. We ensured that the Yukon context and Yukon First Nation ways of knowing, doing, and being were incorporated into all actions flowing from both the reviews and the department so that the department is not making decisions without involving our partners. This has been an underlying principle since day one.

There are a number of projects underway on experiential learning programs. There are school-specific initiatives that are underway. I can get into more of this and I can also provide more information to the members, but the final recommendations of seven of the eight communities of inquiry are received now throughout the upcoming year. The department will focus on analyzing the recommendations and subsequently presenting them to our partners for approval and implementation.

I did want to get into a little bit more about the Ready-to-Learn Schools, which I will do when I'm on my feet again.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate those remarks from the minister. She mentioned a work plan for the reimagining inclusive and special education. Perhaps when she is on her feet, she can tell us if that work plan is available publicly. Can we find that on the Education website? Is it regularly updated to reflect some of the work that she was talking about?

One of the comments made by the president of the YAEP yesterday with respect to the RISE, or reimagining inclusive and special education, was quite damning for the minister and the work that she has undertaken. I know that she has spoken often of RISE over the past number of years since she assumed the role, coming out of 2021 and into 2022 and last year as well.

But when the president of the YAEP said that RISE is a total facade, obviously there is a serious breakdown between the minister and, I would argue, one of her most important education stakeholders, and those are the actual educators who are in the classrooms. I'm not sure what she will do to repair that relationship, because obviously the president of the YAEP does not believe that the work under RISE is progressing in a satisfactory way.

I do want to talk about the EA allocation process. I know that on Monday of this week, the minister told the Legislature in Question Period that there were minor updates made to the 2024-25 school year — that these were administrative and do

not affect how EAs are allocated — but that stands in stark contrast to what we heard yesterday from the president of the YAEP. He said that the process announced is bureaucratically simple; it's one EA per class for primary grades. He said that the allocation has changed so dramatically that students this year who are getting support would not be eligible for support next year.

Then I just want to walk through a bit of a timeline with the minister that the president mentioned. He said that, on November 20 and 21, 2023, they were one of the stakeholders that participated in a summit about the allocation processes. We have talked about the consulting firm from Calgary that facilitated this summit. He mentioned that, after two days, there was a consensus that a needs-based EA allocation process was needed and there was actually one that was established in 2016. Then he took us — fast-forward to February 5 of this year, 2024, when the report was released. He spoke to one of the senior officials at Education and was assured at the time — and, again, these are his comments yesterday — that a new process would not happen unless there was more consultation. However, on February 9, an official with Student Support Services issued the new allocation process to the schools, which obviously caused concern because — it was only three or four days, so there wasn't the consultation that was promised.

Again, obviously, this led to the letter that was sent last week, on Wednesday, signed by five education stakeholders: the YAEP, the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon, Autism Yukon, and the Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees. Again, I'm curious if the minister can shine some light on this. Her thoughts earlier this week were that there were no administrative changes and that this did not affect how EAs are allocated. That certainly wasn't the thought of the five organizations that signed the letter and sent it to the minister. Then, of course, we have been talking this afternoon and earlier today about this interview conducted yesterday with the president of the Yukon Association of Education Professionals. I'm just trying to get a sense here on where the breakdown is and if the minister could provide us with the new allocation process that was sent out on February 9 to all of the schools that the president referenced in his interview yesterday.

Hon. Ms. McLean: First, though, I would just like to finish off some thoughts around the Ready-to-Learn Schools. This has been an important initiative. It was first introduced by staff at Takhini Elementary School and continues to expand to schools across the Yukon. The way that we looked at the work that happened at Takhini Elementary School was a localized community of inquiry, a learning network kind of initiative, that has expanded, and it's great. We really encourage schools to think about approaches that work best for their school community and others that can then be expanded to other schools or maybe all schools, like it has in this circumstance.

In the 2022-23 school year, Ready-to-Learn Schools was implemented at Takhini, Selkirk Elementary, Jack Hulland, and Grey Mountain Primary, all in Whitehorse, and then in Nelnah Bessie John in Beaver Creek and St. Elias School in Haines Junction.

In the 2023-24 school year, it has been implemented in Hidden Valley Elementary, Holy Family, F.H. Collins Secondary, Porter Creek Secondary, St. Francis of Assisi school, the Aurora Virtual School in Whitehorse, Robert Service School in Dawson City, and as well, Tantalus School in Carmacks.

So, work is underway to prepare for implementation for the 2024-25 school year for Old Crow, Carcross, and the Elijah Smith school in Whitehorse, J.V. Clark School in Mayo, École Émilie Tremblay and CSSC Mercier in Whitehorse. Of course, it's in the new French-first school in Dawson and is also being introduced at the Gadzoosdaa residence. So, eventually, these responsive instructional approaches will be implemented into all schools. It's certainly part of our budgeting for each of these fiscal years.

We continue to work with consultants who are working with each of the school communities to help educators to understand brain development, functioning, and learning. Again, based on the work of Dr. Bruce Perry, we are the only jurisdiction in Canada to fully embrace this concept and work toward implementing it into all of our schools.

Educators are leading the neurosequential model in the education certification program. We are working toward the certification of 20 educators. We have a further seven positions of the Department of Education being certified in the model, and we have developed a number of short videos designed to provide insights into various aspects of the Ready-to-Learn initiative and practical application. So, there is a tremendous amount of work that has gone on to support this approach in schools, and we will continue to do that good work, along with many other initiatives that are underway in the Department of Education all related to reimagining inclusive and special education.

There has been a tremendous amount of work within the Department of Education and with all of our partners, as I have stated, to work toward implementing the RISE work plan. Right now, it is being updated. This is an internal document to the partners, and as I have stated, it is being updated right now. It is not something that is available to the public at this time. That being said, happy to bring back progress reports on the work that is underway — certainly very connected to the work and the reporting that we have done on the Public Accounts and the hearings that we have gone through for the Auditor General's report of 2019 and continue to work toward being accountable and moving this work forward.

In terms of EA allocation, this certainly is through, again, reimagining inclusive and special education. We are examining how we allocate educational assistants and other resources for students. We are considering student needs as well as looking at classroom composition, universal design for learning, and small group supports. The EAs are a part of the support system and resources that we work with to support students in their learning and in other ways.

Over the past year, the department has met both individually and with groups of educators and partners, including the superintendents and all of the leads of our other two school authorities, being the First Nation School Board and

the CSFY, to inform the EA allocation process. This has been a critical part of the work around reimagining inclusive and special education.

I won't get into all of the details. Perhaps after the break, I will pick it up and get into the substantive part of the questions that the member has posed. I want to assure folks in the Legislative Assembly that I do not take the correspondence that I am in receipt of lightly. We are working with our partners. We will work with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals to understand the concerns that have been put forward and continue working forward on the process that we are in right now to find a better way to support children's needs.

Mr. Kent: So, that will almost conclude my questions for the afternoon. I did want to thank officials for attending and providing support to the minister.

After the break, I am going to turn the floor over to my colleague the Member for Takhini-Kopper King. I am just hoping that, after the break, the minister can answer just one question for me.

At the briefing yesterday — and I know this is extremely important to the Selkirk Elementary School community — that this fall, they are only going to receive one French immersion kindergarten class. Officials mentioned that was the case yesterday. I am just hoping that the minister can confirm that for us after the break.

Again, I wanted to thank officials for coming here this afternoon to support her.

Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 212, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2023-24*. Is there any further general debate?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I will just finish off some of the answers. I was finishing the piece around the letter that we received from the Yukon Association of Education Professionals that was also signed by other partners. Again, this was a very important part of the work that we've undertaken to look at the process for allocating educational assistants for children who are in need of that. I do not take this lightly.

We have certainly dug in to understand the concerns that have been raised. We have reached out directly to folks, and we have written letters now to the other signatories, and we are working — it's a little bit different, of course, with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals, as we are in collective bargaining now. We were given notice on March 5 for that, so we are working with the Public Service Commission around responses there with the aim of really working toward a resolution to this and ensuring that we understand what the

issues are and that we are able to work to mitigate those and get back to a place of being on the same page with all of our partners, because it's really essential that we get this right and that we are able to adjust the process in the best way possible that will absolutely be working toward that needs-based approach for children.

In terms of the, you know, adjustments that were made, it was about better sharing of information with educators and administrators, including increased transparency in the EA allocation form by clearly noting how the holistic needs of the students are being considered. This includes the safety of the child, independence, communication, academics, and the socio-emotional skills. Our updates to the base calculation were informed by conversations with stakeholders in the fall of 2023 and are in line with the recommendations received so far.

The question around whether children who are being supported now will be supported in the future — yes, they will be supported. This actually enhances the information that is available to us. Any substantial changes to the EA allocation process will take time. We are committed to working with our education partners, including the Association of Education Professionals, on any substantive changes. The department will continue to monitor the results and updates and, where necessary, make further adjustments and analyze the recommendations from the report and work with our partners.

We are reviewing the report internally and plan to share it with partners in the near future. This is an opportunity to improve our communication with partners to make sure that we move forward together. The department has reached out to continue these important conversations.

Again, I think, at the heart of it, it is very exciting work, and it is not easy work to reshape our approaches in education to ensure that we are providing the best support possible for our children. This is a major part of RISE, and I am wanting to understand some of the comments and where Mr. Hupé is coming from in terms of some of his public comments as well. I am certainly interested. I am always very committed to relationship-building and building trust, and I will continue to do that.

The final question that was posed was about the kindergarten French immersion classes at Selkirk. There will be one kindergarten French immersion class for the upcoming school year.

Ms. White: I thank the minister and her officials and, of course, my colleague for the questions he has asked so far.

I am just going to jump right into it. There was lots of talk — I think it was almost two years ago now that the minister made an announcement that École Whitehorse Elementary was going to move to Takhini. Then there was promise that there would be conversations with both the downtown community and the Takhini community, and none of those conversations have happened — certainly not in Takhini. There has not been outreach; there has not been discussions about what may happen in Takhini.

I am looking to my colleague as to whether conversations happened in downtown Whitehorse around the school and what is going to happen. Anyway, can the minister let me know what

the plan is for having discussions with both the downtown residents and the residents of Takhini about what the plans are for relocating the school building and the one in Takhini and then plans for an elementary school in downtown Whitehorse?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thanks for the question. The Whitehorse Elementary School replacement project is a major capital project for the Department of Education. It is in the five-year capital plan. I have already stated that Kobayashi and Zedda was hired as the prime consultant for the École Whitehorse Elementary School. The work that they have undertaken is the site analysis — the test fit and assessment to determine a suitable location for the site. That work is underway.

Phase 2 of the contractor's work will look at work around traffic safety, report on the local impacts of the development, pedestrian safety, traffic, and other issues or any other concerns that the community or stakeholders may have, so it's kind of that next phase that we're working on right now.

The project advisory committee has been in place for this project and they have been engaged with the work. We now have the seat for the Takhini Neighbourhood Association. So, really, we are at that stage of looking at where a building — a new school — would be situated on the Takhini education reserve.

It is a large piece of land. There are a number of options for where the school could be located. An initial step in the work is to identify that location. The next step will be to meet with the project advisory committee to discuss the location on the land reserve and outline next steps in the design process. There will be engagement with the broader Whitehorse community and partners — occurred in the spring of 2023 — and this will inform the long-term plan for replacing and renovating aging Whitehorse schools.

In October 2022, I met with the downtown residents who are concerned about having an elementary school in the downtown core. This information will be considered as the long-term plan is developed. There have been no decisions made about the location of the current Whitehorse Elementary School and it will definitely be part of the information that we have gathered and meetings that we have had. I met personally with the downtown residents and I will continue to follow up — I will follow up with them again in another meeting to have a direct discussion with them. We will definitely be taking into consideration all of what we have gathered and those concerns when we are planning for future development and/or downtown development.

Ms. White: Can Takhini residents expect a meeting with the minister to have a discussion about the new school in their neighbourhood?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you for that follow-up question. I think that it is really important that we are hearing directly from the community. I am happy that there is an association in place now that can maybe help facilitate some of those discussions — so those next steps that Kobayashi and Zedda take. I know that they will be wanting to hear from folks.

Again, it is really important that we ensure — in terms of the downtown school — and I know that this is important to not

only the folks who are here in the House but to Yukoners. The portfolio of schools needs to meet the demand of our growing population — that’s important — and to provide the modern learning environments for students to learn and grow for years to come. We recognize the fundamental role of schools in healthy, thriving communities. We have done the public survey. We conducted all of the open houses, and we delivered a “what we heard” document and received a lot of really great information that will inform decisions going forward.

I think that kind of sums it up. I mean, it’s still an ongoing conversation. Takhini will absolutely be part of the discussion going forward with the consultant.

Ms. White: I guess my concern is that it was at least 18 months ago when the minister made the announcement that the school was going to move, and Takhini hasn’t been part of the conversation. We haven’t been part of the conversation. It’s interesting because, knowing that phase 2 was about traffic safety or local impacts — I live in Takhini, and I can say that since Whistle Bend has been built out, the traffic in my neighbourhood is bananas. As an example, to get here to this building, if I were to drive and leave my house at 7:45, I can get here. If I leave my house at 8 o’clock, it may take me approximately 10 minutes to be able to turn right onto Range Road before I will be allowed into traffic, and then it will be multiple cycles of traffic lights to turn left down Two Mile Hill, and that’s without a 500-plus-person school; that is just with the additional traffic. There are 45 new condo units right on Range Road. There is a new seniors complex that is fully staffed, and with 500-plus children in a school and the school buses and what that means along with the Whistle Bend traffic — traffic safety is already an issue there. It was my understanding that the City of Whitehorse had plans to make some adjustments, but when the announcement was made by the Yukon government about the school, everything was paused.

When I drive, it’s all about timing, but when I ride my bicycle, you have to take your own life in your hands and you have to be very confident about what you’re doing. When we talk about our own climate actions and our own responsibilities, it is not safe. It is not a safe spot to ride your bicycle. There are times when I see little kids walking to school and I feel nervous for them because they are small, it’s dark, and people are frustrated with traffic.

I would hope that, sooner than 18 months — if we go into summer, it will be two years since the announcement was made. At one point in time, my expectation was that the Department of Education would have a conversation with Takhini and ask: What are your concerns? What could be good?

It’s interesting, because I would say that folks in my neighbourhood are very keen on having the First Nation — they are purposely sending their children to the Takhini Elementary School because it’s a First Nation school. They made that decision and that’s the school they want to attend. All sorts of things are unknown. It’s slotted for replacement. I think at one point it was third — maybe not on this list, but I went through that school replacement program.

So, I guess the question really is — we are being told that in phase 2 there will be a traffic and local-impacts study, but at what point in time will the minister and her officials go and have a conversation with residents in Takhini?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, it’s a really important project, but we have been in a planning stage for the last two fiscal years and we are continuing with that planning going into 2024-25. I know that we will have an opportunity to have more of this discussion around the mains and how we see this advancing. The prime consultant was only hired in the summer of last year. The analysis of the site and fit assessment — all of those aspects of what the options are — will be completed and then next steps will be to go into that next phase, which is not just the traffic study. It is part of having conversations with community and looking at all of those elements.

Once a final decision is made — I think more work with the City of Whitehorse around the adjustments and work that they would need to do to adjust some of the work around ensuring that there is consideration of traffic flow. The project advisory committee is in place and will be working with Kobayashi and Zedda. The Department of Education will be part of that work — and Highways and Public Works as well — to have those other discussions. There will be opportunity for the community to have direct discussions with folks through that process, which will be led by the prime consultant.

I do see opportunity. We have been in the planning stages for this last — as the member has stated — year and a bit. We will continue in the planning stage, so there is absolutely lots of room for input and mitigation of issues that may be identified.

Ms. White: I guess it rings sort of hollow to say that you can be brought onsite after we do, for example, the suitable location on-site without talking to residents about what areas are important to them or why or even talking to the existing school about the areas that they think are important or why.

I hear all the words that the minister is saying. I will put out again that the community of Takhini has not been able to have a conversation about this and what it means to their community. I think it’s important and I will probably bring it up again when we are in the mains.

Recent news around the homophobic teachings at St. Francis of Assisi school — I appreciate that the textbook has been pulled, but I have a lot of concern around the harm that was done while it was in the school. I want to know honestly what reconciliation is being led by the Department of Education to make sure that those students are okay.

I purposely am choosing the word “reconciliation” because it’s one that we have empowered and we really recognize the importance of it, which is fixing the harm and moving forward in a good way. I want to know what support the Department of Education is offering the administration, but mostly, I want to know what is happening for students.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, this is definitely — we strive to have schools that are healthy, active, safe, and caring learning environments for Yukon schools. I had a chance to speak about this specific issue during this session of the Legislative Assembly already. I just want to reiterate that all

people have a right to be treated with respect and dignity, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity, ancestry, place of origin, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, age, or ability.

We have worked with the LGBTQ2S+ community to develop the inclusion plan. It included updating the SOGI policy. There is still more work to be done, and you will be hearing a little bit more about that in the near future around some further steps that we are taking around the further review of this policy.

In terms of harm, as a result of this particular matter that arose in the St. Francis school, I note that, at the school level, the principal started some of this work before spring break and had a school community assembly just to start that conversation, working with the superintendent, just to better understand some of the pathways that the community would like to go in and to support and create that space of reconciliation, as you have stated. I think that is an appropriate term to be used here. So, that work will continue immediately upon spring break being completed. In terms of individual — we do also have the regular process and resources that are available to students that they can access for student supports.

I think that, as we understand and have an ability to really understand some of the impacts that this has had, then we will be in a better position to work with the individuals and families around the reconciliation of this and to ensure that individuals are being supported. Again, there is more work to be done around the SOGI policy itself, and we will be hearing more about that in the near future.

Ms. White: Teachers have this incredible amount of power, right? They can uplift students; they can give them wings; they can tell them that the world is theirs; and they can also have devastating consequences. I am almost 47 years old, and I can tell you the exact moment, in grade 11, when I was told that my 73 percent in social studies meant that no second-rate college or university would accept me as a student. It went from 73 percent to 37 percent in the rest of the semester.

Almost 47 and I remember that conversation and that was about my social studies mark. That wasn't about my identity; that wasn't about who I fundamentally was as a person. It wasn't using disgusting language to describe my core being — and I still remember that.

The concern I have is this is long consequences. This can have damage that we don't even understand, because the students themselves might not understand right now, so I am bringing it up again. There doesn't have to be an answer, but my point is that this has impacts. It has impacts that can be devastating. I think the part that makes it very hard — and I know that we can't have a conversation about human resources — but when we see a history of actions repeating themselves, there has to be consequences. When young people are the ones who are bearing that weight, it can be devastating.

This was not about a social studies mark; this was about the core being of people, and that is really important. I don't know if the minister wants to respond right now; I don't know that it's really a question.

Hon. Ms. McLean: When you look at the long term and the impact that this can have, I know that we will continue to work with the school community to understand the immediate and be aware of the longer term.

As I said, we really dug into creating an inclusion plan for Yukon, and there were a number of actionable things that we had for schools and for education. We have done a lot of that work. We have really set out clear expectations. When we revised the SOGI policy, it was done in a supportive way with school communities to make sure that we look at the best ways to support schools to implement the policy in their schools, including the development of templates for school-based procedures and guidelines to support the implementation of the SOGI policy, and in partnership with — we've brought on additional resources to do that work.

I believe that folks understood the expectation of this in terms of following the law of the Yukon — following the policies. It's not, you know — again, I have made some really clear statements about this — that there is no place for homophobic or transphobic teachings in our school system at all, and I stand by that.

I have said, also, of course, that matters are being dealt with at the school level and providing the support for the school to work through this issue that has us talking about it today. We remain committed to ensuring that those safe spaces for all students are there — and, of course, also the staff. This is an impact on staff as well. I know that the department will be providing additional supports to the school. We will continue to work with the Catholic school association. There are some really specific things that have already been put in place around how materials are chosen to be taught in the school. This will be determined, so a number of those steps have been taken. When you are speaking about the well-being of young people and, as you have stated, how things can impact long term — we will make those best efforts to keep those channels open for our young people, as they move out of the Yukon school system and into other aspirations in life.

Point taken; thank you.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that and especially mentioning staff, because staff definitely have been affected.

I can't not right now take the opportunity to talk about the St. Francis GSA, because it is small in a little small space, but it is awesome. They have worked on a logo, which is the lion head that is rainbowy, and it's great. They have set themselves up in a corner of the school, and it is lovely. It kind of reminds me of my own office, because it's always the same light, because there are no windows, so it's just lamps and very cozy. I guess if I was a teenager, I would really like the coziness. They have great staff support for their GSA, and they are expanding and doing things. I think that it is a success story that I will leave it on.

There was lots of talk last fall about TOCs and the lack of TOCs in the schools. Can the minister give us an update on how well we are doing for TOC, either recruitment or retention, as far as schools go?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The current numbers — well, as of January 16 — so I'm assuming that maybe it hasn't changed

much since then, if at all, but we'll double-check that — there were 211 registered teachers on call in the Yukon, 172 of those in Whitehorse and 39 in the rural communities. Oh, sorry — we have definitely improved from the beginning of the school year significantly. We continue to recruit teachers on call and recognize the demand for coverage. It continues to be a challenge, and we continue to evolve our recruitment efforts to attract candidates for future on-call roles to support staff in accepting assignments as they are available.

We have attended career fairs in Dawson and participated in the Champagne and Aishihik career fair on November 30. We have also increased advertising on Facebook, in universities, on YuWIN, Employment Central, and other recruitment sites. We sent targeted communication to former TOCs as well and retirees — folks who have just left or have left recently from the Department of Education — candidates from the ApplyToEducation registry, the applicants from educational assistants competitions. We have sent direct communication to all of them. We recognize the renegotiation — we are currently in a collective bargaining period now, and there are opportunities there to collaborate with the YAEP in this process.

I believe that we are doing better. We do have some pressures in schools. We have heard recently from an elementary school around some pressure that they are having as a result of not enough TOCs, so that is something that we will continue to follow up on.

Seeing the time, Deputy Chair, I move that you report progress.

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

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 212, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: 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. Monday.

The House adjourned at 5:28 p.m.

The following legislative return was tabled March 14, 2024:

35-1-129

Response to Written Question No. 33 re: Safe at Home Society's purchase of the former High Country Inn (Pillai)

Written notice was given of the following motions for the production of papers March 14, 2024:

Motion for the Production of Papers No. 16
Re: costs of health authority (Cathers)

Motion for the Production of Papers No. 17
Re: health authority pension costs (Cathers)