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HANSARD

Wednesday, March 27, 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
Wednesday, March 27, 2024 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: The Chair would like to introduce Japanese Consul General Kohei Maruyama and his wife, Suzue.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any further visitors for introduction?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I also would like to welcome to the House today, from the Japanese Canadian Association of Yukon, Lillian Nakamura Maguire, who is with us today.

I would also like to welcome Terry Kuo, who is the economic advisor with the consul general's office of Japan in Vancouver. He is with us as well today.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, we have several guests, including Natasha Peter, who is here for a tribute, and her family. Her mom, Rose Peter, and her brother, Tyler Peter, are here.

We also have several guests who are, I think, fans of Natasha's work: Shelaine Chapple, Carly Rudolph, Laura Seeley, Patrice Cameron, who is a neighbour as well as a fan of Natasha's work, Deputy Minister Sierra van der Meer, Kelsey Bush, and Jordan Owens — if we could welcome them all.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Japanese Canadian Association of Yukon 15th anniversary

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the 15th anniversary of the Japanese Canadian Association of Yukon, or JCAY.

Founded in March 2009, JCAY is a well-established non-profit organization that hosts festivals, fundraisers, performances, lectures, and workshops to promote and familiarize the Yukon community with Japanese culture. JCAY's mission is: to promote, preserve and increase understanding of Japanese culture and language; organize social and recreational activities for the Japanese Canadian community and friends; provide information and support to

Japanese Canadians, in particular to Japanese newcomers and visitors to the Yukon; highlight the history and contributions of the Japanese in the Yukon and Canada; address issues concerning the well-being of the Japanese Canadian community; and connect with other Japanese groups across Canada.

JCAY serves as a vital hub for individuals of Japanese descent and enthusiasts alike to come together and share stories, heritage, and culture for today and also for future generations.

Through a myriad of public events, workshops, and activities, the association has played a pivotal role in promoting the cultural exchange and fostering cross-cultural understanding here in the Yukon. Whether it be to the highly popular Japanese Film Festival, Japan Fest, Saké Fest, or a performance by the Taiko drummers, these events enrich our communities and help to increase our understanding of the history of Japanese Canadians and the contributions that they have made to our society.

JCAY is also active in promoting and celebrating Asian Heritage Month each May and often offers film screenings and cultural showcases of drumming, dancing, music, and food. Canadians of Asian heritage have shaped our nation and contribute in significant ways to growth and prosperity in arts, culture, business, sports, academia, and public service. As we celebrate their influence and innovation, we must also reflect upon historical journeys and struggles of diverse Asian communities.

The efforts of JCAY are truly a bridge to connect different cultures and to understand and learn from one another.

I had the pleasure of visiting Japan this past year and experienced the culture and strength of the community, and I can see why there is a connection and a continued interest in the territory, whether it is to visit or call home.

JCAY's success is due to its dedicated members — individuals who have generously volunteered their time, talents, and resources to enrich the lives of others. I would like to acknowledge the efforts and contributions of two members in particular, Fumi and Taeko Torigai, who are constituents of mine and have done an incredible amount of work. They were not available today because they are travelling, I think actually from Japan. Their dedication to JCAY is remarkable and the Yukon is richer for their efforts, so thank you.

I ask you all to join me today in recognizing the contributions of the Japanese Canadian Association of Yukon and in congratulating them on their 15th anniversary. I look forward to the culture that they will continue to share with the Yukon.

Thank you. Arigatou.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: Arigatou, Mr. Speaker, Konnichiwa. I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the Japanese Canadian Association of Yukon as they celebrate their 15th anniversary. Founded in 2009, the organization is dedicated to introducing and promoting traditional Japanese culture to the public. Through film and music, art and ceremony, this active organization entertains,

educates, informs, and involves the entire community throughout the year.

They have organized workshops, festivals, and so many exciting multicultural community events. If you have the good fortune of experiencing the incredible Taiko drum group perform, they truly take ensemble drumming to another level. Most recently, the public was able to watch a performance on the performance stage at Rendezvous, and there were some pretty amazing reviews. If you haven't seen them drum, it is certainly worth checking Yukon Taiko out on YouTube.

Domo arigatou gozaimasu to the Japanese Canadian Association of the Yukon for your contributions over the last 15 years to the territory.

Applause

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to the 15th anniversary of the Japanese Canadian Association of Yukon.

I want to start by adding my voice to thank a key member of this organization, Fumi Torigai. Yukoners will know him from his many other community involvements, including as an elementary school music teacher and the conductor of the Whitehorse String Ensemble. He puts hours of time and dedication into all of his community endeavours and we are so grateful, including for his performative work with the Japanese Canadian Association of Yukon. What always strikes me about Fumi is the joy and enthusiasm that he brings to everything he does. Every time I see him, he is just radiating delight to be where he is, giving to his community. Unfortunately, as the Premier mentioned, he is travelling so couldn't be here today, but I do want to thank him for everything he does.

He is one of many people propelling the Japanese Canadian Association of Yukon forward. Thanks to their incredible board and volunteers, they have a constant offering of events and services, ranging from children's Japanese school and emergency interpretation services to events for the wider community. I was lucky enough to attend Saké Fest last year. Not only was it a very enjoyable event, but it also featured the Taiko group, the Japanese drum ensemble. As their drumming vibrated through the entire room, we were all captivated by their passion and skill.

I also had the privilege of attending an online screening a few years ago of *Tsumugu*, or *Weaving Our Stories*. It is a film produced by the Japanese Canadian Association of Yukon and Midnight Light Media. It is a beautiful film, telling stories from generations of the Japanese Canadian community right here in the Yukon. Our guest Lillian I believe was actually in that film, if I'm not mistaken. It tells of the joy and challenge of finding and creating community.

To quote from the film's description: "A strong community solidifies a sense of home and belonging, offering a safe space for self-expression and ultimately, self-determination." I can tell you that this sentiment is perfectly captured in the film.

The Japanese Canadian Association of Yukon is a beautiful piece of what makes the Yukon a vibrant and rich place for all of us. On behalf of the Yukon NDP, I want to thank

all the current and past members and volunteers of the Japanese Canadian Association of Yukon and we wish you many more wonderful years.

Applause

In recognition of Natasha Peter and Kaska Dena Designs

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Kaska fashion phenom Natasha Peter.

Hailing from Ross River, Natasha's Kaska Dena Designs fashion collections have been shown across the Yukon and, you know, New York, Paris, and most recently at Milan Fashion Week in Italy. Milan is recognized internationally as one of the world's most important fashion capitals, so this is an incredible moment and achievement. Showcasing her jewellery and clothing on a such a high-profile world stage is an accomplishment worthy of celebration. By the way, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health and Social Services is wearing a pair of Natasha's earrings today.

Natasha's collection "Gu'Kine of the North" is named after her grandmother and features designs that reflect and celebrate her Kaska Dena heritage. Through her artistry, she is honouring her ancestors and carrying on their legacy while also passing these skills on to the next generation. How incredible to be able to showcase her family, Indigenous ancestry, and creativity through fashion.

Fashion is not only about clothes and dressing; it's also about self-expression, continuing traditions, function, comfort, confidence, and being your true self. How people choose to express and celebrate themselves is limitless, which is part of what makes it so exciting and interesting. Having a Yukon Indigenous perspective rooted in tradition and family showcased as part of the elite fashion world is a massive triumph. All Yukoners have a sense of Yukon pride in this achievement.

Natasha's designs are handcrafted with a mix of contemporary fashion and traditional design. All of her pieces are works of art with long, long hours of design, craft, and intention. It is remarkable that her pieces were presented and appreciated not only by her industry peers but also for an enthusiastic international audience.

It is worth noting that Natasha shared this important opportunity with other Yukon talent. Three Kaska models accompanied her to Italy and walked the catwalk in her creations. She also collaborated with Dennis Shorty and Penny Louie, two Kaska elders, to incorporate their art into the show — a truly multidisciplinary display of Yukon Indigenous talent and art. What a fantastic opportunity this was to promote and showcase the skills and artistic excellence that exists here in the Yukon.

Alongside fashion designer Sho Sho Esquiro, Ross River has become a fashion hub for the territory. We look forward to how this experience and exposure will inspire Natasha on her path forward.

Thank you, Natasha, for sharing your artistry. Thank you for representing the Yukon, and congratulations. The world has

been exposed to Kaska Dena Designs, and we all look forward to seeing your future work.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: I rise to pay tribute to Natasha Peter, whose brilliant and beautiful designs have recently been showcased at some of the most prestigious events in the fashion industry.

From small beginnings at the kitchen table to the runways of New York, Paris, and Milan, the recent appearance of Kaska Dena Designs on the runway at Milan Fashion Week alongside numerous other designer debuts and well-known, highly regarded designers was a proud moment for Natasha and all involved.

Kaska model Kieran Schilling from Lower Post, BC was selected by Natasha to walk his first show in Milan after he answered her call-out for male models. He travelled to Italy alongside Natasha and a Kaska delegation, including other models and two elders whose art was included in the show. What an incredible experience for all and for the Yukon. Seeing such incredible success stories with Yukon roots is always a pleasure.

Congratulations to Natasha and Kaska Dena Designs.

Applause

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to the incredible talent and work of Natasha Peters and her fashion designs, Kaska Dena Designs.

Kaska Dena Designs captures the essence of our grandmothers today and those who are no longer with us through the vibrant colours of the granny hanky, which is combined to create jewellery, shoes, hoodies, dresses, jackets, and more.

Since the launch of Kaska Dena Designs and the unimaginable challenges faced as an entrepreneur, Natasha has remained steadfast in her passion to keep the deep tradition of sewing and beading alive.

As Indigenous women, we are taught in our communities the deep medicine that is rooted in sewing. Through this beautiful form of art, we are taught many lessons about who we are, where we have come from, who the women are that we come from, and what our roles are as young girls and eventually women in our communities. Sewing takes self-discipline and commitment, as when you start a project, it's something that must be finished, because in our cultural ways, we are to not leave anything undone.

Natasha has taken her cultural background from her Kaska and Tlingit roots deep into the fashion world. She has been invited to New York, to Times Square, to Paris, and to Milan to showcase her beautiful fashions and designs. There is nothing bigger than to be invited to those events in the world of fashion.

I admire Natasha for staying true to who she is as a Yukon First Nation woman who continues to uphold her community and her people on her journey. She keeps her community of Ross River walking with her in her world of fashion, as she also ties in the artwork of local artists from her community while also ensuring the Kaska language journeys with her.

There is much strength and inspiration that comes to our community when we see Indigenous women overcome many challenges early on in life and yet, through adversity, come out on top, changing the world one creation at a time.

Congratulations, Natasha. You have worked hard to receive this international fame, and thank you for keeping your community, your culture, and your language with you in your beautiful journey of showing the world what you are capable of, and I know your dad would be so proud of you.

Mahsi' cho.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling a 17-page document regarding engagement on the *Health Authority Act* that has been done by the officials of the Department of Health and Social Services.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling an open letter from economists on Canadian carbon pricing, signed by over 200 of them so far, outlining how carbon pricing not only reduces emissions but also does so at a cost lower than other approaches.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling today a letter to the Minister of Education from the Little Blue Daycare in Dawson City.

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, pursuant to Standing Order 2(5), the House be empowered to sit beyond 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 28 for the purpose of:

(1) completing Committee of the Whole consideration and third reading of Bill No. 212, *Third Appropriation Act 2023-24*; and

(2) receiving the Commissioner to grant assent to a bill passed by this House.

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

THAT this House urges the Minister of Highways and Public Works to take action to address drainage issues on the Old Alaska Highway, including replacing the culvert that continues to make flooding on an adjacent property worse.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Highways and Public Works to take action to improve drainage along the Alaska Highway to reduce the flooding problem experienced by several property owners during spring melt.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to support the growing Yukon arts sector by increasing funding for the arts operating funds.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Diplomatic relations with Japan

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, today I extend a warm welcome to the Japanese consulate general, Mr. Kohei Maruyama, and his wife, Suzue, who are here with us today. We sincerely appreciate their personal attention and dedication to engaging with the Yukon and the Japanese Yukon community.

Consul General Maruyama has proven to be an invaluable partner in fostering a strong relationship between Japan and the Yukon. His initial visit last February provided a platform to discuss the Yukon's strategic significance in the Asia-Pacific and Arctic regions: economic collaboration, critical minerals, and enhancing people-to-people connections through tourism, immigration, and cultural exchange. In May, we continued this important discussion in Vancouver, focusing on tourism, critical minerals, student attraction, Arctic cooperation, and a deeper understanding of governance and cultural landscapes in both regions.

Maruyama-san also provided exceptional support in planning for our mission to Tokyo last September. The consul general's presence today marks the sixth visit from the Japanese diplomatic corps to the Yukon in just over a year, underscoring Japan's sustained and significant involvement and interest in the Yukon.

Our commitment to strengthening the bond with Japan extends to closer business connections, immigration pathways, and fostering people-to-people relationships. Last year, the Minister of Tourism and Culture and I and a delegation of Yukon representatives went to Japan as part of our broader Asia mission. One of the outcomes of this mission included an agreement between the Yukon government and two Japanese tourism companies that focus on aurora viewing flights for Japanese visitors to Whitehorse. This initiative not only enhances tourism opportunities but also strengthens economic ties between the Yukon and Japan.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to welcome new Yukoners from Japan. Japan is the fourth largest source of newcomers under the Yukon nominee program. These individuals are contributing to the entrepreneurial spirit of our territory, bolstering our labour force, and playing pivotal roles in many sectors of our economy.

Mr. Maruyama and his wife's visit also coincides with the 15th anniversary of the Japanese Canadian Association of Yukon, which we are also celebrating today. The Japanese Canadian Association of Yukon features prominently in the Yukon's cultural calendar with film screenings, food tasting, and — some people's favourite event — the Saké Festival.

Whitehorse and Ushiku have been sister cities since 1985 and there have been several cultural exchanges between the two communities over the decades. The cooperative, positive, and friendly interaction between Japan and the Yukon will serve to deepen our partnership, cultural exchange, trade, investment, and security.

Mr. Speaker, I want to finish by expressing our sincere gratitude to the consul general for his dedication and commitment to building stronger ties between Japan and Yukon.

Arigatou gozaimasu, sir. Thank you again for making time to visit the Yukon and our commitment to good relations.

Ms. Clarke: It is a pleasure to rise to respond to this ministerial statement today. There is no doubt that the relationship between Canada and Japan is special. That special relationship has extended to the Yukon as well. Our nations have forged many ties over the decades, which have extended down to the local level. Whether it's the economy, culture, sport, or tourism, the Yukon and Japan have many mutually beneficial connections. Arguably, the biggest perhaps is that of a sister city partnership.

Ushiku is one of the four sister cities of Whitehorse. I know that the two cities have had many student and other exchanges over the years, and I know that these will continue in the years ahead. The Yukon is, of course, home to the aurora borealis, and we are pleased to welcome hundreds if not thousands of folks from Japan each winter to join in experiencing the spectacle that is showcased in our backyard.

I should mention that Japan was also part of the most prominent international sporting event that the Yukon has hosted. Your country was one of the 16 teams that took part in the 2017 Men's World Softball Championships. I know that tournament is still talked about in the Yukon's sporting community seven years later.

Finally, the Japanese community has been an integral part of the Yukon for generations and has helped to shape who we are today. That is reflected in the 15th anniversary celebrations of the Japanese Canadian Association of Yukon.

I do have one question for the minister. In the past, there has been some talk about a permanent direct flight from Japan to Whitehorse during the winter months to make it easier for tourists from Japan to fly to the Yukon and explore the aurora borealis. I know that the minister just said that there was an agreement with two Japanese tourism companies that will focus on aurora viewing flights to the Yukon. These two flights were to happen in September last year and this past March. Will these lead to more permanent travel?

In closing, my Yukon Party caucus colleagues and I extend a special welcome to Japanese Consul General Kohei Maruyama and his wife, Suzue.

[Member spoke in Japanese. Text unavailable.]

We hope you enjoy your time north of 60, and we extend our congratulations to the Japanese Canadian Association of Yukon on their 15th anniversary.

Arigatou gozaimasu.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, it's going to be a hard act to follow.

On behalf of the Yukon NDP, I want to add our thanks to our guests, the Japanese consul general and his wife, of course, for making it here to visit with us.

We appreciate your dedication to building connections with us here in the Yukon, and we look forward to ongoing collaboration and the benefits that will bring to both of our communities. Hopefully, at some point, I will make it for Japanese powder for snowboarding, because you have some of the most incredible snow on the planet.

We hope that you are enjoying your stay in the Yukon, perhaps even witnessing some of the northern lights that have been on display lately.

Thank you so much for joining us today.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the members opposite for their kind and supportive words today — exceptional words from both the Leader of the NDP and the Member for Porter Creek Centre in support and understanding the priorities of international engagement. I thank you.

Our government places a high priority on fostering strong intergovernmental relationships. Doing so helps us to better address local challenges and make our territory much richer culturally, economically, and socially.

I want to start my response with a quote from Da Daghay Development Corporation's Tiffany Echert-Maret, who participated in last year's trip to Japan: "Japan is an extremely beautiful country with one of the largest economies in the world. We were surrounded with the people of Japan, who were exceptional hosts, and who shared with us their knowledge and their experiences in technology."

The Yukon First Nation Chamber of Commerce extends our heartfelt gratitude for the invaluable opportunity to join the business trade mission team for Yukon Government. This collaborative effort signifies the Government of Yukon's continued commitment towards fostering economic growth for Yukon First Nation businesses and was an invaluable opportunity to exchange cultural experiences between our countries. Yukon First Nation Chamber of Commerce is excited to continue to foster the connections that arose as a direct result of this trade mission."

Yukon's trade mission to Tokyo in September 2023 brought a number of notable outcomes. We engaged with the Japan Chamber of Commerce, Mitsubishi Materials, DOWA Holdings, Sumitomo, Nittetsu Mining, and other industry partners during our visit, fostering our efforts to strengthen economic ties between Yukon and Japan.

We brought a Yukon business delegation to further build connections across sectors, including representatives from the

tourism screen production and tech sectors and Yukon First Nation Chamber of Commerce.

The trip was so successful that a business delegation participated in a follow-up mission to Japan in October, which included representation from our three chambers of commerce and the Yukon Chamber of Mines.

Our delegation also met with key Japanese organizations outside of the Team Canada trade mission program and participated in the Japan-Canada Chamber of Commerce forum in Tokyo.

Yukon's chambers indicated that they had many productive engagements with chamber colleagues, Japanese companies, and Team Canada trade mission participants and exchanged valuable information to bring back to their members.

Our government will continue to support Yukon businesses and the Yukon chambers in developing their trade readiness as new opportunities present themselves. We will continue to collaborate with Japanese organizations, fostering information exchange to boost their interest in Yukon sectors and projects.

Mr. Speaker, Japan is the sixth most popular export market for Indigenous small businesses in Canada. The share of women-owned SMEs exporting to Japan has doubled to 9.6 percent in 2020. From 2018 to 2022, the export of copper concentrates from Yukon to Japan amounted to over \$400 million. Approximately 4,500 Japanese visitors annually travelled to the Yukon pre-pandemic, and many Yukon tourism businesses are actively targeting the Japanese market.

I know from our visit that our market has bounced back quicker than any other jurisdiction; that is what we were told by Japanese officials.

Speaking to the question across the way, the March visit marked the ninth successful aurora viewing flight operated by Air North, Yukon's airline. I'll just say in closing that we have been working with Air North and we want to support Air North, Yukon's airline, to actually be a partner with an interline agreement to ensure that we can continue to have travellers versus other competitive players, and, of course, we know that Air North can do that good work.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Yukon River crossing at Dawson City

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, on February 14, the Prime Minister of Canada stood in Parliament and declared that the Government of Canada was funding a new bridge in Dawson City. This prompted some significant confusion between the PMO and the Premier's office, with competing statements from each. According to a statement from the Premier's office, the Prime Minister simply misspoke and mistook Teslin for Dawson. Then, however, the PMO issued a statement that the Prime Minister had not misspoken and that he did indeed read his notes correctly and the Government of Canada had transferred funding to the Government of Yukon for a new bridge over the Yukon River in Dawson City in 2021.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would like the minister of highways to help clear the air. Did Canada provide funding to the Yukon for a new bridge in Dawson?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, thank you for that question. As the member opposite indicated, in February 2024, the Prime Minister made reference to funding earmarked for a bridge in Dawson during Question Period. The Prime Minister's Office later issued a statement clarifying that the funding had been reallocated for the Teslin bay bridge project, as it was in urgent need of replacement.

The Government of Yukon Department of Highways and Public Works continues to work with Transport Canada in order to ensure that the Prime Minister's Office has the most up-to-date information on the Nisutlin Bay bridge project and other Yukon-based infrastructure projects moving forward.

In 2021, the department's application for funding was approved under the national trade corridors fund for phase 2 of the north Klondike Highway reconstruction project, which at that time did include the potential construction of a new bridge in Dawson City and an additional 110 kilometres of highway reconstruction. This phase 2 project would be built on the critical highway and bridge upgrades that are part of the ongoing north Klondike Highway reconstruction project originally approved by the national trade corridors fund in 2019.

In 2022, the Yukon requested that the national trade corridors funding secured for the Yukon River bridge be instead allocated to the Nisutlin Bay bridge replacement project. Of course, that project is progressing very well with expected completion in late 2025.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, so the minister has confirmed that the Government of Yukon did indeed send an application to the Government of Canada for funding for a bridge over the Yukon River in Dawson City.

I would like to ask the minister to clarify: How much money was initially applied for, for the entirety of that bridge project in Dawson City?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I will get the specific numbers and the breakdown, but the breakdown now will be with respect to the Nisutlin Bay bridge project, so that is the money that was reprofiled.

Infrastructure Canada will contribute approximately \$41.25 million through the Building Canada fund, and Transport Canada will contribute approximately \$52.5 million through the national trade corridors fund. That was the reprofiled money through the national trade corridors fund.

The five-year capital plan indicates that approximate spending in 2023-24 will be in the range of \$40 million to \$45 million for the Nisutlin Bay bridge for that fiscal year, and for fiscal year 2024-25, it is \$45 million to \$50 million, and for fiscal year 2025-26 — the final year of that project — it will be \$25 million to \$30 million. These numbers, of course, are subject to change as the work progresses.

The balance of that one envelope of money, as I indicated, was for the north Klondike Highway improvements, which are ongoing and will continue for the next three or four years.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the minister clarifying the exact amount of funding that was applied for from Canada for the bridge in Dawson City, but it seems that the reprofiling of that money from Dawson to Teslin is the source of the concern.

The Prime Minister was clearly reading prepared speaking notes when he spoke in Parliament, and it wasn't just the Prime Minister mixing up communities.

So, it's clear, in the view of the federal government, that they had provided that funding to Yukon for the bridge in Dawson and not in Teslin. So, when the Yukon government decided to reprofile that money from the Dawson bridge to the overbudgeted Nisutlin Bay bridge, did they inform the Government of Canada, and if so, why was the Prime Minister not aware of that?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite reviews Hansard, I believe he will find that I have answered that question.

But in any event, April 16, 2014 from a *Yukon News* article states: "A project to revitalize the Nisutlin Bay Bridge in Teslin has been cancelled.

"Yukon government received sufficient concerns from the community of Teslin that we..." — the Yukon Party government at the time — "... cancelled the Nisutlin Bay Bridge project at this time,..." — a spokesperson for Highways and Public Works indicated.

"The \$14.5 million project..." — at the time, in 2014 — "... would have been paid for jointly by the federal and territorial governments. But because of the cancellation, the \$6.75 million in federal money earmarked for the project will no longer be available to it."

The CAO of the Village of Teslin at the time indicated: "The community had lots of questions about the project, and there wasn't enough time for all of those questions to be answered, he said.

"There wasn't enough lead-time on this thing, and the government maybe didn't realize what impacts it might impose on the community ... It's probably, at the end of the day, a good thing," he said, because now there is more time to make sure that the project reflects the needs of the community."

The tender was stopped, but it doesn't mean the job is not going to continue in the future.

Yes, it's going to continue in the future, like right now.

Question re: Nisutlin Bay bridge replacement

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, in January, the Yukon government announced that the Nisutlin Bay bridge project was going almost \$24 million overbudget as the result of a record-setting change order. As of January, the total budget was close to \$184 million, and according to the minister's briefing notes, this project is supported by Canada through \$52.5 million from Transport Canada and \$41.25 million from Infrastructure Canada.

Can the minister confirm that the \$24-million change order issued this winter will be paid for entirely by the Yukon government, or will the federal government contribute additional money?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, this obviously could have been done — whatever that is now — 10 years ago at a much lower cost, but obviously, the members opposite did not get'er done.

In any event, there is good news on the Nisutlin Bay bridge. To date, the contractor has completed both abutments for the new bridge as well as three of the six piers. Work is ongoing on the next pier on the temporary bridge, of which 80 percent has been installed. Piling works on the last pier will start in April. Steel girders for the new bridge have been fabricated, and deliveries for the pre-cast panels for the deck are ongoing. Granular pit development and rock production near Teslin and environmental measures such as hydroacoustic monitoring, fish salvage, and water sampling are ongoing. During the upcoming season, the contractor plans to have the temporary bridge and all piers for the new bridge completed, steel girders and pre-test panels installed, and both new fish habitat areas created.

There is great work that is being done, both last year and this year, and we look forward to having this major infrastructure project completed, in contrast to the members opposite.

Mr. Hassard: So, maybe if the minister is done patting himself on the back, he can actually get around to answering the question that I asked. So, I will ask it again: Can the minister confirm that the \$24-million change order issued this winter will be paid for entirely by the Yukon government, or will the federal government contribute additional money?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Change orders, both large and small, are a regular part of contract management. To date, there has only been one change order in the contract value, resulting from a change order. This change order stemmed from unexpected and restrictive terms and conditions in the *Fisheries Act* authorization and water licence required for the project.

When the Nisutlin Bay bridge project was tendered, there was no reason to expect any significant deviation from similar previous *Fisheries Act* authorizations from the regulator, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. The department planned according to the historical trend of stable and consistent terms and conditions in other *Fisheries Act* authorizations and water licences received from Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Yukon's Water Board. However, in this case, the Government of Yukon received a *Fisheries Act* authorization in October of 2022 that had new restrictive limits to cumulative noise impacts on fish beyond what was expected and a water licence with additional scope.

Working together with the Government of Yukon, Teslin Tlingit Council, and Graham Infrastructure LP, we applied to amend both the water licence and authorization to ensure that the project could move forward. The variance to the *Fisheries Act* authorization was received in March 2023, at which point negotiations began between the Government of Yukon and Graham Infrastructure LP about the new schedule and work plan, reflective of the authorization and the ensuing additional work.

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the minister apparently doesn't know who is actually paying for that change order, but let's move on.

According to the minister's fall briefing note about the Nisutlin bridge, the contractor, Graham Construction, and the Government of Yukon tracked both the Teslin Tlingit Council and Yukon First Nation participation hours throughout the contract. The minister said that they meet with TTC biweekly to ensure that the contractor is meeting the commitments it made in their original bid.

Can the minister confirm that Graham Construction is currently meeting all of the commitments it made to both First Nations and local businesses in their original bid and the contract that they originally signed?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, both Teslin Tlingit citizens and Yukon First Nation participation hours are tracked throughout the project. They are submitted monthly by Graham Infrastructure LP to the Government of Yukon. There is a target of \$3.7 million in employment opportunities available for First Nation citizens on the project. As of February 2024, 62 percent of that target has been met.

As the member opposite did accurately indicate, the Department of Highways and Public Works reviews the monthly submissions to confirm that the contractor is making best efforts to meet their commitments. Beyond the commitments made by the contractor for employment and training for First Nation citizens and the bid value reductions received to hire Yukon First Nation businesses, the Government of Yukon has provided a number of benefits to the Teslin Tlingit Council by way of transfer agreements to enable their participation on this project. Examples include: funding for project planning and implementation support; environmental and socio-economic baseline studies; aquatic and terrestrial baseline studies; cultural infrastructure support; a community liaison position; funding to develop a Teslin resource inventory and source list; the salmon sonar project; and workforce development. There are further planned transfer payment agreements with the Teslin Tlingit Council as the project continues.

This is how you do a major infrastructure project in the territory.

Question re: Whitehorse General Hospital capacity

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, in January, a Whitehorse doctor took to social media to condemn the unsafe conditions for staff and patients at Whitehorse General Hospital. He said that the hospital was so busy at times that it was not a place where you can expect safe patient care. In response, a hospital spokesperson told media that the hospital was at 100-percent capacity.

The Hospital Corporation website has also shown Whitehorse General Hospital to be at or above capacity on a regular basis this past year. The minister also authorized some long-term care homes as overflow sites.

According to budget documents, the number of hospital visits in all categories were far fewer than planned for. Can the

minister confirm that there were fewer visits to Whitehorse General Hospital than planned for in 2023-24?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak about Whitehorse General Hospital, which is the basis of this question. As our population grows and ages and more complex medical issues come to light, there is increasing demand for acute care services, including diagnostics, out-patient, and in-patient services, and certainly this is a challenge that is being experienced across the country.

To ensure the acute care system is able to support those who need it, we are working with our partners, including closely with Whitehorse General Hospital and the other hospitals in the territory, to ensure that patients are cared for in the right place at the right time and with the right resources. This includes system-level responses to surges in demand for acute care.

I think there was a specific question at the end of the question by the member opposite. I was not able to hear what that question was. If she wants to repeat it, I'm sure that if I have an answer, I will provide it and otherwise I will get one.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, although the hospital has frequently been at maximum capacity, they are seeing far fewer patients than expected. According to recent budget documents, Whitehorse General Hospital will have 10,000 fewer hospital visits than expected this fiscal year.

Those same documents predicted 40,000 visits to the Whitehorse General Hospital emergency room in this fiscal year, but updated figures show it will be much fewer. The same is true for every other budget category at the hospital, including day surgeries, in-patient visits, and patient days, which will be all be lower than expected.

Can the minister explain why Whitehorse General Hospital has been at maximum capacity despite seeing fewer patients than expected in every category?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I very much look forward to future debates with respect to the 2024-25 main budget with respect to the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the specifics there. What I can indicate is that we are working very closely with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to address issues of appropriate funding, to address issues of appropriate care and appropriate services being provided by the Yukon Hospital Corporation to serve Yukoners at every turn. I certainly look forward to future questions about that.

What I can also indicate is that the Hospital Corporation and the relationship between the Hospital Corporation and the Department of Health and Social Services is one that is strong and to the benefit of Yukoners. Relationships are key in making sure that we can respond quickly and work together to make sure that services are available.

I will look into the numbers that are specifically being brought forward in this question. I should not comment on them today. What I can say is that Yukoners are extremely well-served by the Yukon Hospital Corporation.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, according to the supplementary information documents, the hospital will perform 15-percent fewer surgeries than anticipated this year. We have all heard the stories from hospital workers about how

they are doing more with less. Yukoners waiting months and months for surgery know that health care workers are doing their best to provide quality care. That is small comfort for those waiting in pain or discomfort to get the medical care they deserve. Those looking at this budget are certainly not comforted that the minister has reduced the number of expected surgeries from last year.

Can the minister tell Yukoners why she has been consistently unable to deliver the number of surgeries that she has budgeted for while wait times grow?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I think that what is incredibly important for Yukoners to know is that this government has put more finances toward health care in this 2024-25 budget than ever before in the history of the Yukon. Our government continues to meet the funding needs of the Yukon Hospital Corporation. We continue to work with them very closely with respect to things like the amount of surgeries that are available, wait times, the opportunities to make sure that Yukoners have the services that they deserve at the time that is appropriate for them, and ultimately, reducing wait times is a core value for the work that we do together.

Year over year, we provide funding to the Hospital Corporation through core and additional transfer payment agreements funding commensurate with the needs of the Hospital Corporation as determined by the Hospital Corporation's board. We work with them closely, and we look forward to seeing their budget.

We have put in this Yukon budget 2024-25 additional funds to address the hospital budget. We look forward to them continuing to serve Yukoners in stellar fashion.

Question re: Consideration of supplementary estimates

Mr. Cathers: The Government House Leader informed opposition parties that the Liberal government is requesting that 2023-24 *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* be passed by end of day tomorrow, the last Sitting day of the fiscal year. If this does not happen, the government will be forced to take the extraordinary step of moving a motion to sit beyond 5:30 p.m. tomorrow and possibly into the weekend. Of course, the Government House Leader gave notice of that motion earlier this afternoon.

The only reason that the government would take this emergency step would be if they are in danger of missing payroll and violating the *Financial Administration Act*.

So, can the Minister of Finance tell us what will happen if the supplementary budget doesn't pass by the end of day tomorrow?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is more than well aware of the obligations to the FAA and our obligations to make sure that we debate the budget in a timely frame. The motion today speaks to that and is basically letting everybody know that we have a time to tick down. We have a certain amount of time in the Legislative Assembly to talk about a supplementary budget, and we hope that all three parties will work together to make sure that the conversations that are specific to the supplementary budget are done during

Committee of the Whole for the supplementary budgets and the questions for the mains will be left for the mains. If we can do that, then we will not have any problems as far as authorities and timelines.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Mr. Speaker, they are almost out of time, and this has not happened in the last two decades. Going over vote is a serious violation of the *Financial Administration Act*. The Liberal government has already violated the *Financial Administration Act* once this budget year, and the only reason that the Liberal government would take the extraordinary step of sitting late in the evening before a long weekend would be if they are in danger of missing payroll and violating the *Financial Administration Act*.

So, why did this Minister of Finance let this supplementary budget get down to the wire like this, and can he tell us when department officials first notified him of this issue?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, we put a motion on the floor today because what Yukoners expect and what public servants expect is that we come in here and do the work. So, this could be much ado about nothing — just stay and do the work if we need to do the work. If we have to stay here until Friday morning, we will stay here until Friday morning, because that is what Yukoners elected us for — every single one of us — so, let's stay and do the work; let's ask the questions. We will stay here as long as we have to, to make sure that is in place.

Some people may want to take off early or go on vacation, but no, we will stay and do the work. This is really about your commitment to the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Cathers: We will stay as late as we need to, but this last-minute fumbling by a government has not happened in the last 20 years. Other than one opposition motion day, the government has been in full control of the business of this House for the last three weeks. It is a legal duty of every minister, especially the Minister of Finance, to ensure that the *Financial Administration Act* is followed, and yet we have learned that we are just days away from the government missing payroll, violating the *Financial Administration Act*, because the Liberals have fumbled the ball, mismanaged House time, and stumbled and bumbled to the end of the fiscal year.

Why did the Minister of Finance and the Premier allow the government to get to the financial brink and risk multiple ministers breaking the law?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: In this House — I will go back — every time that I go back and study Hansard to look at the trends, the members of the Yukon Party stand up and go: Oh, why is the member doing that work? So, I will go back and look. I took a look to see how often we get through the supplementary budget. I think the average, while we have been in government, has been mid-March. The reason we are going long is not because we haven't called it. No. It's because the members opposite continue to ask questions that are well beyond the supplementary budget.

So, we are happy to stay and work to make sure that budget passes for Yukoners. That's what we are here to do. If the members keep asking questions that have nothing to do with the supplementary budget, that's what will take the time out.

Of course, we have always known about the timeline. The challenge is that we are putting in place the guardrails to make sure that we are onside with the *Financial Administration Act*. What it will require is that the members opposite don't leave early on Thursday.

Question re: Financial support for fertility treatment and surrogacy-related expenses

Ms. Clarke: For many families, the cost of fertility treatment prevents them from fulfilling their dreams of having children. In April 2022, we debated a motion that I put forward calling on the government to create a refundable tax credit to subsidize the cost of fertility treatments.

At the time, the minister said that she did not favour a refundable tax credit because it would not assist low-income families and cited several other reasons why she did not want to see a tax credit used to support fertility treatment. At the time, she said that she would ask officials to come up with options to meet the goal of supporting families who face these types of challenges.

It has now been two years since I raised this. Can the minister tell us what work has been done?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, the work that has been done is the work that we said would be done and the work that the member opposite has just taken the time to describe — we are working to support Yukoners to access sexual and reproductive care services. We are examining how best to do that to the benefit of Yukoners. We remain committed to implementing action items from the 2021 LGBTQ2S+ *Inclusion Action Plan* and from *Putting People First*.

The Yukon government is committed to providing support for fertility treatments, and we continue to work with stakeholders and partners including the federal government, the health care providers, Yukon Medical Association, Yukon Registered Nurses Association, and the Yukon First Nations to implement these initiatives.

I look forward to further questions regarding this, but in short, we are doing the work that we promised to do.

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, several jurisdictions across the country have created supports for families who are facing challenges with fertility or infertility. The previous Progressive Conservative government in Manitoba created a refundable tax credit equal to 40 percent of fertility treatment fees. This was very similar to the program in Nova Scotia. Earlier this year, BC announced that they would pay for one round of IVF outright.

Can the minister tell us whether she is considering any of the models that are currently being used in Canada, and if so, which one will best fit the Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, what the member opposite might not know is that what she has started to describe is what is called a "cross-jurisdictional review". That is exactly the kind of work that I described that would be done and, in fact, that is being done to determine the kinds of programs that exist in other jurisdictions, whether or not they would benefit Yukoners, whether or not opportunities exist for us to

implement something here in the Yukon, and how to best do that with respect to benefiting Yukon families.

In addition to that work that is ongoing, we do cover medical travel with respect to some fertility treatments and investigations that happen if individual families need to go outside the territory.

Recently, the federal government had announced a commitment to funding contraception under the new federal pharmacare framework. There are a number of moving pieces with respect to providing the best coverage for Yukoners and we are continuing to investigate that.

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, may I remind the minister that she made the commitment two years ago. Whether it's a tax credit like in Nova Scotia or Manitoba or a direct funding program like in BC, supporting families facing fertility challenges will take financial support from the government.

Can the minister tell us how much money is in the current budget to fulfill this commitment?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to remind the members opposite and, more importantly, Yukoners that there is funding in this 2024-25 budget, which we are trying to get to debate in the near future, for health care services. More than ever before, funds have been put toward health care for Yukoners. Our priority is making sure that Yukoners have health care that supports them in the best possible way.

With respect to fertility treatments and procedures such as in vitro fertilization, currently they are not insured health services and are not by definition eligible for coverage, but our government has made the commitment to explore opportunities to make fertility treatments more affordable for Yukoners, including by working with eligible Yukoners who travel to access fertility treatments.

Our work continues with the Yukon NDP with respect to a CASA commitment regarding opportunities and exploration of how we can best implement such a program here in the territory. We are committed to doing so; the work is ongoing and being done, and we will meet that commitment.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, 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

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

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 212, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Highways and Public Works — continued

Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Mr. Hassard: Madam Chair, I would just like to thank the officials for being back here today. I left off yesterday with a question regarding drivers' licences. Hopefully, the department had the opportunity to get that information to the minister, so we will jump right in and hopefully get some answers.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to participate in Committee of the Whole supplementary budget debate for Highways and Public Works again. I will just quickly introduce, on my immediate right, Deputy Minister Catherine Harwood and, to her right, Assistant Deputy Minister Richard Gorzyca.

I look forward to questions and hopefully providing relatively concise answers. At some point — because I know the member opposite is very aware of topics that he will be in a position to ask about in the main debate at some point, but in any event, I will certainly keep answering questions.

With respect to the driver's licensing issue, there are two different components to that. The one is specifically — I know it has been asked by members opposite with respect to Standard busing or bus driver testing. The Government of Yukon is working hard to support Standard Bus testing as well as other commercial licences. We have successfully tested and licensed 11 new bus drivers for their class 2 licences since the fall of 2023. Hats off to the department for that — that's a lot of licensing. These drivers are now fully licensed and ready to support the safe transport of students. The Yukon government is currently fully staffed with two full-time driver examiners as well as an auxiliary-on-call staff for testing in the communities.

The Department of Highways and Public Works actively collaborates with Yukon Standard Bus to ensure that drivers are tested in an expeditious manner.

In early November of 2023, department officials from Transport Services reached out to the Standard Bus general manager to determine needs for driver testing. Standard Bus confirmed that the two drivers were currently on the wait-list.

In any event, this leads to the conclusion that ultimately the driver examination request of Standard Bus Lines was met. As recently as February 20, Standard Bus requested a road test for March 1, which was completed as requested. No further requests have been made. Transport Services last spoke to Standard Bus in person on February 1 and by e-mail on February 20. Lines of communication are fully open on that topic.

The other issue is general class 4 and class 5. Yukoners seeking any class of driver's licence must apply for and pass a written test as well as a road test. Licence classes 1 to 4 require a medical examination certificate in addition to a written and road test to become licensed. There is currently a wait time of approximately six weeks for road tests for classified licences in the Yukon. I am advised that wait periods are generally longer than this in other Canadian jurisdictions. Testing for commercial licences is typically shorter, sometimes being scheduled as soon as three business days.

I am advised that — I would just refer persons listening at home to my prior comments with respect to the bus driver testing, which occurred quite recently to get Standard Bus buses up to speed or up to being current with respect to their demand. The Department of Highways and Public Works is working closely with industry to expedite road tests for their employees to help meet their business needs.

As I indicated previously, the department is fully staffed with two Yukon examiners as well working full time to perform tests for classified and commercial licences.

I think that I will leave it at that. I do have more information if the member opposite is interested, but I think that substantially answers the questions. Although, I certainly recognize that, for those persons who do want to have a classified road test, six weeks might seem like a bit of a long wait, but my information from my officials, as I have said, indicates that wait periods are generally longer in other Canadian jurisdictions.

Mr. Hassard: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the minister for that information. It's interesting — the question was actually about commercial licences, if my memory serves me correctly. The minister has said three days — that is very interesting, because I was at motor vehicles a couple of weeks ago. There were some people there from Highways and Public Works who were trying to get class 3 drivers' tests and were told that it absolutely couldn't happen, so I will definitely pass that information on.

Moving on, I know that 511 put out an alert today regarding 75-percent weight restrictions on secondary roads beginning at 12:01 tomorrow. Some contractors, some trucking companies, reached out to me this morning asking questions about which roads are secondary roads and which roads were actually going to be at 75-percent legal axle weight. I told them that I would ask the minister because we were up in Highways and Public Works in debate today. When those contractors called the Whitehorse weigh scales to ask, they were told that they were unsure or were unable to tell them which secondary roads would have those weight restrictions.

I'm hoping that the minister can provide us with an update, because I know that there are people currently listening right now waiting for this answer so that they can plan loads up the highways. If the minister can provide us with that, as to which secondary roads or which highways or which roads that he is classifying as secondary roads that will have those 75-percent weight restrictions, I would appreciate it.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Madam Chair, I will just provide some brief background information and endeavour to get the specific answers that the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin asked. Of course, as the member opposite and the members of the Assembly have heard a number of times, that is one of the — well, there are a lot of reasons why we are improving the north Klondike Highway through the national trade corridors funding between Carmacks and Dawson and ultimately Carmacks and hopefully to Mayo as well.

When it is completed — and I grant you that it is going to take a while to complete — but once complete, it will obviate or it will reduce the need to have significant spring weight restrictions or axle restrictions. That will be absolutely good news for truckers — and certainly aware of the economic issues that arise every spring.

Every spring, weight restrictions are imposed to preserve the integrity of road surfaces. Having weight restrictions in place is the most viable way to reduce the impact of heavy vehicles on the road surface during the spring melt. If we delay or do not implement weight restrictions, it can result in millions of dollars in damage to the road network and possible failure of the road surface. Other actions, such as lowering speed limits, will not prevent rutting and damage to the road surface and may, in fact, make it worse.

The surface of many roads in the Yukon is more vulnerable during spring melt. This is particularly important for roads such as the north Klondike Highway with its minimal sub-base. I gather that, as I have indicated before, that base is being significantly improved in critical areas of the north Klondike Highway.

In practice, this means that heavy loads deflect the road surface, creating rutting in the road and negatively impacting the resiliency of the road surface. These repair costs take away from other projects or necessary upgrades to infrastructure, hence the need for seasonal weight restrictions.

Weight restrictions are implemented when the ground temperature reaches zero degrees. The department provides the trucking industry with — I am advised — two days' advance notice before imposing the restrictions. The temperature of the road surface is determined by inground sensors called thermistors placed in key locations and observations from Transportation and Maintenance staff.

Thermistors measure temperatures at multiple depths in the ground. The Department of Highways and Public Works bases the decision for the entire highway segment from the warmest thermistors, as the one soft section in the segment may be impacted by heavy traffic.

Weight restrictions change from 75-percent to 100-percent legal loads when the road surface is thawed within the top 1.0

metres of the road surface, and overweightes are permitted when the road surface is thawed below 1.5 metres.

In 2020, the department delayed weight restrictions on the north Klondike Highway between Carmacks and Dawson. This delay resulted in several impacts to the road surface. A follow-up evaluation estimated that this delay resulted in approximately \$1.1 million worth of damage to the road.

I am just trying to confirm whether I can get the specific information requested. I have just asked to be provided with the most up-to-date 511 legal axle load restriction information, and I am advised by officials that it is up to date now and that all haulers, all truckers, all Yukon motorists can access 511 and can see where there are axle load restrictions now. I am advised that this website — the 511 website — is up to date.

I will just try one last time to see whether I can get the actual list, but otherwise, I can advise that 511 is accurate. That is the best information, but I can certainly endeavour to get back to the member opposite as soon as possible with respect to the actual list.

Mr. Hassard: As I said, we have some contractors listening to the radio right now hoping to get this information. We have the Minister of Highways and Public Works and we have the Deputy Minister of Highways and Public Works here. Can we find out which roads are classified as the secondary roads that have a 75-percent weight restriction on them as of 12:01 tomorrow?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: We will endeavour to get the member opposite a written list by the end of the afternoon, but as indicated for the record, 511 Yukon is accurate and up to date and provides the information that the member opposite is asking for.

Mr. Hassard: Just to confirm what the minister is saying, if these contractors go on 511 Yukon right now, they will get the information that I am currently asking for?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am advised by officials that the current status of 511 Yukon with respect to restrictions is accurate with respect to limits that will come into effect tomorrow. If my officials or I find anything contrary to that information during the course of this afternoon or certainly before the weight restrictions are in place, we will advise the member opposite. Through 511, I believe that it will be updated.

Mr. Hassard: I mean, it is very important for these companies because they have loads coming up the highway right now. They need to know if they have to be unloading parts of those loads in order to make them legal, so it's very important for these companies to be able to either go to 511 or phone the scales and get this information. It's unfortunate that we have to come to the Legislature to try to figure this out.

I have some questions for the minister regarding the parking lot out here in front of the Jim Smith Building. I assumed that it was finished last year, and then, over the course of the last few days or weeks, we have seen equipment working out there and it appears that we are getting more charging stations. I am wondering if that is part of the original contract, or is this an add-on to the previous contract, or was there a new

contract put out that I was unaware of? Could the minister just give us some updates on that?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Yes, it is part of the original contract.

Mr. Hassard: Is it in addition to the original contract?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Mr. Hassard: So, this is part of the — okay, correct; good enough.

Just for the minister's information, I just received a text from a contractor who says that they cannot see on 511 whether the road to Keno will have the weight restrictions on it tomorrow or not, so maybe the minister could give us that information.

I just received a screen shot of what 511 says currently, and it says "all secondary roads". So, again, the question was: What are those secondary roads? Could the minister please provide that information?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: My most up-to-date information from officials is that it is all secondary roads.

Mr. Hassard: I can read that on the screen. My question was: What are the secondary roads? That is the question that no one seems to be able to answer.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Madam Chair, the high-level answer, which is not going to be particularly satisfactory this afternoon, is that all roads that are not primary roads are secondary roads, but to assist the truckers and the persons who are potentially listening this afternoon, we will be making best efforts immediately to ensure that weigh scales have the most up-to-date information and that they can be contacted. Certainly, the Department of Highways and Public Works can be contacted as well. I understand the member's position and the position of haulers and truckers. This is important information to have, particularly to be able to determine what is a secondary road, but there is an answer within the Department of Highways and Public Works, and weigh scales will have up-to-date information in the very near future.

Mr. Hassard: I am not sure if the minister understands, but if one of these trucking companies or contractors or anybody gets caught hauling a load that is over 75-percent legal axle, they get fined. They get points against their National Safety Code. This isn't just administrative. If the government is going to impose these restrictions on Yukon roads, then I think that it is imperative that the government is able to provide the information that is needed to the contractors and to the trucking community at large. Who are they supposed to call, I guess? Who should these people call? If they can't get the answer from the weigh scales currently and we can't get the answer from the minister and the deputy minister who are the two highest officials in the department, who should these people contact?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Madam Chair, the people can call 867-667-5729.

Mr. Hassard: Who does that number belong to, Madam Chair?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: That is at the weigh scales.

Mr. Hassard: But I just said that these people have called the weigh scales and they are unable to provide them with the information. So, who do they call?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: So, weigh scales are being updated momentarily, and I can advise for the record that highways 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 37 are primary roads. All other roads are deemed to be secondary roads. So, just to be clear, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 37 — and just to confirm that weigh scales will be updated shortly as a phone contact.

Mr. Hassard: Wasn't that easy? I thank the department for finding that information, and I am sure that will make the lives of many people a lot easier now that we have that valuable information.

Madam Chair, during the briefing, I asked the officials about contracting and the bid value reduction, or BVRs. I said that I was going to ask questions about this during debate. I am wondering if the department or the minister can provide us with the number of contracts that have successfully used the BVR and what the dollar value is of those BVRs.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Madam Chair, I thank the member opposite for the question. Between April 1, 2023 and January 31, 2024, 490 tenders have closed that included bid value reduction measures; 178 tenders have closed with bid value reductions that were applied and that includes 44 goods tenders, 85 tenders for services, and 49 construction tenders. Ultimately, however, in total, just 19 tenders with bid value reductions applied resulted in a re-ranking. I believe that I provided this number to the House over the course of the Spring Sitting, but the total is \$30.2 million that has been awarded through contracts to Yukon First Nation businesses. I'm a little unclear as to whether that is further to a bid value reduction. Yes, that is in total: \$30.2 million has been awarded through contracts to Yukon First Nation businesses.

As I indicated, I think as well in the procurement — I will just quickly just for the record check my facts here.

Just with respect to procurement in general, the Yukon government has spent approximately an estimated \$552.5 million during the 2023-24 fiscal year between April 1, 2023 and January 31, 2024. I provided the information as to what this all was, but the bottom line is that I think — that is an exactly comparable period, so that is just over \$30 million on \$552.5 million, which I think arrives then — at the rough math, which is around 6.2 percent — so, a relatively small number of all of the procurements that have occurred in what I would characterize as an extremely busy year for procurement in the Yukon during the course of this fiscal year and not even up to the end of the fiscal year.

Mr. Hassard: Madam Chair, I appreciate that information from the minister. I had a question regarding the proposed rest area at kilometre 467 on the Campbell Highway.

Now, I know that the government has kind of been in the business of closing rest areas last year. Obviously, that was a concern that was brought up in the Legislature on more than one occasion. There was a group of individuals in Faro who had written letters, sent proposals, and done a lot of legwork on proposing a rest area just a few miles from kilometre 467, but the government for some reason decided that, rather than choosing that area that was proposed by the residents of the area, they have arbitrarily chosen kilometre 467. There is concern from residents in Drury Creek about that area being

used. There are concerns from the residents of Faro who have gone through the work of proposing this rest area.

I am wondering if the minister could provide us with some information as to why kilometre 467 was chosen, who Highways and Public Works consulted about this particular location — just some general information around that.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I will just briefly address the first part of the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin's comments, which were with respect to — it is really about the rest area strategy. Just to confirm or just to advise Yukoners who might be listening today as to what the strategy is and why certain decisions were made — and then I can address the good news about the new outhouse that is being installed near the Drury Creek maintenance camp on the Robert Campbell Highway. I will receive some information as to why that decision was made, but I believe that one of the main reasons was its relatively ready access to power.

But in any event, rest areas along the Yukon highways are an important part of our transportation network and provide travellers with a safe and appropriate area to rest. The Government of Yukon is developing a rest area strategy to provide a consistent high level of service for travellers. The strategy will include a standardized distance between rest areas, allowing highway travellers to predict and rely upon Yukon's rest areas for their travel plans. The rest area strategy will also include service standards that will guide future service changes on our highways, including changes to amenities, changes in rest stop locations, and the inclusion of fast-charging stations for EVs and plug-in electric vehicles.

As the department develops and implements the rest area strategy, we will continue to meet the needs of those travelling on our highways. For example, to assist travellers in knowing where rest areas are located and planning their trips accordingly, rest areas were added to the 511 Yukon platform in February of this year. Another example is that the department has identified a high-priority service gap between Faro and Carmacks. In order to address this, the construction of a new rest area is planned between Faro and Carmacks in 2024, as I indicated.

Highways and Public Works also released a request for information in March 2024 seeking an improved model of outhouse and to determine the level of market interest in supplying outhouse buildings. If the request for information is successful, updates to outhouses across the territory may start in 2024.

I recall being briefed about that request for information, and it's to provide more weather-resilient outhouse structures. I am advised that the current outhouse structures don't last as long as they could.

Just to briefly address the members opposite's question with respect to what I would say is a rationalization of outhouses, in the fall of 2023, three rest areas permanently closed on the north Klondike Highway. The Conglomerate Mountain point of interest at kilometre 297.8 — there are outhouse facilities within 10 to 20 kilometres on either side of Conglomerate near Braeburn and the Montague Roadhouse. The second one was at Yukon Crossing at kilometre 395.2.

There are outhouse facilities at Five Finger Rapids, which are within 13 kilometres of the Yukon Crossing, and the Stewart River viewpoint at kilometre 551. There are outhouse facilities in Stewart Crossing at kilometre 535, which is 16 kilometres away. The three outhouses were removed in October 2023 by Highways and Public Works. It's a rationalization and it looks like the range to another rest stop is 10, 13, 16, and 20 kilometres away.

As the members opposite will well know from their time overseeing the sometimes challenging file of outhouses, it is not an inexpensive endeavour to maintain outhouses. This still provides a significant level of service and the distance between outhouses has not been significantly diminished.

With respect to the rest stop at Drury Creek — ultimately, to be safe, rest areas need to meet certain engineering standards, including the ability to have clear lines of sight, multiple accesses, sufficient turning radius, and space for amenities and large commercial vehicles. As I indicated, in order to potentially add a charger to the rest area, there will have to be access to power at the site.

That is the decision that was made specifically for that reason, which is the ability to have clear lines of sight, multiple accesses, a sufficient turning radius, space for amenities and large commercial vehicles, as well as the possibility for the installation of charging infrastructure. But still responding to the community's stated desire, we intend on installing that outhouse between Carmacks and Faro this summer.

Mr. Hassard: A few things there that are a little — I guess they create some more questions.

First, I don't think — well, I know for a fact because I have seen the proposal put forward by the members from the community of Faro with regard to the rest area. There was never any talk of a charging station. This group of people brought forward a proposal with a proposed site that has line of sight, has the room, and has the opportunity for interpretive signage to be put up, and for some reason — that's what I am getting at. I'm trying to find out: Why did the government choose to go with Drury Creek instead, and who was consulted with regard to making that decision?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I can certainly endeavour to get back to the member opposite in a timely fashion, but the primary reasons for the ultimate decision were the reasons that I just set out — just to be clear. I understand the member's position but, nevertheless, the ability to have clear lines of sight, multiple accesses, a sufficient turning radius, and space for amenities and large commercial vehicles — and ultimately the final determining factor being access to power.

We certainly can discuss this further in the mains, as I don't believe that this is really the subject of this supplementary budget.

Mr. Hassard: It sounds like the minister is just trying to find reasons to not answer this question now. Again, the proposed area that was brought forward by this group of individuals provided all of those criteria that the minister has just talked about except for power for a charging station or for an EV station, but that was never part of the proposal brought forward by these citizens.

I guess my question to the minister would be: Why would he not just put the rest area where people want it put? If the government just wants to put in an EV charging station, they are more than able to do that on their own without having an outhouse beside it. I mean, maybe the minister could provide a little bit of rationale as to those thoughts.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: As I have indicated in previous answers, a rest stop needs to be co-located with EV charging infrastructure. The rest area near Drury was chosen as it is an ideal location for power and has been chosen as a need for an additional rest area on the Robert Campbell Highway.

I can advise the member opposite that the project is currently in assessment and the comment period closes on April 2. As I indicated, the plan is to install in 2024. I am advised that officials were in discussions with the Faro CAO and the community regarding the selected site.

As I indicated in my comments with respect to the three outhouses that were closed, managing multiple rest areas is not efficient. It makes the most sense to co-locate the EV charging infrastructure with the new proposed outhouse.

Where we did listen to the communities and the need to have an outhouse between Carmacks and Faro, it's being installed, and it is also part of our overarching plan to ensure that Yukoners can dependably travel around the territory with predictably spaced EV charging infrastructure. I can certainly go into that, but I will not do so at this time.

That is the rationale, and certainly, officials continue to reach out, but in any event, that is the rationale for that location.

Mr. Hassard: It is interesting that the minister talked about the communication with the Town of Faro and the CAO. That communication was that they were opposed to Highways and Public Works' idea. There are not a lot of residents living in Drury Creek, but they are all Yukon taxpayers living there, and they are opposed to this site that Highways and Public Works has arbitrarily chosen.

This minister is part of a government that ran on the slogan of "Be Heard", so now we have essentially almost everyone saying that this isn't the chosen place, so why would this minister choose to not listen to those citizens of the Yukon and arbitrarily put this rest area where he has decided to put it?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: No decision has been made until after the YESAA process is complete, so I would certainly encourage citizens to continue to submit comments, but I would put forward the position that there is a rationale for the decision. It's not a capricious decision. I have provided, on a few occasions, my response with respect to the rationale for at least considering the spot that is being considered. There is absolutely a rationale for the proposition.

Mr. Hassard: So, I will just try one more time for those people who clearly aren't being listened to.

How many — or what would the minister feel would be a sufficient number of comments on that YESAA submission that would encourage the government that, in fact, people are not interested in having this rest area in that particular location?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am not going to pre-judge the YESAA process.

Mr. Hassard: It is very interesting that the minister says that he won't pre-judge, but he certainly doesn't appear to be interested in listening to the citizens in my riding.

Kind of changing gears here — the minister, in his earlier comments, talked about needing more weather-resistant outhouses. I am curious what the minister perceives to be more weather resistant than the concrete ones that Highways and Public Works and campgrounds have been using for the past 10 or 15 years?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I will not in any way, shape, or form put myself out as an expert with respect to the leading technology in outhouse design. What I have seen, at very high-level notes, is that — and I don't disagree with the member opposite — probably the actual — that this is a very inspirational and aspirational afternoon here, but the actual sitting area is probably robust enough. At a very high level, from the notes that I have seen, the wooden surrounding structure and some of the roofing have degraded sooner than Highways and Public Works would like with respect to its replacement schedule.

That is what I understand the request for information is: What is the current state of leading-edge northern outhouse weather-resistant technology? With bated breath, I look forward to receiving that information so that we can hopefully, under the replacement schedule, have more weather-resistant outside structures that will be capable of being replaced on a longer basis.

It is fairly obvious, but we are always looking for efficiencies and standardization in the types of outhouses. Upgrades to outhouses may make them easier to clean and manage as well. If there are good, cost-effective products out there, then of course, I will receive advice from the department, and they will advise me. If there aren't, then I would anticipate that we will be proceeding with business as usual.

Mr. Hassard: Deputy Chair, I will just move from outhouses to bridges, then, I guess.

I'm curious if the minister can provide us with some information as to when the Yukon government decided to take money that was allocated from the federal government for the Dawson City bridge and spend that money on the Nisutlin Bay bridge.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The request to the national trade corridors fund for those funds to be allocated to the Nisutlin Bay bridge replacement project was in the spring of 2022. I can likely secure the specific date. The request went out, and the scope change was approved by the then-federal Minister of Transport in June of 2022. Updated agreements were signed for the north Klondike Highway in May 2023 and for the Nisutlin Bay bridge later in 2023, as I said in my comments this afternoon,

I have received the information as to when that request was, and it was April 8, 2022.

Mr. Hassard: Thank you, Deputy Chair, and I thank the minister and the department for that information.

I have some questions regarding mechanical contracting in Highways and Public Works. I know that, with the COVID vaccine mandates, Highways and Public Works lost a few of

their mechanics. Currently, the government has gone to putting out service contracts for mechanical services, so I am curious if the minister can provide us with some details as to how many of those contracts are going out. Are they direct-award contracts? Are they standing-offer agreements? How are those contracts currently being awarded? I guess some details around them — are they just \$50,000 direct-award contracts? What is the process for Highways and Public Works to be providing those contracts?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: My officials will certainly review the specific question that the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin asked with respect to mechanical contracting and return to the member opposite with a legislative return with respect to that matter. I would agree with the member opposite that we, as most other jurisdictions, suffer from labour shortages for heavy equipment mechanics, as the member opposite did identify. We are working with the union and continue to advertise for staffed positions — so, yes, recognizing or acknowledging that there have been challenges coming out of COVID. I would certainly put a shout-out to all young Yukoners listening that there are certainly a lot of opportunities in the trades — probably across Canada but certainly in the Yukon. From the time that I have had the honour and privilege of being the Minister of Highways and Public Works over the course of now almost three years, I know that heavy equipment mechanics are — well, the cliché I guess would be “worth their weight in gold”. They are certainly incredibly valuable to Highways and Public Works, and I'm sure that it is a priority for Highways and Public Works to try to identify said persons. Recognizing the comments that the member opposite made — and like I said, the officials will review that question in particular and get back to the member opposite.

Mr. Hassard: I guess just to follow up on that, if the department is looking into it, I have heard different stories or different variations of how it's being done, so I'm just kind of curious as to how or why the department has chosen to take the course of action that they have.

I have a question for the minister. Under Property Management in the supplementary budget, there is Green Infrastructure Program, which is a new line item in the supplementary, and it's \$7.129 million. I'm wondering if we could get a breakdown and some information around that line item.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: This was a reallocation between two departments. There was a reallocation of the green infrastructure fund from sustainable infrastructure. That decrease was due to a delay in receiving materials for the solar installations at Ogilvie and Klondike, offset with an increased cost for the biomass expansion at the Whitehorse correctional facility.

The offset is in sustainable infrastructure. The Dempster fibre required additional funds in this fiscal due to accelerated work in 2023 and cash-flow changes, which form a good portion of the supplementary request for \$18.418 million. I can certainly provide more information about Dempster fibre if the member opposite wishes. As I said, there was the reallocation

of Green Infrastructure Program to Property Management capital development.

Ultimately, as we were getting close to the end of the year, it was obvious that, on the Dempster fibre project, a great deal more work had been actualized and that had to be accounted for.

As well, as I indicated, there was a bit of a decrease because of some of the materials received for the solar installations at Ogilvie and Klondike. Those materials are currently on their way, and I believe that the solar array, the new generator, and the new batteries ought to be in place by May or June of this year, so we look forward to those installations being operational and offsetting multiple hundreds of thousands of litres of diesel.

In that transaction, the big budget item is the reallocation to allow for the acceleration of work being done on the redundant Dempster fibre.

As I have indicated in some of my preliminary comments during the various times I have been in here, the ultimate capital request — on an all-of-government basis, there is no additional request, but obviously, there is a significant request for Highways and Public Works based on the acceleration of the funds required for three major projects.

Mr. Hassard: I thank the minister for that information. Just to go a little further on that, can the minister provide us with a little better idea of how much the solar installations will be for those two particular highway camps?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: We are endeavouring to get the exact numbers. My recollection is that they were in the range of \$3 million-plus per installation, but I shouldn't be in the guessing business here, so I will try to get the numbers from my officials. I just wanted to provide a bit of detail for the House.

One of the commitments of *Our Clean Future* is to install renewable energy systems in off-grid government buildings to reduce reliance on diesel-generated electricity. In June 2024, we will be installing batteries at the Klondike and Ogilvie highway maintenance camps to complete the two solar array system projects. These two projects will offset approximately 103,000 litres of diesel fuel each year and reduce emissions by 270 tonnes. We are also moving forward with solar energy projects at the Tuchtua and Blanchard highway maintenance camps, which were tendered in March 2024. The Blanchard tender closes on April 4 and the tender for Tuchtua closes on April 11, 2024. These projects will offset approximately 98,000 litres of fuel and reduce emissions by 260 tonnes per year.

I had the opportunity to travel on the Dempster — I think twice last summer but certainly once — and toured both the Klondike camp, which is close to the Tombstone Interpretive Centre, and the Ogilvie camp. I was certainly impressed. First of all, they are likely larger than persons would think. The contractors — a shout-out to them — did a great job and these are certainly exciting projects. These were part of the *Our Clean Future* acceleration analysis. These four off-grid grader stations were identified as being the best candidates to offset diesel, so we certainly look forward to all four being operational by the spring-summer of — well, the first two,

Klondike and Ogilvie, being operational within the next few months and Blanchard and Tuchtua hopefully being operational in the spring-summer of 2025.

The majority of greenhouse gas emissions in Yukon government buildings come from the combustion of heating fossil fuels, such as heating oil and propane. Heating oil has the highest environmental impact compared to other heating fuels. Highways and Public Works is reducing heating oil consumption with cleaner fuels as well, such as propane, and renewable fuels, such as biomass.

We are endeavouring to get the numbers from last year's budget. I don't have them yet. I am advised that the budget for 2023-24 for both was \$4 million, but that does not take into account the entire project. I anticipate that I should be able to have those numbers for you even before the end of this afternoon. It was \$4 million in 2023-24 for Klondike and Ogilvie.

Mr. Hassard: I appreciate that information from the minister. In his little spiel there, he actually answered one of my next questions, because in his previous response, he said that putting the solar arrays in these two camps would save multiple hundreds of thousands of litres of fuel, so I was curious as to how much fuel that actually was. Then he actually said it would be 103,000 litres, so I appreciate that information as well. It's not quite hundreds of thousands of litres, but it is still a lot of fuel.

The minister also talked about Blanchard camp being one of the upcoming camps to have a solar system installed. I am just curious as to why the minister would choose Blanchard camp. I know that Blanchard has been closed for the last two summers, so is there an intention to not close it in the summer anymore? Or why — if it's being closed, what would be the rationale to spend this potentially \$3 million putting in a solar system for a camp that isn't running?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: There was an assessment of eight off-grid grader stations. The first two were the best candidates — Klondike and Ogilvie. The next two candidates, even considering —

I received the expert advice from the *Our Clean Future* acceleration team. The next two best candidates — even considering the operational schedule of Blanchard — were Blanchard and Tuchtua. The calculations are that 98,000 litres of fuel would be offset and would reduce emissions by 260 tonnes per year.

As the member opposite likely well knows, there are other off-grid grader stations, but the HPW officials did the assessment — the experts did the assessment — and these were the next two. Of course, there is still going to be solar gain in the shoulder seasons, and the grader station still needs to be heated within reason during the summer.

So, these are the next two candidates that were viewed to be the best, and they are actually, perhaps due to the — for whatever reason — I'm not going to speculate — for whatever reason, they are not very far off from the offset of Klondike and Ogilvie or Tuchtua, which are grader stations that are operated on a year-round basis.

I can certainly look into it further, but that is the information that I had. When it came to me, I saw the assessments — the greenhouse gas emission reduction or offset calculations — Blanchard and Tuchitua were the next best. As I have indicated previously — and I take the member's point with respect to the numbers — but Klondike and Ogilvie were 103,000 litres of diesel offset, and Blanchard and Tuchitua are 98,000 litres of fuel being offset. So, they are similar, notwithstanding any issues that might exist with respect to the months of operation of the Blanchard camp.

Mr. Hassard: Deputy Chair, I appreciate that information from the minister. Obviously, there are tons and tons of questions left, but you know, in seeing the need to proceed through everything, I will save everything else for the debate during the mains.

I will just close by thanking the officials for being here and supporting the minister today and look forward to seeing them back when we get to discuss the mains.

Deputy Chair (MLA Tredger): Is there any further debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works?

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

Mr. Hassard: Deputy Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, cleared or carried

Deputy Chair: The Member for Pelly-Nisutlin has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, 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 \$2,940,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$40,922,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$43,862,000 agreed to

Department of Highways and Public Works agreed to

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services, 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 continuing general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services, in Bill No. 212, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any further general debate?

Department of Community Services — continued

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Madam Chair, I believe that there was a question that had been left with me at the end of our last session, and I don't have a record of it. I just came running down here, so I will get a reminder on this, and I'll see if I can get an answer. The question pertained to the golf course and what the ICIP funding was. It was a \$1.5-million recovery from Ottawa.

Ms. McLeod: Madam Chair, can you ask the minister to speak into his mic, please?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Certainly; my chair was out of position; my apologies to the members opposite. The last question pertained to the Mountain View Golf Course. It was the ICIP contribution, and it was \$1.5 million that has been committed from Ottawa.

Ms. McLeod: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the minister for that information. Now, as we know, there is a gymnastics facility being built, and I wonder if the minister has received any concerns or complaints from the residents in the area?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite for the question. I don't see that, actually, in our supplementary budget. I believe that it is not even part of the supplementary budget this time. I will be happy to handle questions like that during general debate.

Ms. McLeod: I guess the minister can correct me if I am wrong, but I presume that the gymnastics facility had money spent during the 2023-24 fiscal year.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: It's not specifically addressed in the supplementary budget. If we could keep to the supplementary budget, that would be appreciated. I am happy to answer questions in the mains for next year.

Ms. McLeod: Well now, the minister can play this game all day if he wants to, but the questions I am asking about are projects that were undertaken in the 2023-24 fiscal year — it's almost impossible for us to know which of those projects come under the supplementary budget and which came under the mains.

Clearly, there was some overspending that went on out of the mains which necessitated the supplementary budget. If the minister could just answer the question, then we can move on.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Just a correction for the member opposite pertaining to the supplementary budget. The supplementary budget is a reduction, not an increase. We haven't overspent. It's not about that at all, so if we could keep it to the supplementary budget — which is a reduction in our ask, not an increase in our ask.

Ms. McLeod: Well, I thought we were here to debate the budget. Now, the minister can correct me if I'm wrong, but the minister doesn't get to dictate to the opposition what we can talk about and what we can't. I thought we went through this over and over again.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite for the comment.

Ms. McLeod: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and I would like the record to show that the Minister of Community Services, who likes to talk about what a great relationship he has with all of our communities, is refusing to answer questions.

So, I am happy to move on. Maybe we can talk about something that he knows something about here. I would like an update on — okay, let's start here. There is a reduction of \$7,725,000 in lapses, so I would like to know which projects those are.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I really do love the conversations that the member opposite and I have in this Chamber on these matters. I am merely just trying to keep the conversation tight so that I can ensure that my good colleague can enjoy Easter this weekend.

As far as the capital reductions go, we have a decrease in fire management of \$725,000 — or, sorry, we have an increase in fire management of \$725,000. The small communities fund is going down \$996,000, the Investing in Canada —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Chair's statement

Chair: Order, please. When members speak, can they please speak into the mic.

Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Certainly, Madam Chair.

We have a decrease of \$996,000 in the small communities fund. That is a lapse resulting from updated cash-flow projections on various infrastructure projects that are 29-percent recoverable from Canada. We have a decrease of \$6.7 million in the Investing in Canada Infrastructure program.

These are lapses resulting from updated cash flow projections on various infrastructure projects that are 37-percent recoverable from Canada. Then in fire management, we have an increase of \$725,000, bringing the total net decrease in capital to \$7 million.

Ms. McLeod: Madam Chair, I did ask the minister for a breakdown of what those projects were.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We have three transfer payment agreement projects that were expected to be completed this fiscal year, but unfortunately, that is no longer the case. There is the Selkirk First Nation water distribution, Whitehorse Robert Service parks building, and the Whitehorse downtown reconstructed Cook Street. There is also the Whitehorse city hall energy upgrade project, which has been facing cost pressures that led to redesign, which has delayed progress on that project. There were also regulatory delays that led to some projects being deferred to next year: the Beaver Creek lagoon, the Haines Junction water well replacement, and Watson Lake

infrastructure phase 1 construction. That makes up the bulk of the reductions in our capital budget.

Ms. McLeod: While we are on the topic of lapsed money, for Frances Avenue, can the minister tell us what the cost to the end of this fiscal year has — what are the costs for the Frances Avenue extension development? Now, if the minister can tell us what the contract amount was for the clearing, for the in-ground work, for the lift station, and for the landscaping of the lift station —

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I will endeavour to get the member opposite the detail of that question. We don't think it pertains to Frances Avenue, but we will get the detailed information about the Watson Lake infrastructure phase 1 construction for the member opposite.

Ms. McLeod: I did not hear a word of that.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I will endeavor to get the information to the member opposite.

Ms. McLeod: As we are here to discuss budget items, I am wondering why that information isn't available today.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: This isn't really part of the component for the supplementary budget. This has to do with — I do see the line item for the Watson Lake infrastructure phase 1 construction. The detailed breakdown that the member opposite is asking about for Frances Avenue is not captured in the supplementary budget; it's in the mains. We will talk about it there.

Ms. McLeod: I could argue because the minister just referenced money that was not being spent as a result of the supplementary budget. Go figure. Certainly, we will get to that.

I am wondering if there is any point to ask any questions of this minister if his entire discourse this afternoon is because they are short on time. I mean, I hope not, because it is not my fault.

There were a number of lots that were released, and so, we have been told that, in 2021, there were 249 lots released in Whitehorse and two in rural Yukon — so, I would like a confirmation of that.

In 2022, there were 101 lots released in Whitehorse and three in rural Yukon, and I would like a confirmation of that.

In 2023, there were 122 lots released in Whitehorse and 20 in rural Yukon. Can we get a confirmation of that?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have been just going through, and I don't see any of this stuff for that specific question, which is historic data which we have talked about in the House before — in the supplementary budget this time — but I am happy to let the member opposite know that, in 2021, we developed and sold — developed lots sold were 258 in Whitehorse and 37 in the communities. In 2022, there were 99 in Whitehorse and eight in the communities. In 2023, 115 in Whitehorse and 21 in the communities.

Ms. McLeod: I have a question about recycling for the minister. Let's see how we make out here.

Is the \$2.4 million that the minister announced that would be made available to the City of Whitehorse — is that money in the 2023-24 budget or in the 2024-25 budget?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The diversion credits are already in the budget. That is part of the deal, so that's a continuing cost

that the Yukon government makes on diverting credits out. It's part of the offer we made to the City of Whitehorse. The rest of the recycling money will be contained in a future budget. I am happy to discuss that in the mains.

Ms. McLeod: Another part of my question was whether or not that was actual money or diversion credits, so it sounds like, if I understand what the minister is saying, the \$2.4 million that the minister just recently announced to assist the City of Whitehorse with their blue bin project is old money in the form of diversion credits.

Can the minister confirm that?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The money that we've committed to the City of Whitehorse for the curbside recycling system is — we have offered the City of Whitehorse \$2.4 million over two years. We don't know the cost of the program yet. This is currently in discussion with the City of Whitehorse, and we are awaiting their decision on this project, so we will know what happens. What we have offered is up to, in the coming mains budget, \$2.2 million annually, of which about \$450,000 would be considered diversion credits covered primarily by YG, as it has been in the past. So, it's about \$827,000 a year over the next two years. That's a full fiscal year.

If the program gets up and running in November, that might cut that year's contribution. It just depends on when the thing launches, so we are up to \$827,000 a year for the next two years. That is in the mains, and I am happy to discuss recycling in the mains when we get to it.

Ms. McLeod: Phase 1 infill project for Haines Junction — there was a meeting on Monday night and I am wondering what the result was of that. I presume that's in last year's budget since we are still in that year.

If the minister could just give us a rundown of what the results were — because what we are hearing is that there is some controversy here.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite for the question. Again, this isn't explicitly covered by the supplementary budget. It's not a line item here. It has really no bearing in the document that is before us, but there were questions raised about the initial land-clearing work for this new land development in Haines Junction. We all know how important rural land development is, so we are working very closely with the municipality of Haines Junction. We had a public information session on Monday, I believe, and attempted to answer all the questions about our methodology and opportunities to achieve a final look and feel of the subdivision that met the needs of the community. For all intents and purposes, that was a good meeting.

Ms. McLeod: The 2 Billion Trees program — how many trees are going to be planted and who is doing that work?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I appreciate the member opposite raising a question that is contained in the supplementary budget. Wildland Fire Management is leading Yukon government's participation in Canada's 2 Billion Trees program, which will provide \$747,000 in federal funding between 2023-24 and 2025-26. Planning is currently underway to plant up to 400,000 aspen seedlings in strategic fuel breaks around Whitehorse and Haines Junction by 2026. It will inhibit

any potential wildfires that may start. As part of our fire prevention in the territory, it is critical. In this budget, we are increasing that budget by \$225,000 this year.

Ms. McLeod: So, since that money was in this year's budget, how many trees were planted this year?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Madam Chair, I appreciate this very important question from the member opposite. There were 170,000 trees planted.

Ms. McLeod: I can see that I have a number of questions that the minister is not going to answer for us. So, last year, the Yukon saw evacuations and evacuation alerts due to wildfire, which I presume cost some money. In the Ibex Valley, hundreds of people were on evacuation alert and we have heard concerns from the community about preparation for the next season.

Does the government plan to do any targeted harvesting or controlled burns in that area?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We are, of course, working with communities across the territory on wildland fire management initiatives to make the territory safer for communities and for citizens. That is job one. I know that the department is working very hard on this.

But as far as controlled burns and whatnot, that really isn't our bailiwick; that is an EMR issue. I ask the member opposite to maybe ask the proper department when it comes to the mains.

Ms. McLeod: Who knew?

Let's try this one: Is Community Services working on any initiatives to help people with how to install fire suppression systems for their homes either in the last fiscal year or in the one coming up?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The branch does promote wildland fire prevention through education campaigns to reduce human-caused fire ignition and help property owners protect their homes from wildfire risk. I recently did a media briefing on this very subject. The department, at that media briefing, very publicly announced that we help citizens with those efforts.

Ms. McLeod: The FireSmart program, some would think, is a very small program. How does the FireSmart program for 2023-24 compare to what is planned for 2024-25?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I would be happy to discuss that question when it comes to the mains discussion in the next coming weeks.

Ms. McLeod: Madam Chair, I would like to thank the minister for refusing to answer yet another question.

I would like an update on the Better Buildings program since it would appear that there are some revotes on that. I would like to know how many applications there have been in the 2023-24 year. How many were from Whitehorse? How many were from outside of Whitehorse? What was the budget total for 2023-24?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: In the Better Buildings program, the Department of Community Services has seven projects and the average cost of those projects is \$31,978.55

Ms. McLeod: Well, that doesn't really answer my questions, but I'm going to concede that the minister is not prepared to discuss this budget today. With that, I turn it over to the Third Party.

Ms. White: I'm glad that my nephews aren't in the gallery today, because having to explain to an eight-year-old and a 10-year-old — and having a 16-year-old call us out on the sarcasm — would be embarrassing for all of us. I will remind the minister that although tone doesn't translate, people are still listening. I don't think he does us any favours.

I am interested in the \$1.5 million that was indicated for water delivery and the additional higher costs for collection and transportation of waste. Can he please tell me what part of that \$1.5 million covers the waste collection?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the Leader of the Third Party for that question this afternoon pertaining to the supplementary budget.

Solid waste facilities — this is operation and maintenance and landfill agreements. In Champagne, the budget has gone to \$262,274 from \$195,000 in the 2023-24 mains; the change is an increase of \$67,274.

In Beaver Creek, it has gone to \$90,000 from \$75,000 — an increase of \$15,000. Braeburn has gone down to \$25,500 from an estimated budget of \$35,000; that's a \$9,500 decrease. Carcross has gone to \$470,366 from \$240,000; that's a \$230,000 increase. Mount Lorne has gone to \$321,000 from \$170,000; that's a \$151,000 increase.

Carmacks has dropped to \$49,000 from \$56,000; that's about a \$7,000 decrease. Dawson City has dropped to \$113,500 from \$197,000 — an \$83,000 decrease. Destruction Bay has dropped to \$187,000 from \$190,000; that's about a \$2,500 decrease. Faro has gone to \$13,000 from \$15,200; that's a \$2,000 change. Haines Junction — \$7,903 from \$10,400; that's \$2,400. Keno City, \$11,000 from \$40,000; that's a decrease of \$28,000. Swift River, \$32,000 from \$5,000; that's a \$27,000 increase. Silver City has gone to \$29,400 from \$25,000; that's a \$4,000 increase. Johnsons Crossing has gone to \$126,000 from \$77,000; that's a \$49,000 increase. Marsh Lake has gone to \$474,500 from \$230,000; that's a \$244,000 increase. Mayo has gone to \$68,000 from \$81,000; that's a \$12,000 decrease. Old Crow has gone to \$199,000 from \$288,000; that is a decrease of \$88,900. Pelly has gone to \$422,900 — so, \$423,000 from \$215,000; an increase of \$207,000. Ross River has gone to \$173,000 from \$180,000; that is a decrease of \$6,700. Stewart has gone to \$92,500 from \$30,000; that is a \$62,000 increase. Tagish has gone to \$370,000 from \$180,000; that is a \$190,000 increase. Teslin has gone to \$74,000 from \$12,000; that is a \$61,000 increase. Watson Lake has gone to \$90,700 from \$166,000; that is a \$75,000 decrease. Deep Creek has gone to \$429,700 from \$264,000; that is a \$165,000 increase. And territory-wide we have gone to — these were the unincorporated other places — \$321,600 from \$230,000; that is a difference of \$91,000. The total increase is \$1.25 million.

Ms. White: I guess I would make the request — in future budget briefings, if we could have breakdowns of that prior to the minister reading them off in the House.

So, there are some significant increases — I believe that it was \$200,000 for Carcross; \$321,000 for Mount Lorne; \$165,000 for Deep Creek; \$200,000 in Pelly; and a \$244,000 increase in Marsh Lake. Can the minister tell me why — the areas with big changes, what was behind those changes?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Madam Chair, I thank the member opposite for the follow-up question. Transfer of household waste from rural Yukon to Whitehorse increased to \$850,000 from \$282,000. That is a 201-percent increase over the last three years.

Tipping fees to the City of Whitehorse for household waste hauled from rural Yukon increased to \$469,000 from \$330,000. That is a 42-percent increase over the last three years.

Site services — attendants, brush-burning, metals recycling, et cetera — rose to \$1.58 million from \$1.375 million over the last three years. That is a 15-percent increase.

Repairs and maintenance — land-filling, cover material, electric fence repairs, et cetera — went to \$978,000 from \$850,000 in 2021-22. That is an increase of 15 percent over the last three years.

We are seeing an increase in all of these costs — in transportation costs and in the costs of improving our regional landfills — and it really highlights why we need to close transfer stations and stop hauling waste.

Ms. White: So, understanding that, for example, Carcross has an increase of \$200,000 but Johnsons Crossing only had an increase of \$49,000 — and Johnsons Crossing, of course, is one of the transfer stations that the minister is intent on closing. We had Silver City — I can't remember the numbers that the minister said. Keno — there was a reduction because I believe that the mine is doing the haul there.

One of the justifications that the minister has for closing those four rural stations is the cost, but if we look at, for example, Mount Lorne, that is where the minister is now collecting fees. We see a significant increase there. Marsh Lake — we see a significant increase. That is where the minister has the fees being collected.

I guess I'm just trying to understand. We see significant increases for those ones that are being peopled — where people are having to pay to distribute their waste but not that same level of increase in at least three of the transfer stations that the minister is intent on closing. Can he help me understand why we are seeing such large increases for those transfer stations — like Carcross, Mount Lorne, Marsh Lake, Deep Creek — and a significantly lower increase, for example, for Silver City, Johnsons Crossing, and Keno?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The Government of Yukon, as I have said quite often in the House, is working toward a sustainable model for solid-waste management in the Yukon. We are investing in waste management facilities that reflect modern, sustainable practices that benefit the environment and the economy. We have signed interim agreements now with Carmacks, Dawson, Mayo, Teslin, and Watson Lake to operate as regional centres. These agreements ensure that all public waste management facilities have gates, operating hours, tipping fees, and on-site staff to monitor and manage waste streams. This will reduce environmental risk and help to extend the life of all landfills and the costs associated with the liabilities of running those landfills. That is really the goal and that's what we're working toward.

You are seeing an increase in costs in the budgets of some of these rural landfills which the member opposite was referring to. It is basically the cost of haulage, so we are trying to make sure that we reduce those costs there and also prevent contamination, because we have had people dumping in these unsupervised sites. We have seen automotive transmissions and old cars left at these sites which have cost us money to dispose of and clean up those sites. We have seen that in several of the unsupervised sites we have in the territory, which is why we are moving to this new model. It puts in more controls and helps reduce pollution and exposure in these areas that aren't supervised. It ensures that people creating the pollution actually pay for the cost of getting rid of the garbage — a small fee for the cost of getting rid of the garbage that they are producing so we start to have an incentive for people to consider the waste they are doing and dispose of it properly.

Ms. White: There is a lot to unpack, I think, from the minister's answer, but to be honest, I am a little bit frustrated. Instead of banging my head against the transfer station scenario right now, I will take the minister's answers and I will bring them back in the mains. I will again remind everyone in this House that we are supposed to be examples. We are elected to represent people. I am glad that I don't have people in the gallery right now where I would have to explain our behaviour.

With that, I have no further questions for this supplementary budget.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services?

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

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 51, Department of Community Services, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 51, Department of Community Services, cleared or carried

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 51, Department of Community Services, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$4,307,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures underexpenditure in the amount of \$7,000,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures underexpenditure in the amount of \$2,693,000 agreed to

Department of Community Services agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, 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 10 minutes.

Recess

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

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 212, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Health and Social Services

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am very happy to be here to speak about the second supplementary budget for 2023-24 for the Department of Health and Social Services. I would like to welcome folks who are here from the department. Officials joining me today are Deputy Minister Tiffany Boyd and the Assistant Deputy Minister of Corporate Services, Paul Payne. Not too far down the row is the Assistant Deputy Minister of Social Services, Jennifer Gehmair.

I would like to thank them and their teams for developing this supplementary budget to support the health and well-being of Yukoners. I am pleased to provide this important update on the steps that we're taking to enhance the health and social services system and to respond to the issues and priorities of Yukoners through a supplementary budget. I look forward to questions about this budget. If we don't have an answer ready for you today, we will endeavour to get one in a timely manner.

I would also like to acknowledge the tremendous work of everyone at the Department of Health and Social Services from Continuing Care, Insured Health and Hearing services and social supports, to Family and Children's Services, Mental Wellness and Substance Use services, to our nurses, care providers, social workers, EMS teams, custodial teams, and corporate staff. I truly am happy to take the opportunity to thank you for everything that you do.

I would particularly like to acknowledge the hard work of our front-line health care staff. They all work so hard in difficult and demanding jobs with long hours, and they do that to keep Yukoners healthy and safe. Each day, their efforts are ensuring that Yukoners have access to essential services and programs.

The Department of Health and Social Services second supplementary budget reflects the important day-to-day efforts of our teams across the territory. This supplementary budget includes important funding in our response to the challenges presented by growing demand for health care services, and this supplementary budget also provides funding to ensure that our legislated programs are appropriately funded to meet current levels of demand and to strengthen our health care system.

As we advance this important work, I want to once again thank everyone across the system, across our Health and Social

Services department, for all that they do to support Yukoners each and every day.

We are presenting a capital increase of \$2.6 million compared to the 2023-24 first supplementary estimates. Changes in this supplementary budget are connected to adjustments to respond to growth in legislated programs and increasing access to primary care. With respect to capital, they are with respect to a number of specific renovations for programs that will be opening or are open to provide service to Yukoners — primarily, if I recall correctly, renovations to space.

The increase of \$44.9 million in operation and maintenance funding will support the department in meeting the growth costs associated with the delivery of health and social care and ensure that the needs of Yukoners are met. Our government is responding to growth within insured health services in areas such as the chronic disease and disability benefits, medical travel, and physician claims. We have added two more physician claims assessors to improve the patient and provider experience and efficiently process physician claims. We are adding personnel to our chronic disease and disability benefit program in response to a higher volume and complexity of care.

We are also recruiting an additional person to the medical travel team to address volume increase for out-of-territory medical travel and reduce wait times for subsidy reimbursements for Yukoners. An additional \$25.6 million is being provided to insured health services for physician claims and out-of-territory hospital claims.

In November 2023, our government announced the creation of the land-based healing fund initiative, and this supplementary budget includes an increase of \$2.2 million for this initiative. The fund is to be administered by the Council of Yukon First Nations, and it will enhance healing and wellness by connecting Yukoners to traditional practices on the land.

In response to the ongoing substance use and health emergency, we have allocated \$150,000 to increase Emergency Medical Services for opioid response drug-checking programs and at-home kits to be used to check for fentanyl and other drugs that can be harmful. Work is already underway to develop a mobile spectrometer. To date, Yukon EMS has distributed over 1,500 home drug-checking kits throughout the Yukon. Kits are available at 405 Alexander, through the paramedic response unit in Whitehorse, at all Yukon Liquor Corporation locations, and in several communities.

The supplementary estimate also includes an increase of \$400,000 to address vaccine-related pressures and ensure access.

The addition of \$103,000, recoverable from Canada, is dedicated to the continuation of the waste-water surveillance funding to One Yukon, a not-for-profit in the territory that is advancing community health and wellness by expanding waste-water monitoring networks.

Our government is working with partners to address shortages that have been experienced across the health and wellness sector. In December 2023, the *Health Human Resources Strategy* was released and included 25 actions under

the topics of “retain”, “recruit”, “plan”, “innovate”, and “learn”. We are providing an additional \$3.3 million within the Department of Health and Social Services to support our ongoing implementation of the *Health Human Resources Strategy* and *Putting People First*. This work will continue to be done in collaboration with Yukon First Nations and with other governments and partners.

We are pleased to continue our partnership with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to advance our shared priorities and ensure that Yukoners have access to the services and programs that they require. As financial pressures are identified by the Yukon Hospital Corporation, our government is committed to working through the main and supplementary budget exercises to respond to these identified needs.

In the second supplementary estimates for 2023-24, we are providing an increase of \$12.5 million for Yukon Hospital Services. This increase will support the Yukon Hospital Corporation to respond to unanticipated costs incurred as a result of the global shortage of health care providers and growth in the use of agency nurses to ensure access to care. This increase will also support the Yukon Hospital Corporation to meet the needs of forced growth and the costs of use of hospital and surgical services.

Once again, I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone at the Department of Health and Social Services for all of our health and social care system partners for the work that they do each and every day to support Yukoners. While we continue to face challenges, we are also working together to meet those challenges, implement new programs, and deliver important services across the Yukon.

The second supplementary estimate for 2023-24 reflects our government’s commitment to supporting our health and social care system to succeed. From implementing initiatives, meeting our legislated programs, to providing required funding for the Yukon Hospital Corporation, we are taking important steps in advancing the work that will impact Yukoners each day.

I look forward to answering questions about the second supplementary estimates for the Department of Health and Social Services.

Mr. Cathers: Madam Chair, first of all, I would like to welcome the officials here today as well.

It will probably come as no surprise to the minister that the first area related to the supplementary budget that I am going to begin asking questions about is hospital funding and the impact on services as a result of what the CEO called “cost containment measures” when he and the chair appeared in this Assembly last fall.

In November, we learned that hospital staff and doctors had been told that some services — including mammography exams, CT, X-ray, and ultrasound — were being cut or capped for budgetary reasons. We heard many concerns about that from health professionals and from patients.

In the 2023 main estimates, at the beginning of this fiscal year, the government had provided Yukon hospitals with just over \$95 million in O&M funding. Under repeated questioning and pressure from us, the government did finally provide the

hospital with an increase of a little over \$17 million last fall and another \$12.5 million in O&M in the second supplementary, which we are currently debating today. We are, of course, pleased to see those increases, but it is important to draw the public's attention to the fact that the increase in O&M money over the year demonstrates that, in fact, our hospitals were short almost \$30 million in O&M funding that they needed at the start of the fiscal year, and that had to be topped up through the addition of \$17 million and change and \$12.5 million in the supplementary.

According to the 2024-25 main estimates, the revised amount for the 2023-24 fiscal year is \$124.78 million in O&M for Yukon Hospital Services. I want to just ask about the reductions that we saw in November, carrying forward to Christmas and beyond, in the areas of the caps and services cuts in areas including mammography, CT, X-ray, and ultrasound. Have those services at Whitehorse General Hospital been fully restored to normal levels?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question. I will talk about how hospital funding is done perhaps in some future questions, but the answer to the question as to whether or not all of the services that have been noted by the member opposite and that were announced to have been potentially delayed in November 2023 have, in fact, been restored.

As a matter of fact, they weren't actually delayed, because immediately, when that information came to our attention, the Department of Health and Social Services worked with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to indicate that it would not be appropriate for the care provided to Yukoners. We worked together to determine how that could be resolved. There was, as there is every year, a surgical slowdown over the Christmas holidays because of the availability of the surgeons and some staff around that. Of course, people are available for emergencies, as they always are.

The services noted in the question — medical imaging volumes, let me just say, include CT scans, MRIs, ultrasounds, mammography, and X-rays. First of all, I think there were some quotes earlier of a total of a little over 29,000 of those procedures in the year 2023-24, but that was only for a period of time between April and November, so that's an incorrect number. The projected number for 2023-24 is 45,088 of those procedures by the end of this fiscal year, which ends in a few days. That is the projected number, and it is, of course, an increase over 2022-23, which totalled 39,395.

I can also indicate that, with respect to surgical procedures — and they include many surgical, general, and more specific surgery procedures that take place at Whitehorse General Hospital — the projected total to be completed by the end of fiscal year 2023-24 is some 4,000 procedures, which will be an increase of almost 250 procedures, because the procedures done in fiscal year 2022-23 were 3,841.

Mr. Cathers: I would just note that the numbers the minister was citing about the total numbers of procedures performed were not numbers that I had referred to. I was talking about the cuts that we heard about.

I would suggest that the minister may wish to look into this matter further, because it is certainly our understanding, from

what we have heard directly from both patients and health professionals, that those cuts and caps to services did continue throughout the Christmas season, and the surgical slowdown — I would point out to the minister and remind her that doctors have gone public indicating that the reduction in surgical services around Christmas was far longer than normal and it was not just the normal slowdown. Some of it, contrary to what the minister said when she claimed that it had to do with surgeon availability, was due to cuts that had been made that resulted in nurses not being available to assist with those surgeries. So, I would encourage her to check her facts and come back with more accurate information.

In November, the hospital's CEO told this House, in response to my questions, that the wait time for mammography screening exams was expected to grow to 35 months as a result of the cost-containment measures. From the information shared with us in November, it was our understanding that the hospital has the capacity to do 120 mammography exams per week.

Could the minister please tell us what the current number of mammography exams being done per week at Whitehorse General Hospital is, and what is the current wait time for non-urgent screening?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Yukon hospitals provide both diagnostic and screening mammography services — both known as mammograms — here in Whitehorse. Yukon hospitals follow national guidelines for breast cancer screening. During the 2022-23 fiscal year, Yukon hospitals completed 2,400 mammograms. The Yukon hospital is on target for the 2023-24 fiscal year to complete 3,600 mammograms. This represents a 50-percent increase in exams completed this fiscal year compared to last fiscal year.

Currently, breast cancer screening wait times are exceeding national targets. Diagnostic mammograms aim to be completed within seven days of referral and are being completed within target. Annual and high-risk screening mammograms aim to be completed every 12 months. As of December 31, 2023, annual and high-risk screening mammograms are being completed within 16 months. Routine screening mammograms aim to be completed every 24 months. As of December 31, 2023, routine screening mammograms are being completed within 33 months.

The Yukon Hospital Corporation has begun providing breast density scores directly to patients, and that practice began, which is recommended by standards in Canada, in January 2024.

Mr. Cathers: I do appreciate the information that the minister provided about the wait times for mammography, but she did miss the question: Could the minister let us know how many are currently being done per week?

Again, we understood from information shared with us in November that the program capacity was 120 per week. Could the minister let us know currently how many are being done per week?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: If the member opposite wants to proceed with the next question, we are trying to find out the per-week number. If we can't do it today, we will get back.

Mr. Cathers: I appreciate the commitment to come back with that answer.

I do want to ask about operating room services as well. Operating room services, as the minister made reference to, were also reduced for many weeks due to the cost-containment measures implemented by the hospital due to the shortage of funding from government. The reduction in surgical services was higher than 30 percent and much longer than the normal slowdown. As I mentioned, doctors, including the president of the Yukon Medical Association, had gone public with concerns about that. Late last year, the president of the Yukon Medical Association was quoted by local media as saying: "I've never seen my colleagues so demoralized and frustrated. This is a really hard time for a group of people who just really want to be able to do their work..."

Could the minister confirm: Have those surgical services now resumed to normal levels in comparison with what they were during that extended slowdown?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Deputy Chair, I'm going to have say just for the record that I don't necessarily agree with the facts that have been put forward around the longer slowdown than usual. Anyway, those are pretty vague terms, but we will determine what those details are going forward.

With respect to the — I guess it's a public text by one of the doctors here in the territory. I think that Yukoners will be interested to know that the same doctor was texting many, many years ago — I think when the member opposite was the Minister of Health and Social Services — something quite similar.

Nonetheless, as I have said in response to the first question, yes, surgical services have returned not only to — I'm not sure what normal levels are, because in 2023-24, we anticipate that approximately 250 more procedures will be done at Yukon Hospital than were done in 2022-23.

Mr. Cathers: Deputy Chair, I would suggest that the minister might not want to rely so much on her imagination for her facts about the past, because she was incorrect in one of her statements that she made and clearly mixing up which doctor she was referring to. I was quoting from comments made by the president of the YMA to CBC late last year, and I think she mixed them up with comments made by a former president of the YMA on social media when he referred to the system as on the "down slide and crashing".

Moving on to another specific area, the Ernst & Young report that the government commissioned — the Premier personally commissioned that at a cost of \$300,000 contrary to a recommendation from the Procurement Support Centre. Ernst & Young came back with conclusions that noted that, during the four years they reviewed, Yukon Hospital Corporation suffered from what they called a — quote: "... chronic cash flow and operating shortfall."

So, we know that this was a problem for at least the last four years under the current government. We know that, at the start of the current fiscal year — as demonstrated by government having to take corrective action in *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* and *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* of providing the hospital with almost \$30 million more in O&M

funding — clearly there was a problem in the amount of resources provided to our hospitals at the start of the current fiscal year.

I would like to ask the minister what steps she is taking to ensure that she and her Cabinet colleagues have a better understanding of the financial needs of our hospitals. To begin with, could the minister indicate how many times since November, when we were last discussing these serious issues and the reduction in services around Christmas and beyond, she has met with the Yukon Hospital Corporation Board and senior management?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I certainly look forward to talking more about the Ernst & Young report in relation to the Hospital Corporation. I should note that there is money in this supplementary budget for the Hospital Corporation and the importance of the services that are provided there, so I have no trouble having that conversation.

I do note the time, and as such, I move that you report progress, Deputy Chair, and I look forward to coming back to this question.

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

Motion agreed to

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Deputy Chair, 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: Mr. Speaker, 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 tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 5:28 p.m.

The following documents were filed March 27, 2024:

35-1-187

“Engagement on *Health Authority Act*” (McPhee)

35-1-188

Big Blue Hub, letter re (dated March 27, 2024) from Sue Lancaster, Executive Director, Little Blue Daycare, Dawson Society for Children and Families, to Hon. Jeanie McLean, Minister of Education (White)