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Thursday, April 11, 2024 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2024 Spring Sitting

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

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

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, April 11, 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.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, today we have a tribute for Scrabble Day, which is coming up this weekend. Please welcome to the gallery my lovely mother-in-law, Freda Walton, my wife, Susan Walton, and Michelle “Scrabble” Crossfield — if we could welcome them all, please.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleagues to please help me in welcoming two guests from Yukon University: Shelagh Rowles, provost and vice-president for academic studies, and Andrew Richardson, dean of the Faculty of Applied Arts. Thank you so much for being here today.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of National Scrabble Day

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberals and the Yukon NDP. This weekend, we celebrate Scrabble Day.

Of course, Scrabble is one of those educational devices cleverly disguised as a game. Like many Canadians, I grew up playing Scrabble with my grandmother. Actually, I was a late reader, and it was my grandmother who got me straightened out on that front. Nowadays, I have the pleasure of playing Scrabble with my lovely mother-in-law, Freda Walton.

As a fan of Scrabble, I was keen to prepare this tribute, but, as I dove into writing it, I started to uncover some very disturbing information, the details of which may be worrisome and may defy belief — so, a content warning for all Yukon listeners.

Scrabble is, of course, made up of the letters of the alphabet — each wooden tile a distinct, discrete letter. However, reports have been coming in to me that some of the letters have, in fact, been co-mingling. I am told that some of the hard consonants like P and T have been seen sidling up with some of the soft consonants like H to form faux names like “this” and “phonemes”, but it doesn’t stop there. I have been advised that the vowels have in fact been publicly consorting with the consonants. These iniquitous connections are giving rise to

unsanctioned syllables. Furthermore, these salacious syllables are wedding together to form a wide array of words. As if this were not worrisome enough, words are conjoining into clauses. Clauses are constructing sentences — oh, the humanity.

Sentences are running on until they are promptly punctuated, but it doesn’t stop there because sentences are coupling and thrupling to produce paragraphs. Paragraphs are populating pages, and I am not referring to the pages of this Assembly. I am speaking of pages of poems, pages of plays, pages and pages of prose. You know what’s next? Books.

Mr. Speaker, I have just learned that our libraries are, in fact, filled with books. I did try to warn us about the difficult content of today’s tribute. Books — from atlases to biographies, classics to dog-eared fiction, it appears that the whole alphabet is taking part in this travesty.

From kids books to metaphysics — are there no bounds? I blame the government. Well, government and Scrabble. I blame the government, Scrabble, teachers, librarians, and linguists. Regardless, games like Scrabble, Boggle, crosswords, and that woke game Wordle are blatantly promoting literacy, reading, and learning right here in the Yukon. It will be a dark and stormy night, possibly one year from now, ere I rise again to wax poetic and expound on the egregious nature of Scrabble and its unnatural influence on promoting literacy.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to Scrabble Day — my favourite game. I have scrabbled since I was a wee little girl and always hoped to find someone to agree to play. A 15-by-15 board with different word and letter scores, 100 tiles, and a bag to hold those tiles — a Crown Royal bag is the best. Then, the magic of finding the best space on the board to get the highest score or, better yet, a seven-letter word — for that is an extra 50 points. A serious challenged timed game is not for the faint of heart.

My friend Rick Steele, who has since passed, was the founder of the local Scrabble club held every Sunday at the Gold Rush pub for many years. Such a gathering of novice and experienced players and the laughter and jokes shared cannot be overstated, and I think that the local patrons loved the novelty of us being there, but this was a moment in time that can never be recaptured.

There are Scrabble tournaments and clubs around the world, and Canada does well. In 2022, a Montréal man, Michael Fagan, was North American champion, with a \$10,000 USD win. In 2023, at age 17, Ruth Li won the North American School Scrabble Championship, the first woman to win.

The professionals reach an average of 600 to 700 scores and this is amazing. I myself am an average player. To reach these heights, one must learn the obscure words, memorize them, and keep track of the leftover tiles to rate your odds on any given turn, while being timed, of course — it is hardcore. There are many who play for fun, without the stress, allowing the use of a dictionary and helping each other, but true Scrabble players challenge.

I know that those who are learning English use Scrabble at home for speech and the knowledge. When I started, it was proper English — no slang and no proper names. Now serious players have the latest edition of the Scrabble dictionary and many slang expressions and shortened words are allowed. “Za” comes to mind for pizza. The choice high-score letters — Q, Z, J, X — are gold, and knowing the two- and three-letter words — ultimate game-changer. You can spell “xu”, a monetary unit of Vietnam, or “qua”, which means “in the capacity of”. Did you know that there is even a 13-letter word, such as “juxtaposition”?

Words and spelling — who knew that this would be a tribute in the Legislative Assembly? But here I am advocating for everyone to at least try the game; you might find that it’s your thing. So, on April 13, play a game. Happy Scrabble Day.

Applause

In recognition of Yukon School of Visual Arts

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to the great work of the Yukon School of Visual Arts as a world-class instructional program.

The Yukon School of Visual Arts, also commonly known as SOVA, offers a rigorous eight-month foundation year program in Dawson. Situated within the traditional territory of the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation, the Yukon School of Visual Arts was created 17 years ago through a joint vision of the Dawson City Arts Society, Yukon University, and Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation to offer an accredited visual arts program in the historic setting of Dawson.

Our government has proudly supported the School of Visual Arts since its inception in 2007 because supporting and fostering vibrant arts and culture in the Yukon is not just a matter of aesthetic appreciation; it is an investment in the social, economic, and cultural well-being of our territory. The program is accredited at Yukon University and is equivalent to the first year of an arts degree. It provides developing artists with industry-transferable skills and the foundational arts requirement for academic art programs in partnering universities.

Furthermore, the program offers an intimate environment with small class sizes and custom-designed studio spaces where students can develop their chosen discipline, whether it be painting, drawing, printmaking, photography, video, or culture, among others. Additionally, the Yukon School of Visual Arts provides opportunities for students to connect with the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in heritage sites and with the vibrant arts community of Dawson.

The faculty has been very intentional in creating opportunities for students to learn First Nation culture by a process-based art practice from Jackie Olson, SOVA’s First Nation cultural instructor.

Arts are important and they are deeply intertwined with the identity and heritage of the Yukon. They provide a platform for celebrating and preserving traditional practices, stories, and languages of our cultural communities. Today, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Aubyn O’Grady, program director, and her

team. Her team helps to cultivate a culture of collaboration and encourages students to explore learning opportunities outside of the school walls — going out of the school to discover our territory.

The artwork of SOVA’s class of 2024 will be showcased in the end-of-year exhibition, which opens tomorrow, Friday, April 12, at 6:00 p.m. in the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture. I would like to send my warmest congratulations to the eight students of the SOVA class of 2024 for reaching this significant milestone in their academic journey, and the best of success for your futures.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the School of Visual Arts, or SOVA. SOVA offers an eight-month program as a foundation year program in the visual arts in the historic town of Dawson City. It is the most northerly post-secondary school of fine arts, set up in a historic building. That historic building used to hold the territorial agent, the liquor store, the teacherage, the public health nurse station, and living quarters for the territorial agent and health nurse as well as all the teachers and the principal upstairs. It has expanded as well and so was much smaller than the current structure. Dawson loves to repurpose buildings, so it was transformed into classrooms, unique studios, and so much more, which makes this program exceptional.

I am sure the graduating students will have many stories about their program and Dawson that are as unique as their art. This program allows students to go on to further studies at various accredited art schools across Canada. After the foundation year completion, a student can transfer directly to a second-year program to attain their bachelor of fine arts. Due to small class sizes and an amazing studio space and, of course, amazing faculty, this school has been a success. The partnership between the Dawson City Arts Society, Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in, and the Yukon University has seen a steady stream of students come here to study.

The early application intake closed on January 31 of this year, and the final application deadline is July 15, 2024.

There will be a year-end exhibition this Friday, April 12 at the school — or KIAC. We will encourage Dawsonites to attend and share an evening with the graduation class.

Congratulations and good luck on your future courses.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to add our voices in celebration of the Yukon School of Visual Arts and their class of 2024.

Tomorrow, their year-end exhibition will be opening at the SOVA gallery. I took a look at the poster. It’s very cool, and if that is the poster, I can’t wait for the show because it looks like it is going to be amazing.

Congratulations to W. Mark Giles, Lillie Smith, Reina Garcia Perez, Petra Huszar-Philp, Eden Wilkins, Miranda Hyatt-Orme, Caleb Tinani, and Lewis Bunce. Thank you for

sharing your art with us and good luck with everything that's next.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House supports the Government of Yukon's participation in an ISO 50001-based energy management system that gives organizations a structured framework to manage energy.

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

THAT this House do order the return of the comprehensive mental health and wellness approach produced for the Department of Education.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to provide self- or family-managed care funding to enable adult Yukoners requiring assistance with activities of daily living to live at home or independently and manage their own care resources.

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

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Continuing care

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, yet again, the lack of long-term care beds in Watson Lake is causing problems for Yukoners. The story from CBC Yukon about my constituents who are both in their 90s and are now separated because one of them needs to stay in Whitehorse for care is just the most recent example of why improved services in Watson Lake are needed.

I know that the Liberals have made up their mind on that issue, so this question isn't even about constructing a new long-term care facility in Watson Lake. Instead, my question is: Will the minister consider converting any long-term care rooms in Whitehorse to accommodate couples coming in from the communities? Currently, the system doesn't offer an option for a spouse to join their loved one who is staying in long-term care, as is the case with my constituents.

So, will the minister consider adding a long-term care option that accommodates couples, like my constituents who have been married and living together for 75 years?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I think that the option of providing care for individuals here at Whistle Bend Place or other long-term care rooms here in the Whitehorse area could

and should present an option for couples who might need assistance in staying close to the individual. Of course, that is a medical decision — assuming that the medical care can be provided in the same setting. I certainly will explore the options. In particular, I understand in this case that — the conversations that I have had regarding this particular family — in fact, exploration is underway to assist in any way that is possible to make primarily the patient comfortable and then ultimately family members who are supporting that patient comfortable and as nearby as possible.

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, during the health budget briefing, we learned that there is a growing wait-list for continuing care. So, can the minister tell us: How many Yukoners are currently on the wait-list for continuing care, and how many of those are from rural Yukon?

We understand that there are some renovations planned to Whistle Bend Place that will add a handful of additional rooms. How many new beds will be created at Whistle Bend Place?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I think that this is an important time to remind Yukoners that, when a Yukon Party government was in power, they voted for Whistle Bend to be a 300-bed location — a service provider with 300 beds — the concept then being that all Yukoners who were aging and needed long-term care facilities would be required to come to Whitehorse because, in fact, there would not be beds provided in communities.

We now have extended opportunities for individuals to stay in some communities. We have explored some communities — in particular, Watson Lake — for the purposes of designating some rooms and having some renovations done so that long-term care could be available there. We had some discussions with community members who were not necessarily supportive of that option. I have said before in this Legislative Assembly that the idea was one that would be phased.

I appreciate that Watson Lake has the concept of wanting a long-term facility. That is still being explored. A needs assessment is being done with respect to community wellness plans being done, and those are created by communities as an opportunity for long-term care.

We have aging in place. We support that and we look forward to providing that for Yukoners.

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, there is a wait-list for continuing care and that list is only going to continue to grow. We understand that there are plans to add a handful of beds in Whistle Bend, but it is clear that much more will be demanded over the coming years.

Has the government developed any plans to meet the large demand for continuing care beds? Will they be building a second phase to Whistle Bend Place or perhaps building a new continuing care facility in Whitehorse? Will the government consider building a long-term care home in rural Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, long-term care beds in rural Yukon as opposed to 300 beds in Whistle Bend — I think that's a change. I think that it is a valuable and appropriate change by the members opposite to now be supporting aging in place. They did vote against aging in place as a concept, so I

hope that they're changing their perspective. I look forward to that being the case.

The long-term care homes here and in other places across the territory offer various levels of care and assistance with daily living to residents as part of our territory's continuum of care. I can note that in 2024-25, we have budgeted \$76 million toward the ongoing operations of long-term care residences in the territory. There are four long-term care homes in the Yukon, which are: Copper Ridge Place, Thomson Centre, Whistle Bend Place, and Alexander McDonald Lodge in Dawson City. There are some opportunities in other communities for designated places for this type of care.

We look forward to the budget that will support the Yukon Council on Aging and Seniors' Information Centre. This is an important issue as we go forward.

Question re: Carbon tax

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Canadian House of Commons passed a motion calling for an emergency meeting between the Prime Minister and Canada's premiers about the carbon tax and the impact that it is having on the affordability crisis in this country. The motion has come forward following a growing multi-party consensus that includes the NDP Premier of Manitoba, the Liberal Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Premier of the Northwest Territories and the carbon tax is not the only way to address climate change.

Earlier this Sitting, we asked the Premier about attending such a meeting, and he said that he looked forward to it because he wanted to make a point of telling the other premiers why they are wrong. He said — quote: "I am going to be sitting at a table with all those premiers and I am going to be disagreeing."

So, Mr. Speaker, does the Premier really intend on participating in this meeting of premiers and telling them all that they are wrong about the carbon tax?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Great interpretation by the member opposite but incorrect — my points were that, number one, we needed to do something, and I'm glad to hear premiers from coast to coast over the last two weeks call out to the fact that we needed to have a meeting. I did it two weeks on national television.

What I said was that we sent a letter in September 2022. It was done by the previous Premier and in concert with the two premiers from the other two territories. We talked about the fact that there needed to be a time to come back to the table to look at what was working. Some parts of the mechanisms were working, but others needed to be improved. But we have to do something.

So, no, the relationship that I have with my colleagues is not that I'm going to show up at a table and tell them that they're wrong. I'm going to look to them to see what the good solutions are that they may have. Some folks have come back to the table and said that they have some good solutions in place. I see that Nova Scotia is putting something forward; it seems that Manitoba is putting something forward. The great thing here was that we made sure that there was a made-in-Yukon solution right from the start.

Of course, the member opposite, if we remember, has always been against this. It's almost like he is a denier of climate change. The previous Yukon Party Premier shrugged the responsibility to go to meetings. In those early days, the leader of the opposition was there in Montréal and was the poster boy for anti-climate sentiment.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, well, I should note for the Premier that I quoted him directly from the Legislature just a few weeks ago when he said that he was going to be sitting at the table with all those premiers and he was going to be disagreeing with them.

I will move on, Mr. Speaker. I have an alternative idea for the Premier. There is no better time than now for the Premier of Yukon to join with the other territorial premiers to make the case to the Prime Minister that the north needs an exemption to the carbon tax. Premier Simpson in the NWT has been making this case very carefully and thoughtfully since his election.

He is not saying that we don't need to take action in the north on climate change or that we don't need to make changes, but he is saying that the carbon tax is simply too punitive for those of us living north of 60.

Will the Premier of Yukon change course and join the Premier of the Northwest Territories to call for a northern exemption from the carbon tax?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: It's good to hear that, in the second question, the Leader of the Official Opposition corrected himself from the preamble of the first question. Again, saying that I disagree with somebody on a particular model doesn't mean I'm saying that they are wrong. What I'm saying is: Bring something to the table, which now they are — premiers across the territories. I've spoken with many of the premiers over the last number of weeks. I have also spoken with my counterparts in the last two weeks from both territories. I think that you should be constantly going and looking to improve policy.

There's a different situation from the Northwest Territories to here. This territory, along with the other two, were the first individual provinces to actually ask to get to the table with the Prime Minister, and that was done actually two years ago — a year and a half ago.

We have always felt that it's time to do that work, and it's good to see now that other provinces are coming to the table and saying: Yes, we should go and have a constructive conversation; we should put forward a proposal that is unique to our particular territory.

Yes, Premier Simpson will put in something based on the situation in the NWT and we will continue to look at how to tweak our situation. But again, remember that the majority of Yukoners are getting more back than they are spending in this particular case. We think that our model is actually a great case for other jurisdictions to look at so that they can improve the situation in their home jurisdiction.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, the Premier of the Northwest Territories has said that we need to take action and make investments that will help us respond to climate change, but he has been making a compelling case that the carbon tax is simply unfair to the Canadian north. Here's what he said just a few weeks in an interview about the carbon tax: "... it makes life

very difficult for a lot of people, especially the farther north you go...”

His comments have been resonating with a lot of Yukoners who feel the same way about the affordability crisis that we’re facing right now. I agree with him, Mr. Speaker, and I think that it is important to Yukoners that we help the Premier lobby for a carbon tax exemption. If he seeks a carbon tax exemption for the north, I will provide a pair in the House for the Premier to attend that televised emergency meeting of premiers.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier join the Northwest Territories and seek a northern exemption for the carbon tax?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Again, a great conversation with Premier Simpson over the last two weeks on these topics, working collaboratively at the COF table — but what I will say is this: What we heard from this individual across the way, the critic for the Premier’s office — the Leader of the Official Opposition, since coming into this House, said: I will come with fresh ideas and a new approach.

There has been no new approach and not one idea. What we are hearing from across the country is Manitoba and Nova Scotia — they are coming with new ideas. So, as Yukoners focus and look toward the leader of the opposition to come with one new idea, one policy — what is your plan? You have no plan. What is your plan? We all know that you have no plan.

Question re: Support for substance use emergency

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, it has been over two years since this government declared the substance use health emergency, and as the wait-list for substance use treatment grows, Yukoners are wondering when this government will expand the list of eligible facilities. People looking for support cannot afford to wait any longer. It takes so much courage for someone to ask for help and it is so devastating when they are told that they must wait. Far too often, we hear from Yukoners who are waiting a week or longer just to talk about their treatment options and then waiting months to access treatment. During those months, some end up giving up on getting into treatment altogether, and in very worst cases, we have seen Yukoners die while sitting on wait-lists to access treatment.

What is this government doing to shorten wait times and expand treatment options for Yukoners?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, in 2022, this government declared a substance use health emergency. We have rallied since that time with an amazing array of partners to determine how to respond. We have had an amazing opportunity for parties to come together for the purposes of providing support for — firstly, recognizing the concepts of the substance use health emergency, recognizing that we must come together in order to provide solutions and that harm-reduction solutions are the way to go. I certainly applaud those in this Legislative Assembly who have seen that as being a priority.

We have, within weeks of the declaration of the substance use emergency, made changes to the directive of providing health care and, in particular, treatment for individuals who want to go out of the territory to do so. We have removed and

lessened barriers. We have worked with the primary care physicians and others. We have worked with the Department of Health and Social Services — the insured health unit and the medical travel unit — to make sure that this is an opportunity for individuals who need and want to have that kind of care, and we have expanded the places in which individuals can go for that kind of treatment.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, currently, if Yukoners need to access Outside treatment, this government only provides funding for them to go to physician-led treatment centres. While the medical model works for some, many individuals have experienced trauma in the medical system.

Health care cannot be a blanket approach. That is why providing a broader spectrum of supports is crucial to support people accessing care. Unfortunately, many community-based treatment programs are not covered for Yukoners — even when those programs would better meet their needs.

There are many highly regarded programs that are not covered, like Westminster House in British Columbia. The decisions seem arbitrary. For example, Westminster House serves women and it is not covered, but its partner program for men, Last Door, is covered.

Many provinces throughout Canada cover funding for community-based treatment models that are peer-led, culturally safe, and provide second-stage housing, but not the Yukon.

So, will the minister expand funding eligibility to include non-physician-led treatment programs?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, we have expanded the opportunities for land-based healing here in the territory as a result of the responses to the substance use health emergency in partnership with the Council of Yukon First Nations as administrators of those programs. We have met with leadership of First Nation governments and organizations and individuals who are providing land-based healing programs here in order to fill a gap that we all recognize has been the case — hopefully, in particular with reintegrating into communities either from treatment that occurs outside of the territory or other programs.

The opportunity to expand those kinds of services is incredibly important. We want to provide the opportunities for as many individuals to avail themselves of treatment as quickly as possible when they are entering the concept of wanting to do that.

It’s incredibly important that we provide support to individuals who are reaching that threshold and who are prepared to go and make those changes to their lives. They must be supported to do so. We will work in every way possible to do so, and we have done that in our entirety here in government but certainly since the declaration of the substance use health emergency with a vengeance.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, evidence shows that treatment programs that are less than 90 days have significantly lower success rates than those that are longer. In fact, research has shown that people in programs of less than 90 days have similar success rates to those who only stay in these programs for a day or two.

Across the country, it has been widely accepted that 90 days is the minimum when it comes to effective treatment.

Most programs have moved to this model, yet the only regularly available treatment program in the Yukon run by the Yukon government is 35 days — almost two months shorter than what is shown to be most effective.

Without a longer term treatment program in the territory, Yukoners continue to rely on access to out-of-territory treatment options. Unfortunately, the wait-list for out-of-territory treatment keeps growing, partly because of the limited options that the government will cover. If the Liberals expanded the list of eligible out-of-territory treatment programs, it would help people to get support sooner and it would save lives.

What concrete actions is the Liberal government taking to ensure that Yukoners have access to evidence-based, effective treatment options when and where they need them?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I don't have near enough time in a minute and a half to answer all of that question, but I can tell you what actions we have taken. There are intensive treatment services available at the Sarah Steele Building. I will come back to that in a moment. There is a psychiatric outreach team. There are plans and work underway to open soon a managed alcohol program. There are services at the Referred Care Clinic. There is support and hours have been extended — more extended hours at the supervised consumption site. There is the withdrawal management program. There is the mobile crisis Car 867. All are in response to the substance use health emergency.

The intensive treatment programs that are available at Sarah Steele include therapeutic group activities, community-based programming, culturally focused programs, and individual counselling. The member opposite in this particular question is speaking about one particular kind of treatment and I appreciate that this is the case. We do support individuals going outside of the territory for the kind of treatment that she is making reference to, but there are three treatment programs here located at Sarah Steele as well as the support for individuals to travel to have treatment in other residential programs.

There is a Spruce program, there is a Spruce 2 program, and there is a Pine program. There are mental wellness and substance use services being piloted, being expanded, and being provided to Yukoners.

Question re: Whitehorse General Hospital capacity

Mr. Cathers: Yukoners are increasing feeling the impact of growing health care wait times, delayed surgeries, and longer waits at the emergency room at Whitehorse General Hospital. Years of chronic underfunding of Yukon hospitals by the Liberal government was confirmed by their Ernst & Young report. Too many Yukoners are waiting unacceptably long for health care services. The Whitehorse hospital was designed for a smaller population. Far too often now, a shortage of hospital beds results in surgeries being cancelled.

Can the minister of health tell us how many surgeries were cancelled in the last year due to a lack of hospital beds?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: What I can tell Yukoners is the work that has been done to build relationships between the Yukon

government, the Department of Health and Social Services, the Yukon Hospital Corporation, and the Yukon Medical Association and the incredible benefit that this has had for Yukoners as we go forward for the purposes of recreating, for the purposes of expanding, for the purposes of supporting, enhancing, and improving services through the health and social services system and, in particular, the work that has gone into us going forward with a health authority act, which is currently being debated before this Legislative Assembly.

All of that work is going in, in recognition of the expanded population here in the territory and of the expanded services that are required and in recognition of the expanded complexity of medical care and the opportunities for our medical and health systems to provide better services for Yukoners — better care and longer opportunities to deal with medical problems or issues that were not able to be dealt with before. All of that factors into the work that we are doing to provide service for Yukoners.

Mr. Cathers: The minister didn't answer the question about how many surgeries were cancelled.

The Liberal government is increasingly demonstrating how badly out of touch it is with Yukoners, and the result of years of chronically underfunding Yukon hospitals is impacting patients who face long wait times. Adding to that, too many surgeries are cancelled or delayed due to Whitehorse General Hospital being overcrowded.

We understand that a handful of new beds will be added when the secure medical unit moves into the new mental wellness unit, but that is not going to make much difference. With the fastest growing population in the country, the government needs to be taking action now to increase the number of hospital beds. What if anything is the government doing about this?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Unfortunately, again, the member opposite doesn't have all of the facts or look for all of the facts.

We have built relationships with the Yukon Hospital Corporation; we have brought forward budgets that have been second to none with respect to providing health care services and the expansion of health care for Yukoners. We have worked to speak to Yukoners, to listen to Yukoners through *Putting People First*, and to implement the 76 recommendations in that document, many of them — 89 percent, I think, is the last annual report — have been implemented.

I can provide that list to the member opposite if he is looking for things that have been done to improve services here for Yukoners, because we have lists; trust me on that.

We have worked to expand the relationship with the Yukon Hospital Corporation, the Yukon Medical Association, and all of our allied health professionals and nurses. We are supporting them through improved recruitment and retention opportunities, through a focus on a patient-centred approach for Yukoners to expand and improve health care for them. I hope that they will support the *Health Authority Act*, which will be a gigantic step in that direction.

Mr. Cathers: Yukon patients need action, not platitudes. While the minister of health was on an expensive

junket to Scotland on the taxpayers' dime, rural health centres were struggling and our hospitals were dealing with increased emergency room pressures and a bed shortage. This Liberal government likes to boast about the fastest growing population in the country, but in seven years in office, they have failed to take action or even plan to increase the capacity of our hospitals to serve a rising population and aging demographic. Too many Yukon patients have had surgeries cancelled due to a shortage of hospital beds, and the government doesn't even have a plan to address the pressure on our hospitals.

Will the government finally recognize that action is needed now and move quickly to work with Yukon hospitals on a wait-time reduction strategy that includes adding more hospital beds?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I think that it is somewhat rich for the members opposite to be talking about plans. They often have no plans.

The Yukon Hospital Corporation, the Yukon Medical Association, and the Department of Health and Social Services are working diligently on providing expansion of services which, of course, includes the integration of infrastructure that will be necessary in order to do that. We look forward to the opening of the mental wellness unit in the hospital in the fall of this year. We look forward to the beds that will be opened up as a result of those moves. We look forward to the work that is being done to expand our bed opportunities at long-term care for working in what we hope will soon be a more seamless system where there are more opportunities to integrate patient services — to put the patient at the centre of those services. We are focused on a new health authority; we are focused on our relationships with the Yukon Hospital Corporation, the Yukon Medical Association, and the primary care providers in this territory — because they are the backbone of this health system.

Instead of criticizing them and working to make sure that Yukoners are afraid of their system, we are working hard to make sure that Yukoners have the best possible health care system available.

Question re: Beaver River watershed land use plan

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, the Beaver River land use plan continues to hang over the heads of the territorial Liberals. Initially touted as a new way of doing business by the now Premier back in 2018, it has unfortunately become mired in confusion and delay. The most recent work plan update on yukon.ca from winter 2023 suggests that the final draft plan was to be ready in December of 2023. The website says — and I quote: “Provide a final opportunity for Plan review by the public, FNNND citizens and stakeholders”

Can the minister tell us if this final draft plan is complete, and if so, when can we expect the final opportunity for plan review, and if not, when does he expect it to be done?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I will make sure to mention to the department that we should update the website. Thank you for that.

What we are doing is working with the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun to advance land use planning across their traditional territory, including the Beaver River watershed. So,

the regional planning for Northern Tutchone is now in the pre-planning stage, and this involves collaboratively establishing a memorandum of understanding and terms of reference for how regional planning will occur.

The Government of Yukon and the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun are actively discussing how the Beaver River planning process may integrate and interact with the chapter 11 regional land use planning process.

I have been in direct conversation with the department and with Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, and they have indicated to me that they wish us to move forward with regional land use planning.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, it sounds like the website is going to be in need of a major overhaul, based on what the minister just told us.

When announced, the now Premier boasted that it would be ready in March 2020. Well, of course, that didn't happen. At the heart of the matter was a year-round tote road to access mining properties north of Keno City. In December of 2020, the proponent at the time, in a press release, openly asked — and I will quote: “If this road can't be permitted following a positive environmental and socio-economic assessment decision and years of governmental encouragement to invest in the project, then you have to wonder if Yukon is in fact open for business.”

Is the Premier at all concerned with the fact that his plan is over four years late with no end in sight?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite loves this question. We usually get it every session, and he always quotes the fact that I said that it's a new way of doing business.

I just want to clarify. A new way of doing business was not fighting with every First Nation government in the territory, not scaring away investment as was done before, not going to a Supreme Court case when it came to —

You can talk off-mic all day long, but the reality is that we know where things were and we know where they are now.

The quote that's being used today in the second question — am I worried about the fact that it's going to hurt business? I will attribute the quote to an individual who is a mining leader and now is leading another company that is doing incredibly well and has come back to the Yukon to work in this sector. So, no, I am not worried, and I congratulate the individual who has put that quote — and with his new-found success and the success of the company he is now leading.

Mr. Kent: The Premier's response leads nicely into my next question. This sub-regional land use plan has also led to the Liberals finding themselves in court with the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun. The initial judgment by the Yukon Supreme Court was appealed by the Yukon government, after which a law firm in the mining industry, McMillan LLP, penned a bulletin entitled *Clear as Mud: The Legal Implications of Land Use Planning in Yukon*. The Yukon Court of Appeal released their judgment on April 9, which mostly upheld the original judgment.

None of this makes the Yukon look very good to the international investment community. So, again, for the Premier: What is he doing to mitigate the collateral damage that

his — quote: “new way of doing business” is doing to the Yukon’s investment reputation?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Look, it must be difficult for the member opposite to ask this question.

First of all, let’s talk about success in exploration and mining, okay? The member opposite knows that the record is held under his watch for exploration of \$6 million in one season — not where we are now, with over \$150 million or \$200 million — but \$6 million total for that particular season. Anyway, we will put that aside. I think we have touched some soft points there; people are excited on the other side of the floor.

What we will do is continue to work directly with First Nation governments. I was actually lucky enough today to have lunch before I came down to sit with Chief Hope and continue to be committed to the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun and Northern Tutchone nations on the work that needs to be done. The members opposite know full well — they made a commitment; it was a contract in good faith to First Nation governments that they would do land planning, that they would have successor legislation in place for lands, that they would have successor legislation in place for minerals — none of those things got done.

We are committed to doing that work; it is important work to do, and that is what will give us an opportunity to build our mining industry here in the Yukon. They know it; we know it, but we are going to get it done.

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

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, in Bill No. 213, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

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

Deputy Chair: The matter before the Committee is Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, in Bill No. 213, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Request for Acting Chair of Committee of the Whole

Deputy Chair: At this time, I will ask if any private member wishes to volunteer to be Acting Chair of Committee of the Whole, as I would like to take part in the debate on Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, in Bill No. 213.

Member for Takhini-Kopper King rises

Acting Chair (Ms. White): The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, in Bill No. 213, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Yukon Development Corporation

Acting Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Madam Acting Chair, to begin with, I would like to welcome back to the Assembly the president of the Yukon Development Corporation, Dennis Berry, and the vice-president, Sara French. As always, I thank them for being here to support and provide information for the members opposite and for Yukoners.

When we were here last on the supplementary budget, there were a couple of questions that were asked. One that was asked several times was about the most recent added dependable capacity to the grid. The answer to that question would be last year, when I think we had five rented diesels added to the grid. I pointed out the wind turbines which are now there and turning. Those turbines, though, don’t represent dependable capacity because we need to get the battery in place, which was one of the concerns that was raised — if it was a dependable capacity.

Also, I note that we are currently in the process of replacing some of our outdated permanent diesel plants in Dawson, Faro, and Whitehorse. Those are just in the permitting stage right now, so they are not quite up and connected. I should also note that, in recent years, we have upgraded some of our hydro turbines, so that gave us some additional dependable capacity there. I am not sure when that timing was versus the timing of the rented diesels.

The other thing that I want to update the House on — there were questions about how much had been spent on the Atlin project. I had indicated that there was a \$2-million transfer payment agreement that was in place to do geotechnical work. At that time, the question was: How much of that money has been spent? What I will just say to the House today is that the \$2 million has now been fully spent.

Thank you, Madam Acting Chair, and I look forward to our debate today.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate that. I welcome the officials and thank them for the briefing that they provided on the supplementary estimates as well as the main estimates earlier this Sitting.

I wanted to go back to last year when we were debating Yukon Development Corporation. I am just going to quote from Hansard on page 3796 — so this was April 27, 2023. I am going to quote the minister here. He said — quote: “There was a request to get information about the history of the rental diesels and the costs. I have asked to get the information. I will make sure to table it, as well, as a legislative return, but it goes back as far as 2017-18. From that year, it was \$700,000. From 2018-19, the total is \$1.72 million. From 2019-20, it is \$4.37 million. From 2020-21, it’s \$8.6 million. For 2021-22, it’s \$6.1 million. In 2022-23, it’s \$4.7 million.” The minister went on to say: “I will have to confirm that all costs are in there. One of the challenges, of course, is that it matters how much they are used, because the diesel costs — the fuel costs — change.”

At the time, the minister did not have the projection for 2023-24. I am just wondering if he could provide that additional information here today. So, that is the cost of the rented diesels for the 2023-24 fiscal year.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: When the member opposite gets back up, if he can just say that date again. I thought that he said April 7, but I don’t have a Hansard for that date, so I am just —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The 27th — thank you so much.

I don’t have numbers yet for 2023-24, so they are still working on compiling the numbers for the rental diesel costs. The last number that I have is from 2022-23, which is \$4.7 million.

Mr. Kent: Can the minister just make a commitment for us that when he does get those numbers for us, that he could provide a breakdown between the rental costs and any associated maintenance costs and then the diesel costs separately, if he could break those down for us? Then, perhaps — I’m not sure if he did bring back a legislative return based on those numbers from previous years, but if that return could also include the breakdown on the rentals versus the amount of fuel used over that time.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I don’t recall having put in a legislative return, so I will check.

Really, what I was trying to do that day when we were standing up in debate — I knew I was using a lot of numbers, and I don’t think it is helpful for us to just always list off numbers. It’s easier if we can share them, so that is what I was trying to do. My apologies that I didn’t.

I am sure that I am hearing — I think what I am being asked for is: What is the rental cost? What is the fuel cost? I think, as part of rental, if we can just say “rental and maintenance” — so, sort of the capital side of that. Then, the operating side is the fuel, and it’s a split between rented diesels and our own diesel plant. I will just check.

Mr. Kent: If the minister can confirm for us how many rented diesels were in place over this past winter — and is there an expectation that we will be adding additional rental diesels for the next winter season in this current fiscal year?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, there were 22 units in 2023-24. I don’t have any information yet about any change to that number, but YDC is just checking in with Yukon Energy

to see if they have any projections. If I get projections where those numbers change, I will try to make sure to flag them to members.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate that from the minister, and I will look forward to getting those numbers from him.

I do want to just jump over to what I will call the “permanent diesels” that the minister mentioned in his opening remarks — the replacement projects in Dawson City, Faro, and Whitehorse. Does the minister have a breakdown of the costs for those different replacements as well as the status of the contract? Has the contract been awarded, and if so, when do we expect those new permanent diesels to be installed?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The power of texting — Yukon Energy is letting me know that they don’t have any intention of adding rentals for our current fiscal year. I can let the member opposite know that our analysis of the costs for 2023-24 are expected next month, so it is likely once we have risen, but it is in May that I expect to get those numbers.

In terms of the diesel replacements for our permanent diesels, the Faro diesels are the first that we are forecasting for an in-service date, which will be in Q3 of this calendar year. The Dawson retirement and relocation to Callison subdivision will be in Q4 of this calendar year — 2024. These are our forecasts — I should be careful — that is where we are currently forecasting. And the Whitehorse Rapids diesel plant — the expectation is that it will be completed in the fall of 2025.

Mr. Kent: I asked in the previous one, but perhaps the minister didn’t hear me: I am just looking for the costs of those different projects and whether or not the contracts have been awarded, and if so, who is the successful proponent?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The projected cost for the replacements, which includes the additional capacity at the Callison site, is \$49 million.

I will have to check on further information about whether those contracts have been let and to whom. Of course, the first place I will look is the Faro project, because that is the soonest one that is front of us. The Whitehorse one is likely not there yet. Once I get information — and hopefully I can get it today while I am here — I will rise and provide that information for the members opposite.

Mr. Kent: Just for clarification, the \$49 million — did the minister say that was just for Dawson alone, or is that for all three projects?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: All three.

Mr. Kent: Can the minister tell us what the generating capacity of the existing permanent diesels is and what the generating capacity of the replacement permanent diesels will be? It is our understanding that it is increasing, but I just wanted to check with the minister and get that on the record.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The Faro plant — its current capacity is 5.1 megawatts. The new capacity is five megawatts.

The Whitehorse Rapids diesel plant is five currently. It will be five — or it is anticipated to be five.

The Dawson City capacity is currently 2.5 megawatts and will be 3.25 megawatts.

So, overall, there is an increase in capacity of between sort of a half a megawatt or three-quarters of a megawatt. Also, it is

worth noting that the new diesels — well, firstly, because of the age but also because of the efficiency of the newer models, we get more energy-for-fuel in them, so they are more efficient. So, there is an improvement, even if the size of them has not increased. For Callison, we will see a measurable increase.

Mr. Kent: I just wanted to go back to the rented diesels for a second. I know we had some deployed at the Whitehorse Rapids dam here in the capital city. There are some in Faro, and there are some in Mayo.

When the minister comes back with the legislative return, I am also curious what the transportation costs are for fuel and if there is any additional cost for maintenance in those communities. Obviously, having those facilities located outside Whitehorse comes with increased costs on transportation, so if the minister can just make a commitment to get that information to us as well as far as hauling fuel to Mayo and Faro as part of the rented diesels.

And perhaps we can get an indication as well with the permanent diesels in Dawson and Faro. I'm assuming that the price will be the same — just adding Dawson City to it — for the cost of hauling bulk fuel to those sites for the new replacement permanent diesels in those communities.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, one of the points of having diesels around the Yukon is because you really want that distribution. It isn't good just to have them in Whitehorse. It's important to have them here, but it is also important to have them — because when a power line — a transmission line — drops between, let's say, Stewart Crossing and Dawson, you need the generating capacity there in Dawson. So, it's not — like, there is a cost to transporting fuel to these locations, but there is also a risk if you don't have that capacity in those places. So, when Yukon Energy has talked to YDC, one of the things that they talk about is that risk reduction and making sure that we have a range.

Second of all, sure, there is a transportation cost in there, but I think that the number that is better to sort of report on is: What is the cost to operate those? Like, the fuel cost, you know, fluctuates, because the cost of diesel fluctuates, but you also have a cost that is different depending on the transportation of that fuel. You have to — you know, somewhere — when we purchase it here in the Yukon, we put in the price of transportation to the Yukon.

From my perspective, I think it's a more fulsome answer to just talk about the operating costs that go in, which include the transportation of the fuel. You know, the member opposite can let me know what they are interested in. I'm trying to not overburden the utilities with information, and I think that they probably just have a total number.

Mr. Kent: I guess what I was looking for — this is more of a backward-looking question — is with respect to these previous fiscal years, if we could get a sense for how much freight is added when you go beyond Whitehorse. I understand the technical side of things, but with that technical side there also comes additional costs in hauling diesel fuel to Faro, Mayo, and Dawson City to power the rented diesels in those communities and the new permanent ones.

I do want to jump over and ask a couple of questions with respect to the grid-scale battery. Are the costs still steady at what the minister last told us in the House for that project? I am not sure if he was able to provide an answer to my colleague during supplementary debate, but we are also curious about the costs associated with leasing the land from the First Nation where the grid-scale battery will be located — so overall costs. I guess I might as well ask about timing as well. When does the minister expect the grid-scale battery to be operational?

This is more of a technical question — and if the minister needs to get back to me on it, that would be fine — but I'm just curious. My understanding is that the batteries in the winter months need to be heated, so what is the source of that? Does it come from the batteries themselves? What kind of percentage of the power that they generate will be used to heat the containers to keep the batteries warm during the winter months?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: To start with, a diesel — when it sits in Mayo, Whitehorse, Faro, or Dawson — doesn't know whether it is rented or purchased, so the cost to transport fuel for a rented diesel is the same as the cost to transport fuel for a purchased diesel.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Well, I say it because it seems that this specific question is about what the cost is to transport fuel for a rented diesel. I just don't think that it matters whether the diesel generator is rented or not.

Of course, there is a cost to operating those diesel gensets around the territory, but the rationale for having them distributed around the territory is to improve the reliability of our electrical grid. That is the cost to make sure that we have that reliable grid.

Anyway, I will pose the question to the utility about what the costs are of transporting the fuel from, say, Whitehorse to Mayo, Faro, or Dawson, but I again emphasize — the way that the utility has explained it to me is that it is important to have those units distributed in order to improve the reliability of the grid.

Then we moved on to questions about the grid-scale battery. What is the land lease cost? The cost is roughly \$1 million for a 25-year term.

Then the question was around the total cost for the project. It remains at \$35 million.

Then there was a question about timing. My understanding for the timing is that it is still later this year for the project. There will be, of course, testing and things like that. This is the first time, and this is a significant-sized battery. The utility will gain experience through this project. We don't anticipate it to be our last.

Do you have to heat the trailers or the containers that the batteries are in? The answer is yes. Where does that heat come from? It comes from the grid, but what I don't know is how much heat is required. I guess that I would have to start asking some pretty technical questions about how insulated they are. I think of them as sort of sea cans that the batteries sit inside, but however the units are there — I am sure that there is some form

of insulation, so I would have to check on what that is and how we work to keep those costs at a minimum.

Mr. Kent: As I referenced, I thought that it was a technical question and I welcome the opportunity for the minister to reach out through his officials to the Energy Corporation and provide that information for us.

Then, just jumping back to the diesels, I understand that the cost of diesel, whether it is going into a rental or a permanent diesel, is the same. You have to haul it from Whitehorse to one of the communities — be it Dawson City for the permanent or Faro for permanent and rentals or Mayo for the rentals that are there. I understand the rationale for that, but with it comes a cost. That is why we are asking those questions. There are always trade-offs. It is more expensive to have diesel in those communities, so that is what we are curious about.

I thank the minister for the answers on the grid-scale battery and the lease costs. Sorry — he said \$1 million for 25 years, so is that \$1 million total or is that an annual cost? I just didn't get that clarification.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The reason I hesitated about the price is because it's \$1.004 million that began in 2022 and it's for the total of the 25-year term, so it's just slightly above \$1 million for a 25-year term.

Mr. Kent: Deputy Chair, there was a significant amount of improvements done to that piece of land. I think that the Yukon Energy Corporation is only using a portion of that land and then there is another piece that is for rent. For the road and clearing and other things, were the costs covered by the landowner or did the Energy Corporation have to cover those costs?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Our sense is that the development work and improvements were done by the landowners, but we will confirm that those costs were borne by them and that this is part of what we're paying for in our 25-year lease.

Mr. Kent: I just wanted to jump back to a question that I asked in Question Period yesterday with respect to the costs to improve the grid to meet some of the commitments in the *Our Clean Future* document, particularly around the electrification of vehicles. If we were intent on getting — I think it was around just under 4,500 more electric vehicles on the road by 2030. The vice-president of ATCO, in a CBC article on December 29, 2023, said that those would come with significant costs. So, I'm just curious if the minister can tell us what kind of cost estimates either the Development Corporation or the Energy Corporation has done with respect to modernizing or upgrading the grid associated with not only the EVs but obviously the electrification of heating in a number of homes and buildings. I am just curious if that cost analysis has been done to meet those targets that are set out in *Our Clean Future*, and if so, what is that cost estimate?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: There are a few things that I just want to comment on. The first one is that, before we got to *Our Clean Future*, some stuff had started to happen, so I am going to give a shout-out to the City of Whitehorse. They brought in a building code around energy that went far beyond the national code. So, through a bylaw, they brought in that code change.

The new buildings that started to be built here in the City of Whitehorse started to go to much more energy-efficient homes. What that led to was to go away from heating appliances like an oil furnace because it was just much simpler to use baseboard heaters. A transition started to happen toward electric energy for heat. That definitely complements the work of *Our Clean Future*. It was well on its way.

When we look at the penetration of electric heat in jurisdictions, it's happening quicker here than it is in many jurisdictions across the country. It was those early steps that helped to start that move.

Other things that are happening which are outside of *Our Clean Future* and have added load to the grid are things like growth — the territory is growing — and mining activity. So, mines have been working to get on the grid and to move away from fossil fuels. All of that pressure has been coming, and then *Our Clean Future* sets these goals which complement that work.

Now, let me turn to the question of modernizing the grid. We have a work plan in place. I have talked about Yukon Energy updating their 10-year energy supply plan. They anticipate having that out by 2025. Alongside that comes some analysis to look at the grid-modernization study, which will evaluate and prioritize options for distributed energy resources, means to reduce the impact of heating and transportation adoption on peak demand, solutions that can defer or replace the need for transmission and distribution projects at a lower total resource cost — so it's how to modernize that grid. ATCO will be part of that work because they too want to modernize their distribution grid. They are looking alongside because it will help to inform their work.

This is a work plan for this year — 2024. We have terms of reference with the working group and they will issue a call for this work to be done. We anticipate it coming this year, in 2024.

Mr. Kent: Just a couple of quick questions before I cede the floor to my colleague from Whitehorse Centre — I wanted to clarify with the minister. The targets in *Our Clean Future* for electric vehicles and electric heat in homes were set without understanding what the cost implications would be to modernize the grid; is that correct? That work is going to be done after those targets were set in 2020? I just wanted to clarify that with the minister.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Before I forget, I just want to back up to the question about the site for the grid-scale battery. The costs of access and the sort of general development are borne by KDFN, so that is their price. The site-specific work for preparing for where the batteries are going to sit is a cost that was borne by Yukon Energy.

How much planning work was done ahead of setting these goals? I remember, even long before I was elected to this House, sitting down with Yukon Energy. At that time, the Yukon government asked me to come in to talk to them. We would start to make projections — we all understood that the energy system is going to transform away from fossil fuels and that we were going to move toward electrification. You have to forecast what the load is. It's not an easy thing to do, and what

we can say is that Yukoners have moved faster than we anticipated in those early planning stages — for example, with electric heat and even with electric vehicles.

Yukoners have been adopting faster — we had a range of projections and it has been much higher at the high end. That is terrific in the sense that it moves us closer to our goals, but it also puts pressure on the system. For that, we always have to go and refine the work to consider what those costs are going to look like. It isn't just to add a delta — no, you start to hit thresholds, and as you hit those thresholds, you need to do different things. As an example, we did not anticipate how quickly microgen and the solar projects would come on. We did not anticipate that there would be frequency questions that needed to be dealt with by the utilities. Those were things that we didn't anticipate. We also have seen that the uptake has been faster than we had estimated that it would be. All of those things require us to go in and add to the analysis that needs to be done in order to modernize the grid in a smart way.

I put forward that this was always work that was going to be needed, and it didn't stop us from saying that we had the goal to begin this transformation and to start to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, I will note for the House that there is a cost to not doing it. For example, last year across Canada was the highest fire season ever — not just by a little bit, but I think it was like five or seven times higher than anything that we had ever seen before. British Columbia and Alberta are starting off believing that they are in a high-risk season again. Those are costs related to not having moved early enough on this question.

I know that there is criticism from the members opposite that we should have done all of this analysis ahead of time, but I think that we should acknowledge that there is a risk to going slowly on these things as well. This is work that is timely and I don't think that it takes away from *Our Clean Future*.

Mr. Kent: I certainly understand that there is an overall cost when it comes to climate change, be it increased forest fire frequency or increased propensity to flood, but when it comes to the grid modernization, the vice-president of ATCO told the CBC that the only way for the utility to recoup the costs of grid modernization is through the ratepayer. That's a concern.

Of course, I would say that the vast majority of Yukon families are concerned about climate change and the effects of climate change. We are in the north. We are on the front lines. We probably see it more than our friends in southern Canada or elsewhere. We see the effects of it, but the bottom line for many Yukon families is that they have to sit at their kitchen table every month and they have to figure out how they are going to pay the bills — how much the power bill is, how much their rent or mortgage is, how much for those with children it is to be involved in sporting activities or arts and culture activities and how that factors in. People need an understanding of how much it's going to cost them as individual families as well.

I think that this is why I am concerned and why we are concerned on this side of the House that there doesn't seem to have been a cost analysis done on what it's going to cost Yukon families when it comes to increased power rates. When they're trying to balance their monthly budget — obviously, everybody

needs to eat, everybody needs to heat their homes, and most people have to drive to work or activities, so there are a number of increasing costs. We see it with the inflation numbers here.

The most recent report from the Bureau of Statistics that I read shows that the cost of a bundle of groceries that they measure in Whitehorse versus Alberta is 23 percent higher in Whitehorse. That's an astounding number, and I think that it is 21 percent higher than it is in British Columbia. There are additional costs to living up here and we understand that, but we're trying to get a sense of how much the modernization and upgrades to the grid required to meet the targets that are set out in *Our Clean Future* are going to cost.

I understand that the minister doesn't have those numbers now. I just would have thought that perhaps that study would have gone concurrently with setting those targets and then setting the revised target from a 30-percent reduction in emissions to a 45-percent reduction that we did when we debated the *Clean Energy Act* here in the Legislature a couple of years ago.

That said, the final question that I want to ask is with respect to what is outstanding for Yukon Energy Corporation to go to ratepayers with. The minister mentioned earlier that we have \$49 million in cost to replace the permanent diesels in Faro, Dawson City, and Whitehorse. I know that it's not the full cost for the grid-scale battery, but a portion of that will be going to rate. I recall witnesses from the Yukon Energy Corporation and Development Corporation talking about the Southern Lakes enhancement and expenditures with respect to that project having to go to rate.

So, I'm just looking for what is outstanding now that it isn't included in the current GRA. Then, I guess the final question, before I turn it over to my colleague from Whitehorse Centre, is: Can the minister tell us if Yukon Energy is expecting to file another GRA in 2025 to pick up some of these outstanding costs?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: You know, the goal of Yukon Energy is to — it is three things. It is, of course, to have power for our lights, but it is to make sure that power is reliable, affordable, and sustainable. What we have found is that it is important not to ignore any of those pillars. They are like a tripod, and you need to consider them all. The point that I say back to the members opposite is that the sustainable part of this is not diesel. We do need diesel for backup; I completely agree — or some thermal fuel for backup, whether that is LNG, diesel, or propane. We do need it as a backup, but what we don't want to do is to work, as the Yukon grows, to supply the new winter capacity with fossil fuels. We may have to in the short term because we have to make sure that the system is reliable, but I don't believe that will make it affordable.

You know, usually, projects like wind/battery backup are going to have a high capital cost, but they pay for themselves over time because the energy is free. That wind — no one had to pay for the wind to blow, whereas we are definitely going to have to pay for the diesel. I think it is a fair point that we want to always make sure that we're trying to look at the question of affordability. For example, our current rates this past year for an average residential electrical rate for, say, 1,000 kilowatt

hours per month is \$217 here in Whitehorse, but it's also \$217 in Old Crow because we levelize it, which is not the same as what other places do. That's pretty amazing. It's one of the things that I love about this place, honestly.

If I look — because the member was talking about other prices down in Alberta — if I look at Edmonton, it's \$278 a month for that same residential electricity. If I look at Vancouver, we're more — or Toronto, we're more. We're more than Toronto or Montréal, but we're cheaper than — Calgary is \$298 a month, you know, and this is in a territory, not a province. This is in a place that is the size of California that has 45,000 people, and these folks have to get energy all over the place — or electricity distributed all over the place. It's quite a feat.

So, you know, I've had my concerns with certain issues around the rate of return for ATCO in recent years, but you have to say that it's pretty impressive — especially when I look at our prices compared to Yellowknife or Inuvik or Iqaluit. Those places are up over \$700 a month — not for Yellowknife; that's \$340 a month.

It is pretty amazing that the prices are what they are here, and I know that doesn't help for the average Yukoner as they are looking to pay for their monthly electricity bill. I get it, but I also know that it takes a lot to get that electricity to our homes.

We did bring in an inflation relief rebate. Six months — I'm trying to remember how many months it was — more than that. Anyway, it was quite a few months where we tried to do this to try to bring the cost down for Yukoners. One of the ways that we're trying to look at is around where the government can invest in projects so that the cost which goes to the ratepayer drops.

The member asked specifically about what sorts of things we have that are outstanding. He noted the diesel replacements for \$49 million. Yes, because that hasn't happened yet, so, yes, that is something that will come to rate. He mentioned the Southern Lakes enhancement. That is done. Well, it's not done — that project is not going to proceed, so the costs that were incurred do go to rate. That's in the current rate application, and the Utilities Board will make a determination about that.

He asked what other projects we have. Yes, the grid-scale battery is coming this year, so it will be, but of the \$35 million that is going toward a grid-scale battery, \$16.5 million is coming from the Yukon government to offset those infrastructure costs. So, the actual cost — I don't know what that percentage is; let's call it 60 percent of the cost is what will go to rate and 40 percent of the cost has been paid for through taxpayer dollars one way or another.

There will always be investments in this grid. It is a system. It does take investment over time to have it work. Then, on top of that, we have seen tremendous pressure and growth, so you do have to invest in that system.

One of the reasons that you invest, for example, in the modernization side is because you get to things like distributed energy resources. When I talk to these experts, they are telling me — and I think trying to tell all of us as Yukoners — that those distributed energy resources are going to be really critical to how a system works in the future because they are the sort of

thing where, as we get these e-vehicles and start to link them all up across the system, you suddenly have battery backup on your system. That's a way you can get there, but you must modernize the system to be able to do that.

Our sense of it is that we have to be working very closely with not just Yukon Energy but ATCO Electric, and we need to work very closely with Energy, Mines and Resources. Anyway, that's why we have these groups. I will see if there are further questions, but I take the member opposite's point that we do at all times work to try to keep the costs as affordable as possible while also not letting our system slide as we go through these transformations.

MLA Tredger: I will start by thanking the officials for being here today as well as anyone listening in. I actually want to pick up where my colleague left off.

The minister has just highlighted some of the challenges with our current model of utilities and funding — the major infrastructure updates that we need that are coming and how a model that worked well when there was one source of electricity maybe made sense, and now that we're moving toward renewables, it has more challenges. I understand that there is a *Public Utilities Act* review going on. In that review, is there consideration of an alternative model for utilities — an alternative to the cost-of-service model?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, the Yukon Development Corporation will not be leading the work on the review of the *Public Utilities Act*. The reason is that we are the people who are governed by the *Public Utilities Act* and you try to keep the separation so that we don't make choices that work too much in our favour. Really, the way that the *Public Utilities Act* is created is around the notion of ratepayers.

The idea is to try to protect ratepayers when you have a monopoly from utility. In this case, the monopoly is largely but not exclusively that Yukon Energy is supplying the energy or generating the energy and ATCO — a private company — is distributing that energy.

There is work through the *Public Utilities Act* — or consideration about how to make that system more efficient, how to modernize the process and keep regulators — modernize it for regulators, but I don't think that there is a sense that we should not have a regulator. I think that we have thought about things like — I will just give two examples — one is that, when we consider how our system runs, we have often relied on support from Outside jurisdictions. You could have a choice there — you could have a jurisdiction that has more of a fossil fuel-based electricity system which is transitioning to renewables, or you can get support from a jurisdiction that has a renewable-based system and is looking to grow. That is more our sense of where that alignment should lie, because that is — again, I say that we are lucky that, as Yukoners, that we have largely a renewable based — 90 percent-plus-based electricity system that is based on renewables.

The other thing that I think that we think about in where we are going in the future is with First Nations and First Nation investment. As that happens, we anticipate those types of investments, and that is why we had things like the independent power producer policy which allows for those opportunities so

that, when we look at the *Public Utilities Act*, we need to make sure that it can accommodate that type of future that is out there. We haven't seen it as much, but I think that is part of the strain, and when we say "modernize the system," I think that is what is contemplated in there.

The last thing I want to say is that I stand in here today and answer questions, but I note that there is a Yukon Development Corporation which has a board. That board takes decisions for that corporation, and Yukon Energy is also managed by a board, and that board has responsibility to direct those decisions by the utility, and then it goes to a utility board that will consider rate applications.

So, I think all of that is still contemplated, so it's not that sort of — I haven't heard of conversations that would depart from that, but I think that there is a sense that it needs to modernize and become more efficient.

MLA Tredger: I thank the minister for that. I want to be clear: I'm not suggesting not having a regulator. I think that's pretty important for protecting ratepayers, but there are a lot of alternative models to the current model — like revenue decoupling, like total expenditure models — that allow utilities to invest more in things that don't necessarily make sense in the short term but allow a better cooperation between government and utility to come up with solutions that make sense in the long term and also work for the ratepayers. I hope that is being explored. I know that is supposed to be done in 2025, so I imagine it's getting pretty close to the drafting stage if it's not already there, but I hope that is being considered as the decisions are being made.

I was looking into the projected energy needs for the Yukon. On the Yukon Energy website, there is a page called "Electricity Planning", and it talks about winter demand for electricity increasing 23 percent in the last five years and expected to grow by an additional 36 percent by 2030. I'm wondering if the minister can point me to — I imagine that there is lots of work going on to project the electricity needs for the future. Is there a document that either Yukon Energy or Yukon Development Corporation has produced — or someone else that they know of — that has more detailed information about energy projections for the future?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yukon Energy and the government both have the sort of very complex models that they use for energy projections and load forecasting.

You put in how much population growth you think you are going to have. You have to put in all sorts of — a tremendous amount of detail. There are these very complex things. I don't know what specific tools there are. Usually, what happens is that those very complex things get distilled down into kind of a rough idea of what the forecast looks like, and then they put those out, sometimes as a graph over time: This is what is going to happen. But it really matters as well not just what your electricity demand is going to be, let's say, in 2028; it matters what that electricity demand is going to be on your coldest day in 2028, so these are sort of complicated things.

I am not saying that to try to move away from that notion that we still need to inform and engage with the public. I don't know what information they have right now. What I do know

is that — sorry; I should also note, just when I talk about that complexity, even on a community-by-community basis, you have to forecast load differences because you have to understand what your capacity is should some piece of your infrastructure drop — like a transmission line that connects us together.

The thing that I can say is that when Yukon Energy came out with its electricity supply plan several years ago, they put within it these sorts of graphs that show that this is what they were projecting. So, as they are working to redo that electricity supply plan, it is really driven by changes around whether Atlin is going to go or not, whether Moon Lake is going to go or not — and that update is coming next year. There is an expectation that they would again put out those sort of load forecasts so that Yukoners can see it.

I can ask them if they have something on hand that they put out there on a more regular basis.

I have always found, with Yukon Energy Corporation, that when they design their public-facing information to provide that information, it is a strength. I don't have anything at hand right now, but I know that one is coming as they redo the energy supply plan.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister for that. Having that available just makes it easier for us to ask questions, so I will look for the electricity supply plan, which I actually wanted to ask about as well, so that segues really nicely.

On the Yukon Energy Corporation website, it says that this is going to be released in the spring of 2024. Does the minister know if that is on track and what "spring" might mean?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: If on their website it says 2024, they really are saying to me — and I believe that there is still work that is still ongoing — it is 2025. I am not sure if the misunderstanding is mine, but I certainly will ask them. If we are talking about the updated electricity supply plan, their target for that was next year. That doesn't mean that they won't have lots of work done in the interim — and hopefully that load forecasting model will be available sooner than that — but the timeline for the completion of the electricity supply plan, as I understand it, is 2025.

MLA Tredger: I am reading from the page called "Electricity Planning" on Yukon Energy Corporation. Just to be clear, they talk about an electricity supply plan and an integrated resource plan, which I understand to be different things — the electricity supply plan being a short-term document that was supposed to come and be about what we can be doing in the next few years and then the integrated resource plan being more about what's going to happen over the next decade and further. It does say that the electricity supply plan is scheduled for release in the spring of 2024. The integrated resource plan is much later because it's a much bigger document, and it says it's scheduled for release by the end of 2025.

Just with that information, could the minister give me updates for the timelines on both of these documents?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: My mistake — I am told that the release for the electricity supply plan is 2024 and that the

integrated resource plan is 2025. I think that I must have switched them in my brain or got something cross-wired, because I have been saying it wrong now since several weeks ago at the very least. So, I will go back into Hansard and see where I made the same mistake last time I was up in March, but it is 2024 for the electricity supply plan.

MLA Tredger: No problem — I'm glad we know that we are talking about the same document.

So, when in 2024 is the electricity supply plan scheduled to be released?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: You will recall, Madam Acting Chair, when I was talking about the governance side of these things, that there is a Yukon Energy board. So, I think that the board is getting a draft of this sometime this spring — in the next months. I don't want to — maybe it's good; maybe they think that it is fine and then it moves ahead. Or maybe they want some more diligence done on some things. I don't want to speak for the board, but my understanding is that they are getting a draft in the coming months.

MLA Tredger: Thank you for that. I look forward to it coming out.

I want to loop back to a bit of the earlier conversation that my colleague was having with the minister about grid modernization and the working group that is working on that. When we spoke during the supplementary debate, the minister said that he would try to get some milestones that he can share with Yukoners about the modernization piece and where that modernization piece is happening and how we can anticipate it to proceed, and he said that he would ask the working group for a timeline about the distribution side. He mentioned that they are currently working on a variable penetration for the grid and that this work is supposed to be completed by the fall. He did mention that they have terms of reference and a work plan. I am wondering if he could just give me sort of a sense of what they are working on, in what order, and what the timelines for those projects are.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: In terms of the variable penetration study, that work is underway now. The work is going on as we speak, and we are anticipating results this fall.

In terms of the grid-modernization study, it's in the scoping phase right now, so the partners are just doing the scoping of that study as we speak.

MLA Tredger: Does the group have capacity to work on both of those things at once, or do they have to wait until the variable study is done in the fall before starting work on the modernization study?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The two studies will inform each other, but we're not intending to try to do them sequentially; we will be doing them concurrently. I should note that while we do have very strong folks within the Development Corporation and the Energy Corporation, we will still bring in expertise around grids and grid modernization.

I mentioned earlier distributed energy resources. I remember that the specialist, I think, was out of Québec City maybe. I can't remember now, but it was somewhere out east. We did like a Zoom call for the board and for senior

management, and I was invited to be there. I sat in the front row. I asked a lot of questions.

So, they will be concurrent. They will, of course, exchange information to make sure that, as we get results or even preliminary results around the variable penetration study, it will help inform the modernization study, but they will be going on at the same time.

MLA Tredger: So, when is the grid-modernization study expected to start?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Once that scoping is agreed upon by all of the partners in that group — again, those partners include: the Yukon Development Corporation, which is here today; the Yukon Energy Corporation and their board; Energy, Mines and Resources and the Energy branch; and ATCO energy and their private sector company. All of them need to agree to that, so that scoping is happening now.

I know that I don't have a precise answer for the member opposite, but what I can say is that everyone in that group whom I have talked to is keen to get this work done, so they are working at this moment to scope it. I anticipate that we will be moving ahead as soon as possible.

MLA Tredger: I will take the opportunity to thank the folks in that working group, because they are doing really critical work. I am really glad we have them working on it.

The other project that I was told that this working group was working on is designing the new independent power producer policy. Where does that fit into the timelines?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: This also will happen concurrently, although there is a piece of this that is pretty dependant on the variable penetration study. So, there are a couple of pieces where we can move ahead — there is a conversation happening right now with the Yukon Development Corporation board. The responsibility for the independent power producer program was previously with Energy, Mines and Resources, and it was moved over to the Yukon Development Corporation, so we need to work with the board there. But I think they're all keen — in my conversations with them, anyway.

We need to see that variable penetration study or the information that comes out of that, but we can get going on other aspects of the independent power producer policy — for example, winter generation. It's pretty important. The original policy didn't really give much focus to that; it was just any time of year, but I'm asking them to think about winter generation because that's really where our capacity gap is. In the summertime, we have typically an excess of hydro, and in the winter, we have a dearth of renewables, so I have asked them to think about: If you were designing a policy, could you consider that? That work can begin now. Then, when the variable penetration study is completed, I think that it will inform the independent power producer policy conversation as well. Then that will combine for them to give some recommendations back about how we should craft this on a go-forward basis.

MLA Tredger: So, it will come sometime after the fall then, the new independent power producer policy. Does the minister have a timeline for when after the fall it will come?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I don't. I appreciate how important these things are, and I would love to be able to give a precise timeline, but I also feel that is not fair to the board or to the work that they have in front of them. My rough sense of it is that they can begin the work now. We can do lots of good work in the meantime, but I do think that they will want to see the results of the other study as well. It is difficult for me to say what the timeline is yet because it's still a little too far away to be able to project that.

MLA Tredger: How often does the working group meet?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The president just reminded me that all of this work ultimately has to go in front of the Utilities Board, so they require us to do this level of diligence. I don't think that they will accept things unless we can demonstrate, through that diligence, the performance of these types of programs. So, there is a requirement for us to do this sort of thing.

How often does the group meet? They have been meeting monthly. I think that their terms of reference require them to meet quarterly, but they have been meeting much more than that. Then, in between those monthly meetings, there are all of these separate sort of more direct meetings with the technical folks, which is more like on a weekly basis. So, there is a fair amount of activity happening around the issues.

MLA Tredger: Within the Yukon Development Corporation, I'm wondering what percentage of FTEs is allocated to these three projects: the grid modernization, the variable penetration study, and the redesign of the IPP. Like, in terms of FTEs, how much time is allocated to those three projects?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I wonder if it will surprise folks to hear that today joining us in this House, we have 40 percent of the Yukon Development Corporation. I say that because the president is actually a 0.25 position and the vice-president is a full-time position and there are two other employees. One of them deals with admin. It's not possible for them to do all of that work, so that's why we bring in contractors and partners to assist with that work. There are other things we have sort of talked about today — First Nation investments; working with the Yukon Energy Corporation because they are a subsidiary of the Yukon Development Corporation; working with the Government of Canada on funding issues; dealing with the financial issues that we always want to align with the Yukon government, et cetera.

I think the member asked how much is focused on this work, and I would say that a significant amount of time is put toward this, but that is why we tend to be contracting in some of those services — because at some point, we need those studies to be done: (1) by specialists but (2) to increase the capacity to allow that work to take place.

It just gives you a sense — I know that the world believes that government is big here in the Yukon — and it is — but here is an example where it's actually a very lean team doing a lot of rather important things.

MLA Tredger: I will try to find the right page in my budget, but I will just ask my question. I think that makes a lot

of sense to contract out people because I don't think that even a significant portion of 3.25 FTEs is enough to get this project done — or these three major projects done. I was looking in YDC's budget for money for contracting out those projects, those studies.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The budget that we have in front of us for the appropriations for the main budget doesn't always have all of the elements of the contracts and things like that which are ongoing because the board itself, as an entity, will have the ability to use — for example, as money flows back and forth from the Yukon Energy Corporation, sometimes the money comes from there. The dollars that are going to the variable penetration study I think is in the range of \$175,000 for that work. The contract that is going for the grid modernization — it hasn't been let yet; it's in the scoping stages, so we don't have a dollar figure yet. So, the \$175,000 doesn't appear in the lines of the budget, but that is the amount.

MLA Tredger: Thank you for that. Where does it appear? I am trying to understand where that money is coming from.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: These dollars appear in the annual report which we table here every year from Yukon Development Corporation, and that report is audited yearly by the Auditor General.

MLA Tredger: I thank the minister for that. I'm just trying to figure out if that is captured within the O&M for the department, then. I'm looking for the source of that money. Is it appropriated in this budget but in a subline item that isn't broken out? What is the source of that money?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: You know how ATCO has a return on equity and there is an amount of dollars there that goes to them? There is also a return on equity for the Yukon Energy Corporation and those dollars flow to Yukon Development Corporation which in turn reinvests most of that money back into the Energy Corporation itself to give them operating capital. Sometimes that money goes back as a loan, which also has interest, so there can also be a flow back that way, and then there is the operating capital for some of the activities of the Yukon Development Corporation. So, it is all part of that cycle of the utility. Think of it as the parent company to the Energy Corporation, and all of that cash flow is part of the annual statement that is put out in their annual report and it is audited by the Auditor General. That's the system.

But if you are asking where the revenue source is, then it would be in that back-and-forth of dollars that go between Yukon Energy and the Yukon Development Corporation.

MLA Tredger: If I understand correctly, it is money coming from the ratepayers that is going to fund this study via Yukon Energy. Why was the decision made to fund this with money from ratepayers rather than the government investing in this project?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will try to answer the questions as best as I can. I think if we get into more of the complexities about how the Development Corporation is established and how it deals with its finances, these would be great questions when we have our witnesses in here to try to answer because they are much better suited to answer them than me.

The way that this is set up is a requirement by the Yukon Utilities Board to maintain a debt-to-equity ratio and how a parent company will deal with a subsidiary company — in this case, YDC and YEC — and how monies are borrowed and repaid over time. What is explained to me is that it is close to 100 percent of the money that comes out from that return on equity and goes right back into the working operations of the utility — Yukon Energy. So, that is the Yukon Development Corporation just putting that money right back in, but there are some dollars that are required to be under the side of this — of how the corporation is established. This is a cost that then comes from there — that \$175,000.

I will check back with my colleagues to see if I have all that they have tried to relay to me about how these finances work. Again, all of this is very public information that is put out through the annual report. I know that the part that the member opposite is focusing on is that those dollars have come from ratepayers, but it is also as dictated under the Yukon Utilities Board.

MLA Tredger: Speaking of the Yukon Utilities Board, I wanted to go back to something the minister said earlier when we were talking about the working group and its three projects. I can't remember what he was referring to, but he said that all the work was going to have to go before the Utilities Board. What did he mean by that? Does he mean that the independent power producer program needs to be approved by the Utilities Board, or was he talking about future requests that the utility might be making of the Utilities Board? I am hoping that he can explain that a bit.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: You learn new stuff every day, Madam Acting Chair.

Under the independent power producer policy — if it is coming under the main part of the policy, under the standing offer, then there is a set rate that is going to be paid for the electricity, so that doesn't end up needing to go before the Utilities Board. The connection costs are the responsibility of the proponent.

On the other hand, if it is an unsolicited proposal, then you will end up negotiating a power purchase agreement, and there still may be discretion around whether it gets in front of the Utilities Board. But no matter what, there is always diligence that is required, so that diligence is what you need around the policy and including in the policy development. So, that is the part of it where, you know, you can later on, when you get some of those unsolicited proposals — which I think we are anticipating more of either through the call for power or for the unsolicited proposals — they will end up with energy purchase agreements. Those will possibly — not certainly but possibly — end up in front of the Utilities Board. The Utilities Board will always require that the utility has done its homework around those choices. So, that's where you want to make sure that the policy is done right.

MLA Tredger: Thank you. That's helpful.

I have a quick question about the standing-offer program. Last time we were discussing it, the minister and I were accidentally saying “megawatts” when we meant “gigawatts”. I just want to make sure that I have the right numbers. The total

capacity of the standing-offer program is 40 gigawatts. How much hasn't been allocated yet?

I think what was said before was that it was two megawatts, but I am wondering if that is actually two gigawatts.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: You geek out in this place with different things. I apologize if I got it wrong last time. When we are talking energy, we will typically talk in gigawatt hours. When we think of it in our households, it's kilowatt hours. When we think in capacity, then we will talk in megawatts. The independent power production policy was to get to 40 gigawatt hours. Currently, the projects that we have in the queue are at 78 percent of that total.

MLA Tredger: I was trying to do some really fast math in my head, but I think I might just ask: What is left? Is that 40-gigawatt-hour limit — it's just for the standing-offer program, right, and not for the entire IPP?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: That is correct. In round numbers, if we look at how much has already been connected — where the energy purchase agreements have already been put in place — we are at roughly half. When we look at studies in progress, we're at about another 11 of the 40. What that leaves us with is about nine — sorry, of the 40 gigawatt hours. So, when the one project stepped away, that is the room that we have there. We have other projects in consideration at the moment, but we have 31 gigawatt hours built or in progress — in analysis, let's say.

MLA Tredger: At the briefing, I think it was said that we were up to 38 with all of the projects in queue. Has that changed? Has a different project backed away, or is that an updated number?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We knew that there was a project that had dropped out — the North Fork hydro project. I don't believe that is nine gigawatt hours, so we are just off trying to find out where that difference lies. Without restating numbers because I am asking the team to go back and check those numbers for me, the total is 40 gigawatt hours. We have had some projects — or these projects do come in and out over time, so there is room at the moment, and I am just seeking to clarify for sure how much room is there right now under the standing-offer agreement.

MLA Tredger: I thank the minister for that. Maybe a legislative return would be a good place to put those numbers, and then we will all have them in the same place and we can talk about them next time too, so thank you for that.

My last question about the IPP — or the independent power producer policy or program, maybe — is: When we were last in the House, I talked about the goal that program had of 10 percent of new generation coming from renewable energy or from the IPP; so, the goal that's listed is 10 percent of new electrical demand to be met by the IPP — and the minister was going to look into whether that goal had been met, and I am wondering if he can update us.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The amount that we have on right now for IPP or the number that I saw was around one percent of the total, so it's not there. But, of course, remember that we were sort of halfway there with the number of standing-offer-agreement projects that had come on, so we anticipate more of those. That will get us a little bit further.

We were working to get Atlin. Atlin would have been a big project and would have helped to shift that needle a lot. We don't have Atlin right now, so what the utility is doing is shifting its perspective. I'm not trying to steal their thunder; I am trying to reinforce the language that I heard from them, but what they are going to seek under this type of program — because remember, it's not just the standing-offer agreement; there can be calls for power, calls for partners, and there can be unsolicited proposals. I think that they are going to use those tools, and they're going to seek winter energy. Where will we get winter energy? The main place I anticipate it will come from or I believe they anticipate is wind/battery backup. I know that it's not the only one out there, but it's the one that we can most confidently see on the horizon.

We do not yet have our stated goal of 10 percent IPP, but I can say that the utility and the Development Corporation have been working pretty actively to help foster First Nations and other groups — but in particular First Nations and their development corporations — to come on board with energy projects.

MLA Tredger: I just have one topic left, which is the BC grid connect. The minister had said when we were discussing this before that the Yukon Development Corporation does have a piece of that even though most the money for the work is budgeted in EMR right now. Could the minister tell me what the pieces are that YDC is doing? I will just ask about those.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, it's sort of the technical side of the question, because the Development Corporation will work with Yukon Energy. You need to have a sense of how you're going to connect, right? There is a very technical piece to that.

It would also be the relationship on the other side of that grid connection with their relationship with BC Hydro. So, that is the first piece — is on the technical side of it. The second piece is that we anticipate that a grid connect like this is a significant opportunity for First Nation investment, and I have already spoken today about how the Development Corporation is working on developing a framework for the First Nation investment into energy projects. I think that will be very useful, so it is not the only work that is happening on that front, but that is an important piece. It complements the other work that is happening.

Then the third one is that we are always in dialogue with Canada. The federal government has been very good for the Yukon in terms of their investment, in particular around energy. So, you always have a lot of files moving back and forth, so you want to try to coordinate them so that, when you put in asks to the federal government — for example, in this instance, we have applied under the critical minerals infrastructure fund to get significant planning dollars — like many tens of millions of dollars — to do the planning work around a grid connect that we hope are successful. That application has gone in through Energy, Mines and Resources, but you really always want to try to coordinate all of that dialogue going back and forth with your federal partners.

MLA Tredger: My first follow-up is about the technical side of things that will need to be done. I'm wondering about where the funding for that work is coming from. Like, does a study need to be done, and is that part of what is happening in the next year? Is Yukon Energy paying for that out of their return on equity, or is that money coming from somewhere else?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We anticipate the dollars for that to come from that funding application that we put through to the federal government — the critical minerals infrastructure fund application. You know, just for round numbers today, let's say if it is the range of \$50 million — I think that our request is even for a little bit more — but part of that would go to the technical side of that, you know, because as soon as you — we're not just connecting to BC. Once you connect to BC, you're connecting to Canada, so you have to have those sort of national electricity standards which are probably set federally and be part of the family of the Canadian Electricity Association — I hope that I got that right.

The funding is contemplated coming out of that funding request that we have put in to the federal government, so we are not looking to put that to the ratepayer.

MLA Tredger: Yes, I imagine that the technical pieces of connecting would not be an insignificant challenge, so I am glad that work is happening. I assume that means that this work won't start until we find out if we are getting that money from Canada.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The work will not start in earnest until we identify where the funding source is for that work.

Let's say this in a few ways. The first way is that we had a study done previously — the Midguard study — so there has been some work that was out there — I am guessing that it was six or seven years ago. We are not starting from scratch, so there has been some technical work done. I know that our utility has had conversations with BC Hydro. So, there are high-level conversations — enough to understand that we are likely talking about a high-voltage direct current line.

So, there are a few pieces where the dialogue begins — but not work in earnest, not work that you would call the meat-and-potatoes work that we are looking to do. We believe that grid connect is pretty critical. If we are unable to find, through this funding application, the dollars that will go toward the grid connect — well, we will then move to the next opportunity because it is not like: Okay, we didn't get it and we're not going to go. I think our sense is that this is the natural evolution in the development of Canada.

We have had connectivity in the past — for example, telecommunications with satellite connections in the past and now fibre optics. We are about to complete a loop to harden that telecommunications network.

The Alaska Highway — these are incredibly important pieces. In fact, as we look back at those, we want to learn from them about the mistakes we made in those instances and how to do that work better this time. That just leads me right back to that conversation around First Nations and their partnership in trying to do this work. We think that it is essential.

It is our belief that, as Canada develops, this is how it will develop as a nation — connecting our territories to the provinces over time. We think that the Yukon is very poised for that for a whole range of reasons. We just heard the federal government talking about Arctic security; that is one of the reasons. Critical minerals are another potential reason — but just in general, the need for us, as we grow, to have that opportunity to weather the ups and downs of growth without affecting our rate base adversely.

If we don't get the funding application that we put in for, we will turn to look for the next opportunity because we think that grid connect is critical over time.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister for that, and he actually touched on what my last question is about. He talked about how First Nation investment is going to be important, and I think that consent is going to be particularly important because that would cross a number of territories. In terms of learning from the mistakes of the past, I think that we have seen with large-scale energy projects that, when you start them and then find out later if the First Nations are interested in participating, it hasn't gone super well.

I am wondering which First Nations have been involved in conversations about the grid connect so far.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Our sense is that we should talk to all First Nations. Of course, a transmission line may cross someone's traditional territory and we must talk to those nations, but I think that our interest is in talking to all. Our sense is that this is an opportunity for a broader investment by First Nations across the Yukon.

I want to be careful. On the BC side — I don't speak for the BC government, but my experience with them has been that they have been very inclusive as well in their conversations with nations around their projects. I know that we have many transboundary nations that cross into BC, including Liard, Teslin, Carcross/Tagish, and Champagne and Aishihik, and then there will be other nations where the transmission line crosses their traditional territory.

Here in the Yukon, our scope is to talk to all First Nations for a project of this scale.

MLA Tredger: Which First Nations so far have been engaged on this project? I am interested in both sides of the border — in Yukon, transboundary, and in BC.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Most of our conversations so far have been at a very high level. For example, we had this as a topic at the Yukon Forum. I would have to look back to see which nations were there, but all nations would see the agenda that we're preparing and the speaking notes that are there.

The Council of Yukon First Nations hosted a couple of workshops late last fall. I think that the starting one was more technical, but then the second one was for leadership. It was like a two-day workshop or conference. We definitely talked about grid connect there. Again, my sense is that most nations were there. I would have to go back and check my notes to see which ones were there, but they were all invited.

I have been pretty clear — and so has the Premier — that we believe that this is an opportunity. Frankly, we don't think it will happen without First Nation involvement.

We had a day of meetings — I think Yukon Energy may have organized it — where we brought in some utilities from Ontario that had been doing partnership models with First Nations to have conversations about how they had structured those things so that they could de-risk them for nations in the investment cycle. It has been a fairly high-level conversation. We are not yet into the real planning work or what I described earlier as the “meat-and-potatoes work”, but what we have been saying and signalling to nations all along is that we think that this is a project where there is a real opportunity under the final agreements for their participation. We believe that it is an economic investment opportunity for them.

We will see, as part of that planning work, if there are nations that are more keen or not, but our initial conversations have been with all.

MLA Tredger: I agree that this project will not happen without First Nations, and so I feel pretty concerned that we are already at the point of getting money for technical studies when there doesn't sound like there has been any of those direct conversations with individual First Nations. It sounds like it has just been a very high-level thing. I didn't hear anything in there about BC First Nations which are also going to have to be involved for this to work.

I will highlight that concern, but I am done with my questions on this department for the day. I will thank the officials again as well as all the other folks at YDC who aren't here but I know are doing a lot of work on this important stuff.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I too would like to thank the officials. I will say that I have talked to British Columbia and I will work with them around — I don't think that it would be appropriate for me to go and speak to nations without talking to the BC government, and that is exactly what we want to do with these dollars. Yes, there is a technical side to it, but it is all about doing the planning in partnership. That is the point about getting the funding dollars — to have it to provide for capacity dollars for nations around that development or that planning work.

Actually, First Nations have come to talk to me about their interest in the project. What I have heard is that there is an interest out there, and that is on both sides of the 60th. So, it is great that there is that interest. Again, we will reinforce what the member has said — that we need that partnership in order for this project to proceed.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide information about the Development Corporation.

Acting Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation?

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

MLA Tredger: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, cleared or carried

Acting Chair: The Member for Whitehorse Centre has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous

consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Acting Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$6,125,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$16,023,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$22,148,000 agreed to

Yukon Development Corporation agreed to

Acting Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 213, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 213, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Department of Education

Deputy Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Colleagues, I am pleased to rise today to present the Department of Education's main budget for the 2024-25 fiscal year. Department officials with me today are Mary Cameron, deputy minister, and Andrea McIntyre, director of Finance. Thank you so much for being here.

As Minister of Education, my mandate is to work to create successful learning outcomes for all Yukon learners. I take this responsibility to heart and truly believe in the critical role that education plays in individual, societal, and economic development.

The main budget for 2024-25 includes operation and maintenance along with capital. It is set at \$282,125,000. This represents \$252,745,000 for operation and maintenance and \$29,380,000 for capital expenditures.

This year's operation and maintenance budget has an increase of \$8,689,000, or 3.6 percent, from the 2023-24 budget and supports 1,254 full-time positions within the Department of Education. This is an increase of 66 full-time positions from 2023-24. This budget provides for a well-funded education system that can support learners throughout their education journey from early learning centres through to adult education. As you will see in the budget, approximately 50 percent of our

operation and maintenance budget, or \$127,774,000, is dedicated to our kindergarten to grade 12 school authorities.

As Minister of Education, another key aspect of my mandate is to advance efforts to improve the education system in the Yukon in collaboration with Yukon First Nations and education partners. We are doing this work. We are leading change in the evolving landscape of education in the Yukon with a focus on ensuring that our system is robust, inclusive, and forward-looking.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone involved in this work — Yukon First Nations, our education partners, dedicated educators and school staff, early learning educators, program operators, students and families, and our central administration team. Your collective commitment is reshaping education in the Yukon for the better. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight a few of our key priorities and how the 2024-25 budget will support this important work.

The first priority area that I would like to highlight is our commitment to collaboration with Yukon First Nations. Supporting the First Nation School Board is one way that we are providing opportunities for Yukon First Nations to reclaim greater responsibility for the administration and management of education programs for students in their communities.

The Government of Yukon, Chiefs Committee on Education, and the First Nation School Board share the common goal of providing high-quality and culturally appropriate education based on an Indigenous world view for all Yukon students. The First Nation School Board governs 11 schools across the Yukon. In the 2024-25 budget, \$26,356,000 is allocated to support the day-to-day operations of the First Nation School Board. This funding ensures that the board can deliver quality, safe, and inclusive education programs to students in kindergarten to grade 12. The budget also reflects other internal budget transfers, such as personnel for human resources and from education support services to the First Nation School Board. This personnel transfer supports the board in establishing a sustainable structure.

The First Nation School Board is an example of effective collaboration between Yukon First Nations and the Government of Yukon to advance reconciliation. We are also working directly with all Yukon First Nation governments to ensure that schools across the territory meet the needs of Yukon First Nation students and offer all students opportunities to learn about Yukon First Nation ways of knowing, doing, and being.

Yukon First Nation governments are essential partners in our work to improve educational programs, services, and outcomes for all Yukon students. We will continue to work with individual Yukon First Nation governments on community-level education funding agreements to improve educational outcomes for their citizens and learners on their traditional territories at local schools.

In the 2024-25 budget, \$1,510,000 is allocated toward First Nation education agreements. This community-level collaboration reflects our government-to-government relationships and commitment to reconciliation. The department currently has education funding agreements with 12

Yukon First Nations, including Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun', Kluane First Nation, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation, Ross River Dena Council, Selkirk First Nation, Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, Teslin Tlingit Council, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, and White River First Nation.

The department continues to work closely with both the Liard First Nation and the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation governments to develop their transfer payment agreements and flow funds to them to support implementation of their education priorities and outcomes for their citizens.

Collaborating with First Nations produces many benefits for Yukon students. Our shared efforts have brought to life program units, camps, and resources for Yukon schools, including the First Nation credit policy to support credits for on-the-land and locally developed education programs including doòli — traditional knowledge resources with the Northern Tutchone nations — for the schools of Pelly Crossing, Mayo, and Carmacks and teacher training.

External credits with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Fish, First Hunt, and Moose Hunt is part of their 17.7 education agreement. Spring culture and trapping camps for the Chief Zzeh Gittlit School for the Vuntut Gwitchin Government and the Kluane school with the Kluane First Nation, among others. We have established curriculum with the Carcross/Tagish First Nation on First Hunt, First Fish, and trapping.

The funding in our 2024-25 budget will allow us to continue to advance this critical work. In addition to these agreements, we have dedicated funding to support language, culture, and heritage. Enhancing language and cultural education programming is a key pillar in the joint education action plan. Included in the budget is \$735,000 for the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate to support Yukon First Nations with work on the joint education action plan and the secretariat role for the First Nations Education Commission.

Our 2024-25 budget includes \$3,649,000 for Yukon First Nation language teachers for a total of 31.59 full-time equivalents. These language teachers bring Yukon First Nation languages into classrooms across the territory, enriching the educational experience for Yukon students. In addition, the 2024-25 budget supports continuing funding of \$1,195,000 for the Yukon Native Language Centre to support First Nation language revitalization. Through this partnership, our Yukon First Nation language teachers have access to language resources and courses to support their own fluency and to better support Yukon students.

On the topic of language and culture, the Department of Education also funds French first and second language programming across the Yukon. We work collaboratively with the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon to support the learning needs of French first language students and the path for administration of French language education in the territory. In the 2024-25 budget, there is \$11,278,000 allocated to the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon. I am happy to report that, this school year, French first language students have access to in-person French language program instruction in

Dawson City. This was a priority for the Francophone School Board and francophone parents in Dawson. Additionally, the Department of Education offers excellent French second language programs to students, fostering a lifelong love of learning languages, and we work with our parents and school communities to address the long-term needs of these programs.

I would like to turn to another one of our priorities, which is ensuring that learning environments are modern and meet student needs. We are advancing several capital projects this year — building new schools and modernizing others. It's important that we ensure that the portfolio of schools meets the demands of our growing population and provides modern learning environments for students to learn and grow for years to come. Investing in school capital is investing in our community.

The first that I would like to speak about is the Whistle Bend Elementary School. In the 2024-25 budget, we have \$2,500,000 allocated toward the substantial completion of the Whistle Bend Elementary School. This will be the first new elementary school in Whitehorse in over 20 years. We look forward to welcoming the first cohort of students to Whistle Bend Elementary School this August and we are dedicated to ensuring a smooth transition for students, families, and staff. The new school will provide students with a modern learning environment and will improve the liveability of this thriving and growing community.

Another Whitehorse-based project is the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary School. Replacing École Whitehorse Elementary School is an important project for the Government of Yukon. You will see \$2,500,000 in this budget allocated to this project. This funding will be used for planning and design work.

Looking out into the communities, we are continuing with structural upgrades at Ross River School. There is \$2,050,000 in the budget for this work. These upgrades will ensure that the school is safe and welcoming for all students for years to come.

Another exciting capital project that we are moving forward with is Këts'ádañ Kù school-build project with Kluane First Nation. This budget has \$13,025,000 allocated for the next steps in this project. This is a meaningful project, as we have heard requests from Kluane First Nation and Burwash Landing residents for years to have their school located in their community. When complete, it will allow children to walk or bike to school rather than ride the bus to the current location in Destruction Bay. This school will provide Kluane First Nation citizens the opportunity to learn and thrive in their community.

As Yukoners reiterated in last year's public engagement, modern learning spaces also mean spaces that are connected to outdoors and that facilitate learning about Yukon First Nation ways of knowing, doing, and being. You will see that \$1,200,000 has been allocated in the 2024-25 budget for outdoor experiential learning spaces. Many Yukon schools already have outdoor classrooms and we look forward to supporting several additional schools to develop these spaces in the coming year.

These spaces allow education to bring students outdoors to engage with the curriculum in a more meaningful and

memorable way. We are also proud to offer experiential learning programs in several schools. These initiatives reflect our commitment to a holistic and inclusive approach to education rooted in respect for and understanding of Yukon First Nation culture and knowledge.

As Whitehorse continues to see a steady population growth, the Department of Education is routinely gathering data and input from school communities about how our school facilities need to grow and adapt to meet the needs of the student population for the coming school year and future years. For 2024-25, we have allocated \$1,200,000 toward portables and modular classrooms. Modular classrooms are one option to address enrolment pressure in schools. We are working with Highways and Public Works on a multi-year procurement and placement program to place new and replace aging modulars at Yukon schools.

Moving on from capital, I would like to take some time to talk about our work to improve learning environments. This work starts with early learning, where our investments have made childcare more affordable than ever for families. In the 2024-25 budget, you will see \$42,500,000 allocated to early learning and childcare. Part of this funding allows us to continue to subsidize childcare, which means that most families pay an average of \$10 per day per child. This continued funding also supports better access to childcare. Since the implementation of universal childcare in April 2021, more than 380 childcare spaces have been created in Pelly Crossing, Whitehorse, Ross River, and Dawson, and I'm pleased to note that the program continues to expand and grow.

Investing in childcare also ensures that our youngest Yukoners have access to high-quality, inclusive learning from an early age. This means that children are better prepared when they reach school. If they need additional support, they have already had the opportunity to have that need recognized and met. They are starting their kindergarten journey in a stronger place. When children start at school, we are working to ensure that they are in inclusive, welcoming environments and get the support that they need to thrive.

Ensuring Yukon students' mental well-being and overall health is crucial for equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to thrive as lifelong learners and make positive contributions to society. You will see \$5,745,000 allocated in this budget to student well-being and inclusion. This division oversees and delivers reimagining inclusive and special education, student support services, and our new student well-being branch.

Our goal is to better meet the needs of students and learners to enhance their educational experience and outcomes. We will be able to do this through specialization, efficiency, coordination, and a focus on service accountability, staff training, and professional development. This leads me to another budget highlight: \$4,440,000 to hire additional school-based staff to support student learning and well-being. The funding will support us to hire additional educational assistants, learning assistance teachers, and wellness specialists. This funding can be found in the budget under student well-being and inclusion for \$1,398,000 and school authorities for

\$3,042,000. This supports one of our key commitments under the confidence and supply agreement.

In addition to these initiatives, our 2024-25 budget supports other critical work to advance inclusion, well-being, and safety in our schools, including continuing the Ready-to-Learn Schools initiative, first piloted at Takhini Elementary School in 2020 and now operating in eight schools, with \$230,000 earmarked for this initiative.

Continuing our work with the ARC Foundation to implement the SOGI 1 2 3 program, which supports inclusive educational practices and helps to create more inclusive schools.

I look forward to answering questions in this Committee of the Whole debate.

Mr. Kent: Thank you very much, Deputy Chair, and I take the opportunity to welcome the officials and thank them for the briefings that they provided earlier this Sitting.

I'm going to jump right in. I know that our time is limited here today, so I did want to ask some specific questions. The first one is with respect to the École Whitehorse Elementary School replacement project.

I understand that recently there was a meeting with a number of different stakeholders organized by the contractor tasked with doing the work, and there were three different options presented as far as school locations on the Takhini educational reserve. But it's also my understanding that the report wasn't provided to the stakeholders. They were not allowed to take a copy of the report away from the meeting. So, I have a couple of questions. Can the minister tell us what those three options are and why the stakeholders who attended weren't able to take a copy of the report back to the organizations that they were representing?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am happy to rise today to speak about the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary School, which will be located on the Takhini educational reserve. We have had a number of discussions about this project already during this session. In August 2023, Kobayashi and Zedda Architects Ltd. was awarded the prime consultant contract for the École Whitehorse Elementary School replacement project through a public tender. A site analysis and test fit assessment to determine suitable locations on-site is complete. We are working toward moving toward phase 2. The government, again, has educational land reserves identified for schools. The Takhini Educational Land Reserve is a large parcel of land, it's serviced, it's appropriately zoned, and it provides a central location that has better access to a greenspace. I know that we have had these conversations, but I think that it's worthwhile repeating.

An initial step in this work is to identify potential locations for the future school on the Takhini educational reserve, at which point, engagement with the First Nation School Board, Softball Yukon, and other partners that we've identified — to occur then after we have identified those locations. On March 27, 2024, an information session was held with project partners and stakeholders to discuss school placement options on the educational reserve land. This session was well-attended and had representatives from the project advisory committee,

Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, École Whitehorse Elementary School Council, Sport Yukon, the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education, and Softball Yukon, to name a few. The project team will take the feedback received from these sessions into consideration in the next steps of the design process.

The specific question about the design — the documents that were reviewed at the meeting — the folks and organizations that attended the session — certainly our department would be willing to attend and bring the documents to a meeting with an organization. We are doing this with one specific group next week, and so that is how those documents can be accessed until we are ready to share more information with the larger public.

Mr. Kent: Just to get back to it, I am just kind of curious why there is so much secrecy around these three options that were presented at the March meeting that the minister talked about. We're trying to get a sense for why these documents can't be released and why organizations aren't allowed to take them at this point. Is there any reason that the minister can give for why there is so much secrecy around these three options?

Hon. Ms. McLean: As we go through this process, I think that the member opposite may have had experiences when they were in government — when you are moving through a process such as this, you work with confidential documents that are considered embargoed, and that is what this is. We will continue working with our partners. We thought that it was important, as I have stated many times, that we are going to work with all of our partners and stakeholders as we move forward on the selection of the site. The project team will take the feedback received from this session into consideration in the next steps of the design process.

We will continue to work with our partners. If there are requests to have documents brought to specific meetings so that they can have thorough discussions, we are absolutely willing to accommodate that and we are doing that.

We will provide future opportunities for partners and stakeholders to have conversations about this project, as I have committed to all the way through.

Mr. Kent: I am still kind of concerned that it is a secret process at this point, with embargoed briefings and specific requests for briefings. I think this is something that affects a number of organizations. It affects the WES community, it affects the Takhini school community and the Takhini neighbourhood, and it affects the downtown neighbourhood, so I am just a bit concerned that there is so much secrecy around what's going on with the planning of this school at this point.

I am going to move on to a question regarding the educational assistants allocation process. Obviously, there were a number of concerns raised by a number of organizations and education stakeholders about what was being proposed for a new EA allocation status to the point where the minister paused that. I am just wondering if the minister can provide us with an update on the pause. Obviously, staffing allocations will have to begin for next year quite soon. I am just wondering if the minister can give us an idea of where we are at with the pause

and how long she believes it will be until we get a sense for what next year's EA allocation process will look like.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, this is important work that we are undertaking and it has been part of the work that we have committed to under reimagining inclusive and special education and, of course, coming from the Auditor General report and the Nikki Yee report and work that we have been doing with all of our partners through the First Nations Education Commission and the advisory committee on education.

Over the past year, the department has met both individually and with groups of educators and partners, including superintendents and school board executives, to inform the EA allocation process. This good work was undertaken to create a more open, transparent, and objective EA allocation process in the long term. We agree, of course, that EAs are one of the most important parts of the broader support for Yukon learners, and we are working to ensure that appropriate wraparound supports are available across the territory.

In terms of the specific question, I am pleased to share that we have started the formal consultation process with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals to ensure that we have fulsome input going forward. We are also in the process of setting up conversation with the other important stakeholders to be included and to discuss what their concerns are and, of course, to respectfully address the concerns. As we are taking this pause, I want to just be clear that we have received all of the information that is needed from all of our schools to make informed decisions. We have paused that until we have worked through this consultation piece and we will, of course, be ensuring that supports are in place and are done thoughtfully for our students in the upcoming school year.

Mr. Kent: I am just curious if the minister has a deadline or if her officials have a deadline in mind with respect to reworking or I guess ending the pause on the EA allocation for next year. Again, I am just hearing back from a number of different school communities that they are trying to get a sense of what the numbers look like for EAs so they can begin that recruiting of staff for the next school year.

Hon. Ms. McLean: We certainly are working within the timelines that are set out as we move into a formal consultation. We hope to have this matter resolved in the near weeks to come.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate that, and we will look forward to getting some sort of resolution to the situation and getting some numbers out to the schools.

We have been hearing some reports from a number of different school communities about bullying and, in particular, cyber bullying that is taking place within the different school communities. Online today at www.yukon.ca under the Department of Education, I looked up the safe and caring schools policy. The effective date on the document that I have is September 1, 2018. I am just curious if there have been any upgrades to this policy since that time. Is there a more recent version that we can direct Yukoners to?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I certainly have worked around the whole area of safer schools in the last several years, particularly

since 2021 — since I have been in the position. The safe and caring schools policy was brought in under our government and outlines expectations for all school community members to avoid bullying, abuse, and unacceptable behaviour. We are actively reviewing and enhancing our policies and procedures to address student-to-student harm, ensuring that our commitment to safer, more inclusive schools in the Yukon is followed. Again, this is a work in progress.

Yukon schools develop and support positive behaviours through school values and related expectations. The values and related expectations are developed from the *Education Act* and the safe and caring schools policy.

I do not believe that it has been updated since it was brought into effect in 2018, but if there have been any changes to it — and we will check the website just to make sure, but I believe that this would be the most up-to-date version.

Mr. Kent: I believe that the minister said that there is work in progress on this policy. Again, as I mentioned, we have heard from a number of school communities that particularly cyber bullying is taking place now. I think that everyone in the country is alarmed by how devastating that type of bullying can be for students and their families who are dealing with it. Again, I just wanted to get a sense — is there additional work or is there work in progress to update this to include, for instance, some of the more popular social media apps, like Snapchat and those types of things where the messages don't last — I don't think that they remain up. They are on for a little bit and obviously long enough to be harmful and demeaning to the targets of them but not long enough to track them. I'm just kind of curious if there is a review of this policy underway — if that work actually is in progress now.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, this is such an important part of the work that we are doing at the Department of Education. As I have stated, we are reviewing policies, and I couldn't agree more about ensuring that we are modernizing and taking into consideration the pressures and the changes in terms of how bullying happens and what the impacts are.

We are certainly well aware and looking to ensure that our policies are modern, up to date, and helpful to our school communities.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate that response from the minister. I don't want to get into any specifics obviously here today, but I and my colleagues who have heard about it will reach out to the minister — not on the floor of the House — and just give her a sense of what we are hearing and some of the challenges that are out there for a number of students in our school system.

I did want to jump over to some questions regarding staffing allocations based on the construction of the new Whistle Bend school. It was last night, I believe, but the minister received a letter from the Jack Hulland school council. One of the questions with respect to the student enrolment for them — they have been told that it is anticipated that approximately 100 students will be transferring from Jack Hulland to Whistle Bend school on catchment criteria. They are curious — beyond mailing letters and running ads, what work is the department doing to fact-check the enrolment data, and when does the department anticipate being able to provide Jack

Hulland with concrete enrolment data so that they can ensure that they are appropriately staffed for the upcoming school year?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I certainly received the letter from Jack Hulland school and read it last night. As I had indicated at our last debate on the supplementary budget, I had an opportunity recently — or maybe it was during Question Period — where I had talked about having gone to Jack Hulland to meet with the school council as well as the Minister of Highways and Public Works — and all our deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers were there as well — to talk to them about some of the visions that they have for their school.

I have some updated numbers that I will give you around Jack Hulland Elementary School and, of course, I have not communicated yet other than acknowledging the letter from Jack Hulland school council. We are working on a reply and we will be working directly with them around the concerns that they have.

As of April 2, 2024, the new Whistle Bend Elementary School projected enrolment for September 2024 is 170 students, with 16 teacher FTEs. These numbers are anticipated to change as enrolment is completed. We have just gone out on a second round to the catchment area for Whistle Bend to prompt folks to register. There is a lot going on, of course. The Whistle Bend Elementary School will help address some of the enrolment growth in the north end of Whitehorse. As folks are aware, we have added a number of portables to different schools that are in surrounding areas, such as Hidden Valley and other elementary schools in the Whitehorse area.

As we are working through recruitment for Whistle Bend, schools are allocated staffing numbers based on the number of enrolled students. Again, we are working on finalizing that right now. We have projections.

In terms of Jack Hulland Elementary School, in the fall of 2023, we had: a staffing allocation of 35 FTEs; vacant positions, two; and the student enrolment was 402 in September and then 430 in December. The fall 2024 staffing allocation — this would be for the 2024-25 school year — is estimated right now at 29 FTEs, with the possibility of three vacant FTEs. That will change — this is today's information — just based on how teaching staff are moving. We have a projected student enrolment of 329 for Jack Hulland.

Some information that I think is also important is that for Jack Hulland, we are anticipating zero to minimal layoffs. Lower enrolment assists with school capacity issues, and that is certainly what we heard when we went to Jack Hulland — that it was really at that point being viewed as an opportunity to really focus at the school on areas that they had wanted to for some time, and so we are working with them on that. There may be some capital commitments as well that may come out of that discussion.

The numbers that I just gave do not include confidence and supply agreement increases — so the LATs and other positions — and this may not include the teachers who accepted positions at Whistle Bend Elementary School. We are still in an HR process — and certainly take point on the messages that we

received from Jack Hulland, and we will be following up directly with them.

When a competition comes open in the Department of Education, individuals have the right to apply on positions that they are interested in. This is a brand new school, so it's a little bit, I think, more focused, but teachers generally do move around from school to school and community to community, and that is part of the HR process. Of course, also, getting those postings out earlier allows for folks to look and make decisions within their own lives.

The projections for the 2025-26 school year become available in October/November of 2024, so that helps us to look forward to the next year.

Mr. Kent: I have a number of other questions obviously, but I believe that my colleague from Takhini-Kopper King has a question that is timely for her that she would like to get in, in case the department doesn't come back early next week. I will turn it over to my colleague from Takhini-Kopper King.

Ms. White: I thank my colleague for Copperbelt South for that.

In conversation last week, the minister asked me a very specific question, and ultimately, I believe it is her who can answer me. Can she please let me know about the cost of developing a locally developed course? I have spoken to teachers and numerous people who have done it, and they said that the cost was really them doing the paperwork. I'm just looking to the minister for clarity and confirmation: What does it cost to have a locally developed course created?

Hon. Ms. McLean: We definitely value the importance of offering courses to students that respond to the local needs of the community and the First Nation.

We have had some shifting with First Nation initiatives and student learning. We now actually have curriculum development under that assistant deputy minister in that area within Education. That's a really important and exciting change that I hope to get a chance to talk a little bit more about, because it is very important and strategic from the Department of Education's perspective.

This year in the mains that we are presenting and talking about today, under curriculum development, we have \$3,906,000 allocated. That is for kindergarten to grade 12. This is within the Department of Education, and other authorities would draw from their allocation within the dollars that we allocate to them for their school authority. This is the amount that we have for all schools.

We can get into more detail I think as we move through our debate. The Department of Education will be called again. We have had an hour and a bit of time here today on the mains, and I certainly look forward to more debate. I will be happy to continue having this discussion around locally developed curriculum.

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

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

Motion agreed to

Hon. Mr. Streicker: 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. 213, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2024-25*, 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 p.m. Monday.

The House adjourned at 5:28 p.m.