



# Yukon Legislative Assembly

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35<sup>th</sup> Legislature

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## HANSARD

Monday, April 29, 2024 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

# YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

## 2024 Spring Sitting

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

### CABINET MINISTERS

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

### OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

#### Yukon Party

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

### THIRD PARTY

#### New Democratic Party

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

### LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Dan Cable
Acting Deputy Clerk	Allison Lloyd
Table Clerk	Christopher Tyrell
Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

**Yukon Legislative Assembly**  
**Whitehorse, Yukon**  
**Monday, April 29, 2024 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

*Prayers*

**Withdrawal of motions**

**Speaker:** The Chair wishes to inform the House of a change made to the Order Paper. The following motion has been removed from the Order Paper, as it is now outdated: Motion No. 941, standing in the name of the Member for Porter Creek North.

**DAILY ROUTINE**

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

Introduction of visitors.

**INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS**

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly today to welcome a number of individuals who are with us today for a tribute and others whom I would like to recognize for their attendance here today. Let me start with first the business and tourism excellence awards. I would like to welcome: Jennifer Logtenberg, who is with us today; Alida Munro; Dylan Soo; Neil Hartling; Tanya Boone; and Scott Boone. I will speak to their roles at the awards banquet in a second.

As well, I would like to welcome to the House — from the Arctic Security Advisory Council for the Yukon, we have a number of officials who are here in the Yukon finishing up some of their first pieces of stage work. I would like to welcome to the House our chair, Dr. Ken Coates, as well as Major-General Retired Derek Joyce, Dr. Heather Exner-Pirot, Dr. Jennifer Spence, and Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer.

Again, welcome to the House.

Last, before we give a hand, I would like to welcome Jessica Zinn, who is a guest with us today, and her friend and support dog, Sasha. Thank you for attending with us this afternoon.

*Applause*

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Mr. Speaker, for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Yukon conservation officer services tribute, we have, to welcome to the House today, chief conservation officer Gordon Hitchcock and conservation officers Adam Henderson and Tynan Thurmer, as well as Deputy Minister of Environment Michael Prochazka and Assistant Deputy Minister of Environment Briar Young.

*Applause*

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, I invite my colleagues to join me in welcoming Ashraf Mahmoud, who is joining us today. It is his first time in the Assembly, but he has spent a lot of time

listening to it over the years, so it is delightful to have him here in person.

*Applause*

**Mr. Istchenko:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce someone in the House today. He has been introduced already, but few would know that Whitney Lackenbauer is also the honorary lieutenant-colonel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Ranger Patrol Group. I first met him I believe in a wall tent at Quiet Lake and I have spent many times talking about northern sovereignty. Thanks for being here today, sir.

*Applause*

**Speaker:** Are there any tributes?

**TRIBUTES**

**In recognition of Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards**

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards, which were celebrated this past Thursday during a terrific dinner event catered by the fantastic Kit's Kitchen.

Each year, the awards are presented to some of the finest entrepreneurs and leaders in our business community. This event serves as a way to celebrate the many businesses that help enrich the fabric of the City of Whitehorse and the Yukon as a whole.

Recognition is given to businesses that offer superior customer service, commitment to community, and entrepreneurs who stand apart as positive role models for others.

This diverse set of awards celebrates both small and large businesses as well as innovative methods, sustainable practices, and leadership. Across the nine award categories, 31 businesses were nominated and included restaurants, short-term rentals, retailers, childcare providers, and many more unique businesses. The finalists and winners were chosen by an independent panel of judges made up of prominent business leaders. This year, three new awards focused on tourism businesses, which were also presented at the event.

The Tourism Industry Association of Yukon's Tourism Awards of Excellence were established to recognize and foster excellence in the tourism industry, and I would like to thank both Dylan and Alida for their work in this sector.

It is great to see these new awards recognizing the best in tourism and this collaborative approach to acknowledging high quality across our industries.

I would like to congratulate all of this year's nominees and finalists, and special congratulations to all the winners in their respective categories: first of all, the Tourism Lifetime Achievement Award, which ended off our night — and a big celebration occurred and a big thank you for his work over the years — to Mr. Neil Hartling, who is with us this afternoon; Tourism Ambassador of the Year Award, Jennifer Logtenberg, with the Yukon Convention Bureau; Tourism Traveller Experience of the Year Award, Terre Boréale; Business Leader

of the Year Award, Katie Young, from Klondike Kettle Corn; New Business Entrepreneur Award, Canadian Outdoor Academy; Innovation Award, Cold Snap Chippery; Outstanding Customer Service Award, La Cara Tacos; Greatest Community Impact Award, Yukon Built; Workplace Excellence Award, Yukonstruct; Sustainable Business Practices Award, The Yukon Refillery; Small Business of the Year Award — the owners are here with us this afternoon — the Boones' Yukon Driving Academy; and lastly, Business of the Year Award winner Big Bear Co.

Congratulations to each of you, and I also want to thank the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce and operations director Keara Hlewka for taking on this initiative and appreciate that, year after year, this event allows us to recognize the significance of local businesses in our community and their hard work and dedication.

*Applause*

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the winners of this year's Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards. This year's ceremony featured 13 awards, including three Yukon Tourism Awards of Excellence, and highlighted some of the most incredible businesses and leaders in the Yukon. From wildly successful entrepreneurs to those who have provided invaluable service to Yukoners for many years, every one of these businesses and individuals deserves recognition and our thanks.

The 2024 Yukon Tourism Awards of Excellence took place alongside the Business Excellence Awards this year. Terre Boréale, Jennifer Logtenberg with the Yukon Convention Bureau, and Neil Hartling of Nahanni River Adventures all took home awards for their services and contributions in the tourism sector. In the case of Mr. Hartling, he also took home a sticker in his likeness — head tattoo and all.

For the 2024 Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards, those were as follows. The Yukon Refillery took the award for sustainable business practices. They provide an incredible service of bulk, eco-friendly goods and sustainable products. The Canadian Outdoor Academy won new business entrepreneur, offering tourism-based workshops, certifications, and training opportunities. Yukon Built won the greatest community impact. It's no surprise here, as they have been incredible community ambassadors since their early days. Yukonstruct won the award for community excellence, an excellent hub for entrepreneurs and innovators alike to network and thrive. La Cara restaurant won for outstanding customer service, and I will encourage anyone to go and sit down for lunch at La Cara; you will understand right away why they won this award. Cold Snap Chippery took the award for innovation. The customer lineups are proof of the popularity of these 100-percent local chips and the flavours, Mr. Speaker, are amazing. Small business of the year went to the Yukon Driving Academy for offering comprehensive driver training by professional drivers. The business leader of the year went to Katie Young. Many of us recognize Katie from years of farmers markets with her kettle corn popper. She now offers

a huge variety of flavours across the Yukon and even across the country. Big Bear Eatery and Taphouse took the honour this year of business of the year. The Yukon Party caucus was honoured to sponsor this award and have been rooting for the continued success of this great business since their early days.

A huge thanks to the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce and, of course, in particular to Keara Hlewka for organizing the event, to the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre for hosting, and to Kit's Kitchen for the wonderful meal. Congratulations and thank you to all of the winners and finalists for your contribution, your dedication to community, and to your service to Yukoners.

*Applause*

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon NDP to congratulate and recognize the diversity of Yukon businesses both big and small, the community leaders and innovative entrepreneurs who were nominated for the 2024 Business Excellence Awards and for the 2024 Tourism Excellence Awards.

Being nominated for one of the awards across 12 categories is something to be proud of. It's the acknowledgement that your hard work and dedication to Yukoners haven't gone unnoticed. I will make a special note that two of the award winners live in Takhini, so thank you to Yukon Driving Academy and La Cara restaurant, because they are representing our neighbourhood well.

Congratulations to this year's winners on a job well done. We appreciate you.

*Applause*

### **In recognition of Conservation Officer Services branch**

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Yukon Conservation Officer Services branch, a law enforcement agency dedicated to promoting public safety relating to wildlife. Today's Yukon Conservation Officer Services branch traces its history back to the foundation of the game branch in 1949. Over the decades, the branch has expanded its leadership and role in protecting Yukon wildlife. They have developed several programs and initiatives, including the turn in poachers and polluters program, advanced numerous bear safety initiatives to reduce human-wildlife conflict, and more.

Mr. Speaker, a tremendous amount of responsibility is put on the Yukon Conservation Officer Services branch. They deliver programs and services across five districts, including Whitehorse and nine Yukon communities across our territory. Being the first Yukon government agency to create a First Nation liaison officer, they understand that conservation is a collective effort. They collaborate with a variety of partners and local experts on the land, including First Nation governments, transboundary Indigenous governments, local and cross-jurisdictional law enforcement agencies, boards and councils, wildlife enforcement agencies, and the public.

They encourage voluntary compliance by delivering educational programs like the hunter education and ethics

development course, hunting and backcountry skills, bear spray use, meat care, and catch-and-release. Conservation officers serve as stewards of our territory's natural resources; therefore, their job is diverse and demanding. They can be found patrolling remote natural areas to ensure the protection of wildlife and wild spaces, investigating complaints of non-compliance with natural resource laws, and managing trapline and outfitting concession administration.

COs also respond to and assist other public law enforcement agencies with emergencies, including search and rescue. The RCMP has mentioned that, although conservation officers are under no obligation to assist in public safety matters, their support and actions have been of great assistance to the overall success of some of their police operations. They are at the front lines of environmental law enforcement and public safety in the Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, I want to express my gratitude and appreciation to everyone at the Conservation Officer Services branch, including the administrative staff, for ensuring that everyone stays organized and that the resources are optimized. Your dedication to education, public safety, and conservation law enforcement has been essential over the last 75 years of service. Congratulations to the Yukon Conservation Officer Services branch, and here's to many more years of protecting Yukoners and Yukon wildlife.

*Applause*

**Mr. Istchenko:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize 75 years of Conservation Officer Services — or, when I was a kid, the game branch — here in the Yukon. It's not an easy job, but it's certainly an important one.

As the population of the Yukon grows, we are reminded that many people moving here, either interprovincially or from outside of Canada, are doing so to take advantage of everything that our beautiful territory has to offer. Yukon is a relatively small population dispersed among breathtaking views, plentiful wildlife, and endless outdoor opportunities.

The work of conservation officers to minimize the impacts of humans on wildlife and the environment and to ensure compliance with laws is important in so many ways. They work with all levels of government organizations, with renewable resources councils, and with the general public to educate, enforce, and ensure protection of the environment and the different species of animals that call that environment home. We all have a duty to use our land thoughtfully and respectfully, and this includes following the laws around hunting, trapping, and fishing and being clean and safe in the backcountry.

I would like to recognize all those who have helped over the last 75 years to conserve and protect our territory: the conservation officers who are the boots on the ground across the Yukon and the staff working to support them at the Yukon Conservation Officer Services branch. I would especially like to give a shout-out and a thank you to the rural Yukon conservation officers who volunteer above and beyond in our small communities, whether they are coaching youth in hockey, teaching firearms safety, or just helping with the outdoors and

so much more. Thanks for all the work you guys do and keep up the good work.

*Applause*

**MLA Tredger:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Yukon Conservation Officer Services, which has been in existence for 75 years. That takes us all the way back to 1949. I can't even begin to imagine all the changes over those years. I often think of these officers as protecting wildlife and ensuring that harvesting laws on the land and water are being followed, but they do so much more. These officers work with First Nations, renewable resources councils, communities, and many others to protect our environment. They investigate potential violations of our natural resource laws. They educate the public on reducing human-wildlife conflicts.

From reminding people to secure garbage to teaching bear safety, they approach the job with creativity and good humour. A demonstration that particularly made an impression on me was watching someone try to get bear spray out of a backpack while a conservation officer, pretending to be a bear, charged at them across the lawn. The point was made and I have really tightened up my compliance on keeping bear spray easily accessible.

Through all these actions and many more, conservation officers protect us, our wildlife, and the land and water we share. That's the job that they have been doing for 75 years and will continue doing into the future, and we appreciate it. Thank you to everyone at the branch and a special thank you to conservation officers.

*Applause*

## TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

**Speaker:** Under Tabling Returns and Documents, the Chair has for tabling, the *Report on Subsistence, Travel & Accommodations of Members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly 2023-2024*.

Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling correspondence from the Premier to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

I also have for tabling an e-mail from the Member for Porter Creek Centre to health care workers' work e-mails, and I also have for tabling a response from the Leader of the Official Opposition condoning their MLA's conduct.

**Ms. Clarke:** I have for tabling a letter to the Minister of Health and Social Services signed by 38 nursing home attendants, which was copied to me and to the Member for Copperbelt North via e-mail.

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling a letter addressed to the Minister of Health and Social Services from me dated April 29.

**Speaker:** Are there any reports of committees? Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?  
Are there any notices of motions?

## NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House:

(1) supports the work being done by the Arctic Security Advisory Council to advance opportunities for the Yukon to take a leadership role in shaping Canada's approach to ensuring the north's long-term security and well-being; and

(2) thanks Dr. Ken Coates, Major-General Retired Derek Joyce, Dr. Heather Exner-Pirot, Dr. Jennifer Spence, Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer, Grand Chief Peter Johnston, and Chief Pauline Frost for their work on the Arctic Security Advisory Council.

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

THAT this House urges the Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board to support the families of the Yukon firefighters who died of workplace injuries or illnesses only recently recognized by the new *Workers' Safety and Compensation Act* by writing letters in support of their eligibility for the Canadian Firefighters Memorial.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to introduce amendments to the *Education Act* and the *Child Care Act* that would ensure stringent indoor air-quality standards in Yukon schools and childcare centres.

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

## QUESTION PERIOD

### Question re: Long-term care staff recruitment and retention

**Ms. Clarke:** Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of Health and Social Services received a letter signed by dozens of nursing home attendants who work in long-term care. That letter was tabled today. They wrote in response to — and I quote: "... the blatant disregard by the Health Minister for the Nursing Home Attendants." It is clear from this letter that this group of front-line health care workers does not feel appreciated or respected by this minister.

How does the minister plan to respond to this letter?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the Department of Health and Social Services value all of our health professionals and the integral work that they do for Yukoners daily. This is some of the work — the discrepancies that were brought to the attention of me through this letter and our department officials. It is just one of the reasons that the *Health Authority Act* is so important for Yukoners going forward.

As of March 5, 2024, there are 509.05 full-time equivalents — individuals working within Yukon's four long-term care homes, and 197 of these are nursing home attendants. In a cross-country jurisdictional scan, Yukon's nursing home attendants receive one of the highest wages in the country. The retention and signing bonuses for regulated nurses employed by the Government of Yukon help to make Yukon more competitive in recruiting and retaining nurses in a very challenging labour market.

I look forward to considering all of the points brought forward in this letter to me, and I certainly look forward to responding appropriately to those who wrote it.

**Ms. Clarke:** Mr. Speaker, the letter outlines that nursing home attendants felt disrespected by the minister's decision to offer retention bonuses to some employees but not others. To quote from the letter again: "This is more than a slap on our faces and a kick on our already abused backs. This is why we are beyond hurt that we have been conveniently left out and rudely ignored."

What is the minister going to do to repair the relationship with these important front-line health workers?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I am very glad that there was actually a question there, because that is exactly the work that we have been doing as a government since 2016 — is working to repair relationships, repair relationships that have been tattered in almost every aspect of government.

Relationships with health care workers are a key priority for the work that we are doing; it is a key priority in the work that we are doing to introduce a health authority and to implement *Putting People First* and the concepts that have been very carefully reviewed by an independent panel there and reviewed on behalf of Yukoners — listening to Yukoners' voices. This is a great opportunity for us to hear from a group of individuals and hear about how they are feeling and how we might resolve issues for them and work with them together to improve that relationship — absolutely. It is something that we have proven, through evidence, that we have done over and over again since 2016. We will continue to do that, particularly as we go forward to build a health authority and transform Yukon's health system and social system on behalf of Yukoners. It is something, quite frankly, that the Yukon Party just could not do.

**Ms. Clarke:** Mr. Speaker, here is what these almost three dozen front-line health workers said in their letter to the minister — and I quote: "The morale among all NHAs is at the lowest it has ever been right now. You treated us like we do not matter and are invisible. We are hurt, disheartened, insulted and angry."

Why has the minister let morale in long-term care get so bad, and what is she going to do to repair the damage?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Mr. Speaker, we all know what the next number of questions will be. The opposition is doing absolutely anything that they can do to attack the minister, attack the government, and just go after any element of health, but we know that the reality is this: In every case, we have tried to ensure that every health care worker — that we have an understanding of what they need and that they are respected,

whether doctors or nurses or people on the front lines. That is the key. A health authority is a way to ensure that there is a comprehensive approach to supporting workers inside our health care field.

What I would say as well is that we have to make sure that we support health care workers and we also have to make sure that we support Yukoners. We heard loud and clear from Yukoners that they wanted to see a structural change in our system. We saw, after the Yukon Party's antics last week, that we had individuals in the lobby of this building in tears saying that their dignity was taken away. I would ask the member opposite who is asking these questions this: What are you going to do to rectify that? Probably the answer will be: Nothing.

### Question re: Health care system

**Mr. Cathers:** Mr. Speaker, nursing home attendants aren't the only front-line Yukon health workers who are facing low morale and don't feel that their contribution to the health care system is appreciated by this minister or the Premier, for that matter. The Yukon Medical Association released the results of a recent survey of its members. One result that stands out is the fact that only seven percent of Yukon doctors feel that the current Liberal government supports and values physicians' contributions to the health care system.

What is the minister's response to the fact that the vast majority of Yukon doctors surveyed don't feel supported or valued by her government?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Mr. Speaker, what we are going to continue to do is understand what our medical professionals are identifying as ways that we can improve systems. The minister and I, last year — it was one of the first times in many years that we had the opportunity to sit for hours — the majority of doctors who were there inside that room at Mount McIntyre. We went and we gave, doctor by doctor, an opportunity to identify areas where we could improve.

Today after I finish here in the House, there is another opportunity. We will have a chance to sit down with other members of the Yukon Medical Association. We are continuing to support doctors as we go through this transition to a new health authority, so we are going to continue to work hand in hand to understand what they need. The member opposite knows that there can be challenges in the relationship. We know that doctors, when he was the health minister, asked for him to be removed. We know that there will be lots of antics this week in these conversations. We know that challenges that do exist in health care systems across the country — that the members opposite will try to amplify them.

Yukoners who are listening must know that this is about any possible way to not support a health authority. We know that the majority of Yukoners want to see a change. We know that people who have felt disenfranchised by this system want to see themselves represented, and that's the work that we're going to do this week.

**Mr. Cathers:** Mr. Speaker, as entertaining as the Premier inventing facts may be, he didn't answer the question.

Right now, there are thousands of Yukoners without a family doctor. According to the recent YMA survey, that could

get even worse. Forty-one percent of family physicians in the Yukon say they are planning to close their practice in the next five years. Of those, two-thirds expect their patients will be orphaned. It is also clear from the survey that the current government is a big part of the problem.

What is this Liberal government going to do to pull out of this nosedive and improve how they work with doctors so that more Yukoners can have access to a family doctor?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Mr. Speaker, I just want to provide a quote here from the president of the Yukon Medical Association, from a letter that we have received — quote: "The [Yukon Medical Association] is keenly devoted to the work needed to implement a better system. Our values of engagement, collaboration, and impact drive us to ensure that we focus on healthy partnerships that meaningfully improve the health and wellness of Yukoners. We understand that health system transformation is a process that will unfold over many years, and we are committed to bringing our best to that shared work ahead."

Again, this is just a chance to reflect on the work that has been happening between the government and the health care system. I have sat with doctors. I think, what the member opposite is not touching on is — yeah, you know what? — we are going to see a lot of health care professionals retire in the next five years — not just in the Yukon, but across the country.

I know that we do not see medical professionals having the longevity in the career that they used to. I have grown up around it. I know my father just retired two years ago at 83. We are probably not going to see people carry full caseloads until the age of 83, but there will be changes, and that is across the country; this is not something that is unique to the Yukon. But what we will do is ensure that we support the doctors who are here.

The other challenge that's key to know is that many of our doctors have multiple tasks that they are doing — specialties as well as GPs. I look forward to the third question here today.

**Mr. Cathers:** Well, Mr. Speaker, at just seven-percent confidence in Yukon doctors, these numbers are shockingly low.

Whether it is nursing home attendants who say morale has never been lower than it is under this minister and government, or the vast majority of Yukon doctors who feel that the current government simply does not support or value them. It is clear that this government has a serious problem with its relationship with front-line health workers.

Why has this Liberal government let down so many front-line health care workers and what, if anything, is the minister doing to fix this problem she has created?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Mr. Speaker, what we are going to continue to do is make sure, through our collective agreements, that we have appropriate and respectful relationships.

We are going to make sure, over the next number of years, that we have an opportunity to go out and have discussions as we see the health authority bill pass and a chance to understand what these folks need for ways to be supported as we move and transition. When he talks about the front-line workers, I do have a question for the member opposite. We know that the Yukon

Party was sending direct communication to members of the health sector. We don't know what was in that; we don't know what was being said — we don't — but we do know that, and we know that we had complaints brought to us because of that direct communication.

What I would like to know is: This group of individuals, who provided a letter as well — did the member opposite or anybody else in that caucus provide them with information — either accurate or inaccurate — before that letter was sent to us? Please, we would like to know that today while we are in Question Period.

#### **Question re: Environmental awareness fund**

**MLA Tredger:** Mr. Speaker, this government talks a lot about how they value the environment, so it came as a real shock that they scrapped the environmental awareness fund. The mandate of the environmental awareness fund was to — quote: "... support the efforts of grassroots organizations to educate, engage and connect with Yukon communities within the territory's natural environment..." as well as to support "the promotion of conservation, biodiversity, and ensuring human impacts on the environment are sustainable."

Education, engagement, promotion of conservation and sustainability — those all sound like things that we should be supporting. This fund supported at least 31 projects since 2018, including everything from speakers about McIntyre Creek to wetlands conservation events, to Yukon River cleanups and recycling workshops.

It's hard to understand how this government could decide that these projects weren't important anymore and cut the funding that allowed them to happen. Why did the minister cut the funding for the environmental awareness fund?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Mr. Speaker, WildWise Yukon, established in 2012, has had a presence in promoting environmental education and awareness in the Yukon. Over the years, WildWise Yukon has launched several programs and projects aimed at reducing human-wildlife conflict — for example, the electric fencing program to protect domestic sheep and goats from predators.

The Department of Environment funded the program between 2013 and 2022 and is aware of WildWise Yukon's recent dissolution. The department received an e-mail from the board in early August of 2023. The Department of Environment funded WildWise Yukon and other organizations for nine years with transfer payment agreements ranging from \$25,000 to \$42,000, depending on the projects proposed.

Upon that organization's dissolution, the Conservation Officer Services' communications and finance branch has been working with the organization to support efforts to secure a transfer payment agreement for 2023-24. The Department of Environment officials met with the organization multiple times to identify new projects that would meet the funding requirements; however, they were unable to put forward a suitable project for funding.

The Department of Environment works with a diverse range of local organizations and we certainly are in contact with them, as well as with the Yukon Conservation Society and the

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, to address any ongoing funding concerns.

**Speaker:** Order, please.

**MLA Tredger:** I was actually asking about the environmental awareness fund, although that also sounds like a problem that this has been cut.

They have also cut the Yukon environmental training funds with no notice. This fund supported training for staff in the environmental sector. CPAWS Yukon wrote to the minister saying that this fund helped build a stronger environmental sector in the Yukon, but it has been cancelled too. Organizations have been told they can access a new program called "Staffing UP", but we've heard that it just doesn't work for them. One organization shared their experience with the Staffing UP fund. They applied for funding for training two months in advance and then finally heard that their request was denied almost three months after the training was over.

This government's decision to cancel the environmental training fund tells people working in the environmental sector that their work doesn't matter. Why doesn't the minister think that it is worth supporting training for people working in the environmental field?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Mr. Speaker, the Department of Environment works with a diverse range of local organizations that work to support conservation and sustainability in the territory. Contrary to the comments and question from the member opposite, funding for a number of organizations, including CPAWS and other organizations, has increased over the years. We also have a good working relationship with them.

With groups like WildWise and others, we are always looking for new ways to foster innovation and more effective ways of supporting our environmental enhancement stewards among Yukoners and visitors. We are thankful for the years of work and advocacy of many organizations; however, on balance, we certainly have a strong working relationship with organizations and have heard loud and clear from CPAWS and from the Yukon Conservation Society with respect to concerns and we are in the process of developing — we have a very significant relationship with organizations like the Yukon Wildlife Preserve, where we have a funding agreement in the order of \$800,000, which certainly supports ongoing initiatives on education and —

**Speaker:** Order, please.

**MLA Tredger:** Mr. Speaker, to summarize, the environmental awareness fund, which supports grassroots education and outreach about environmental issues — cut. The environmental training fund, supporting people working in the environmental sector — cut. It seems like this government doesn't think that the work done by environmental NGOs matters. Perhaps I can remind them: these are the organizations that fought side by side with First Nations to protect the Peel; these are the people who successfully fought to protect McIntyre Creek; they play a pivotal role as watchdogs for government and industry alike. Maybe this government is trying to cut funding to those who object to their damaging environmental decisions. I hope not, but these aren't the actions



of a government that wants citizens and non-profits involved in environment protection.

I would remind them that we are in a climate crisis and we need all of us involved to have a future. How can the minister justify cutting funds for environmental awareness and training?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. Just last week, we had the announcement with respect to the memorandum of understanding with respect to McIntyre Creek, setting aside a very significant amount of land within the City of Whitehorse borders. That requires a lot of resources, which will be brought to bear, both by the territorial and the federal governments.

Also last week, we had the Peel feasibility planning study with respect to an area of approximately 3,000 kilometres set aside in the Peel watershed land planning area.

As well, of course, this government funds regional land use planning on a large scale. We fund regional resource councils as well with respect to that. There has been unprecedented investment in both aerial surveys and other surveys across the territory over the course of the last three fiscal years, in the range of \$500,000, \$600,000, and \$700,000 so that we have an accurate assessment of the need for either conservation or providing opportunities for Yukoners.

This government is absolutely committed to funding conservation and research in this territory.

#### **Question re: Whitehorse General Hospital capacity**

**Ms. Blake:** Mr. Speaker, from April 1 to August 31 of last year, Whitehorse General Hospital was in the red zone for bed occupancy 79 times, and several times it was nearly 25 percent over occupancy. WGH also reports that, last year, half the time there were not enough beds to meet demand. With no available admission beds and regular patient rooms, health care providers are forced to place patients in hallways or other spaces that are not consistently equipped with oxygen, suction, or proper call bells.

Hallway medicine is a clear sign of a health care system in distress, reflecting the strain on resources, staff, and infrastructure, leading to delayed care and staff burnout.

What is this government doing to increase access to patient beds at WGH?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, as the population grows and ages here in the territory, there is increasing demand for all acute care services, including diagnostics and outpatient and inpatient services.

This is truly a challenge that is being experienced across the country, and we work to ensure that the acute care system is able to support those in need. We are working with our partners to ensure that patients are cared for in the right place at the right time and with the right resources.

This includes systemic-level response to surges in demand for acute care here in Whitehorse, mostly seen in the hospital. The Whitehorse General Hospital is working with the Department of Health and Social Services, and we are both working with our partners to respond with a holistic, system-wide approach to providing care and services. This practice was maintained and is being continually improved on and

developed after some recent surges in care and resource need at Whitehorse General Hospital.

**Ms. Blake:** Mr. Speaker, the hospital and its staff have been under extreme pressure now for at least the last 18 months. Time and time again, Yukoners are told that circumstances are challenging or that there is a global shortage of health care workers.

Health care professionals have been sounding the alarm for years about shortages in resources to provide an acceptable level of care for patients. Just last year, a surgeon told the *Whitehorse Star* that nurses were experiencing serious fatigue and stress because of the backup and delays in surgery. He also said that without more investment in facility upgrades, staff burnout and service backlogs will become regular realities as the health care system is forced to react to crisis after crisis.

What is this government doing to upgrade and expand hospital facilities to meet current and future demands?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, in response to the situation that we have here in the territory, we have, last year — well before many jurisdictions in the country — brought together a unique group of decision-makers for the purposes of determining a path forward and writing a health human resources strategy that is being implemented. In addition to that, the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the Department of Health and Social Services are co-developing an integrated surge plan for the health system that will prioritize an effective response to any future surges.

We have worked to identify contributing factors and continue to work together on quality improvement processes focused on intentional prevention, guided by a home first philosophy. We have, during those two periods of time, expanded the hours at the Whitehorse Walk-in Clinic. We worked together with the department, the Yukon Hospital Corporation, and the Yukon Medical Association, and we sent a joint letter to physicians asking them to expand their opportunities for appointments at their own clinics, which was done.

The Government of Yukon and the Yukon Hospital Corporation are encouraging Yukoners, of course, to continue to seek care through the emergency department or their hospital, as needed.

**Ms. Blake:** Mr. Speaker, the Yukon hospital website describes the red zone as unusually high demand for acute care services and space extremely limited or the hospital is full. If the hospital is regularly in the red zone, this demand is not unusual anymore. It is the new normal.

Whitehorse General Hospital is the core of the Yukon's acute care system for the Yukon. At present, patients are being treated in hallways. Paramedics are being called in to help nurses because there aren't enough nurses to keep up with patient needs. If red zone is the new normal, our health care system is way past a crisis point.

What is this government doing right now to end this state of crisis in Yukon hospitals to ensure that patients are receiving the care they need when they need it?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate that question because that is absolutely the goal — providing the care that Yukoners need when and where they need it.

There have been formal communications developed with respect to responses between the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the Health and Social Services department. We have a joint incident command structure that is established to facilitate system-level decision-making and communications. The Department of Health and Social Services leveraged Emergency Medical Services to assist — and will do so in the future — Whitehorse General Hospital staff to ensure that patients receive comprehensive and timely care.

As I have said, we expanded the hours of the Whitehorse Walk-in Clinic in response as necessary. We have explored options to use additional health staff employed in non-direct care positions within the hospital, such as nursing and allied health resources, to support inpatient care. We have worked to support the Yukon Hospital Corporation discharge planning for patients who require an alternative level of care. We are working to expand the availability of Yukon hospital beds throughout the territory in the three hospitals that we have and, in this year's 2024-25 budget, we have a commitment to take, as part of the health transformation system, a full look at the hospital and Yukon health care infrastructure as a total.

#### **Question re: Whitehorse Emergency Shelter**

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, over the past several weeks, the recent coroner's inquest has made a number of startling findings in relation to the operation of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. Last fall when asked about the operation of the shelter by the Third Party, the Premier said this — quote: "What we are saying is: The clients inside right now are getting good programming. I have sat with CYFN. We have done the analysis, but we have a problem on the outside of the building. So, I don't believe that we are failing the individuals who are inside."

Having reviewed the work of the coroner's inquest, does the Premier stand by those comments?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Mr. Speaker, I know that we have talked lots about some of the challenges around 405 Alexander and certainly some of the activities on the outside. I think that what we can say is that the coroner's inquest focused on a period of time when the Yukon government had responsibility, as well as a time when the Council of Yukon First Nations worked with Connective — of course, previous to those statements.

What I would say is that we are closely looking at the recommendations. Of course, they have just been provided. We did have an opportunity to meet with a number of First Nation leaders on Friday. I do want to thank the Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council for the work that they did on Friday. We had an opportunity — I think almost all of our folks here were in attendance and I think there were a lot of First Nation leaders as well who attended, and members from the NDP. It was important to show solidarity around these challenges.

Again, I do think that there has been good work. I think there are almost 140 people who have had their lives saved

through the work at the shelter, and I think there is a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done. I know that leaders across the territory are ready to roll up their sleeves to make sure that this work does get done. We will make sure that we have a very calculated and disciplined approach based on the recommendations that have been provided.

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, the government has committed to thoroughly assess the recommendations and provide an update, bringing forward a plan for implementing the actions that will be taken as a result of this coroner's inquest.

Can the government tell us when that work will be done, and is there a date for that work to be complete?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, rest assured — and Yukoners most importantly should rest assured — that this work will begin immediately.

The coroner's inquest was a very important opportunity for Yukoners to learn what happened in relation to these four women and their experiences. It is incredibly important that we thank all of those who participated in that process. We worked hard, through the Department of Health and Social Services, and the Department of Justice — and I know the Women and Gender Equity Directorate — to support family members who were involved. We provided counselling and safe spaces, food, support, and lodging for individuals who wanted to be here as part of that incredibly important process.

The Department of Health and Social Services provides a range of on-site supports at 405 Alexander, including emergency medical services, home care, social supports, and mental wellness and substance use outreach services. Community outreach services and other organizations visit 405 Alexander on a regular basis, providing supports to their clients and guests at the shelter. EMS has expanded their paramedic specialist clinic hours at 405 Alexander to at least 20 hours per day and our continued work to support 405 Alexander is a commitment by this government.

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, one of the recommendations of the coroner's inquest report is a policy review for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter that will be undertaken by Connective Support Society within six months. Will the Yukon government include its own policies related to the shelter in that review as well?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I can indicate that we will review carefully the recommendations that have been put forward. The jury, which spent so much time listening to the evidence of this particular coroner's inquest, made thoughtful and comprehensive recommendations. We look forward to reviewing each and every one of them and determining, with health partners and with First Nation partners, how to best implement those and how to achieve what is determined to be the eight recommendations from the coroner's inquest.

With respect to that, any review of policies that will be required to be undertaken by those recommendations will, of course, include the work of Health and Social Services as the department responsible for the transfer payment agreements and responsible for absolutely many, many of the services that are provided at 405 Alexander — as I have noted, EMS, home

care, social supports, and mental wellness and substance use outreach services, being just a few.

**Speaker:** The time for Question Period has now elapsed. Introduction of visitors outside the Daily Routine.

## INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to stand and introduce some visitors we have today for the next opportunity here in the Legislative Assembly. I look forward to having my colleagues help welcome Tiffany Boyd, Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services; Donna Milne, executive assistant to the deputy ministers; Jenny Imbeau, director of legislation and partnerships at the Department of Health and Social Services; Angela Salé-Roche, the project coordinator; Alex Taylor, senior policy advisor; Jacob Rohloff, the policy analyst; and Jessica Hall, junior policy analyst. I understand as well that Doris Bill is here as a member of the Health Transformation Advisory Committee.

Thank you all for taking the time to be here.

*Applause*

**Speaker:** We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### GOVERNMENT BILLS

#### Bill No. 38: *Health Authority Act* — Third Reading

**Clerk:** Third reading, Bill No. 38, standing in the name of the Hon. Ms. McPhee.

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

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

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to stand today to speak to the *Health Authority Act*.

I think we should maybe speak for just a moment about what happened on Thursday in this Chamber. Many of our health partners, including members of the Chiefs Committee on Health and the Health Transformation Advisory Committee members and other chiefs and the health team from the Council of Yukon First Nations as well as other members of the Department of Health and Social Services — all who have worked intensely on this process — were here for the opportunity — and it was just an opportunity — to hear the third reading of this bill.

I think what we know based on what occurred is that the members of the Yukon Party opposition decided that it was not an appropriate use of their time, but I think that it is incredibly important that we realize that the people who were here on Thursday — members of the public gallery, guests who were here who are members of the public — didn't come here to see the Yukon Liberal government pass the *Health Authority Act*;

they came to see the Yukon Legislative Assembly do that work together on behalf of Yukoners. The blocking of the process of the progress to third reading — for what I would classify as no legitimate reason — made this process political. It made it political in a way that it was never intended to be. Dismissing the attendance of people in the public gallery was also, in my estimation, disrespectful and it was needless.

The determinations of the members who were here — and the reasons provided as to why the Yukon Party would not support us proceeding to third reading — which, by the way, is also part of the process that is available in the Standing Orders of this Legislative Assembly — were blocked, in my view, for really no legitimate reason. One of the excuses given by the Leader of the Official Opposition, in speaking to this matter after the matter did not proceed on Thursday, was the fact that they were not terribly concerned about other people's schedules. I think that was a flippant response and I think that it was disrespectful.

The other excuses given with respect to why this matter wouldn't proceed to third reading on Thursday were frankly disingenuous. They were about why the delay wasn't enough and that the bill needed to sit on the Order Paper for another day. That said, it had been reprinted and provided to the Yukon Party in the morning several hours before we were to come in here — remembering that every single change made to that bill and the reprinting had been provided in writing to each Member of the Legislative Assembly when the amendments were made and translated at the time. Had the members been paying attention or taken notes, they would well have known which sections were going to be amended and ultimately were amended.

The reprinting of the document and bringing it here is an important step in that process, but our request for the matter to proceed last Thursday was obfuscated possibly because it was my request or possibly because the members opposite weren't interested in having it proceed with people who were here and had worked on this for many, many months — if not many years. It was an opportunity for us to continue this work together and it was disappointing that this was not the case. As we can see, there are certainly less people available to be here today.

I know that the Leader of the Yukon Party and other members were contacted personally and it was explained to them that the request was not mine. I was certainly happy to bring the request forward and it is my role to do so, but it was at the request and was our response to a request made by members who wanted to be here and who are not here today and have to be out of the territory for work. I truly hope that on this momentous occasion today the members opposite will rise to that occasion. I do hold out hope that the Yukon Party will see their way clear to doing what is best for Yukoners. They made several public statements through their leader this weekend that this is somehow about the current minister. I urge them to do the right thing. This is not about me.

Let's speak for a second about the concept that was also brought up this weekend — about the regulation-making power here in this bill. The regulation-making power and authority

rests with Cabinet. This is a process that is included in virtually every piece of Yukon legislation and perhaps every piece of legislation in the country. This makes their objections to this legislation about concerns about the current minister and the authority for regulations to be made simply untenable. It's nonsensical, frankly, that you would challenge the idea of regulation-making power in this context. It's in every piece of legislation. It is the way in which our system works.

We have been very clear from the beginning that the *Health Authority Act* is enabling legislation and, as such, we will continue to work with our health partners and with individuals who are stakeholders in this process, with employees, with unions, with front-line health care workers, with medical doctors, with nurses, and with other allied health professional who work in the process to build what will be the most improved, caring system of health care transformation that we can possibly imagine for the territory — imagined by Yukoners, not by me, although I am happy to take their lead. I certainly appreciate it somehow being made about me and the confidence that I will somehow remain as the minister long into the future, but that is not what this is about.

The health authority supports a system-wide perspective that enables better planning, improves efficiency, and allows for an innovative, healthy system that delivers health care to Yukoners. The health and social services system of transformation aims to create an effective, efficient, integrated, and population-health-oriented system based on equity and respect for all Yukoners. The proposed health authority will serve as a major health service provider and contributor to transformation of the health and social services system in the territory to improve coordination, to utilize limited resources, to provide holistic person- and family-centred care, and to establish a role for Yukon First Nations in the health and social services system.

Approving this bill will enable joint action on system transformation between the Government of Yukon, Yukon First Nations, the health authority board, and all of the allied health professionals, all of the medical professionals, and all of the employees, unions, supporters, and stakeholders that we have mentioned so many times.

The scope of the health authority includes the management of three hospitals currently under the Yukon Hospital Corporation and responsibilities for day-to-day delivery of health and social services such as community health centres, long-term care, mental wellness and substance use services, emergency medical services, and medical travel.

Creating Shāw Kwā'ą will aid in a system-wide perspective that allows for an integrated and responsive health system that improves care and coordination and continuity between hospital care, long-term care, and social services, enabling wrap-around, team-based primary and secondary care models.

One of the things that the Member for Lake Laberge conveniently forgot to mention in their questions about the Yukon Medical Association is that the survey was keenly focused on providing better care and team-based primary and secondary care models. We are going down this road together.

The development of Bill No. 38 is a crucial enabling step in health system change. Significant work is required to operationalize a health authority, such as establishing a board of directors, developing regulations, and transitioning the operation of health and social services delivery and staff. The work to build and operationalize a health authority begins with the passing of this bill in this Legislative Assembly.

The creation of Shāw Kwā'ą will allow the department to transition its focus to providing strategic, system-wide stewardship and regulation, which is the role of health ministers in most other Canadian jurisdictions, and the department will remain responsible for ensuring that services are safe and effective. This work will reduce the conflict of having the department act simultaneously as a funder, evaluator, and service provider. This has been the road taken by all but one other jurisdiction in this country. This will allow Yukoners to have one health service provider organization to support and coordinate their wellness instead of accessing separate services between the department and hospitals, sometimes for the same health need. This will enhance the experience for Yukoners.

Health care providers will be better able to collaborate and to integrate care for Yukoners, breaking down organizational barriers through the single set of standards or policies or procedures of a single organization — stronger system planning, evaluation, and quality-improvement tools and systems to improve the effectiveness and cohesiveness of health and social services around a single goal of improving wellness for Yukoners, rather than specific program or organization goals.

A stronger understanding and incorporation of the needs of communities and Yukon First Nations in the local and Yukon-wide delivery of health and social services is a key goal — a tangible outcome.

The Department of Health and Social Services will be better positioned to leverage upstream investments in prevention, health promotion, and community wellness, while Shāw Kwā'ą will focus on the delivery of quality and responsive health and social services.

Working in partnership with Yukon First Nations and their governments in delivering culturally safe and relevant services in their communities to achieve health equity is a key tangible outcome of Shāw Kwā'ą.

Shāw Kwā'ą — it is all well; it is all good.

I feel both incredibly privileged and grateful to stand here with you today on behalf of Yukoners to move this bill through the House and for it to be passed. To conceptualize a health authority for the Yukon for all Yukoners and in partnership with Yukon First Nations is an incredible opportunity, an incredible step forward. Kudos to everyone who had the courage to envision health transformation in the territory and the change that we can make and that we are making and that we will make.

I have said before that this bill represents the work of all Yukoners who, since 2017, advocated for change and doing things differently. Thank you to all those Yukoners for speaking up and helping us to shape health system

transformation. We hear you and we want to keep hearing from you.

This bill is also the work of Yukon First Nations and the Government of Yukon coming together to discuss and design framework legislation on an integral element of health system transformation for the benefit of all Yukoners.

The health care providers and staff and officials currently working in the system are our greatest asset. With the passing of this bill, we will continue to work with employees and health system providers to inform health system transformation.

Again, I acknowledge and thank the Chiefs Committee on Health, the Health Transformation Advisory Committee, and the support teams at the Council of Yukon First Nations and within the Government of Yukon that worked day and night — often literally — to get us here.

I also reiterate my thanks to the Yukon First Nation chiefs and the Council of Yukon First Nations for their leadership and for their resolution entitled Bill No. 38, *Health Authority Act*.

The bill has also benefited from the review and input of this Legislative Assembly, including at the Committee of the Whole, adding value to the bill through questions and debate.

Advancing this bill through the Legislative Assembly and having the opportunity to reach unanimous consent on its passing — I remain hopeful — will demonstrate a commitment from all parties to champion this bill on behalf of Yukoners as part of health system transformation and improving health outcomes for all.

Passing this bill is a monumental step toward health system transformation to ensure that our system is responsive and that health services are people-centred, integrated, and culturally safe. Change is hard. We all know that change is hard. We will face and work through hurdles while making meaningful change to our health and social services system by working together and doing things differently, by keeping the person and the community at the centre of every decision and advancement.

Passing Bill No. 38 and moving on to its implementation will give Yukoners the improved experience of integrated health services that are focused on the person, the family, and the community — where system users and health system providers are supported through removing silos, improving communication, seamless transition, and enhanced data sharing.

Shāw Kwā'ą represents one of the most progressive, if not the most progressive, pieces of health legislation in the world — legislation that was built together with our First Nation partners, legislation that will ensure better care and outcomes for all Yukoners, legislation that appropriately honours and protects culture, language, and identity, legislation that leads to equity in health outcomes and the elimination of health disparities among all population groups in the Yukon, including Yukon First Nations and other equity-deserving groups, and legislation that expands health care services to include and recognize Indigenous traditional healing and wellness.

I could not be more proud or more optimistic about what passing Bill No. 38 means for Yukoners. Our jobs require us to make decisions in the best interests of all Yukoners. By

working together, we can ensure good health care experiences and better outcomes. Passing Bill No. 38 is a pivotal step in doing things differently by being committed to health equity, to reconciliation, to improving the experience of health care providers, and to putting individuals, families, and communities at the centre of our work — putting Yukoners first.

I would like to end by reiterating our respect and thanks to all of the partners, the Chiefs Committee on Health, the Health Transformation Advisory Committee, Members of the Legislative Assembly, stakeholders, and Yukoners for shaping and supporting the health system transformation and the establishment of Shāw Kwā'ą/Health and Wellness Yukon/Santé et mieux-être Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, I urge and call on all members of this Legislative Assembly to support the passing of Bill No. 38 and support a commitment to work cooperatively on the development of Shāw Kwā'ą and moving forward with health system transformation.

Merci; thank you; mahsi' cho; gunalchîsh. Shāw Kwā'ą.

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, as always, it is a privilege to speak today at the third reading of Bill No. 38. This particular bill has been an interesting one. It is a substantial bill and one that contemplates sweeping changes to our health care system — in particular, a new corporation to oversee the delivery of health care across the territory. I know that a substantial amount of work went into this bill, so I would like to begin by thanking those who have worked on it. I have worked on projects like this before. I know that it takes great effort on the part of public servants and officials across multiple departments to bring together a legislative package like this one.

As always, I will do my best to direct any criticisms or concerns that I have to the political level. I would also like to thank those officials from outside of the Yukon government who have worked on this. Of course, there has been significant work by First Nation governments and chiefs and other leaders and officials who have all had a hand in this bill. I would like to thank them for their contribution as well.

While I think that there could have been some doubt at one point about what might happen with this bill, I knew that when I read the open letter from my colleague the Leader of the NDP that opened with the line that stated clearly that her party would support it, it was inevitable that this bill would pass the House. From that point, I knew that our vote on this bill would be a symbolic one. Nonetheless, I have given that vote a great deal of thought over the course of the last eight weeks.

There are a lot of things in this bill that I support. I know that one aspect of the bill is to attempt to reduce or eliminate racism in our health care system. I don't think that there is a Yukoner out there who would disagree with that goal. The bill also significantly increases the participation of First Nation leadership in overseeing and directing the health authority. We have been told that improving health outcomes for First Nations is an important driver behind the bill.

As well, in general, I support the better integration of health services in the Yukon. There is a compelling argument

that, by improving the linkages between different delivery arms in fields like long-term care or community nursing with the operations of our hospitals and acute care, we can find efficiencies. To the extent that this bill holds that as a goal, I think it is a reasonable goal; however, there are a lot of outstanding questions about the bill and there are legitimate concerns about some aspects of it.

For instance, I think it remains unclear to me how it will actually affect health care outcomes themselves. More specifically, I have not seen a compelling case yet for which outcomes will specifically be improved as a result of this bill.

Another compelling criticism of this is the case that has been made by many folks out there that making sweeping administrative changes does not address the underlying problems and issues that have plagued our current health care system. It's not the only one, but one of the more public expressions of this position was made by local economist Keith Halliday in his persuasive article in the *Yukon News* that government would be wiser to focus its scarce resources, including time, money, attention, and capacity, on stabilizing primary care in our current model rather than devoting so much of our resources to a systemic overhaul — in other words, put the fires out first before we begin to renovate.

Unfortunately, many of the outstanding questions at this point are academic because they have not been answered and won't be until the implementation of the new health authority takes place. At this point, it remains to be seen how well — or not well — that will unfold. At this point, all we know is that it will exist and, over time, it could take on services that are contemplated to be delivered by it.

To judge this bill, I will look at three things: (1) the content of the bill and how it has progressed and changed through the Legislative Assembly process; (2) the consultation that informed its development; and (3) our faith in the ability of the current government — and more specifically the current minister — to implement it successfully.

First, the progression of Bill No. 38 through the Assembly. Since the bill was introduced on March 11 for first reading, Bill No. 38 has had one of the most complex and chaotic progressions through the Legislative Assembly that I have ever seen personally and, as far as I can tell, in the modern history of the Legislative Assembly. It has seen stops, starts, and pauses. It has seen rarely used provisions of the Standing Orders leaned on. It has seen amendments proposed by all three political parties and the majority of those amendments coming from the bill's own sponsor. For those who don't follow such things, amending a bill on the floor of the Assembly has been quite rare in the past several decades — let alone multiple amendments.

At second reading on March 26, I proposed that we adjourn debate because there were significant unanswered questions and we had heard concerns from groups like the Association franco-yukonnaise that, at that point, had written to the minister expressing concerns and had not yet received an adequate response. In response to my suggestion, the government laughed it off and said that this was entertaining. Then, over the course of the following weeks, the government was forced to

report progress on the bill and pause the proceedings midway through debate in Committee because of the ongoing work happening outside of the Legislature with concerned groups about the bill. I hope that observers of this debate can appreciate the irony in that.

To recap, the progress of this bill through the Legislative Assembly process — the bill was introduced for first reading on March 11; it received second reading on March 26; it was debated in Committee on no less than six separate days; the sponsor of the bill moved to pause debate and report progress midway through debate no fewer than three times; there was a total of six amendments proposed, including one deletion, and four of those amendments were adopted.

Outside of the Legislature, there were serious proposals for at least two subamendments further to that which were planned but ultimately did not come to fruition. Multiple clauses of the bill were stood over in Committee, which relied on a rarely used part of our Standing Orders. In fact, the stand-over process was used more times on this bill than has been used in total over the past several decades. To summarize, the progress of this bill through the Legislature has been unprecedentedly chaotic.

Next, I will discuss the consultation process and the gaps therein that led to the changes to the bill. I will start first with the submission from the AFY. Shortly after the bill was introduced, we all received a letter from the AFY noting not only their concerns with features of the bill that they thought were omitted but with their general concern about the lack of consultation. Over the course of the following weeks, the minister and the AFY went back and forth numerous times to negotiate amendments to the bill that both sides could accept. This, of course, was all ongoing while debate was proceeding on the bill here in the Legislature.

Next, there are the concerns that had been expressed by the unions representing health care workers, specifically in relation to the workers whose jobs, pay, and benefits will be directly affected by this bill. When we first reached out to request feedback from health care professionals on the proposed bill, we were surprised to hear that unions were unable to adequately comment because they had virtually zero information on the proposed health authority and the future of our health care system under it.

On April 11, after the bill had already received significant debate, the Yukon Federation of Labour wrote a letter which decried the — quote: "... unilateral decision-making by the government in establishing the Health Authority." It noted that it was quite — quote: "... worrisome and raises red flags regarding the success..." Following that letter, the union's president did an interview with local media where she described the consultation process by the government as "horrendous", among other things.

Meanwhile, our caucus has engaged with the affected unions directly and, as a result, came up with the proposal for two amendments, which would have clearly defined the roles and need for consultation with workers affected by this bill. It was those amendments that prompted one of the instances of the minister reporting progress midway through the debate, and ultimately it was the spectre of these amendments that forced

the minister to the table with the unions to negotiate what would ultimately become the MOU that was announced just last week. The MOU was notable not just for its content but for the fact that it came down to literally minutes before the amendments would be voted on.

Yet again, the minister was forced to scramble to consult and negotiate with groups directly affected by this bill while the debate on the bill was proceeding through the Legislature. So, to summarize, both of the amendments that were made to address the concerns of AFY and the MOU, which came in response to the concerns raised by the unions, were cases of the lack of adequate consultation, creating significant issues for this bill.

That, of course, leads us to wonder what else has been missed or what other aspects of the bill may cause issue for some who are simply not aware of it yet because of a lack of consultation. For instance, I wonder what the views of Yukon communities will be about the removal of regional representation from the board and the removal of the requirement that the Yukon hospital board has for guaranteed representation from rural Yukon.

Now I am going to turn to more practical aspects and factors affecting its implementation. When I have been asked by Yukoners about this bill, I am often asked questions like: How will it change delivery of health care for me? Or, from health professionals, I have been asked: What will it mean for the way that we do our jobs? Quite frankly, the answers to these questions are not able to be answered specifically at this time; that is because we simply don't know. So much of the detail of this new health care delivery system is going to be the subject of planning and work over the next several years. What that means is that we are being asked to place our trust in the hands of the current minister of health to conduct and lead that work.

I tabled a letter on this subject earlier today, so I won't go into great detail about the minister's track record, but I will simply say that entrusting this minister to do this work in a way that would make it successful is something that I am not comfortable with.

So, having thought carefully about this bill and having weighed the balance of the arguments that I have seen put forward in this regard, I have come to the conclusion that I will be voting against this bill.

It is entirely possible that all of the hypothetical arguments in favour of what the government is proposing could come to fruition and all of this work could go exactly as planned. Alternatively, there are significant pitfalls that could beleague the new health authority's establishment, but quite frankly, we won't know for several years.

When I consider the three observations that I have just expressed — first, the bill's chaotic movement through this House; second, the lack of meaningful engagement with health care workers, stakeholders, patients, and many others in the lead-up to the bill's tabling; and third, the deeply flawed record of the current minister who is now tasked with implementing this massive and complex change to our health care system — I believe that I should express these concerns with a vote against the government on this bill.

I know that my vote and the votes of my Official Opposition colleagues won't affect the passage of this bill and that it will indeed become law later today. I believe that some of my colleagues would like to express their own views about why they will vote against this bill and some have asked that I speak on their behalf, so I will leave it to colleagues to speak later today. But the Official Opposition will be voting against this bill.

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, it has taken both what feels like an incredibly long time and the blink of an eye to get us to the third reading of the *Health Authority Act*. So much has been said, asked, and answered in the last number of weeks, and now it's time for us to set this piece of legislation free and out into the world to continue the important work of health transformation.

Thank you to the Chiefs Committee on Health and the Health Transformation Advisory Committee in helping to chart the course toward the transformation that our health care system needs. Thank you to the public servants who have put so much of themselves into the work of creating a responsive health care system for all Yukoners. Thank you for answering questions and providing presentations to the valuable folks who will continue to be the faces of health care delivery in the Yukon. Thank you to the drafting team that has taken on not only the enormous task of writing the legislation but then taken on the feedback that was given and worked to make this legislation even stronger.

Merci à la communauté francophone pour votre coopération et volonté pour améliorer cette législation pour le bénéfice de tous les yukonnais et toutes les yukonaises.

Thank you to the Yukon Employees' Union, the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, and the Public Service Alliance of Canada, which worked so hard to ensure that your members have sound footing leading into the next steps of Yukon's health transformation. I have so much admiration for your willingness to work in a collaborative way with each other, the Yukon government, and the Yukon Hospital Corporation to a very tight deadline. I thank all of those who played a role from all sides in getting a memorandum of understanding signed. This was and is a big deal going forward.

I want to thank the minister because, despite the comments from my colleague from the Yukon Party, I disagree. It's not often enough in this Assembly that we recognize when an oversight has happened and we work to change that. Your willingness to work with the French association was important. Your willingness to work with the unions to get that signed memorandum of understanding was so important.

I will point out that when I used the stand-over clause, I didn't know that we would get to that signed letter, but I was hopeful because all sides wanted the best. They wanted the best for health care employees. So, when I used that stand-over clause, I did it knowing that there was a real risk that we wouldn't get there. I was prepared to move an amendment to the Yukon Party's amendment. The reason why I was going to move a subamendment is because it didn't make sense — the

way it was written. I had concerns about some of it. But I also indicated to the unions that I would support them, that I would stand with them. What they indicated to me was that the best path forward was a memorandum of understanding, and this is what happened. Similar to working with Association franco-yukonnaise — working together was important.

As Yukon moves toward Shāw Kwā'a, addressing systemic racism and calling out the barriers that currently exist in our health care system are crucial. Systemic racism perpetuates within the health care system. It's critically important that, as we go forward with this legislation, the steps toward ending systemic racism don't start or end with this. Racism must be addressed at all levels of that system. To get there, we need to ensure that the staff working within the system are also brought along and that they are provided support, training, and resources to make this new way of supporting Yukoners a success. We must be brave and challenge the current structures and systems. This means doing things differently and listening to Indigenous and racialized Yukoners. Addressing systemic racism within the health authority will require changes at every level and the commitment of everyone involved. To change everything, it will take everyone.

The same must said of supporting the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and the disability communities. It means the same when we talk about people who live in poverty or drug users. They all need to be treated with respect.

Shāw Kwā'a must remove barriers that hinder the delivery of health care to any part of the community who has felt like they have been left out of the current health care system. I know that these are just the first steps of what will be a very long journey. It will be up to all of us to work together to ensure that Shāw Kwā'a meets the needs of all Yukoners.

We look forward to a health care system that is kind, responsive, and balanced to those working within the system and to those accessing the care that they need. We believe that this is an important first step, but it is just that: It's a first step.

We know that transformation will take time, but we look forward to the time when we can look back and the current system we have is a distant memory.

**Ms. Blake:** Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the privilege to speak at third reading of the *Health Authority Act*.

Access to health care is a right that all Yukoners have no matter their physical place of residence. Disparities within the current health care system continue to lead to inequities, particularly for Yukon First Nations and residents who reside in rural Yukon.

Closing the gaps in health outcomes for all Yukoners can be achieved by addressing the many disadvantages that have led to intergenerational trauma for Indigenous people across the Yukon. I am always reminded that the history of trauma continues to impact many Indigenous people across the Yukon today, particularly the health and well-being of Yukon First Nations, and I see this every time I travel home to my riding. With the development of the health authority legislation and the work that is to unfold in making the health authority a reality in

the Yukon, I have hopes that this will start to make the changes that are so deeply necessary.

The transformation of Yukon's health authority will continue to require a collaborative process between the Yukon government, Yukon First Nation governments, the Yukon Medical Association, the Yukon hospital association, the unions, and all impacted departments of Yukon's health and social system. This will enable decisions to be made collectively, focusing on the enhancement of health outcomes for all Yukoners, while also ensuring that this legislation leads to policies that will be respectfully put into practice by all parties working within the health authority.

I know that there will still be much work to be done to address systemic racism within the health care system, as this is something that will take investment, commitment, and dedication as we move forward. Systemic racism is embedded deeply in many of the policies that have a direct impact on Yukon First Nation people, especially within the non-insured health benefits program.

It is also very important to make sure that there is investment made into local rural health centres to ensure that adequate resourcing is put into place for ongoing training, mental health supports, capacity, and recruitment. These investments must also ensure that communities are able to gain long-term access to providers who are there to listen to their health concerns while also ensuring access to adequate services when they're needed.

I would like to thank all the folks out there who have been involved in the development of the health authority legislation — in particular HTAC and the Chiefs Committee on Health. I also want to thank the many individuals who were so courageous in reaching out to share their concerns with moving forward when they were not included in the conversation. I thank them for reminding me that it always takes a community to form a circle and that a circle cannot be formed by one person alone.

I also want to thank our party leader for the NDP for her leadership and for reminding me that no matter what challenges we face in this role, to always remember that we are here to support all Yukoners. Everyone's voice is so important, and it is the voices of all Yukoners that have helped to shape this legislation. I admire our party leader for her leadership and courage and for standing up and ensuring that all voices are heard and included as we move forward with the health authority legislation.

The health authority will be a way forward for the Yukon, a way to embody the ideals of *Putting People First* and to truly support all Yukoners.

Mahsi' cho.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Are you prepared for the question?

Are you agreed?

**Some Hon. Member:** (Inaudible)



**Point of order**

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** The Speaker can call it if he wishes. I am on my feet; I rose to speak.

**Speaker's ruling**

**Speaker:** I have already called the question, so we are going to proceed.

**Some Hon. Members:** Division.

**Division**

**Speaker:** Division has been called.

*Bells*

**Speaker:** Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Agree.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Agree.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Agree.

**Mr. Dixon:** Disagree.

**Mr. Kent:** Disagree.

**Ms. Clarke:** Disagree.

**Mr. Cathers:** Disagree.

**Ms. McLeod:** Disagree.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Disagree.

**Mr. Hassard:** Disagree.

**Mr. Istchenko:** Disagree.

**Ms. White:** Agree.

**Ms. Blake:** Agree.

**MLA Tredger:** Agree.

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

**Speaker:** The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

*Motion for third reading of Bill No. 38 agreed to*

**Speaker:** I declare that Bill No. 38 has passed this House.

We are now prepared to receive the Administrator of Yukon to grant assent to a bill which has passed this House.

*Administrator Inverarity enters the Chamber accompanied by the Sergeant-at-Arms*

**ASSENT TO BILLS**

**Administrator:** Please be seated.

**Speaker:** Mr. Administrator, the Assembly has, at its present session, passed a certain bill to which, in the name and on behalf of the Assembly, I respectfully request your assent.

**Clerk:** *Health Authority Act.*

**Administrator:** I hereby assent to the bill as enumerated by the Clerk.

*Administrator leaves the Chamber*

**Speaker:** I will now call the House to order.

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

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

*Motion agreed to*

*Speaker leaves the Chair*

**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**

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

The matter now before the Committee is continuing 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.

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

*Recess*

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

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

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

**Department of Education — continued**

**Chair:** Is there any further general debate?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Madam Chair, I would like to start by welcoming our department officials back here today: Mary Cameron, Deputy Minister of Education, and Andrea McIntyre, director of finance. I know that I have a bit of time left from our last debate.

I am definitely pleased to rise again today to discuss the Education mains budget for the 2024-25 fiscal year. The last time I spoke, I shared some of the highlights of the Department of Education that we are continuing to work on. Today, maybe I will start with a few other items around the budget as a whole.

For the 2024-25 budget, \$252,745,000 has been allocated to operation and maintenance expenditures to provide education to Yukon learners. \$29,380,000 has been allocated for capital expenditures to build new schools and modernize existing learning environments. The 2024-25 total revenue and recoveries are estimated at \$26,218,000. We estimate that total capital recoveries will be \$9,769,000 related to the Investing in Canada infrastructure program funding for the Kêts'ádañ Kù school build project with Kluane First Nation. We estimate that operations and maintenance recoveries from Canada will be \$14,716,000, of which \$11,624,000 is tied to the multilateral and bilateral agreements for early learning and childcare.

As we delve into maybe a bit more of the details of the budget — or maybe I will just skip ahead a bit. Under Education Support Services, there is \$6,305,000 to provide leadership and strategic support services to the department in the areas of the deputy minister's office, communications, human resources, and finance. Under Administration and Support, \$10,948,000 has been allocated to support Yukon schools to provide quality, safe programs in kindergarten to grade 12. This budget further supports maintaining our facilities, providing student transportation and technology, and student information.

School Authorities, as I had mentioned in my first budget address, accounts for approximately 50 percent of our operation and maintenance budget. \$127,774,000 is dedicated directly to our three kindergarten to grade 12 school authorities. This makes up approximately 50.6 percent of the department's budget.

Under Student Well-Being and Inclusion, there is \$5,745,000. This division prioritizes the holistic well-being of students by implementing comprehensive and inclusive programs that address student physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs.

As I work through the debate today, I hope to get to some more of the details and unpacking of the 2024-25 main budget for Education. I am happy to take questions now.

**Mr. Kent:** Madam Chair, I will welcome the officials as well today to support the minister during Committee on the Education mains this afternoon. I'm going to jump right in.

In reviewing the minister's fall session briefing notes, I'm just going to give a snapshot that I believe is from November 19, 2023 with respect to staff vacancies. At that time, there were 17 teacher postings — one in Whitehorse, 16 in rural Yukon — and there were two postings for LATs, five postings for Yukon First Nation language teachers, and eight postings for educational assistants, or EAs.

I'm just wondering if the minister can give us the most recent numbers and if she can give us a breakdown by community for those outside of Whitehorse.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** This is an ongoing priority, for sure, for the Department of Education. Effective teachers are one of the most important factors in a student's success at school. It is a priority for us to attract and retain the best educators. We have certainly talked about the national labour shortage and different issues that may be barriers, especially for rural communities, that we are working to address.

For the 2024-25 school year, we are taking many strategic recruitment actions. We posted positions earlier to be more competitive with other jurisdictions. We visited three universities and placed advertisements on YuWIN, Employment Central, LinkedIn, Facebook, Google, YouTube, and through Canadian universities. To date, human resource consultants have attended five in-person education career fairs in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, New Brunswick, and Alberta. This May, human resources, the First Nation School Board, and the Yukon Association of Education Professionals will be attending an outdoor education job fair and conference in Alberta. These steps are supporting our

recruitment efforts. We work, of course, to find staff with the best combination of qualifications, experience, and suitability.

The most recent numbers that I have — and we will go back to make sure that these are still accurate — go back to January 16, 2024. We will make sure that these numbers are still accurate. On that date, we had 14 teachers — four in Whitehorse, 10 in rural, and I do not have the breakdown by school, but we can endeavour to look for that information — one learning assistance teacher, which is rural; one Yukon First Nation language teacher in Whitehorse; one religious education coordinator/teacher in Whitehorse; two teachers on call, one Whitehorse and one rural; four temporary teacher postings, one Whitehorse and three rural; five temporary educational assistants in Whitehorse; and one temporary First Nation language teacher for Whitehorse.

We are in the first round of recruitment for the upcoming school year, and these numbers will be changing. There are folks moving around to different opportunities that are becoming available through opportunities in the Yukon education system, one of them, of course, being the new Whistle Bend Elementary School that is coming online for the next school year and other commitments that we've made in the CASA. Those new positions are being filled and I can provide more information if the member wishes.

**Mr. Kent:** I appreciate that from the minister. I will review Hansard to get a sense of that. I was trying to write the numbers down as quickly as I could, but I'm sure I missed a few. I hope at some point to get a breakdown by community for the 10 vacancies that are outside of Whitehorse currently — of the 14 vacancies for teachers.

I did want to ask a quick question about teachers on call. The minister, in her opening remarks at the Yukon Association of Education Professionals on the weekend, gave — well, I'll leave it to her to confirm the number of teachers on call who are currently registered. I'm just wondering if any analysis has been done with respect to how many of those TOCs are actually answering the phone in the morning to come in and serve as TOCs, because that is something that we're hearing is a bit of a challenge — where there are individuals on the list but not everybody is answering the phone. So, has any analysis been done with respect to, again, just how many of the total number of TOCs who are registered are actually participating and subbing on a regular basis?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** As of March 15, 2024, there were 250 registered teachers on call, which represents 208 in Whitehorse and 42 rural. When I spoke at the Yukon Association of Education Professionals on the weekend, I started by saying that, in September, we had 124 registered TOCs, so that was 98 in Whitehorse and 26 rural. The number has certainly gone up significantly — to 250.

We continue to recruit teachers on call and recognize that demand for coverage continues to be a challenge. We continue to evolve our recruitment efforts to attract candidates for teacher-on-call roles and to support staff in accepting assignments as they are available.

This analysis is happening now, so when we have more to share around that, I will bring that information forward.

Just a few further points here — we attended career fairs in Dawson and participated in the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations career fair on November 30. We also increased advertising on Facebook, in universities, on YuWIN, Employment Central, and other recruitment sites. We sent targeted communications to former TOCs, retirees, candidates from the Apply to Education registry, and applicants from educational assistants competitions.

We recognize also the negotiation of our collective agreement at the end of the current term and we are presently in that collective bargaining now. The term of the agreement will end in June 2024, so there certainly are some opportunities to work together on collective priorities.

**Mr. Kent:** I look forward to receiving some information with respect to the analysis of how many individuals are actually picking up the phone on a regular basis and serving as TOCs.

One of the issues that was raised specifically with me was from the J.V. Clark School in Mayo, and that is with respect to staff housing. I know that the overall responsibility for staff housing does not lie with the Minister of Education, but I am wondering if there is anything specific that Education is considering similar to what we believe Health and Social Services does — booking specific units for community nurses. Is there anything underway on that? Because in conversation with an individual from Mayo whom I ran into over the weekend, it was said that there is still difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers for that community because of the staff housing situation. Is Education considering anything different with respect to staff housing in communities that have market housing available or in communities that don't have market housing?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Government of Yukon certainly recognizes that staff housing has a role in supporting the recruitment and retention of teachers in Yukon communities. Within available resources, we are continuing to assist staff in rural communities in meeting their housing needs. This is challenging and complex work, as housing supply is limited, especially in rural communities. Currently, there are 52 Yukon Housing Corporation units in the communities leased to teachers. An additional three units are leased by the Department of Education and sublet to teachers in rural communities. As well, three additional units are leased by the department from Yukon Housing Corporation for short-term-accommodation needs in Pelly, Ross River, and Old Crow. All other staff have private housing, which they either rent or have purchased themselves.

A teacher's ability to receive extensions on staff housing gives them some security and confidence, so the Department of Education works very closely with the Yukon Housing Corporation and the Public Service Commission. They have created a solution in alignment with policy where the department will recommend extensions annually on behalf of any teacher subject to renewal. The solution ensures that teachers will not receive notice of term end and supports the department's rural recruitment and retention strategy.

I am certainly mindful that there is a new labour market strategy being developed looking at all of the challenges that we have across the Yukon in terms of all of our labour market — education, of course, being one of them. We will work closely as a whole government to look at the solutions Yukon-wide. Certainly, getting lots out the door to Yukon communities is one area that we are working on as a government and have committed to. We are always looking at innovative solutions and looking to the private market to develop housing that could then be used as teacher and educator housing through agreements. I laid out some of those today in other communities.

I certainly have spoken with the school council for J.V. Clark on occasion, and we have discussed this directly. I have definitely had discussions with Yukon First Nations as well around these opportunities as they consider their investments through their development corporations as well.

**Mr. Kent:** I think it was last week or perhaps earlier this week when we asked a question about staff housing — well, not earlier this week because it's Monday. So, it would have been last week that we asked a question about staff housing, and the Premier, in his capacity as Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation, said that there are seven individuals on the wait-list for staff housing. Are any of those individuals teachers or working for Education — teachers or education professionals?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I do not have that information at my fingertips today. I will endeavour to bring that information back to the House.

**Mr. Kent:** I appreciate that, and I'll look forward to receiving that from the minister.

I wanted to jump over to educational assistant allocations. The new policy that was announced earlier this year — the minister later paused that allocation policy. I'm wondering if there is any update on where we're at. Are we close to having a new policy in place that would be developed in consultation and collaboration with the education partners who initially alerted the minister with their concerns? I ask because obviously school communities and administrators are in the process of hoping to get their staffing allocations for next year. I'm just curious if the minister has perhaps set a deadline either for a new policy or to revert to the old one until a new one can be developed and then move into next year with the previous one and then look to the 2025-26 school year to bring in a new EA allocation process.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I will just start with a little bit of history. I always like to do that around this because it's really important work that has been done by the Department of Education, along with all of our partners in education. Over the past year, the department has met educators and partners both individually and in groups, including superintendents, school board executives, and all of our education partners, 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.

I would also like to say and emphasize today that the department is not reducing access to EAs. The number of EAs

is not decreasing as part of our work. Instead, the total number of EAs is actually increasing. We agree that EAs are one of many important parts of the broader support for Yukon learners and we are working to ensure that appropriate wraparound supports are available across the territory. We have undertaken all of these efforts with the goal of meeting the needs of children. This is at the heart of all of the work that we do.

We are in a formal consultation process with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals. The department is collaborating with the Public Service Commission to determine appropriate timelines for this consultation going forward. Timelines may vary due to the nature of the stakeholder meetings and the grievance process. Additionally, we have moved forward with important conversations on the topic with our trusted stakeholders. On April 25, a facilitated conversation was held to understand and discuss concerns and to collectively discuss a path forward.

The department is in the process right now of reviewing the input gathered from this conversation. There will be more to share as we work through this information with stakeholders on immediate next steps and how we will continue innovating together. We strongly value the input of all of our partners and the relationships that we have developed.

We will be considering how best to continue these and other conversations on shared priorities in a good way. We respectfully address these concerns. We have taken a pause, of course, as the member knows, from the EA allocation process to gather and better understand from our partners — which was a big part of the meeting on April 25 — moving in a forward-leaning way to move this work forward. We look to being able to resume the process so that it can continue in a timely fashion for the upcoming school year.

The department additionally continues to meet with the association to discuss shared priorities and initiatives.

**Mr. Kent:** So, I guess we will look forward to that process concluding and then the per-school EA allocations getting out as soon as possible so that the schools themselves can know what recruitment efforts they will have to make for next year.

I did want to follow up on a question that we had asked in Question Period about the training program that is part of the confidence and supply agreement. This was a training program for EAs and teachers on call that was supposed to be in place this year. The president of the YAEP, in an e-mail, had some concerns with the progress of that training program, so I am just curious if the minister can update us on where we are at with getting that program in place. Is it expected to be done this year? Then, I guess the other aspect — there are some partners identified in the CASA that needed to be consulted and collaborated with on the development of this training program, including the YAEP and I think LDAY Centre for Learning and Autism Yukon.

So, I am looking for an update on where we are at with that training program, the one that is referenced in the confidence and supply agreement that the Liberal government has with the New Democratic Party.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** A one-year training program for educational assistants and teachers on call is being developed in collaboration and consultation with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals, LDAY Centre for Learning, and Autism Yukon, with an anticipated completion within the 2024-25 school year. We have an updated training-plan timeline to move this work forward which has recently been shared with our partners.

We have been consulting and collaborating with our partners and education stakeholders and will continue to do so. We are dedicated to working collaboratively and in the best interests of Yukon learners and Yukon educators. This includes hearing diverse perspectives, considering research and best practices, and exploring different opportunities while considering the needs of Yukoners. We are committed to getting this work done. This is important work to ensure that educators and learners alike are supported in a good way. We are happy to be hearing from our partners and education stakeholders that they too want to continue to collaborate and consult.

The Department of Education's Human Resources branch works closely with the Public Service Commission partners to ensure that employees are onboarded and compensated in a timely manner. An updated proposed timeline for the CASA commitment on EA and TOC training plans has been developed and shared with the involved partners as follows: continue to offer specific training for EAs. Student Support Services has several ongoing trainings online and in-person. Estimated time — this is an ongoing piece — defining the EA role — summer/fall of 2024 — review, update, and align the EA course with YGLearn — this is for summer and fall of 2024 — research the PD training opportunities across Canada, preference online and in-territory, in-person sessions, fall 2024 — continue conversations with Yukon University to explore partnership opportunities — this has been ongoing through this whole time — develop an EA training for fall/winter 2024.

**Mr. Kent:** I'm going to ask a separate question, but I'm hoping that the minister can comment on if she believes that what she just mentioned in the House satisfies the commitment made in the confidence and supply agreement with the NDP with respect to that training program.

Another CASA commitment that I did want to get an update on is the wellness specialists. These, of course, in the CASA, are referred to as "wellness counsellors", but the name has been changed to "wellness specialists". In CASA, it said that there was to be one in every school, so I'm just curious if the minister can tell us: How many have been recruited so far? Which schools will they be in? Is the goal still to get one in every school across the territory?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Yes, one of the commitments was to provide a one-year training plan for educational assistants and teachers on call. My understanding is that the time frame was to have this in place by 2024. We are working to meet that commitment. Our Cabinet Office definitely works closely with the New Democratic Party on a regular basis and will continue to do so to ensure that we are checking in our commitments to this important confidence and supply agreement.

For the 2023-24 school year, we have hired — as of April 12, 2024 — 13 educational assistants and 15 learning assistance teachers. Now we have seven school wellness specialist positions hired. They are on-board and will begin their work. We are continuing to work with our partners to fill these positions.

**Mr. Kent:** Of those seven wellness specialists who are currently employed by the Department of Education, can the minister tell us what schools those wellness specialists are in?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Of the 12 school wellness specialists who we had allocated to hire this year, we have hired seven. One is with the CSFY and six are in areas 1 and 2. Five vacancies remain in this FTE allocation. We are currently in the hiring process to fill those vacancies.

The First Nation School Board wellness specialists are still recruiting and we are working to fill all these vacancies.

**Mr. Kent:** The minister mentioned that six of the seven wellness specialists who are currently hired and in place are in area 1 or 2. It was my understanding from the CASA that these wellness counsellors or wellness specialists were supposed to be assigned to each school. Has something changed where they are now assigned to different areas? Again, my question was: Which specific schools have those who have been hired — I guess six, because one is with CSFY. They do have three schools now with Dawson City, so will there be a couple more hired for CSFY? And then, of the six that are in area 1 or 2, are they specifically assigned to schools, or has there been a change to assign them to zones or areas where there are different schools?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** What we're working with is that, over three fiscal years, the department is allocating 81 FTEs to meet the government's commitment to increase the allocation of educational assistants, learning assistance teachers, and the wellness specialists. In 2023-24, we had 12 for the wellness specialists specifically. Again, we are working very closely with all three education authorities, which are the Francophone School Board, the First Nation School Board, and the Department of Education. For 2023-24, we have five vacancies remaining under the school wellness specialists. We have an allocation of 21 additional FTEs for the 2024-25 year. We are debating that budget; it's part of our debate today.

In 2025-26, we have an additional 20 FTEs allocated and we are working closely with all of our partners — particularly across the three authorities — to ensure that their needs are being met through these important new resource allocations.

**Mr. Kent:** We will continue to monitor that situation and get a sense for when the remaining five for this year are hired and then when the remaining numbers that will meet the CASA commitment will be hired.

I did want to jump over and talk about early kindergarten. In October 2019, the Liberal government, in their first mandate, did a Speech from the Throne. On page 12 of that document — I will quote from it — it says: “Your government recognizes the positive impact that early learning supports have on children and families. It will make early kindergarten available in every single rural school as it investigates the future

implementation of this program in Whitehorse.” Again, that is from page 12 of the Speech from the Throne back in 2019.

So, I pulled up the March 2024 enrolment numbers, so I will start with the rural schools. Most of these schools had K4 prior to that announcement. I think where it was absent was in Watson Lake and Dawson City. Currently, as of March 2024, Johnson Elementary School in Watson Lake does not have any students enrolled in K4, nor does Klwane Lake School currently in Destruction Bay. I would assume that it might be a numbers issue with students there. The total population of the school there is 12 students, so that might be a numbers issue because there are no students enrolled in kindergarten either. Robert Service School in Dawson City does not have anyone enrolled in K4, so I am just curious where we are at with this commitment from the 2019 Speech from the Throne to have K4 available in all rural schools. Is it indeed available in Watson Lake at Johnson Elementary School and Robert Service School in Dawson at this time?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** We certainly continue to work with rural school communities, Yukon First Nations, and the First Nation School Board to enhance early kindergarten programs in their communities for the 2023-24 school year. All Yukon education authorities operate at rural schools — offer optional early kindergarten programming, except for Robert Service School in Dawson. The Department of Education is prepared to support early kindergarten programming in Dawson when there is community readiness for this, and we will continue to work with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and Robert Service School on this matter.

All rural Yukon schools offer full-time, optional kindergarten programs. Early kindergarten is intended to provide students with more time engaging in the kindergarten curriculum for critical skill development, supporting a successful transition into school years. Early kindergarten follows the same class-size maximums as kindergarten: 18 students per one teacher, as outlined in the Yukon Association of Education Professionals collective agreement. When more student support is required, early kindergarten classrooms also have the support of an educational assistant and/or an early child therapy assistant. The department is currently conducting a review of the early kindergarten policy.

**Mr. Kent:** So, I'm just curious if the minister has a timeline for when or if she expects Robert Service School, as the lone rural school to not have this option available, to perhaps have that option available for students to enrol in early kindergarten.

The other part of that commitment in the throne speech was to investigate the future implementation of the early kindergarten program in Whitehorse. Again, looking at the 2024 enrolment reports, there are currently 29 students enrolled in École Émilie Tremblay — which is the francophone elementary school — in K4, and there is one in Takhini Elementary School, which is governed by the First Nation School Board. I'm just curious if the minister can give us an update from this 2019 commitment on the investigations for the future implementation of this program in Whitehorse, or has that commitment been abandoned for one reason or another? If

the minister has the reasons for the abandonment if that is the case, that would be helpful too.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** As I indicated in my earlier answer, the department is currently conducting a review of early kindergarten policy that will include the expansion into urban schools. In terms of the timeline for the Robert Service School in Dawson, we will continue to work with our partners and school community there. I do not have a specific time for how long that work will take. We are committed to doing it in a good and right way to ensure that folks are comfortable in moving forward or continuing to explore the impacts of that program.

**Mr. Kent:** Just sticking with the enrolment reports from March 2024 and looking at specifically the CSFY program in Whitehorse, École Émilie Tremblay has their students start at CSSC Mercier in grade 7 rather than grade 8 like the other schools. École Émilie Tremblay has 36 students currently enrolled in grade 6 and five students currently enrolled in grade 12. Assuming that those students or a vast majority of those students move on to CSSC Mercier for grade 7, is the minister concerned with capacity issues at CSSC Mercier?

Currently, there are 139 students registered there and I believe that the capacity that the school was built for is 150, so are there any contingencies in place to deal with potential capacity issues at CSSC Mercier for this upcoming school year this fall?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** As Whitehorse continues to see steady population growth, the Department of Education is routinely gathering data and input from school communities about how our school facilities need to grow, adapt, and meet the needs of student population for the upcoming school year and future years. It is certainly a very important part of our work in planning with the school communities.

In terms of the CSSC Mercier, the enrolment at CSSC and École Émile Tremblay is managed by the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon. We work very closely with them, as one of our education authorities, as we do work closely with the First Nation School Board to ensure that we are understanding any of the pressures or areas that they are seeing. We work directly and closely with them. As we plan for future growth of Yukon schools, we will continue to do that work. As we go through the budgeting process, there is a very specific process in terms of how we work and how decisions are made collectively in regard to those two other authorities.

**Mr. Kent:** As I mentioned, there are 139 students currently enrolled there and it looks like there could be a net of 31 students coming in this fall. When you look at grade 6 students versus the ones leaving from grade 12, there may be some different enrolment factors to consider, but I am concerned that we are already close to capacity at Mercier. If the entire grade 11 cohort moves into grade 12 and then you add all the grade 6 students to grade 7, then we could be experiencing some challenges there.

When I look at sort of the overall elementary school numbers, the enrolment number for grade 7 right now is 395, so by removing the 28 from Mercier for that, it is at 367. Then, in grade 12 — so those students leaving the system — the number here is 414, but if you remove the five from

CSSC Mercier and the 99 who are at the ILC, that is 315. So, there seems to be a higher number of students coming out of elementary schools in Whitehorse and going into the secondary schools than those leaving from grade 12. So, I am just curious if there are enrolment pressures that the minister can talk about with respect to the Whitehorse area high schools.

Then, of the \$1.2 million that is in this current budget for portables, can the minister tell us if any of those are going to F.H. Collins? I know they were promised some in the last budget, but those were taken away, so I know the school is quite anxious to get a sense if any of those modulars are coming there. Of that \$1.2 million, how many modulars will that get us, and where will they be deployed?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Again, as Whitehorse continues to grow — and we have seen a steady population growth — the Department of Education is routinely gathering data input from school communities about how our school facilities will need to grow and adapt to meet the needs of student populations for the coming school year and future years. While student enrolment at all schools is currently below the official operational capacity, we recognize that enrolment levels are closer to capacity at some schools — particularly F.H. Collins Secondary School.

As a whole, our secondary schools are more than large enough to accommodate the number of grade 8 to 12 students enrolled in Whitehorse public schools. We continue to look at the many factors that impact enrolment pressure across the school system, including out-of-catchment area enrolment and how space at schools can be used more efficiently.

Our schools are built for operational flexibility in terms of schools, grade structure, programs and scheduling, and specialized courses. We will continue to have conversations with Yukon school communities and Yukon school boards about facility needs as we plan for future projects. Capital planning decisions are made based on current information and facility assessments supplemented with educational programming needs and emerging enrolment trends and pressures.

Certainly, one of the tools that we use are the modular classrooms. Again, we monitor all schools and help administrators and school communities plan for enrolment needs in the short, medium, and long term. Modular classrooms are an option to address enrolment pressures in schools. Enrolment pressure is also a key element in the long-term capital planning process. We work very closely with Highways and Public Works on a multi-year procurement and placement program to place new and replace aging modulars at Yukon schools.

With respect to F.H. Collins, site feasibility studies have been conducted and two portable classrooms will be placed at the F.H. Collins campus. Work is underway to supply and deliver portable classrooms to the territory with the intent of having them ready to occupy for the start of the 2025-26 school year. Each modular classroom will represent an additional instructional space to accommodate up to 28 students. In the 2024-25 mains budget, we have allowed for \$1.2 million, and the department is working with Highways and Public Works on

a multi-year procurement and placement program for Yukon schools. It is anticipated that the public tender for the modular classrooms will be issued on May 7, 2024.

**Mr. Kent:** I appreciate that from the minister. I will forward that on to the F.H. Collins school community.

I have a number of other questions, but, of course, time is running short not only today but in the session overall. I will follow up post-session with a letter to the minister and ask the remaining questions that I have. I just wanted to thank the officials for attending today to support the minister and thank them for the briefings that they provided on the supplementary and the mains.

I believe that after the break, I will turn the floor over to my colleague the Member for Takhini-Kopper King.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I just wanted to clarify that, with F.H. Collins, we have communicated these commitments to the modulars to the school community. They are aware and we are working closely with them.

**Chair:** Do members wish to take a brief recess?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

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

#### *Recess*

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

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

Is there any further general debate?

**Ms. White:** I thank my colleague for sharing the time today and, of course, I welcome back the officials.

I am just going to get right into it. I have concerns around the collection of data and how that has been shared. What I am going to do is that I am going to hone it very specifically to the *Yukon Wide Student Data Report* — specifically grade 12 graduation rates.

Although there is data collection and reporting problems across the board, I think that the grade 12 graduation rates provide the clearest example of how deeply flawed this reporting is and why it needs to change. I am bringing this up — and I very clearly want to say that this is in conversation with and learning from a data expert and in conversations with the First Nation Education Directorate. There are concerns about the collection and the sharing of data.

I recognize that this might not be possible right now, but it's important that, when we talk about the *Yukon Wide Student Data Report*, we can go from 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23. Ideally, we would be able to compare those across the board, because what was happening ahead of time — in the 2017-18 year — it's not the same collection that is happening in 2022-23. I appreciate that right now, without being able to see all of those reports — but I am putting it on record right now that I will be following up.

I am looking for the total number of grade 12 Yukon students in the adult graduation program. If the minister can let me know which report she is getting it from — because, again,

2017 through to 2022-23, they are significantly different. If she will let me know which report — but I am looking for the total number of grade 12 Yukon students in the adult graduation program.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** The report that I am speaking about is the *Yukon Wide Student Data Report*, so the 2022-23 school year. The Department of Education acknowledges diversity among students, including differences in their educational journeys and the support that they require to succeed. Consequently, there are multiple paths to complete K to 12 education in the Yukon.

Back on March 25, the member inquired — and I am just going to go through this because I think that this is exactly from the debate that we had then — about why Education is not reporting on all the graduates and in particular the gap of 89 students between the enrolment report and the *Yukon Wide Student Data Report* of 2022-23. There are three 2022-23 reports that are relevant to this information, all of which are available on [yukon.ca](http://yukon.ca). The three include the enrolment report of 2022-23 — the date on it is May 2023 — and it notes that there were 462 active grade 12 students. The 2022-23 Yukon-wide report notes that there were 373 grade 12 students who were potential graduates with a Dogwood diploma, which is a gap of 89 students compared to the enrolment report above.

The 2022-23 “how are we doing?” report notes that there are 72 students in the adult graduation program. The remaining 17 students were on an alternative path to complete high school in 2022-23, which included the school completion certificate program. The Dogwood diploma pathway is for students who graduate with the minimum of 80 course credits, including several specific courses as per the Yukon graduation program requirements within a specific time frame. The adult graduation program is a pathway for students who are at least 18 years of age and are either continuing their path toward graduation or plan to do so in the near future. Tracking these students becomes challenging, as they may complete this pathway in another institution or even in another jurisdiction. Consequently, distinguishing between students who have relocated, extended their graduation time, or left school entirely can be difficult, potentially leading to inaccuracies in the numbers at any given time.

The school completion certificate program, sometimes called the “Evergreen certificate”, is intended to celebrate the successive learning for students who are unable to meet the graduation program requirements. This path requires informed parent/guardian consent to be put in place, and these students would have an individual education plan to support the student in achieving their individualized markers for success.

The department is pursuing a number of initiatives, such as the integrated learner outcome strategy and reimagining inclusive and special education, which are aimed at improving graduation rates, enhancing our ability to analyze and understand students' experiences as they encounter various challenges in their education. This is a crucial aspect of these efforts.

Again, going back to the numbers — 462, which is the 100 percent; 373 were on a track for Dogwood diplomas, and

that represents 80.7 percent; and for the adult graduation program, as I have described, there were 72, which represents 15.6 percent; and then the remaining 17 were on an alternative path to complete high school in 2022-23, which included the school completion certificate program.

**Ms. White:** I guess the challenge is, if we were to look at all of these reports beside each other, we would recognize a very real difference in data collection, including the definitions, for example, of “adult learner” or “graduation rates”. When those changes happened, it actually skewed it to make it look like we’re doing quite well, but the reality is harder to piece together. When the minister talked about the challenges of tracking outmigration, I appreciate that it is difficult to track, but then why aren’t we using any of the other accepted methods for doing so that are used in other jurisdictions across Canada and the US? Why aren’t we using tools that have been developed in other places to do a better job of tracking that information?

The challenge really is that, when we talk about a six-year cohort, we are losing a lot of folks even before they get to high school. Because we say that it’s outmigration and we don’t know the reason, it’s easy enough to put it in that definition without saying that actually 44 percent of people just didn’t continue on in high school. They didn’t go to any school anywhere; they just stopped going. When we’re not looking deeper into the numbers and what they mean, it’s giving us a false sense that we are doing okay. So, it’s: They have moved jurisdictions, they’ve gone to a different school, or they’re no longer in the Yukon. But it is not accurate and it’s because of the way we’re tracking the data.

Why aren’t we looking to other jurisdictions when it comes to tracking the data?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Collecting and analyzing student data, sharing this data within organizations, and working with our partners are extremely important aspects of education. Student data gives the Department of Education and our education partners a better understanding of how our students are doing. Student data is integral in supporting schools to develop their school growth plans as well.

We certainly are working with all of our partners. In 2020, the minister and the Chiefs Committee on Education signed a data-sharing MOU in which they agreed to collaborate in sharing aggregated Yukon First Nation student data and research and analysis initiatives for the purpose of improving outcomes with Yukon First Nations. Under the data-sharing MOU, the data working group was established to work collaboratively to administer and achieve the objectives of the MOU. The data working group is comprised of members from Education, Yukon First Nation governments, and the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate. Education is currently working with the ATIPP process to determine the ability to share non-aggregated data. These are all things that we are working with.

In terms of the specific question about looking at other tools and best practices from other jurisdictions, we certainly work very closely with British Columbia as we work with their curriculum in terms of how we analyze our data.

We will continue to do that good work, but one of the areas that was pointed out, of course, in the Auditor General’s report was an area that we were directly to work toward addressing. It relates so much to better outcomes, working collaboratively with Yukon First Nations to meet the *Education Act* requirements and strategic action plans and specific measurable actions and timelines. This certainly relates to almost every aspect of the Auditor General’s report of 2019, which brings you to being able to analyze the root causes and poor student outcomes, defining performance targets and actions to reach these targets, and evaluating effectiveness of actions. All of this requires data. We remain committed to working with our partners under these agreements.

Again, the big one in this aspect of the Auditor General’s report of 2019 was creating a data-sharing memorandum and understanding with Yukon First Nations and releasing publicly available student data reports and engaging on the development of a 10-year integrated outcome strategy for Yukon learners.

**Ms. White:** So, my concern is that the 2016-17 *Yukon Wide Student Data Report* actually did report dropout rates, and then 2017-18 included it, and then it was revised and that was pulled off.

BC and Alberta, as an example, do actually have the ability to track specifically the dropout rates. The reason why that makes sense and is important is because then it is more reflective of what is actually happening as opposed to the more watered-down version, which just says “outmigration” and it doesn’t actually say where folks have gone.

When we talk specifically about BC and Alberta, those jurisdictions use the proxy cohort method, and that may not be the best method, but the fact is that it is still something and it is more accurate than just talking about outmigration; it says more about where they have gone.

The concern I have is that it’s not accurately reflecting the data. By not accurately reflecting the data, then we are not actually living up to what we said we would do with the 2019 Auditor General’s report because we are not really truly showing who is graduating and who is not and for who is not, why they are not as opposed to just, for example, changing schools.

I think maybe I am going to try a different track.

Can the minister tell me what the Yukon Education official definition is for “grade 12 graduation”? What is included in the grade 12 graduation rate?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** A “potential graduate” is defined as having graduated successfully or was last recorded in grade 12 and is not currently on an individualized education plan. Further, a “successful student” is defined as having been active in grade 12, either full time or half time in the Dogwood or adult graduation, enrolled at Yukon public schools and successfully graduated. Further, an “indeterminate student” is defined as continuing to live in Yukon without completing a Dogwood certificate, which includes non-graduates and students who are on the school completion certification program or an Evergreen certificate.

A bit more information — the Performance and Analytics branch is working to include K to 12 completion certificates,



including a school completion certificate program, which is also known as the “Evergreen certificate”, and other completion paths in their regular analysis and reporting. As a key objective of the learning outcome strategy — reimagining inclusive and special education and other initiatives — Education is committed to improve how these students are tracked and anticipates analyzing and presenting information about these students in the future.

**Ms. White:** My concern is that we used to follow British Columbia’s definition of “grade 12 graduation rate”, but we don’t anymore. Can the minister let me know when the decision was made to move away from what that definition was and why that decision was made?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Certainly, our goal is to ensure that Yukon students have the skills and knowledge necessary for their transition into higher education and training or workforce, wherever their path may be. The Performance and Analytics branch regularly analyzes and presents information about graduation numbers across the Yukon. I certainly have breakdowns by community and I have already gone through some of the definition here.

All grades 10 to 12 students follow the BC graduation program requirements, including the requirement to complete four credits — for instance, for an Indigenous-focused course. That is an important change that came into effect in the 2023 school year. Another key graduation requirement for all Yukon students is completing the BC literacy and numeracy assessments in grades 10 and 12. These assessments demonstrate overall skills in literacy and numeracy rather than the student’s proficiency in a specific course and students are required to earn a minimum of 80 credits and complete the BC provincial graduation assessments in numeracy and literacy to graduate.

There are other changes coming in 2025-26 around some changes that BC has gone forward with and we are looking to align with in terms of the grade 10 social studies curriculum to include explicitly teaching about the Holocaust. All Yukon school authorities, including the First Nation School Board, Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon, and private schools, must meet all graduation requirements as well.

An important initiative that we are working on with our partners — the Department of Education is in the process of developing a 10-year integrated outcome strategy for Yukon learners. We are engaging with partners — in particular with the First Nations Education Commission and the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education — prior to finalizing this strategy in order to ensure that we are taking the time to do the work in a good and right way. This is going to be another very key initiative that will help us track the outcomes. The integrated outcome strategy for Yukon learners will help us better understand what students need to thrive. It will also help us make better decisions based on facts and current data.

Over the past year, the consulting company IRP led an extensive engagement with Yukon First Nations and the broader education community. The feedback from this engagement forms the foundation of our strategy. The strategy aims to address the long-standing gaps in student performance

and improve outcomes for Yukon students, including First Nation students, rural students, and students with diverse learning needs. The strategy will help us develop a deeper understanding of how we can best support students and make evidence-based decisions that ensure all students have an opportunity to succeed.

Education staff are committed to doing this work in a good way with kindness and supportiveness, taking the time to listen, learn, and understand. All initiatives in education, including in schools and in our central services, will align with the values and intentions of this strategy. We highly value our collaborative work with Yukon First Nations and the First Nation School Board, the Chiefs Committee on Education, the First Nation Education Directorate, and, as I have already mentioned, the Advisory Committee on Yukon Education for better outcomes for all students but particularly, as we are relating a lot of the work back to recommendation 42 of the 2019 audit where one of the recommendations was that the Department of Education should develop and implement a strategy to address long-standing gaps in student performance and improve student outcomes, those of First Nation and rural students.

This is a direct response; these are areas that we have been working very intently on and will continue to do that work and move toward addressing, of course, the issues that the member brings forward today. They are important questions; they are important for better outcomes for all Yukon students, and we are committed to that work.

**Ms. White:** Just looping back into evidence-based decisions and again focusing on the *Yukon Wide Student Data Report* and the grade 12 graduation rate specifically, can you please explain the formula that the department uses to calculate the six-year cohort graduation rate?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Thank you for the question. I will return that information. It’s not something that I have readily at my fingertips today, but I will return that to the Legislature.

**Ms. White:** I’m going to add some other things for that return. I’m looking for the definition of terms used in the formula — specifically “outmigration”, “withdrawals”, and “transfers”. To clarify, I understand if, when Yukon Education uses “withdrawals”, they mean students who have dropped out of school.

I’m also looking to understand why the method that we use here claims to follow British Columbia but does not use the proxy cohort adjustment for outmigration that the BC method does. Then I want to understand if the Department of Education believes that it’s appropriate to combine outmigrants and withdrawals.

I want to know if the department realizes that the practice changes the graduation rate to make it artificially inflated. In fact, with the way that the department’s model is structured, the more students who withdraw, the better off the graduation rate gets. I am concerned about that, and I will look forward to getting a response.

Based on that, I am going to move on from data. I think that is probably best. I can give the minister a second to respond, but I will move on from data now.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Thank you for the questions today. I certainly will bring information back and again highlight some of the good work that is happening to address the 2019 Auditor General's report, which pointed out many of these areas that we have been actively working to change to ensure that we have a system that is supporting the best outcomes for Yukon learners. We are actively engaged in this, and the 10-year integrated outcome strategy for Yukon learners will be a key guiding document that all the folks working with children who are working toward graduation will align to.

I am happy to bring back the information that has been asked for today, and thank you for the questions.

**Ms. White:** So, in the past, it was possible to get a Dogwood or an adult graduation certificate as an adult student. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case in the Yukon if you are over 21 years old. Up until 21, you can go to the ILC; past 21, you can't. So, now we are talking about an unknown number of students who withdrew from school. I want to know what we expect now. The one thing I would point out is that I didn't graduate from high school until I was 21 years old when I took math in summer school. What would my options for graduation be if I were 22 years old now? What options is the department providing for students over 21 who want to learn as adults or after they have withdrawn to be able to get their Dogwood graduation diploma or to be able to get their adult graduation certificate?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** We continue to help adult learners and post-secondary students to access financial support and to find other supports. We provide individual adult learners with flexible support that best meets their needs. We recognize that every individual journey and needs are different and encourage interested Yukoners to connect with the training programs team to discuss the supports available for them. Students have access to the Yukon grant, the student training allowance Canada, and student financial assistance loans and grants.

We are completely aware that Canada's general education diploma, or GED, high school equivalency test was no longer available after March 31, 2024. This will have no impact on Yukon learners. Adults will continue to have access to the BC adult graduation diploma, which was introduced in the 1960s under the BC adult basic education program. Adult learners in the Yukon studying for high school equivalency have access to the BC adult graduation diploma, which was introduced all that time ago.

We do have, of course, Yukon University, which can support adult learners to reach their requirements for either trades or academic study.

I wanted to also just make note that we are aware that the 2024 federal budget resulted in \$625 million — in some cuts, we are working with Canada and we will be able to determine if any impacts will be felt in the Yukon, but I have had direct discussions previously with the federal minister around this need in the Yukon and how important it is.

So, there are many supports that are available within the Department of Education. We retained the training and apprenticeship and Working Up program, the summer career placement, and we share the other aspects of the workforce

development strategy with Economic Development. We will be working closely with them on the workforce strategy going forward.

**Ms. White:** Just seeking clarification — if a student who is over 21 years old wants to achieve their Dogwood diploma, their graduation, where are they supposed to go to school here?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Under the *Education Act*, students can apply for special consideration. Those applications are dealt with directly by the deputy minister for consideration to allow placement in a public school. There are some criteria points that we would have to make sure we meet, but those applications come directly to the deputy minister. If the member knows of students who may not have this information or have the supports to access this, I would encourage the member to share that information with me. I would be happy to direct, through my office or directly through the deputy minister's office, that process for them.

**Ms. White:** If there was an adult learner interested in achieving their high school graduation, where would they find out about applying for special consideration? On the Yukon website, where would they see that they could do that?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** We'll have to go back and just have a look at the website to make sure that we give clear information about that. But generally, if a student applies for grade 12 graduation or registers at a high school and if they are over that age threshold, they will automatically be flagged to the superintendent, and then the Department of Education — oftentimes, we do have students come into the Department of Education to meet with folks who work in the training area within the Department of Education — and they will help them to map out a path as well, depending on what it is that they want to achieve.

But that is a pathway. They can go to their high school, they can register for study in high school, and if they are over that age threshold, then they will automatically be flagged and moved into a process to get them on a path to achieve their desired outcomes. If that is graduation — Dogwood graduation — then they can have that direct assistance from the department, their superintendent, or even the principal at the school level.

**Ms. White:** Looking at the government's website — it's entitled "Find out what you need to graduate from high school" — there is the adult graduation diploma — that is the title, and it says: "Adults 18 and older who haven't graduated from high school can take courses and credits to earn a BC Adult Graduation Diploma (or Adult Dogwood)."

"To learn more talk to the school counsellor at your local high school.

"You can also visit the BC Education website to learn more about the courses and requirements for a BC Adult Graduation Diploma."

Following the link to BC, it says that you can find an institution that offers adult education programs. But the point is that it says to go to the school and speak to a counsellor, but if I was 27 years old — and I was like: I need to do this — I am not sure that I would walk into a high school to ask for a meeting with a school counsellor and ask: Well, how do I

graduate now? And I am not so sure that they necessarily would have the tools in order to support me in that.

Again, summer school at 21 was hard enough. It was hard enough. I was 21 and I was in grade 11 math with people who were 16 and we had far different realities, and I can't imagine what it would have been like if it was further. My point is that if there are adult learners who want to go toward graduation, then whatever we can do to make it easier — because it is hard to go back. Maybe the website could say that you can apply for special consideration and there could be that process — or where there could be more information about what that could look like — because I think that would be helpful.

Ultimately, I probably have like seven hours of questions left, but that is going to be really hard for us to get through in the — I don't know — eight hours of debate that we have between now and the end of day Thursday. I know that my colleague the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin has two questions and then it is my intention to try to get us to Highways and Public Works, but I will be sending these in a letter to the minister and I look forward to getting a response back.

**Mr. Hassard:** I thank the Member for Takhini-Kopper King for allowing me the opportunity and as well thank the officials for being here this afternoon.

I just had a couple of questions specific to my riding. Teslin school — I am kind of looking for an update on or the status of the maintenance and repairs to the school. I know that last year, an architectural firm had gone down and done a report on the roof. The paint situation, I know, is somewhat in need of some serious attention. I am curious if the minister can let me know where we are at with the repairs of the Teslin school.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Part of the work that we do with our schools — we ensure regular preventive maintenance through the school year, with a focus on minimizing disruptions to school activities, of course. Maintenance tasks affecting school programs are planned during winter, spring, and summer breaks. We work directly with our school communities. Of course, our commitment is to the health and safety of students and staff. That includes ongoing maintenance of all facilities, addressing both routine and emergency needs, regardless of the age of the school.

We work very closely with Highways and Public Works and school administrators on identifying areas of need and maintenance. I know that our team is working with the school community in Teslin. One of the major capital projects that we are working on right now — for instance, we have a commitment to experiential learning spaces, and Teslin school is certainly one of the schools that is receiving one of those learning spaces this year.

I have recently had a meeting on a government-to-government basis with the Teslin Tlingit Council and have had members who are directly related to the school involved in that meeting. We had a very good discussion and a lot of takeaways and work that we intend to keep doing with the school community but also with the Teslin Tlingit Council on some longer term options around the school itself.

In terms of those two items, I will have to bring that information back to the member.

**Mr. Hassard:** I appreciate that from the minister and I guess, while I am on my feet, I would ask if she would prefer and if I would I have better success asking the Minister of Highways and Public Works that question when we are hopefully up for debate in Highways and Public Works.

Moving on, the other question I had was — my understanding is that Teslin school is the only school in the Yukon that doesn't have a full-time principal — or that it's the only school that only has a half-time principal might be a better way to put it. As well, the Teslin school doesn't have a vice-principal, so I am curious: Is there some rationale or is that, in fact, accurate information? Maybe we could just shed a little light on that situation.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Thank you for the question on teacher allocation. Effective teachers are one of the most important factors in student success, and we work directly with each school community with regard to staff allocation. A lot of times, it is based on student enrolment and class sizes, so there are always unique aspects of each school community.

Student enrolment certainly has increased over recent years. The department is working to ensure consistent service levels in schools as well as effective, targeted support for students with diverse learning needs. While overall enrolment is increasing, some individual schools have decreased enrolment, which may sometimes impact staffing allocation.

Schools basically received their enrolment projections and staffing allocations in February 2024. Based on these projections, our administrators are working with their assigned superintendent to complete their school's 2024 staffing plans.

I will note that our superintendent was actually just in Teslin maybe a week or so ago, and they can confirm that they will have a 0.5 VP and a 0.5 principal for the 2024-25 school year. I would need to go back and the department could go back and just look at the allocations across the Yukon to specifically answer the part of your question around the staffing allocation for other schools in terms of that principal/vice-principal role.

**Mr. Hassard:** The minister said that the department "could"; she didn't say that the department "would" or that she would actually get back to me with that information. So, if she could confirm that she would actually provide that to me — and I guess the follow-up to that or the reason for it is that I know that Teslin has a very similar school population to that of Ross River and Faro, the other two communities in my riding. To the best of my knowledge, they both have full-time principals and at least half-time vice-principals, so I guess I'm just trying to wrap my head around why Teslin would be less than the other two schools in my riding.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Yes, thank you for that clarifying question. I will bring that information back. I will just note that one of the schools that the member is referencing is operated by the First Nation School Board, so they have the autonomy to work in different ways within their school. That being said — because sometimes schools make decisions on the FTEs that they have and how they allocate their resources based on the enrolment. I will definitely bring that information back for the member.

**Ms. White:** Just realizing that it's 5:10 p.m. and with a break, it means that we would have like four and a half minutes before we moved on, I'm just going to ask a couple more questions in Education and, with the support of the minister and members of the House, we will clear it by 5:25 p.m.

At the Yukon Association of Education Professionals meeting on the weekend, there were a couple of points that were included in the president's report. When they talk about wellness specialists, the YAEP do not consider social workers to be the best solution to be filling the school wellness specialists. They believe that the positions need to be filled by certified school counsellors. They are concerned that the government talks about these positions as if they actually exist. Now we know that there are seven out of the possible 12 and we're told that they were in zones and that the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon has hired them.

What response does the minister have to the concern that the YAEP does not believe that social workers are the best solution to filling those wellness specialist positions in schools?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Sorry for the delay — we have a lot of different notes. These supports are very important. We know that counselling support is important and is not the only aspect, of course, of a comprehensive mental health approach to Yukon schools. Everyone is aware, of course, that we are working toward establishing the school wellness specialist and also the First Nation wellness support roles, both referred to in our commitment to the confidence and supply agreement.

These positions will be served by two specific roles, with each school having access to choose from wellness specialists. The minimum requirement — this goes back to our classifications and, of course, working with our partners and the other authorities to work toward collaborating to develop these positions. The other one, of course, is the First Nation wellness support role, which we are developing in collaboration with First Nation governments. This could be an elder, a traditional knowledge-keeper, or a traditional healer, so we are really trying to be very flexible with those positions.

We definitely have had conversations with Yukon First Nation governments around the development of the First Nation wellness support roles. The job description for the school wellness specialist role was developed by working with the executive directors of the school boards, superintendents, and partners at mental health and substance use in 2023. We worked with the Public Service Commission around the classifications and requirements for these types of roles. We are actively recruiting for the positions and we do also have that flexibility around the First Nation wellness supports.

**Ms. White:** When is it expected to have one of these positions in every Yukon school?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** As I stated earlier in other questions — maybe by the Official Opposition — I talked about having an allocation of 81 positions, some of them being for 2023-24. We are still actively recruiting some of those positions, and then we have 21 FTEs for 2024-25 and we have 20 for 2025-26.

Again, we are working closely with our partners. As I stated earlier, out of the wellness specialists, we now have hired seven. One was for the Francophone School Board and the

other six were for areas 1 and 2. There are five vacancies that we are still actively recruiting for. Again, for the 2024-25 budget that we are currently debating, we have 21 FTEs allocated within this fiscal year. We will continue to move with our partners to fill the positions and fill the need in the schools and work also on the First Nation wellness supports as well. Those will have different criteria and we will be able to work directly with First Nations around those positions.

**Ms. White:** When will those seven hired positions be active in schools?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** They will be beginning their work in the coming months.

Moving forward, some have been hired earlier and then, just between a few days ago and today, we have confirmed that we have seven, so they will be active and onboarding. We will definitely continue to work with our partners to fill the existing positions.

**Ms. White:** How many of those seven are expected to work in this school year — the one that ends in June 2024?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** We have two who are active and have started now in schools and the other five will be in by next month.

**Chair:** Is there any further general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education?

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

**Ms. White:** Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 3, Department of Education, cleared or carried, as required.

### **Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 3, Department of Education, cleared or carried**

**Chair:** The Member for Takhini-Kopper King has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 3, Department of Education, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Chair:** Unanimous consent has been granted.

***On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures***

***Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$252,745,000 agreed to***

***On Capital Expenditures***

***Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$29,380,000 agreed to***

***Total Expenditures in the amount of \$282,125,000 agreed to***

***Department of Education agreed to***

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Madam Chair, I move that you report progress.

**Chair:** It has been moved by the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes that the Chair report progress.

*Motion agreed to*

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

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

*Motion agreed to*

*Speaker resumes the Chair*

**Speaker:** I will now call the House to order.

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

#### **Chair's report**

**Chair:** 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 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. tomorrow.

*The House adjourned at 5:25 p.m.*

#### **The following sessional paper was tabled April 29, 2024:**

35-1-153

Report on Subsistence, Travel & Accommodations of Members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly 2023-2024 (Speaker Harper)

#### **The following documents were filed April 29, 2024:**

35-1-250

Nursing Home Attendants' Plea, letter re (dated April 26, 2024) from Mark Reymer Agapito to Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee, Minister of Health and Social Services (Clarke, Y.)

35-1-251

Bill No. 38, *Health Authority Act*, letter re (dated April 29, 2024) from Currie Dixon, Leader of the Official Opposition, to Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee, Minister of Health and Social Services (Dixon)

#### **Written notice was given of the following motions April 29, 2024:**

Motion No. 982

Re: review of Connective Support Society programs (Blake)

Motion No. 983

Re: *Legislative Assembly Act* amendments (Cathers)

#### **Written notice was given of the following motion for the production of papers April 29, 2024:**

Motion for the Production of Papers No. 27

Re: health authority memorandum of understanding between Yukon government, Yukon Hospital Corporation, and unions (Cathers)