



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 196

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Wednesday, October 2, 2024 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2024 Fall 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
Deputy Clerk	Allison Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, October 2, 2024 — 1:00 p.m.**

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

I would like to begin the 2024 Fall Sitting of the Legislative Assembly by respectfully acknowledging all Yukon First Nations and also that we are meeting on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

We will proceed at this time with prayers.

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of changes made to the Order Paper. A total of 182 motions have been withdrawn. The following two motions were withdrawn for the start of the 2023 Fall Sitting, but the Chair omitted mentioning to the House last year this particular change to the Order Paper on October 4, 2023. They are Motion No. 80, which was standing in the name of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, and Motion No. 438, which stood in the name of the Member for Porter Creek North.

Similarly, the Chair did not announce on October 7, 2021 that outdated Motions No. 5, 6, and 7, which stood in the name of the Member for Riverdale South, were removed from the Order Paper at the start of the 2021 Fall Sitting.

The following motions have been removed from the Order Paper, as they are now outdated: standing in the name of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, Motions No. 234, 235, 254, 258, 281, and 931; standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge, Motion No. 336; standing in the name of the Member for Riverdale North, Motion No. 356; standing in the name of the Member for Porter Creek Centre, Motions No. 328 and 329; standing in the name of the Leader of the Official Opposition, Motion No. 726; standing in the name of the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin, Motion No. 793; standing in the name of the Member for Kluane, Motions No. 115, 123, 440, 451, and 784; standing in the name of the Member for Copperbelt South, Motion No. 994; standing in the name of the Member for Watson Lake, Motion No. 437; standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse West, Motion No. 607; standing in the name of the Hon. Premier, Motions No. 643, 790, and 802; standing in the name of the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes, Motions No. 957 and 977; standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre, Motions No. 181 and 725; and standing in the name of the Leader of the Third Party, Motions No. 446, 695, 789, and 934.

The following motions have been removed from the Order Paper, as the actions requested in the motions have been completed in whole or in part: standing in the name of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, Motion No. 752; standing in the name of the Member for Porter Creek Centre, Motions No. 328 and 329; standing in the name of the Member for Copperbelt South, Motion No. 422; standing in the name of the Member for Porter Creek North, Motion No. 53; and standing in the

name of the Leader of the Third Party, Motions No. 152 and 377.

The following motions have been removed from the Order Paper at the request of the member: standing in the name of the member for Porter Creek Centre, Motions No. 936 and 995; standing in the name of the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin, Motions No. 41, 54, 92, 121, 163, 289, 439, 534, 600, 630, 670, 690, 779, and 935; standing in the name of the Member for Kluane, Motion No. 866; standing in the name of the Member for Copperbelt South, Motions No. 832 and 864; standing in the name of the Member for Watson Lake, Motion No. 668; standing in the name of the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes, Motions No. 317, 332, 333, 618, 743, 768, 858, 891, 898, 907, 922, 938, 952, 953, and 972; standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre, Motions No. 383, 409, 411, 412, 444, 518, 545, 550, 572, 720, 836, and 867; standing in the name of the Member for Porter Creek North, Motions No. 147, 206, 370, 415, 496, 929, and 965; and standing in the name of the Leader of the Third Party, Motions No. 17, 26, 78, 114, 137, 165, 166, 172, 182, 185, 191, 196, 213, 222, 242, 251, 280, 306, 312, 340, 361, 382, 387, 388, 396, 397, 402, 403, 445, 452, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 463, 497, 502, 512, 517, 531, 535, 539, 542, 543, 549, 568, 602, 614, 632, 633, 638, 642, 678, 687, 700, 709, 710, 719, 748, 749, 770, 809, 810, 844, 845, 855, 861, 869, 894, 902, 908, 909, 943, 945, 947, 955, 956, 960, 974, 978, 980, 990, and 998.

Motion No. 590, standing in the name of the Member for Riverdale South, has been withdrawn, as the subject matter of the motion was decided with the passage of Bill No. 38.

Finally, Motion No. 996, notice of which was given by the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin on May 2, 2024, was not placed on the Notice Paper, as the motion is not in order.

INTRODUCTION OF PAGES

Speaker: It gives me great pleasure to introduce the pages who will be serving the House during the 2024 Fall Sitting. They are: Nari Benoit, Kartana Walton Thorsteinson, Lucas Anderson-Lindsay from Porter Creek Secondary School; Melia Emery from CSSC Mercier; Xinyao Zhang and Eliahn May Minguito from F.H. Collins Secondary School; and from St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Secondary School, Renzo Baluyut and Roman Snider.

Today, we have with us Roman Snider and Kartana Walton Thorsteinson. I would like to ask members to welcome them into the House at this time — sorry, a little slow here after all those numbers.

Applause

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Under Introduction of Visitors, allow me to introduce visitors.

Visitors introduced

Speaker: Are there any further visitors to be introduced?
Visitors introduced

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In remembrance of Rolf Hougen

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to mark the passing of an iconic member of our community, Rolf Hougen, who passed away last month. His contributions to the Yukon are not only a testament to his entrepreneurial spirit but also to his unwavering commitment to the community he loved.

Born in Tatalrose, British Columbia, Rolf moved to the Yukon with his parents at a young age. Rolf developed his business acumen at his family's department store and, at the age of 18, took over the management of the family business. By 1949, Hougen's had expanded with the acquisition of a much larger building on Main Street. When a fire ravaged the store in 1952, Rolf's resilience was evident and he quickly adapted, purchasing the neighbouring bowling alley and constructing an even larger store. This was a testament to his resourcefulness and determination.

The 1950s were a period of change and modernization in the Yukon and Rolf was at the forefront. He founded WHTV, a telecommunications company in Whitehorse, in 1958 and CKRW, the first commercial radio station, in 1969. Perhaps one of Rolf's most ambitious endeavours was his role in founding CanCom, the Canadian Satellites Communications system, which brought multi-channel radio and television to more than 2,000 remote communities across Canada — a first in the globe. This bold initiative, although financially risky, cemented Rolf's reputation as a national visionary.

Rolf's legacy is about much more than business success, though. His deep love for the Yukon was evident in his efforts to preserve our history and heritage. He was a founding chairman of the Yukon Sourdough Rendezvous, which has now celebrated over 60 years of bringing Yukoners together. He also was the founding chairman of the Yukon Foundation, which continues to support Yukoners through scholarships and grants. He was the driving force behind efforts to save historical treasures like the *SS Klondike* and the White Pass & Yukon Route railway, ensuring that future generations could experience the rich heritage of the Yukon.

Rolf's passion for Yukon history and culture was unmatched. A keen photographer, he donated thousands of photographs to the Yukon Archives and helped preserve the works of early Yukon photographers. Rolf also commissioned local artists to create bronze busts honouring iconic figures from the Yukon's past, further cementing his legacy as a preserver of our history.

Even in his later years, Rolf remained active in the community. He served as chancellor of Yukon College and played a key role in advancing its efforts toward university status.

Mr. Speaker, I share with the family — I have had the honour and privilege of sitting next to Rolf through those

meetings for three years. It was something that I looked forward to every month as we sat in those meetings and I appreciated the opportunity to learn from him, and his talent is something that I will never forget.

His lifetime of dedication was recognized in 2019 when he was awarded the prestigious Order of Yukon, among his many accolades.

Rolf was a loving husband to his wife, Margaret, for almost 70 years, and together, they built a family of six children. Rolf was also a proud grandfather to 18 grandchildren and a great-grandfather to 10.

I want to thank grandchildren Jarred, Miles, Kai and PJ who shared reflections about their grandfather at MacBride at the celebration of life — incredible to hear from that generation of the family about all of the values that he instilled in them.

Rolf Hougen's life was defined by service to his community, his visionary leadership, and his enduring commitment to the Yukon, and Rolf's legacy will continue to shape our territory for generations to come.

I think that for anybody who heard from the family and sat and listened, the biggest lesson that I walk away with is the importance of family, friends, and the people next to you, spending time with them — quality time — and making sure that it is a priority.

We owe him our heartfelt thanks and his memory will always hold a special place in the hearts of Yukoners.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to an amazing Yukoner, Rolf Blakstad Hougen, and I am honoured to do so.

Rolf Hougen and the Hougen Group of Companies have been a mainstay in Yukon for decades. There has been so much written about his achievements and his awards, and as you can see, it's a long list. Today, I want to talk about how he touched Yukoners.

Rolf worked in his father's store and eventually took over the business at age 18. With hard work, tenacity, and wise business sense, he proceeded to build the largest department store in Yukon. Many will remember well wandering through Hougen's store, and whatever you can imagine was most likely tucked in there somewhere. The hardware store in the basement, the record and clothing stores upstairs, sporting goods and guns, drugstore items, and even nugget jewelry could be purchased — items that I still use at home today.

Christmas was extra special at Hougen's. Their outstanding window displays — I hosted a customer appreciation night with a beverage and snacks before it became a thing. Perhaps it was with all the children in Rolf's life that he loved this holiday, as he also sponsored the Santa train for everyone in town.

The store wasn't enough. Rolf was a visionary and worked tirelessly to bring the world to the north. WHTV in 1958 and then, in one week in 1969, he opened CKRW, Whitehorse Motors, and a retail store in Faro. There was no stopping as he, along with his family, thought of other projects they could be involved in — in growing Yukon.

Rolf also had a passion for keeping track of events and happenings around the territory. Along with his photos, he captured a time of yesteryear. If you have not done so or do not know, please look up Yukon Nuggets and you will be amazed at the goings-on that went on during the 1950s, 1960s, and so on.

As was mentioned, he was the founding member of the Yukon Sourdough Rendezvous. So, picture matching fur coats, Rolf and Margaret on the frozen Yukon River in front of the White Pass Building watching the likes of Stephen Frost and Alex Van Bibber racing dogs and cheering with everyone.

This true Yukon event — dances at every large venue, a parade, and the crowning of the queen and her court at the ice palace on Main Street where the Town and Mountain sits now — it was an experience one never forgets.

One of the best things we appreciate about the Hougen family is that they all had a hand in building the business, just as Rolf had done with his father. All of his children worked in the store to understand and learn about business and to make a difference for others.

As the big box stores began arriving in Whitehorse, Rolf adjusted to the times and started closing some of the departments and switched to specialty stores with quality products. Again, it worked.

The arts were important. Arts Underground and the Yukon Art Society have a gallery and workshop space and a gift shop down the stairs at Hougen's. The bronze busts of well-known Yukoners seen on street corners were commissioned and donated by the Hougens.

Despite all the accolades and awards, Rolf was the local boy who succeeded beyond imagination but stayed grounded and loved the Yukon. It always struck me that for Rolf, his family came first, no matter the flitting around the world and attending meetings to bring his ideas to fruition. His core being appeared to be with his wife, children, and grandkids and their well-being.

Info from an inside source — two things he was known to have said often. When doing something special at home, at the cabin, or at his favourite fishing spot, he would say, "Isn't this great?" When recognized or when receiving awards, he would say, "I couldn't have done any of this without Marg."

The legacy that Rolf and Margaret have left will be carried on by Craig, Kelly, Karen, Erik, Greta, and Maureen and their partners, the 18 grandchildren, and the 10 great-grandchildren. They are almost rivalling the Van Bibber clan. As one generation passes and as the decades continue to move along, it is not the length of time one is here that is important; it is what one contributes to the greater good of all that matters, and Rolf Hougen has certainly fulfilled his part.

Applause

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to the life and legacy of Rolf Hougen. Rolf's impact on Whitehorse and the Yukon really can't be overstated. You see it when you walk down Main Street past the iconic downtown building that is the Hougen Centre; you hear it when you turn on the radio and listen to the

news decades after he started Whitehorse's first local news cable station; you feel it in the excitement every February during Rendezvous, a festival that evolved from the winter carnivals that he organized many years ago.

I could go on for a long time listing his many accomplishments, but what I think of most when I think of Rolf Hougen's impact is his incredible family. I know he was very proud of his family and it's easy to see why. Whether they are running businesses, raising children, adventuring into the outdoors, or supporting and caring for their fellow Yukoners, his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren are carrying on Rolf's legacy in every part of Yukon life. It's pretty hard to imagine a Whitehorse without Hougens in it, and I can't think of a better legacy than that.

On behalf of the Yukon NDP, I want to express our sympathy to his entire family for their loss and our gratitude for sharing their father, grandfather, and great-grandfather with our community. Thank you.

Applause

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Speaker: Under Tabling Returns and Documents, the Chair has for tabling the *Report from the Clerk of the Yukon Legislative Assembly on the Absence of Members from Sittings of the Legislative Assembly and its Committees*, dated October 2, 2024; a certification report from the Ombudsman, pursuant to section 18 of the *Ombudsman Act*, dated August 6, 2024; and the Yukon Electoral Boundaries Commission interim report, dated May 9, 2024.

Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the *Fifteenth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees*, dated June 4, 2024. I also have for presentation the committee's 16th report, dated August 12, 2024. Finally, I also have the committee's 17th report, dated September 12, 2024.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the *Seventh Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts*, dated September 19, 2024.

Speaker: Are there any further committee reports to be presented?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 215: Second Appropriation Act 2024-25 — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 215, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2024-25*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 215, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2024-25*, be now introduced and read a first time. Are you agreed?

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 215 agreed to

Speaker: Are there any further 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 recognizes the recipients of the Yukon 125 anniversary medals who have made significant contributions to the well-being of our territory.

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

THAT this House supports the Government of Yukon's efforts to modernize schools across the territory through:

- (1) the completion of Paul-Émile Mercier Secondary School;
- (2) opening of the brand new Whistle Bend Elementary School;
- (3) awarding of the construction contract for Kêts'ádañ Kù in Burwash Landing;
- (4) replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary School; and
- (5) engagement on options to build a new school in downtown Whitehorse.

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

THAT this House acknowledges the leadership of the Canadian Medical Association for their apology to Indigenous people for the racism and discrimination that they have experienced and thanks the Yukon Medical Association president, Dr. Alex Kmet, for his recognition of the Yukon as a leader in creating safer spaces in our hospital system and for the creation of a health authority that is being developed in partnership with Yukon First Nations.

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

THAT this House acknowledges the completion of the 778-kilometre Dempster fibre line that will provide Internet and cellular service redundancy in the Yukon and across the north.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House supports Government of Yukon efforts to ensure that recycling services are offered in the Yukon by:

- (1) providing \$2.4 million to cover half of the costs of launching a new curbside recycling program for Whitehorse residents;
- (2) continuing to collect recyclable materials from depots across the territory to process and ship to southern markets; and

(3) implementing the extended producer responsibility regulation to shift the costs of recycling from the territorial and municipal governments and taxpayers to product manufacturers and producers.

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

THAT this House supports the \$40-million investment through Canada's critical minerals infrastructure fund for the Government of Yukon to explore the feasibility of a grid connection for clean, affordable energy.

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

THAT this House supports the ongoing implementation of the *Breaking Trail Together* operational plan 2023-26, which addresses chapter 22 of the Yukon First Nation government final agreements for a representative public service.

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

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Eagle Gold mine management

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, the mining industry, the business community, public servants, First Nations, and Yukoners in general have been watching the Liberal government's response to issues associated with the Eagle Gold mine throughout the summer with great interest and great concern.

In August, the government petitioned the courts to force the Victoria Gold Corporation into receivership and took over their assets, including the Eagle Gold mine. Since then, the mine has been under the control of a receiver, PricewaterhouseCoopers, with the responsibility for the mine ultimately falling to Yukon taxpayers.

My first question to the Premier is very simple: Does the Premier still believe that this was the right decision?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. Also, I'll just start by saying that, from June 24 forward, non-stop, everybody has been working hard to protect the environment, animal and human health, safety on-site — and that includes Energy, Mines and Resources and the Department of Environment. In talking with Chief Hope from the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, she has expressed to me how hard her team has been working. I would also like to acknowledge the Eagle Gold staff who have been working throughout, the receiver since August 14, and all the contractors. Everybody has been working very hard to address the environmental risk that is there on-site with groundwater contamination, trying their best to address it ahead of freeze-up.

Do we support the decision to petition the courts to see a receiver come in and take over the management of Eagle mine? Yes.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, one of the most confusing aspects of this decision by the Liberal government was the mixed messaging between the Premier, the Minister of Energy,

Mines and Resources, and the Minister of Justice. In the days following the court's acceptance of the Yukon government's petition to force the company into receivership and seize all of its assets, the Minister of Justice became the lead spokesperson. She told local media that, in fact, the Yukon government had no intention of putting the company out of business and had no intention of shutting them down.

Mr. Speaker, can the Premier explain how Yukoners can be expected to believe that, despite seizing the company's operations, assets, money, and the mine itself, they can say with a straight face that they had no intention of shutting the company down?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I'll say it even today. In fact, yesterday, the Leader of the Official Opposition was on CBC Radio and was talking very cavalierly, misinforming Yukoners that the Yukon government is now the owner of the Victoria Gold Eagle mine. That is not correct. In fact, the receiver, PricewaterhouseCoopers, is not the owner; it is still Victoria Gold. In fact, this receivership was put in place to deal with that environmental remediation, to deal with that risk that is being felt there on-site.

The Yukon Party — sort of as a “stay out of it”, Wolverine mine approach to this — I think that we have moved way, way past that, and I think that Yukoners expect that we will address the environmental remediation, and I thank the foresight of all of the folks involved from Justice, from EMR, from Executive Council Office, from the Department of Finance, from the Department of Environment — everyone working non-stop and hard to make sure that we protect the environment, because that is the best route back to a strong, functioning mineral sector.

Mr. Dixon: I would remind the minister that Victoria Gold no longer has a board, no longer has an executive, no longer has any money, assets, or any operations, so it's pretty tough to understand how they exist still.

In her August 14 written statement, the Minister of Justice said — and I quote: “This legal action provides a pathway for the required costs of mitigation to be recovered from the assets of the company...” However, just two days later at a technical briefing, she said that the government's goal was not to sell off Victoria Gold's assets but rather to get the mine back to the state it was in before the failure.

So, to be clear, Mr. Speaker, the state that the mine was in before the failure was a producing, heap leach gold mine. So, can the government now confirm that their intention is indeed to bring the project back into production as a heap leach gold mine? If so, how much will that cost, who will pay, and how long will it take to reopen the mine?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think it's very telling that the very first question of our Fall Sitting — this is the priority of the Opposition. That's good. I think that what we will do today is — I want to give the leader of the opposition, colleagues, and the critic for Energy, Mines and Resources one last chance to go back. There was a court filing yesterday from PricewaterhouseCoopers. That report outlines activity that has happened since June — the assets, the burn rate. I think that the leader of the opposition positions his

approach as academic, as business-minded, being able to go through those documents.

I'm happy to debate the next 27 days, but I want the opposition to take one more opportunity to not be the outlier on this particular issue — to actually go through the information and analyze it. If they want to come down and double-down as they are today on this particular topic, we are more than happy, because I have sat down with financial leaders in the country, mining leaders, and I can tell you that the opposition right now is an outlier. I'm happy to debate.

Question re: Eagle Gold mine management

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow up with some questions specifically about what is going on at the Eagle Gold site since the government has taken over.

In a letter to the *Yukon News* on September 13, a whistle-blowing former employee from the site called out the Yukon government, saying — quote: “The forced receivership of Victoria Gold has exposed a troubling pattern of mismanagement and double standards by the Yukon government. The government's initial emphasis on urgency and environmental concerns seems to have faded, replaced by delays and inconsistencies. This is in stark contrast to the stringent and unrealistic demands imposed on the company and which were the basis for the receivership application.”

So, Mr. Speaker, how does the government respond to these claims — from someone who has been working directly on the site — of delays, inconsistencies, and double standards, and why have they abandoned the urgency of getting work done to protect the environment since taking control of the site and forcing the company into receivership?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will start, Mr. Speaker, by repeating what I said when I first rose, which is to thank PricewaterhouseCoopers for their work in the role of receivership and the staff at Eagle Gold, who have been doing tremendous work to get as much environmental protection as can be ahead of freeze-up. Since they have come in roughly a month and a half ago — and as the Premier noted, they just filed their first court report late yesterday — 18 groundwater monitoring wells — so we are getting more detailed information about the groundwater contamination — they have done improvements to the camp, they have built the road in to get the berm going — that is with local Yukon contractors. The Premier and I met with them late last week, I believe it was, and PricewaterhouseCoopers has been doing a lot of work to get water treatment up and running. We know that, when Victoria Gold was there, the water treatment that they had in place failed. I have been told that we are at the 95-percent mark on water treatment, so this is all the work — and we will continue to hold whoever is in charge at the Eagle site to make sure that we are getting that environmental remediation work, because it is critical for Yukoners.

Mr. Kent: On July 26, the Yukon government issued an update on the situation at Victoria Gold with respect to the construction of a safety berm. In this update, YG stated — and I'll quote: “Due to the company's failure to construct a safety berm, the Government of Yukon has engaged contractors to

design and build this berm. The berm is critical to ensure that groundwater monitoring and interception wells can be installed safely.” Further — and I will quote again: “This work is expected to take around two weeks to complete and groundwater wells can be installed in certain locations as construction progresses once it is safe to do so.”

Well, here we are two months later, and the berm isn’t finished. Now the berm has a revised timeline of at least four more weeks to complete.

Why was the company expected to do something in a couple of weeks that we have now learned will take the government well over three months to complete, and how is this not considered a double standard?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: It is not the government doing the work; it is the receiver that is doing the work. Our job as regulator is to make sure that the receiver is doing that work. Following the orders and the inspector’s directions that have been issued with respect to four weeks to build the berm rather than two — the reason is because, if the work had been started when we first requested it, you could work 24 hours. Now you can work 12 hours a day. It just has to do with daylight.

When we requested it, the company, Eagle Gold, said that they disagreed with it. They just didn’t believe that it was the right thing to do, and it was one of the reasons that we started to lose confidence in the company to fulfill the directions that we had issued. Those directions are to protect the environment and, in this case, to make sure it is done in a safe way, because it is right at the bottom of the slide. We were nervous about the potential for additional slides, so this is to protect those workers to go in and put in those groundwater wells so that we can extract the groundwater and treat it, because we know that the groundwater is contaminated.

I want to thank PricewaterhouseCoopers for their initiative around this and the contractors that they brought on-site. I was told yesterday that the access road for the berm is now in place. That had to be constructed as well, so they are working.

Mr. Kent: Just for the minister, the government took this over on July 26 — this aspect of the project — and we are just simply asking why the company was held to a different standard and a different timeline than the government was.

Another urgent task required of the company was the construction of lined water storage facilities. On July 10, the company was ordered to complete 50,000 cubic metres of storage and had five days to do it. After the Yukon government assumed control of the entire site in August, contractors took over a month to line the mine’s pit and use it for water storage.

Does the minister believe that it was reasonable for the company to do in five days what it took the government over a month to complete? Why was there a double standard?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, we lost confidence in the management at Eagle Gold. One of the reasons was that when we requested these things, rather than saying: Hey, we need a bit more time to build that, what we got back was: No, we’re not going to do that. Since the receiver has been in place, they have built two ponds. I think that the total is 146,000 cubic metres, pit pond included.

There are several ponds they are building down closer below the mine site in — sorry, I’m going to get this acronym wrong, but it’s called the “ice-rich overburden stationing area” or something like that.

So, they are doing that work and it is not a double standard. What it is is that we have a receiver that is now working to fulfill the government’s directions from our mine inspectors, and that’s about keeping Yukoners safe and protecting the environment, and that is what is so necessary — and how hard everybody has been working toward that since the start.

Question re: School drinking water quality

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, according to water-quality reports from 2019, 27 Yukon schools had unsafe amounts of lead in their drinking water. At the time, little was done to address these concerns. We are talking about levels that, in some cases, are hundreds of times higher than what is safe. The health effects of children being exposed to lead include permanent damage to neurological development, lower IQ, behavioural problems, and, in adults, increased blood pressure and kidney problems.

The Liberals promised that the water would be fixed this past summer, but they didn’t do it. No remediation work happened. The situation is exactly as dangerous as it was in the spring. So, why hasn’t this government prioritized ensuring that Yukon children have safe drinking water in schools?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure folks that this is a high priority for our government. The health and safety of our students remain a high priority, absolutely. We are doubling down on our commitment to ensure that all Yukon students have access to clean drinking water in school facilities. Clean drinking water is available in all of our schools. I have made this my personal priority. The Highways and Public Works minister also has. We are working across departments to make sure that this issue is resolved as quickly as possible. I want to speak directly, of course, to parents, students, staff, and members of the school community and reiterate this commitment.

We are working to retest drinking water fountains to ensure compliance with updated guidelines. Any fixtures found not to meet standards will be deactivated and remediated. Again, clean drinking water is available in all of our schools. I also want to applaud the work of the two students at the Del Van Gorder School in Faro who tested the water there as part of a science fair project. They certainly have done a service to their classmates and school community, and I hold my hands up to them.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, it was such a high priority for this government that the contract to remediate the problems of the drinking water was only tendered weeks ago.

In 2019, the Yukon government did some remediation work to address lead levels, but even after the work was done, when they retested the drinking water, 19 schools still failed. Nothing additional was done. Later in 2019, Canada made the guidelines more stringent, emphasizing the extensively documented toxicity. Nineteen Yukon schools were already failing the old standard, and now another eight schools were

above the safe levels. So, what did the Liberals do? Well, absolutely nothing.

Fast-forward to this spring when the Del Van Gorder School science fair project exposed that lead was still present in their school's drinking water — information that the Liberals had since 2019. So, the Liberals promised that it would be fixed by this fall before school started, but it wasn't. Why does the minister think that it's acceptable for children to drink water that puts them at risk of harm?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, again, I have made this a personal priority — absolutely. As the Minister of Education, we are working across departments to make sure that the issue is resolved as quickly as possible. We are working with a third-party contractor to complete the sampling, testing, and resolution of water issues.

We will continue to keep Yukoners informed as we progress forward on this important issue. I will note again that, for folks — all Members of the Legislative Assembly — there are dollars contained in the supplementary budget for the upgrading and remediation of school facilities, and I really hope that I can count on all opposition partners to vote in favour of this funding. Again, going back to some of the communication — when it comes to communicating about health and well-being of students, there is always more that can be done, of course, and we are committed to being proactive in our communication with Yukoners on issues that matter, and we always welcome feedback on that. Transparency and information-sharing are a priority to us, and I will ensure that this commitment is reflected in my actions as a minister and throughout the departments.

Again, working across departments to address this issue — it is a high priority for me and the Minister of Highways and Public Works.

Ms. White: Children today across the Yukon have access to drinking water that does not meet the national safety standards in their schools. The chief medical officer of health said that the slightly elevated lead levels in the short term were not dangerous, but we are talking about levels that are double, triple, or even hundreds of times higher than standards for the last five years. That is not “slightly” and it's certainly not short term. A handful of schools have been given bottled drinking water; other schools still only have access to the same water that was tested and failed in 2019.

For five years, the Liberal government hasn't fixed the lead-contaminated water in schools. They promised that the work would be completed before school started this fall, but it wasn't. Why not?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, again, I will clearly state to parents, teachers, children, and Yukoners that clean drinking water is available in all of our schools. That is just not correct — what was just said here in the Legislative Assembly. We have made this a high, high priority for our government. The health, safety, and well-being of students and staff are absolutely first priority. We are working, as I have stated, with a third-party contractor to complete the sampling, testing, and resolution of the water issues. We have worked closely with the chief medical officer of health throughout and will continue to

do that. Going forward, Education has a plan to routinely monitor drinking water at each school and will be communicating to environmental health services and, of course, the chief medical officer of health for review and approval of that.

Again, thank you for the question. This is a really important issue for Yukoners and one that I personally take very seriously, as does my colleague, the Minister of Highways and Public Works. We are working actively and, again, Mr. Speaker, there is clean drinking water available to all Yukon students.

Question re: Rural solid waste

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, for several years, the Liberal government has been pursuing a clear agenda of reducing or cutting services in rural Yukon. There has been no better example of this than the Liberals' decision to close solid-waste transfer stations in several small communities, a decision that just came into effect yesterday. This is yet another hit to rural communities that are already feeling ignored by this Liberal government. Residents in these small communities have heard plenty from the minister about this, and quite frankly, they believe that the Minister of Community Services simply doesn't care about rural Yukon.

My question is for the Premier: Why won't he step in and stop the minister from continuing to cut services in rural Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I really thank the member opposite for the question on all the improvements that we are making to waste disposal across the territory. This is something that the communities and municipalities across the territory have asked for. We actually have Haines Junction, in the member's own riding — they just recently signed an agreement with the Yukon government to deal with the waste because they found that, for example, auto carcasses and decrepit old cars put in the landfill were turning up in Haines Junction, which had, previous to this, an uncontrolled waste facility.

Since then, we are going to put in a gate and actually control the waste that is going into rural landfills. That's the goal; that's what municipalities have asked for — so that everybody is treated fairly. There's now a cost for the garbage we're producing and the goal is to actually reduce the amount of waste that we're creating in the territory.

We don't want to have sites in the territory that are unmonitored where people can go and toss either waste cars or waste oil and other waste materials in landfills without having some sort of control on our waste-control system.

That is what's happening, Mr. Speaker. We're working very hard to improve and bring the territory's garbage disposal into the modern age.

Mr. Istchenko: What is most frustrating for rural Yukoners is the phony consultation that the minister has been hiding behind. My constituents have had a first-hand look at how this minister conducts consultations. I was at a meeting in Destruction Bay in 2021 when he told the community that there was no point in arguing with him because a decision had

already been made: the transfer stations were closing. But despite that, over the last several years, the government has spent time, lots of money, and government resources to kick this issue down the road.

This summer, they finally released a “what we heard” document about this issue, and it should come as a surprise to absolutely no one that the overwhelming feeling from those folks who were consulted was that they did not want those sites to close.

So, Mr. Speaker, what was the point of consulting with Yukoners about this when everybody and everyone knows that the minister’s mind was made up in 2021?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The member opposite is absolutely correct: We have held many meetings in all those communities to hear and work with the communities to hear what they wanted. As a result of those meetings, we have made a number of different alterations to our plan. We’re not just closing the transfer stations. We actually put bear-proof bins in all of those communities. There are 70 bear-proof bins that we have now circulated to deal with the residents’ concerns about garbage in bear country. We have done that. We’re actually putting out bins every year for seasonal disposal, geared to make it easier on communities and people living along the highways to deal with their waste on a seasonal basis and make it easier for them, but this is a plan that was brought forward by the Association of Yukon Communities and worked with for many years.

When we came into office in 2016-17, Mr. Speaker, the very first thing that the Association of Yukon Communities did was come to my predecessor and say: You have to deal with our landfills; you have to do it; the cost of dealing with the garbage in this territory is bankrupting our communities.

My good colleague acted immediately, and we’re going to stick to the plan, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, my constituents and those residents in other affected communities all participated in that consultation in good faith. They made thoughtful suggestions and tried to find creative solutions to help the government meet their goals. The “what we heard” document is full of great ideas — gates and keys for local residents and user-pay systems that would help the government save the money that they say is the reason for this change. But despite this good-faith participation and input from rural Yukon, the government has done exactly what the minister has said that they would do back in 2021.

I will say this again and ask again: What was the point of asking rural Yukoners to participate in consultation when the minister’s mind was already made up? It makes no sense.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, right out of the gate, I really want to thank the municipalities across the territory for their willingness to embrace the plan and actually work with us to get gated regional landfills established across the territory. I also want to thank the civil servants in the Community Services department who worked so diligently and went to so many — often very emotional — meetings, listened to residents, and worked with them closely to come up with options for the waste transfer stations, including bear-proof bins and seasonal disposal bins that we are going to have in there at the beginning of the seasons so that they can get rid of their waste. They are

also going to have recycling programs that they have offered to all of those communities, and there is some enthusiasm for bringing in a recycling program in these communities. The communities have the option to organize these programs and actually start to gain some revenue for their communities. That’s another piece we took from those consultations.

We made a lot of changes to make this more palatable for Yukoners. I understand that change is difficult, but, Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is making the system fair to all and we are improving our regional landfills so that we actually have a cost to the garbage we produce to try to bring it down, and that is important.

Question re: Rural solid waste

Mr. Hassard: I too had several constituents who participated in good faith in this so-called “consultation” conducted by the Minister of Community Services. Like those residents in Silver City and Braeburn, residents in Johnsons Crossing provided a number of really good suggestions that would help the government address the issue. Despite what the minister has just said in response to my colleague, we all know that’s not the real reason behind the Liberals conducting this phony consultation that was never taken seriously. The reason they did it was because the NDP forced them to in the 2023 confidence and supply agreement. So, rather than committing to keeping the transfer stations open in these communities as a condition of the CASA, all the NDP asked for was this phony consultation.

My question for the minister is this: If keeping the transfer stations open was a condition of the CASA, would those facilities still be in operation?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I really want to once again applaud the work of the communities and all of the community citizens who participated in the consultations we have held over the last year or so. We got some really good ideas, and those ideas are laid out in the “what we heard” document, and we actually pulled from those ideas to refine our plans.

So, it worked, Mr. Speaker, and I think we have also had good buy-in from all the municipalities in the territory that are now implementing regional landfills that are important in managing the amount of garbage that we’re producing as a society. They asked for those regional landfills, and we now have virtually all municipalities on the program. We are now charging tipping fees and controlling the garbage that comes in. It will be better managed and will make life way more affordable and better for Yukoners into the future because we’re going to be better managing our landfills. They are very expensive to commission, very expensive to decommission, and they hold an incredible insurance liability for the governments in which they are placed.

We are now managing those assets a lot better. The municipalities are getting money from the Yukon government to help run those plans. It’s going to be a tremendous improvement in the way we handle our waste in the territory.

Mr. Hassard: So, when rural Yukoners affected by these service cuts look at the “what we heard” document, they see a real effort by those who participated to help the

government address the issue. Despite this, they have watched this Liberal government disregard the document and charge ahead with the closure of the transfer stations against their clearly stated wishes. The only reason they are able to get away with this is that the Leader of the NDP is willing to let them.

My question for the Minister of Community Services is this: Does he believe that closing the transfer stations in Silver City, Braeburn, and Johnsons Crossing is consistent with his government's commitment made in 6.b of the confidence and supply agreement?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: It's not often that the member opposite or that the Yukon Party and I agree on many things, but I will say that it was the Yukon Party that went through the absolutely incredibly difficult transition from burning our garbage to actually having a proper disposal and getting rid of the burning of garbage.

It was the Yukon Party that did that. Hats off to them, because they actually navigated a very, very difficult and antiquated approach to garbage and refined the way we handled it in the territory. They took that step. That's about as far as they went.

When we came into office, the municipalities asked us to please help them to get regional landfills and their program off the ground, and my good colleague started that process. It is now coming to fruition. We have all of the municipalities — with the exception of Faro, which we are still working with — to get these regional landfill agreements in place. Through that, we are going to actually better manage the garbage that we are producing as a society and bring that down. It is a difficult transition, just like the stopping of the burning of garbage is difficult, but ultimately, Yukon and Yukoners will be better off for the moves that we are making here to make sure that we are better managing the garbage in our territory.

I am very happy to have a hand in making this transformative change in the way that we handle waste. I look forward to the member opposite's next question.

Mr. Hassard: Clearly, the minister isn't interested in actually answering my question. Anyone who has been following this Liberal government over the past three and a half years will know that the CASA is the defining policy document of this government. It is the only thing standing in the way of Yukoners getting a change in government. So, despite this, we see the commitment after commitment that this document has failed to be achieved.

My question for the Minister of Community Services is very simple: Now that the Liberals have cut even more services in rural Yukon and closed these rural transfer stations, is he worried that the Leader of the NDP will do more than just put him on notice?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I am really happy to answer this question today. We know that the Yukon Party is really interested in the CASA. We know that the leader endorsed the CASA that we have with the NDP, so we know that their interest is there — that they are ultimately interested in the CASA. I applaud that.

We have been working very hard to manage the territory. We have been working with our partners across the way on all

of the commitments and making good on the commitments that we said we would.

Mr. Speaker, what I will say to the member opposite is that we are making the change that Yukoners have asked us to make before we were elected in 2016. They wanted action; we are delivering that action to make sure that we are making progress on the issues that matter to Yukoners. One of those issues expressed through the municipalities was better management of the garbage that we are producing in the territory. We are making good on that commitment, and we are standing by that commitment to advance the territory in positive ways in many fields.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Introduction of visitors outside of usual proceedings.

Visitors introduced

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 55(2), I request the unanimous consent of the House to move second reading of Bill No. 215, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2024-25*, at this time.

Unanimous consent re moving second reading of Bill No. 215

Speaker: The Minister of Finance has, pursuant to Standing Order 55(2), requested the unanimous consent of the House to move second reading of Bill No. 215, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2024-25*, at this time.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Unanimous consent has been granted.

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 215: *Second Appropriation Act 2024-25* — Second Reading

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 215, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I move that Bill No. 215, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2024-25*, be now read a second time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 215, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2024-25*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill No. 215, also known as the *Second Appropriation Act 2024-25* or the *Supplementary Estimates No. 1*, for the fiscal year.

The supplementary budget allows us to review our fiscal strategy for the year and update Yukoners and the Legislative Assembly on any areas of spending that have changed or are expected to change from our initial expectations in the spring.

As we guide the Yukon toward a more prosperous future, we must stay committed to our goals while making necessary adjustments to keep the Yukon strong.

This government believes in transparency and being up front with Yukoners about our financial situation. The supplementary estimates are key to that. Our role is to make sure our decisions are efficient, effective, and financially responsible. We must always stay flexible to embrace new opportunities and be prepared for unexpected events. We are committed to making thoughtful financial decisions and strategic investments that not only address our needs today but also ensure a prosperous and sustainable future for the Yukon.

Our approach prioritizes long-term values and resilience, reflecting our dedication to building a stronger foundation for future generations. We are investing in health; we are investing in schools; we are protecting our environment and taking steps to ensure that we are resilient in the face of climate change. We are making certain that our infrastructure is safe, modern, and equipped to manage our growing population. We are working with partners and responding to the community to ensure that downtown Whitehorse is safe and open to us all.

While I dive into the details of the spending included in this bill in more detail during Committee of the Whole, I would like to briefly outline the high-level changes to the fiscal framework before providing some details on our ongoing fiscal strategy. The first supplementary estimates will result in an increase of \$150.1 million in gross O&M spending, offset by \$20.7 million in recoveries. The net increase in O&M expenditures after accounting for recoveries is \$129.4 million. There is also an \$8.8-million decrease in revenues. Capital spending will decrease by a modest \$299,000 to account for revised project timelines and cash flows. As well, capital recoveries will decrease by \$4.2 million to reflect updated cash flows. With these adjustments in spending, we are seeing a revised surplus of \$75.4 million, down from the March forecast of \$119 million. Year-end net debt is now at \$530.4 million, which is up from the initial projection of \$488.8 million last spring.

As part of budget 2024-25, we included a \$50-million contingency fund in preparation for emergency response and health care costs. The contingency fund was first introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic and has become an important budgeting tool for responding to events while protecting the government's fiscal framework. By applying this contingency to the cost pressures for emergency response related to floods, fire, as well as those in health care, we reduce the impact of those rising costs on our overall budget. Although these actions come with a financial cost, we remain committed to taking the necessary steps to ensure the safety and security of our communities and our residents.

Finally, with respect to FTEs, there is an increase of 46.6, mainly to hire long-term care and school staff, ensuring that we continue to provide high-quality services for Yukoners.

As we plan for a prosperous future, it is clear that the government is growing, and it is also a dynamic territory. Our population is increasing, our communities are expanding, and the demand for essential services and infrastructure is rising.

To meet these needs, we must plan strategically and ensure that we have the financial flexibility to support the development and growth that Yukoners expect.

To date, we have operated under a strong fiscal plan that did not require significant borrowing. Recent unforeseen challenges, such as urgent environmental responses and health care pressures, require us to assess our financial approach. These unprecedented circumstances have highlighted the importance of having increased flexibility to manage cash flow throughout the year as well as the ability to make use of the tools beyond the government's line of credit. This flexibility will be important as the need to address critical responses becomes increasingly common.

As we adapt to the changing world of the growing territory, we are working closely with our federal partners to secure an increase in the territory's borrowing limit. This is not a sign that we intend to take on significant debt but rather a step to ensure that we have the flexibility to respond to both expected and unforeseen challenges. This solution expands on the options available to manage cash flow efficiently and invest significantly and strategically in the future.

As we plan for a future and assess the financial outlook in preparation for the years and budgets ahead, we will continue to explore new and existing ways to ensure long-term sustainability. Borrowing remains one of the tools available to help realize plans that will provide the necessary resources to invest in the long-term prosperity of our territory.

It enables us to meet immediate financial obligations while positioning us to invest in essential infrastructure and services that benefit the entire Yukon. Strategic borrowing allows us to seize opportunities that drive growth — from improving health care to protecting our environment — while also preparing us to address urgent needs, such as responding to environmental events like floods and fires. By expanding our borrowing capacity, we gain the flexibility to navigate peaks and valleys in cash flow with greater ease. This broader range of financial tools strengthens our ability to make informed decisions that benefit Yukoners today and into the future.

The Yukon is in a strong financial position, as reaffirmed by the recent reissuance of our AA credit rating with S&P Global Ratings. Even with an increase in our borrowing limit, debt levels are and will remain among the lowest in Canada, reflecting our commitment to fiscal responsibility alongside the need to grow.

In the coming months, we will keep Yukoners informed as we seek an increase from our federal partners to the Yukon's borrowing limit, ensuring transparency as we continue delivering critical services and investments. Together, we are building a stronger, more resilient Yukon for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, as we continue to build a resilient and strong Yukon, investing in our health care system remains a top priority. Ensuring access to quality health services is not just about addressing immediate needs but also about securing long-term well-being for our communities. Across the country and around the world, governments are struggling with the escalating challenges of providing health care to their

populations. The Yukon faces these same difficulties, including increasing costs and longer wait times. While the Yukon is taking active steps toward remedying this situation and these issues, we continue to work to find better ways to deliver effective health care services. We are directing \$28 million from our contingency fund toward the \$34-million increase in funding for insured health to better address the growing needs of Yukon's health system.

As well, \$10.4 million in combined O&M and capital directed to the Yukon Hospital Corporation will support operations by easing staff pressures, increasing breast cancer screening, and adding 10 acute-care beds to the Thomson Centre.

In total, over \$56 million in new funding is being directed toward the Department of Health and Social Services. Health care is essential for everyone, and a robust and sustainable health system is critical for maintaining the overall well-being of our population.

I am going to turn my attention to mining for a second, Mr. Speaker, as mining remains critical to the Yukon's economy. The mining sector helps sustain local stores and services, including grocery stores, hotel accommodations, and air services. As well, the mining sector provides employment to a significant percentage of Yukoners outside of Whitehorse.

With the heap leach failure at the Eagle Gold mine, we are reminded once again of the absolute necessity of balancing economic performance with strong environmental protection. We continue to treat the heap leach failure that occurred at the Eagle Gold mine on June 24 as an urgent response, including placing the company into receivership. The Government of Yukon is anticipating advancing up to \$50 million — of which \$15 million has already been provided as of late September — to PricewaterhouseCoopers to cover some of the anticipated work over the first 90 days of receivership. Funding advanced to the receiver has a net zero impact on the surplus and the net financial debt. Furthermore, we are committed to ensuring that Na-Cho Nyäk Dun citizens as well as Mayo and Yukon residents and businesses benefit from remediation work that is required.

Likewise, working on the reclamation and closure of the Minto mine site continues in close collaboration with the Selkirk First Nation. For now, however, we are using a range of approaches to ensure that work progresses effectively and efficiently. While these events are of significant concern for Yukoners and for the government, they are unfolding at a time of strength of Yukon's economy.

We continue to lead the country with low unemployment and our economic outlook is positive. Further potential positive news for the outlook of mining comes as negotiations with the Selkirk First Nation move forward to support the purchase of Minto mine assets. The Yukon government will continue to prioritize opportunities for the involvement of Yukon First Nations in economic opportunities associated with mining activities. This court decision offers significant opportunities for the Selkirk First Nation, and we look forward to the benefits that this could bring to the First Nation, the region, and the broader territory.

Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to supporting Yukoners by both investing in and maintaining the Yukon's public infrastructure. After diligent work and the logistical complexity of building in Old Crow, the health and wellness centre and tenplex housing unit recently opened. Whistle Bend Elementary School, the first new elementary school in Whitehorse in over 20 years, just welcomed its first cohort of students and is sure to become a pillar of the growing Whistle Bend community.

We are pleased to have recently awarded a contract for the construction of the Burwash Landing school, Kêts'ádañ Kù. We are adjusting spending for this project to align with the revised cash flows.

Construction on the Dempster fibre line is now complete. This brings the territory one step closer to having more reliable telecommunications, further ensuring that northern communities have access to digital services that meet their needs. The next step is handing the line over to Northwestel. Over the coming months, Northwestel will continue to perform commissioning work before officially connecting the line to the network and bringing it into operation. This line is expected to come into service in December of this year. We understand that telecommunications connectivity and quality have been significant concerns for Yukoners. We are pleased to see the successful completion of this important work.

We continue to take additional measures to ensure that the Yukon's infrastructure remains modern and well-suited to the needs of our growing population. Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport is a crucial gateway for travellers to and from Canada's north. The airport plays a significant role in connecting Yukon to major cities across Canada and is an important hub for the tourism industry, an industry that has strongly rebounded since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Improvements completed to date include upgrades on the parallel runway, taxiways, the apron panels, as well as developing airport land for institutional and commercial uses. The main runway project is well underway, with construction expected to be completed by fall 2025. Final cleanup and other work may extend into 2026.

Work also continues on the reconstruction of the Nisutlin Bay bridge. This project provides a significant positive economic outcome for the territory, local businesses, and the community of Teslin and includes ongoing collaboration with the Teslin Tlingit Council, from project funding to fisheries initiatives to artwork for the bridge. The bridge is expected to be open to drivers by 2026.

Upgrades are also being made on highways and bridges across the territory, ensuring that Yukoners can get to where they need to go. These updates increase safety; they improve driving conditions, better connect the Yukon's resources to markets, and increase the resilience of highways to the impact of climate change, such as thawing permafrost.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, Whistle Bend subdivision, our fastest growing neighbourhood, now has its very own elementary school that can accommodate up to 425 kindergarten-to-grade 7 learners. We are also supporting our growing student enrolment with 7.3 FTEs for new teachers

across multiple schools, as well as 3.5 FTEs for custodial staff at the new Whistle Bend school. An additional \$342,000 is earmarked to support the new school as well.

Education, whether it is early childhood in our school system or even at the post-secondary level, is key to the future of the Yukon. We are including \$4.6 million, which will be fully recoverable from the federal government, to support early learning and childcare infrastructure. This funding will support projects to increase the capacity and accessibility of childcare buildings. Due to a growing number of students, we are increasing post-secondary grants by \$1.2 million in new funding. These grants are key to supporting Yukon post-secondary learners. This is in addition to the ongoing financial investment in early learning and childcare, which makes life more affordable for families, as the new universal childcare program has reduced fees to less than \$10 per day on average.

Making life affordable for Yukoners has long been a focus of this government. We are committed to supporting Yukoners in the face of a higher cost of living and what has recently been higher than normal inflation. Now, in recent months, inflation has started to improve, but households in the Yukon continue to see their budgets stretched by elevated prices, and this is exacerbated for lower-income households. We continue to track inflation and its impacts so that we can take decisive steps to ease these burdens.

The efforts are shifting from short-term assistance to measures that could provide longer term benefits, such as actions to improve home affordability. For example, we are investing in a Housing First project in Watson Lake and the replacement of the Ryder Apartment building in Whitehorse. The Yukon Housing Corporation also brought three multi-unit residence buildings in Whistle Bend that will be completed by the end of this year.

We continue to lead the nation with our Yukon-wide dental program, which saw sustained funding this year.

We have measures in place for paid sick leave and continue to raise Yukon's minimum wage. We now have the second highest minimum wage in Canada, only behind Nunavut.

Our commitment to making lives more affordable for Yukoners is reflected in our comprehensive approach to addressing both immediate and long-term needs. By investing in critical infrastructure, advancing support programs, and leading in wage improvements, we are fostering a more stable and prosperous future for us all.

Investing in emergency preparedness and response is also vital to the well-being of our population in the Yukon, and as a whole, we know that every Yukoner is mindful of the risks posed by wildfires and by flooding. These events are becoming more frequent and more intense, and wildfire risk is beginning to extend into the fall.

This spring saw above-average snowpack in the Klondike and also in the Porcupine River basins. This meant communities in the Klondike Valley and Old Crow faced a higher flood risk. I am proud of the work in preparing for this flood risk, which involved working closely with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, with the City of Dawson, with the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, and many other local responders, utilities, and a

whole host of other partners. We continue to strengthen protocols between different branches of departments for flood and emergency response, including Highways and Public Works, Community Services, Health and Social Services, and Environment.

More frequent and intense weather events incur higher response costs. This year, we are including \$20.6 million to support direct fire costs and \$1.4 million for flood response. Both of these will be funded from the Yukon government's contingency fund. When combined with all emergency management efforts, which include flood mapping work in the Department of Environment, we are including \$24.5 million in emergency supports.

As I mentioned in the spring, we are continuing to invest in this area because we know that climate change is real. Our government declared a climate emergency in 2019 and followed that with the launch of *Our Clean Future* to lay out the plan to address the situation that we do find ourselves in. We will continue to deliver on this strategy and we will develop more resilient communities and infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, in 2024, Wildland Fire Management responded to more than 140 wildfires, which burned over 165,000 hectares, including 28 wildfires that were high risk to communities or critical infrastructure. Teams were challenged by wildfires of note, evacuation alerts and orders, and critical infrastructure disruptions. The crews did excellent work on initial attack efforts and, without these efforts, the impacts to the communities would have been a lot greater.

Costs for disaster response are typically a combination of our normal annual costs for maintaining emergency response programs and additional costs due to unexpected or large incidents. As much as possible, we seek federal recoveries for these events. Those processes are usually multi-year processes where the contingency can be available immediately and more effectively.

This government is committed to working with partners and the community to ensure that the downtown here in Whitehorse is a place where everyone feels safe and supported. Over the last year, guided by the downtown Whitehorse safety response action plan, we have collaborated with many community partners, Yukon First Nations, and local businesses to address challenges related to homelessness, substance use, and community safety. This plan ensures a coordinated and sustainable approach to create a vibrant, inclusive, and safe downtown for everyone.

Some of these outcomes include extended hours on the supervised consumption site, funding for on-the-land treatment, a new Canada-Yukon housing benefit rent subsidy for people fleeing gender-based violence, the community warming space pilot project here in the Jim Smith Building, which ran from March until May of this year, and also ongoing community engagement and education. We will continue to work on several initiatives, which include offering food services in additional locations, operationalizing a managed alcohol program, and bringing more affordable housing online.

These supplementary estimates advance these goals by including: two additional permanent RCMP resources for the

Whitehorse detachment to allow for more dedicated policing of the downtown area; one additional SCAN investigator to allow for a more rapid response to complaints within the downtown core; funding for a criminal prevention program; and funding for Safe at Home to implement and run a supportive housing program at 408 Alexander Street. This plan is about making lives for people better, and this work progresses through Bill No. 215.

Mr. Speaker, this year, we are seeing a fairly large variance attributable to a small number of items. We cannot forget that with the unexpected events that we have faced since the main estimates were approved in the spring — events from flood activity, fire activity, to shifting construction timelines and increased health pressures — it's also important to highlight how the contingency fund has helped mitigate the impact on our surplus and also on our net debt. We have all seen that no one is immune to global issues, from climate shifts to high inflation, and this government remains committed to protecting our communities while balancing our responsibilities within our means.

I am pleased to say that our careful planning at the start of this year has given us flexibility to stay in surplus.

I am looking forward to discussing the details and answering questions about the bill during Committee of the Whole and hearing from other members during second reading, but for today, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude there and I will thank you for the time of the Legislative Assembly.

Motion to adjourn debate

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise as the Official Opposition Finance critic. I move that debate be now adjourned.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Lake Laberge that debate be now adjourned.

Motion to adjourn debate on second reading of Bill No. 215 agreed to

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I move that the House do now adjourn.

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 2:38 p.m.

The following sessional papers were tabled October 2, 2024:

35-1-155

Report from the Clerk of the Yukon Legislative Assembly on the Absence of Members from Sittings of the Legislative Assembly and its Committees (October 2, 2024) (Speaker Harper)

35-1-156

Certification Report — Pursuant to section 18 of the Ombudsman Act (August 6, 2024) (Speaker Harper)

35-1-157

Yukon Electoral District Boundaries Commission 2024 Interim Report (May 9, 2024) (Speaker Harper)

35-1-158

Fifteenth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees (June 4, 2024) (Clarke, N.)

35-1-159

Sixteenth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees (August 12, 2024) (Clarke, N.)

35-1-160

Seventeenth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees (September 12, 2024) (Clarke, N.)

35-1-161

Seventh Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (September 2024) (Dixon)