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HANSARD

Monday, October 7, 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

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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Monday, October 7, 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: Prior to proceeding with the Daily Routine, the Chair wishes to inform the House of changes made to the Order Paper. The following motions have been removed from the Order Paper at the request of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin: Motions No. 753 and 966.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Introduction of visitors.
Visitors introduced

TRIBUTES

In recognition of World Teachers' Day

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf our Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to all Yukon educators in recognition of World Teachers' Day. Celebrated since 1994, World Teachers' Day honours the dedication and impact of teachers across the globe.

On October 5, 1966, UNESCO made the recommendation concerning the status of teachers. This recommendation set essential standards for teachers' rights, responsibilities, and professional development. The theme of 2024 is "Valuing teacher voices: Towards a new social contract for education". It underscores how we must take care to listen and learn from teachers about the work that they do to shape our collective future.

As we celebrate educators' contributions to education progress, we must also consider the challenges that they encounter in moving our system forward. It is crucial that teachers' voices are valued and considered when developing policies and guidelines that influence their profession.

We remain dedicated to listening to educators and lifting them up, individually and collectively. Your voices are important and vital to creating an education system where students and teachers can grow and thrive. Educators' insights and wisdom are essential as we continue to reimagine our education system in the Yukon. In this respect, front-line school-based staff participated in the communities of inquiry that helped us reimagine inclusive and special education in the Yukon. These important collectives are how we work together and include everyone in the effort of system changes from the start.

As we lay the foundation for improvements in inclusive practices and support for all students, we hold our hands up to Yukon educators for their valuable contributions to these efforts. I continue to be amazed and humbled by how innovative and dedicated our teachers and our Yukon First Nation language teachers, educational assistants, administrators, and school staff are. When educators come up against a challenge, their ability to lean into their compassion and care when finding a solution for their students sets an example for all of us.

On behalf of our colleagues in the Legislative Assembly, I extend my heartfelt thanks to all of the teachers, specialized support staff, administrators, and school personnel for their kindness, their dedication, and commitment to students and school communities throughout the Yukon.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize all teachers — teachers on call, educational assistants, school administrators, and staff — for World Teachers' Day, celebrated on October 5, annually.

The 2024 theme is "Valuing teacher voices: Towards a new social contract for education". This brings the focus on the importance of listening to teachers and involving them in shaping education policies and practices.

We all have school stories — good and bad — and we all remember teachers and how they impacted us as we moved through the grades. I know I had several who inspired and encouraged me.

In a school setting or in a social setting, teachers had influence in our communities and respect. As times change and new ideas evolve, the teacher-student relationship has changed as well. We believe that we must empower teachers to drive meaningful education changes and advocate for greater equity and allow teachers the needed resources and support they require to do their necessary work.

To recognize those whom we expect to teach our children through the school years and beyond should be ongoing. Teachers must be resilient and creative to keep students engaged and spark the love of learning. As we go through life, we go on learning.

It might have been one teacher who gave you the passion to explore just a little bit more. Because a teacher nurtures students from kindergarten to higher education, they assist in developing critical thinking and exploring ideas and assist with social skills, but they can't do it all. So, with the help of parents and families as well as hard working school boards and councils, they can succeed.

It never fails to amaze me the number of hours needed and that are dedicated to making the school become a better place to work and teach within. Our teachers and all the school support staff with their dedication and hard work are the front-line experts. It is so important to recognize the challenges that teachers and school staff face in the classroom and school setting. Speaking to this year's theme, let us listen and help the

teachers' ability to encourage lifelong learning for our students so they succeed.

It's important to advocate for change so teachers are involved in all decisions that will affect their roles and how they carry out their responsibilities.

To teachers across the country and especially in Yukon, we wish you only good things and we celebrate you for all that you give through this and every school year.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate teachers and educators. It is a delight to think back on all the wonderful teachers I have had and the profound impact they have had on me. It's just as delightful to think about all the amazing teachers I know now and the impact they're having on their students today. I think of their energy and their enthusiasm, their kindness and curiosity, and the care and support they bring to their classrooms every day.

I'm always inspired by the commitment of educators to their schools and students, whether they're staying late to provide a bit of extra support to a student who needs it or advocating for resources to make sure students can thrive, I see teachers giving it their all with determination and hard work.

So, today, as we thank teachers, I hope we can do the same for them. I hope that we can show up for them not just with words but with actions, that we show our gratitude with real, tangible measures like good working conditions and fair wages that reflect the Yukon's reality and challenges. To all our amazing educators, thank you, and happy teachers' day. We stand with you inside and outside of the classroom.

Applause

In recognition of Yukon permanent art collection

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the artists from our Yukon permanent art collection, newly acquired and newly on display here in our Assembly. Starting on my left, we have a gopher hat by the late Annie Smith. Annie Smith was an artist of Southern Tutchone heritage and a respected elder of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation. Born and raised in Whitehorse, Annie learned sewing and beadwork from her mother and aunts. She made a living from her artistic skills and was also a generous teacher and mentor.

Next, we have *Red Book of Annaghmakerrig* — I hope I have that right — by Helen O'Connor. Helen is an interdisciplinary visual artist based in Whitehorse. This hand-sewn book was created over many years, each page made from different hand-gathered plants, including flax, hemp, cotton, and nettle.

Moving clockwise, next is an abstract portrait mask by the late Mark Preston. Mark was an multidisciplinary Tlingit artist who attended the famed Ksan school in Hazelton, BC, where he studied print and jewellery making and woodcarving. He later developed a contemporary style that combined minimalism with traditional northwest coast form-lined shapes.

Next, we have *Yukon Bear* by the late Kitty Smith. Kitty Smith was Tlingit and Tagish Kwan and raised on the upper Alsek River near the old village of Dalton Post.

She settled at Robinson and began carving in the 1930s, often in collaboration with her husband, Chief Billy Smith. The couple sold their carvings to tourists travelling the Alaska Highway. Many of Kitty's sculptures depict legends and traditional knowledge.

Then we see *Galaxy Pendant* by Cohen Quash. Cohen is an artist and designer of Tahltan, Tlingit, and Kaska ancestry from Watson Lake. Cohen started sewing at the age of 10 and beading at 11. He creates pendants and accessories using rich colours, obviously, and luxurious selections of beads and crystals. At 13, he is the youngest artist to have work in the Yukon permanent art collection.

Finally, we have Valerie Hodgson's painting *Sarah*. Valerie is a painter and fibre artist who has called the Yukon home for four decades. *Sarah* is a portrait of Sarah Lennie from the series *Yukon Women: 50 Over 50*.

I would also like to recognize the 14 newest art works acquired for the Yukon permanent art collection, including from Anick Fernandez, Phoebe Gonzales Rohrbacher, and Ernest Chua, who are here today in the gallery. The show, entitled *Abundance*, is on display at the Yukon Art Centre until mid-November. I encourage all Yukoners to go see this fabulous exhibit, and I ask the members of this House to join me in expressing our abundant appreciation to these talented artists for the rich contributions they make to Yukon communities, economies, and quality of life.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to congratulate and to recognize those artists whose artwork has been selected for display in the Legislative Assembly. Annie Smith, Helen O'Connor, Mark Preston, Kitty Smith, Cohen Quash, and Valerie Hodgson are the names behind these beautiful pieces. Thank you for sharing your work with us here in the Assembly. Our office is the current home of two of the beautiful pieces from the permanent art collection, *Trapper's Cabin of Today*, painted by Jim Robb, and *Moose Hide Creek, Yukon River*, painted by Halin de Repentigny.

I would like to recognize the staff who work with the permanent art collection in Tourism and Culture to curate, care for, and distribute art in public spaces throughout the territory. The permanent art collection plays a vital role in supporting local artists and fostering appreciation for the arts within the territory. Thank you and congratulations to all whose art has been selected for display in the Assembly and to all those who have worked in the most recent acquisition of the permanent art collection.

Salamat po.

Applause

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate the Yukon artists whose work has been acquired for the permanent art collection and whose work is being displayed here in the Assembly. I think about how, behind each of these works of art, there is an artist who has been developing their creativity since they were a child. Each one has spent hours and hours practising and practising, running

into roadblocks, undoing their work, and starting over. I like to imagine the long, challenging, frustrating, and rewarding process that went into every one of these pieces of art, and I like to think about how lucky we are that these artists are willing to share so much of their time and creativity with us by having their work in the permanent collection and displayed here in the Legislature.

Having their art here connects us all as Yukoners and the whole spectrum of human experience, and that is a very important thing for us to have here in the Legislature. One of the most important aspects of the collection is its role in documenting the evolving narrative of the Yukon. It captures the land, the people, and the intersection of nature and human experience through various art forms.

Maintaining a permanent collection ensures that future generations will have access to these cultural assets, allowing them to connect with their history and identity. It serves as a repository for creative expression and is a reflection of the rich diversity and stories of the people who live in or are connected to the Yukon, including Indigenous communities such as the Gwich'in, Tlingit, Southern Tutchone, and others.

I want to thank the Friends of Yukon Permanent Art Collection for making such great selections this year, and congratulations to each of the artists. Thank you. We are lucky to have you and your work here in the Yukon.

Mahsi' cho.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Ms. Blake: I have for tabling a media release from the Yukon Employees' Union and the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada.

Speaker: Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 39, entitled *Act to amend the Forest Resources Act (2024)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources that Bill No. 39, entitled *Act to amend the Forest Resources Act (2024)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 39 agreed to

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 40, entitled *Act to amend the Clean Energy Act (2024)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources that Bill No. 40, entitled *Act to amend the Clean Energy Act (2024)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 40 agreed to

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I moved that Bill No. 41, entitled *Technical Amendments (Environment) Act (2024)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Environment that Bill No. 41, entitled *Technical Amendments (Environment) Act (2024)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 41 agreed to

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I move that a bill entitled *Act to Amend the Elections Act* be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Leader of the Third Party that a bill entitled *Act to Amend the Elections Act* be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 308 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, on the one-year anniversary of Hamas' attack on Israel:

(1) Israel's right to live in peace with its neighbours within secure boundaries and ensure its own security; and

(2) the Palestinian right to self-determination and supports the creation of a sovereign, independent, viable, democratic, and territorially contiguous Palestinian state.

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

THAT this House recognize the third anniversary of the supervised consumption site and the partnership between Blood Ties Four Directions, Emergency Medical Services, and Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services teams in:

(1) receiving 14,000 visits from Yukoners accessing harm-reduction, counselling, and health care services;

(2) successfully reversing 87 overdoses;

(3) facilitating more than 1,600 harm-reduction and counselling conversations;

(4) distributing harm-reduction supplies more than 8,000 times; and

(5) expanding access to medically indicated opioid treatment, including safer supply and opioid agonist therapy.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to:

(1) address the challenging working conditions and severe staffing shortages that have led to 95 percent of Yukon educators voting in favour of job action; and

(2) immediately schedule meetings with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals to deal with all outstanding issues.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice of the following motion for the production of papers:

THAT this House do issue an order for the return of the Whitehorse General Hospital surgical services renewal project plan dated January 2018, which was submitted to the Yukon government by the Yukon Hospital Corporation.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Highways and Public Works to ensure that the project to upgrade the Takhini River bridge on the Mayo Road includes widening the road surface of the bridge to improve traffic safety.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to set bargaining dates with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to conduct a study on highway safety for the Lewes River bridge and nearby highway sections to improve safety for drivers, cyclists, and motorcyclists.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to establish a public inquiry into the role of the Government of Yukon in the failure of the Eagle Gold mine heap leach facility under the *Public Inquiries Act*.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

This then brings us to the Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Yukon Association of Education Professionals collective agreement bargaining

Mr. Kent: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, 95 percent of members of the Yukon Association of Education Professionals voted in favour of job action following unsuccessful negotiations with the Liberal government. Yukon teachers have cited challenging working conditions and severe staffing shortages as reasons behind this vote.

Simply put, Mr. Speaker, Yukon educators don't feel valued by this Liberal government. So, why has the Minister of Education let the working conditions deteriorate this much?

What is she doing to repair the relationship with Yukon educators?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I'll start out today by acknowledging the Government of Yukon recognizing and respecting the hard work and the expertise and the devotion that we see time in and time out by our educational professionals. We value the work contributions that these professionals do in nurturing the intellectual, the social, and the personal development of our students. That's extremely important.

As we move down this road, we really hope to get an agreement done. Yukon teachers are right now being paid — some of the highest-paid teachers in Canada. The average salary is more than 30 percent higher than British Columbia. The parties have made significant progress when it comes to agreements on all non-monetary issues. The parties remain further apart on some of the key monetary issues. Neither party has tabled an offer, but we have agreed that future bargaining at this time would not be productive, given the widening gap that remains on these monetary issues.

For some context as well, Mr. Speaker, YAEP has requested a declaration of impasse from the Yukon Teachers Labour Relations Board. The next step in that process is a request for conciliation or binding arbitration, which will allow the parties time to conclude a negotiated agreement.

Now, the YAEP — I will continue my response as we go on. Thank you.

Mr. Kent: While I appreciate that from the minister, my question was actually for the Minister of Education about working conditions and the deterioration of the relationship with Yukon educators.

So, according to the news release from the Yukon Association of Education Professionals, Yukon government is stalling the negotiations and won't return to the table until December. It's not lost on the teachers that this is after the close of the Fall Sitting.

In fact, here's what the release says about the timing. The Liberal government is "maneuvering to dodge public and political pressure in the legislature."

So, Mr. Speaker, why is the Liberal government trying to avoid the scrutiny of the Legislature? Why are they delaying the negotiations until after the end of the Fall Sitting?

Hon. Mr. Silver: When the Government of Yukon received YAEP's notice to bargain in March 2024, the government offered to commence bargaining in April, throughout May, and into June. YAEP informed the Government of Yukon that they were not available in April or June. The YAEP and the Government of Yukon were scheduled to commence bargaining in May for three days; however, on our side, the Government of Yukon was required to cancel those three meetings due to the unexpected absence of key personnel. The YAEP office was closed to bargaining at the beginning and end of June, July, and into the later part of August.

In late May and early June, the Government of Yukon contacted YAEP several times to schedule additional dates; however, we did not receive a response. The Government of Yukon met with YAEP at the bargaining table on

September 11, 12, 18, 19, and again on October 1 and 2. To go back to my response in the past about the statement that the member opposite started with as far as 95 percent of the members, the YAEP is not in a legal strike position, and no job action can be authorized or commenced until conciliation or arbitration processes have concluded.

We do remain committed on our side to securing a new agreement that preserves Yukon educators as among the highest paid in the country — an agreement that is fiscally responsible as well.

Mr. Kent: For the minister, once again, my question was about the delays in the negotiation until after the Legislature closes and they can be subject to the scrutiny of the Legislature.

We understand that one of the sticking points for the YAEP has been the government's unwillingness to provide increased support for educational assistants. It is worth noting for Yukoners that supports for both EAs and LATs were a focal point of the Liberal-NDP confidence and supply agreement that is keeping the Liberals in power. The CASA commits the government to increasing the supply of EAs and LATs, developing a training program for EAs and teachers on call by the end of this year, and creating dedicated wellness counsellors for each and every school. As far as we can tell, the government has not fully completed any one of these commitments yet.

Is the Minister of Education concerned that her failure to live up to the confidence and supply agreement and her unwillingness to support Yukon teachers might cause the NDP to finally hold the Liberal government to account?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, as I said in my opening statements today, a lot of progress has been made between YAEP and the negotiators at the table. We are obviously not going to negotiate here in the Legislative Assembly, but we will comment on the package that we proposed, which accounts for the current fiscal situation impacting many Canadians. It is consistent with agreements that have been reached in other jurisdictions and would maintain Yukon teachers among the highest paid in our country.

YG has offered wage and other monetary improvements equivalent to just over 12 percent over three years. This does, as I said, maintain Yukon teachers' status as among the highest-paid teachers in Canada, with average salaries more than 30 percent higher than British Columbia.

In contrast, the YAEP is seeking wage increases equal to 24 percent over three years and other monetary improvements equal to another five percent, for a total of 29 percent over three years. This is not fiscally responsible and it is not consistent with other settlement patterns in Canada. We have made some great strides in a lot of the conversations where the compensation package provides some groups of YAEP members — where we are looking at is in the areas where we don't believe that we are at current market competitiveness, and that would be with our teachers on call. In there, we have included a 40 percent increase in wages for teachers on call, whose rate of pay is significantly below market, and also a \$2,000 annual allowance for the educational assistants.

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: **École Whitehorse Elementary School replacement**

Mr. Dixon: On September 26, the Department of Education quietly released a document that showed that they had chosen a location on the Takhini Educational Land Reserve for the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary School. The following week, they rushed out a news release that confirmed that this decision had been made and that it was the result of consultation with stakeholders. Since then, we have continued to hear from stakeholders who have serious concerns with building a new school on the Takhini Educational Land Reserve.

We know that the government did not consult a single stakeholder before they made what the Minister of Highways and Public Works called “the big reveal” back in 2022.

So, my question for the Minister of Education is simple: Now that she has consulted with stakeholders, can she name a single stakeholder who thinks that it is a good idea to build this school on the Takhini Educational Land Reserve?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise today and talk about our government's commitment to build new school infrastructure, which are very important spaces for education to happen in our education system. I was very pleased to have been a part of the announcement, and we did do a press conference around the location of the new school, which will be the new École Whitehorse Elementary School.

We went through a whole process on the consultation for this new school and the site. Ultimately, the on-the-field option within the Takhini Educational Land Reserve was chosen. The work was done by Kobayashi and Zedda, which set out a number of options. The site scored the highest based on the criteria, including traffic management, existing facility impact on the neighbourhood, and cost efficiencies. The site offers improved sports facilities, minimal disruption to current school operations, and other criteria.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I think the reason why the minister can't name a single stakeholder group is because there are none. When various stakeholders reviewed the Department of Education's document, some of them were alarmed by what they saw. In fact, yesterday, the Takhini Neighbourhood Association posted an update on their website about this. Here is what they said — and I quote: “Another surprise for us was a statement in the document that suggests the location the government chose for the school was the preferred option of the Takhini Neighborhood Association. This is not true.

“We have never confirmed support for this area or any other area in the reserve.”

So, why was the input of this important stakeholder, the Takhini Neighbourhood Association, misrepresented by the Liberal government?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, since the establishment last year of the Takhini Neighbourhood Association, they have been a valuable voice and partner on raising and addressing neighbourhood concerns. This government believes that the proximity, convenience, familiarity, and comfort of the neighbourhood schools is of

benefit not only to the students and parents but to the community overall.

We believe that having a French immersion elementary school in the Takhini neighbourhood will be a huge benefit to the community. We also understand that, when it comes to building a new school in Takhini, some members of the community have concerns around the traffic impacts and greenspace, among other concerns. These were the top priorities raised during the engagement with the Takhini Neighbourhood Association.

Phase 2 of the new École Whitehorse Elementary will see our contractor conduct traffic analyses with major intersections around the selected school lot which would be impacted by a new school. The contractor will make recommendations for site parking and access.

We anticipate that this part of phase 2 will be conducted over the fall and early winter months, and, of course, there's a lot more work to be done and we look forward to continuing to work with the association.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I'll note for all listening that the minister did not answer the question. The question was clearly aimed at why the government misrepresented the views of the Takhini Neighbourhood Association in their document that they released just a few weeks ago, but since the minister has gone to the issue of traffic, I'll follow her.

This has been an issue that has been raised by the Takhini Neighbourhood Association over and over again, and we continue to hear from many other stakeholders as well: the issue of traffic on Range Road and the impact of adding Yukon's largest elementary school to an area already facing considerable congestion.

The Liberal government's own press release from October 1 admits that they have not yet done a comprehensive traffic impact study on the plan to add this school in this location.

So, I will ask the Minister of Education this question: Why didn't the government do a traffic impact study before they made the decision to choose this location for the new school?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, again, we are moving into phase 2 of this work and we will continue to work with all of our partners. There is a project advisory committee. The Takhini association will certainly be a member of that. We look forward to those discussions.

We anticipate that the contractor will make recommendations again on site and parking access, which includes general site layout considering pedestrian safety and efficiency of traffic access and will work, of course, closely with the City of Whitehorse to determine potential impacts on municipal infrastructure as well as future public engagement on this and what that could look like.

Again, there were a number of partners that were a part of this consultation and discussion. We brought all of the options to them. We had facilitated discussions with all of our partners.

The Yukon Party has a track record of not investing enough in school infrastructure, putting the needs of students and communities on the back burner, really. Even when they invested in the FH Collins school, they made significant

mistakes, so I really have a hard time taking advice from the Yukon Party.

Question re: Wind River Hospice House

Ms. White: Due to decisions made by this government, Yukoners' experience of dying has changed for the worse. This decision was made without consideration for the dignity or comfort of Yukoners at the end of their lives, their families, or the staff who support them.

Until recently, people at the end of their lives had a purpose-built space that provided them with dignity, warmth, and support of the Wind River Hospice. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case. In August, the purpose-built hospice was moved with almost no warning to a long-term care unit — a very different kind of space — no more built-in oxygen and suction, no more built-in lifts, no more room for extra beds for family to stay, no more private entrance for loved ones coming and going, and no privacy for the final ceremonies with family and friends.

So, how can this government justify taking away a purpose-built hospice from people who are dying and instead forcing them into an unsuitable space?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member opposite, despite the fact that it has quite a bit of incorrect information. Yukoners and Canadians, in fact, cite health care as one of their primary concerns. It is certainly my primary concern.

The Wind River Hospice House is located in Whistle Bend Place and was located in Whistle Bend Place previous to the move. It provides end-of-life care to Yukoners in a home-like setting. The care and the support that is provided to Yukoners and to their families is truly cherished. The Wind River Hospice House was recently moved from House No. 3 in Whistle Bend Place to House No. 1 in Whistle Bend Place as part of the long-term care room optimization plan. It created space for more acute-care beds at the Whitehorse General Hospital and therefore additional long-term care rooms at Whistle Bend Place.

I recently attended, a few weeks ago, the Wind River hospice. I met with staff and the physician who were present there that day. We talked about some challenges that were met by them, and I look forward to being able to continue to provide Yukoners with that information.

Ms. White: So, it appears that the minister thinks that moving the name was moving all the services that were provided.

The end of someone's life is a sacred time, a deeply personal and private time, both for the person dying and for their family and loved ones as they prepare to say goodbye.

As a health care system, what we can offer is dignity, comfort, and connection with loved ones. The former space did a beautiful job of offering all of these things, but now it has been moved to a space that was never meant to be a hospice. The staff are doing their best, but they can't offer the same level of care without the tools to do it. Before, people had built-in oxygen and suction in their rooms; now they have to use portable units, which are much louder and more disruptive.

Now they spend the ends of their lives competing with the sounds of noisy machines. This change is a direct result of the decision to move from the purpose-built Wind River hospice.

Why didn't this government prioritize the comfort and dignity of Yukoners in their decisions about hospice care?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, the families who are being cared for and their loved ones at Whistle Bend Place at the Wind River hospice are a top priority. As I said, I recently attended the Wind River hospice a few weeks ago with my deputy minister and a number of others. We met with the staff and the physician who were present there. They shared their concerns about some situations regarding the move. Let's just be clear that the care teams, in fact, moved with the clients, and they each produced individualized relocation plans with their patients and clients and they were made with each and every one of the affected residents to ensure continuity of care and to support them in their compassionate and personalized service.

The Wind River Hospice House remains a place of compassionate and personalized high-quality care and that is because of the people who work there. The issues that were brought to our attention during our visit are being addressed. I understand that perhaps all but one of those has been addressed — issues of concern — and we encourage them to bring forward those to us so that we can work closely with them.

Ms. White: In that list, the minister never mentioned meeting with families, either past or present, who are using hospice.

It's not just the patients who have lost opportunities for dignity and comfort because of this government's decision to move the hospice; it's also their friends and families who are losing out. Here is an example: Wind River hospice had room for extra beds in the rooms for families to spend the nights comfortably alongside their loved ones; the new space does not. Here's another example: Many families deeply value the ceremony of walking their loved ones out from their dying place for the final time. It is a deeply emotional time and, at Wind River, families had the dignity of a private entrance for this ritual. Now with the new facility, the only option is the busy entrance of a multi-use extended care facility. In the time of their deepest grief, they can't even mourn in private.

Will this government commit to righting this wrong?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think I need to emphasize that I met with the caregivers, because I would never impose on the families or any of the individuals who were staying there, and nor should I, quite frankly. I was there to hear about the move. I was there to, of course, engage with the experts — the people providing this absolutely essential care.

The care teams moved with the clients. There was absolutely no change to the level of care that was ordered for patients and families. The access to a private exit is a challenge, no doubt, but it should be noted that when individuals pass away at Whistle Bend Place, there is a very conscious and specific opportunity for families to leave the building with their loved one. It is part of not only the Wind River Hospice House but the reality of individuals living in long-term care, and much respect is given by residents and caregivers at Whistle Bend Place for those types of situations.

The core mandate of the Wind River Hospice House remains: providing compassionate, personalized, high-quality care to their patients and their families, and we will continue.

Question re: Transgender health care

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, or WPATH, provides clinical guidance for health professionals to assist transgender, two-spirit, and non-binary people with safe and effective pathways to health and well-being. This government has committed to providing WPATH training to all health care practitioners by 2026 as part of the LGBTQ2S+ *Inclusion Action Plan*.

What is this government doing to ensure that health care providers are receiving WPATH training?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I can indicate that our health human resources work at recruiting and retaining health care professionals is absolutely critical. It continues to be a primary concern for us. Part of onboarding individuals who will come to work and provide health care human resources to Yukoners is the training aspect of that — local training concept of individuals who may work outside of the territory before they come here, may have been born here and raised here and acutely aware of Yukon-specific issues. Nonetheless, the training that is provided across the board for individuals who are coming to work in our health care and health human resources to provide care to Yukoners is of utmost importance. Commitments have been made to provide this training; it is done in an onboarding stage and it is done throughout the opportunity of individuals to have their training updated when that is appropriate and available.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, the IHealth integrated health information system is supposed to provide Yukoners with system-wide consistency and standardization for improved quality and health outcomes. Right now, lab requisitions processed through this system are unable to accommodate complete patient information, like changes to names or gender. This means that health care providers accessing IHealth are not getting the real picture of patients' health. It also means that patients are being contacted using incorrect names and genders.

What is this government doing to fix the errors and personal information in the IHealth system?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, the data collection — the importance of IHealth, the ability for Yukoners to have access and their care providers to have access to updated electronic information that can be made available to them no matter the location is critically important.

The updates with respect to IHealth are ongoing. I can also indicate that it is a priority as we move to transform, update, and improve Yukon's health system — the health transformation system. I can also indicate that providing proper patient care and having appropriate and proper patient information in that system is a top priority.

It is not valuable for us to have situations where either we are not able to contact people or there is incorrect information. That is one of the issues that is regularly updated with respect to IHealth and continues to be a priority for us.

I can say from very personal experience that making sure an individual has access to the appropriate gender identity is a top priority for me.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, with incomplete information from IHealth, patients are currently being flagged by the system for health conditions they do not have. For a person going through hormone treatment for gender-affirming care, the IHealth system misgenders them and their health care providers receive warnings about concerning hormone levels every time the patient goes for bloodwork.

Additionally, this has left some patients with flags on their records for these conditions or for inappropriate hormone use, despite their hormone treatments being a prescribed part of their gender-affirming care. How will this government fix these issues with the IHealth system and ensure that it is operating in a way that supports and respects queer and trans Yukoners?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, as I have noted in my last response, Yukoners deserve to have a health care system that is responsive to them and is available to them and their gender-specific situations. I can also note that the Yukon government is committed to supporting Yukoners in creating access to sexual and reproductive health and gender-affirming care.

Before any government in Canada, we remain committed to implementing the actions of items that were set out in the 2021 LGBTQ2S+ *Inclusion Action Plan* and from *Putting People First*. We work with stakeholders and partners, including the federal government, health care providers, the Yukon Medical Association, the Yukon nurses association, and Yukon First Nations, to implement these initiatives.

The Yukon Sexual Health Clinic and Yukon Women's MidLife Health Clinic are supported by three contracted nurse practitioners. What I can indicate as well is that the track record of this government in performing priority-making of gender and reproductive care and access to gender-affirming care is second to none in this country. It is work we are very proud of.

Question re: Takhini Haven women's transitional housing program

Ms. Clarke: In February of last year, the Minister of Justice posed for a photo op of the new Takhini Haven building, which was being opened to serve as a halfway house for women who were transitioning through or out of the criminal justice system. At the time, the minister said — and I quote: “This residence, this programming will allow women who might otherwise be unsafe returning to their community, who are involved in the justice process, to be in a safe place and to start to address some of their concerns and issues in a way that will ultimately allow them, we hope, to ... reintegrate into their communities.”

Mr. Speaker, we have now learned that, despite only being open for just over a year, this site was closed on September 30. Why did the minister close this facility and halt the funding for this program?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the question. I look forward to being able to provide information with respect to the supervised housing program. I will object to “photo op”. I am

not sure that is a political term. I think that it's appropriate to provide information to Yukoners by virtue of written word as well as photographs at some times. We were very proud of the program that has been put in place with respect to providing these services that have been provided to men for a very long time here in the territory. To have them provided to women at that location was unfortunately an opportunity that was not well used. It was an opportunity for the initial residents for that particular program. There were approximately seven during the period of time that it was open. All but one left the program and had to deal with their issues in another part of the criminal justice system. It was not terribly successful at the time.

It was the appropriate and responsible decision to put it on pause and to evaluate the program.

Ms. Clarke: When the minister stood in front of the newly renovated building and announced the new program, she described it as a first of its kind in the north. In the press release, the minister stated that: “The safe and effective transition back into our communities after time in the justice system is vital for overall personal and community wellbeing.”

At the time, the minister said that approximately \$1.2 million was allocated for this project until March 2024. Can the minister tell us how much money was spent renovating this building, how much funding was provided to Connective to operate this program that was only open for just over a year, and what has happened to that funding now that the building is closed?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the continuation of the questions. Supervised housing is a key component — I don't disagree with anything that is being quoted about what I said. That's clearly the intention of the program.

Supervised housing is a key component of the criminal justice system and provides structured support for justice-involved individuals to assist them with their reintegration back into the community. The women's supervised housing program is on pause while an evaluation is completed due to the low subscription rates to the program. I'm not sure if the member opposite would have us leave the program opened and continue to spend taxpayers' money on a program that was simply not being used.

The evaluation of the supervised housing programs will include the women's and the men's supervised housing program. The evaluation will assist if the programs — in determining whether or not they're effective, in whether intended outcomes are being met, and how we might better serve this community. The evaluation is expected to be completed by February of 2025. I can indicate that the continuation of the contract to the end of this fiscal year would have been approximately \$370,000. The decision was made at the end of September to not continue without evaluation.

Ms. Clarke: The minister's briefing note from the Spring Sitting has indicated that the review of the program would be completed by the end of September in this year. I would like to see the terms of reference for that review.

Can the minister provide more information about the review of this program and who will be involved in the review?

Also, can the minister provide an updated time for the completion for the review of this program?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate the opportunity to repeat that the evaluation is expected to be completed by February 28, 2025, and the results will inform decisions around future needs for the men's and women's programs. The residents of the men's supervised housing program receive person-centred support — as would have the women who were enrolled in the program — and have access to programs based on their individual needs, including but not limited to criminogenic programming, employment support and education, Indigenous-focused programming, if appropriate, and homelessness prevention programs as well as reintegration services, community living services, peer support, inclusive community drop-in centres, and food security support.

The program opened with much confidence that it would be serving a need in our criminal justice system. It provided structured support for justice-involved individuals, and the women who were provided the opportunity to do this over the last year and a half did not complete the program. We will evaluate.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 215, entitled *Second 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. 215: *Second Appropriation Act 2024-25* — continued

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 215, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I will start by welcoming back to the Assembly the Deputy Minister of Finance, Jessica Schultz, and cede the floor to the members opposite for questions.

Mr. Cathers: Madam Chair, I would also like to welcome the deputy minister and thank the Minister of Finance for providing the opportunity for me to begin immediately with questions.

The first question that I have regards the government's borrowing and their increased use of a line of credit to meet the cash needs. The first question that I have: What is the current limit of that line of credit? How large is that amount that they have negotiated with a bank? What is the current balance of that line of credit, and what is the interest rate that government pays on that line of credit?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I will start with some context in consideration of what type of loans we have on the books, and then we will get into lines of credit. Again, borrowing does remain a tool, a good tool, in helping us to achieve our goals and to invest in the long-term prosperity of the territory. When it comes to disclosing our borrowing in the Public Accounts, we have \$233 million loaned at this point. These are not lines of credit; these are not to be confused with the concept of a net debt. These are loans that have been established throughout time with our government. For that \$233 million, the Yukon Development Corporation — I was going to round; I am not going to round — the Yukon Development Corporation has \$205,112,000; the Yukon Hospital Corporation has \$23,612,000; the Housing Corporation has a loan for \$791,000; the Yukon University has \$966,000; and we have an accrued interest and capital lease of \$2,999,000. So, the total is just over that \$233 million mark or \$233,480,000.

In addition to long-term borrowing by the government corporations, the Government of Yukon does have access to a line of credit with its banker, with the bank that we have, which is used to manage temporary or short-term cash-flow needs throughout the year. At any given time, either through short-term or long-term borrowing, the government can borrow up to \$800 million. This is the limit that has been set by the government under the *Yukon Act*. Each year, the government discloses a comprehensive summary of its borrowing — any corporate interest or expenses as well as its net financial assets or debt position — through the Public Accounts.

If we want to talk on a non-consolidated basis, the government reflected net debt of \$258.9 million at March 31, 2023. During the same period, corporate interest expenses were \$210,000. This reflects the latest available information. On a consolidated basis, the government reflects net financial assets of \$10.7 million and corporate interest expenses of \$1.4 million for the same period.

Information comes out to the Public Accounts. This is our regular FAA compliance. The Government of Yukon to date has operated under a strong financial plan and did not require significant borrowing. Jurisdictions around the world and here in the Yukon have seen unforeseen challenges, such as urgent environmental responses and pressures to the health care

system, that have required us to responsibly access our financial approach, as we plan for a prosperous future.

These unprecedented circumstances have highlighted the importance of us having increased flexibility to manage cash flow throughout the year, and this flexibility will be more important as the need to address critical responses becomes increasingly common. The government is well-positioned to support borrowing due to its strong financial position. That is evidenced by the Yukon government's AA stable credit rating and its low net-debt-to-GDP ratio.

I will also commit that, to meet the challenging needs that we have as a territory, we are working closely with our federal partners, and we do look to secure an increase in the territory's borrowing limit from \$800 million.

This is a necessary step to ensure that we have the flexibility to respond to both expected and unforeseen challenges. This solution expands the options available to managing our cash flow, and it helps us to invest in those things that we have seen right across the country as being emerging pressures, like in the health care field, but also knowing that, in the Yukon, there are some specific challenges that we are seeing in the mining industry. There are some specific challenges that we are seeing in wildland fire management — flooding — so, in the coming months, we will keep Yukoners informed as to the work that we are doing with our federal partners to seek an increase in our borrowing limit and to ensure transparency as we continue to deliver critical services and investment. Together, we are building a stronger and more resilient Yukon for generations to come.

I will take a look at the specifics of the lines of credit. I believe that those lines of credit now are at \$300 million. I will sit and look forward to some further questions from the member opposite.

Mr. Cathers: Madam Chair, I appreciate the information from the Minister of Finance. The minister indicated that the government's current long-term debt stands at just over \$233 million. That, as the minister knows, represents a \$17 million increase from the previous fiscal year-end, the year ending on March 31, 2022. According to the Public Accounts, page 23 — "... the total debt is \$216.4 million at March 31, 2022..."

Also, in trying to understand, without the government having shared with us the details of that new borrowing, looking at the amount — again, according to page 23 of those Public Accounts — indicates that the loans by Yukon Hospital Corporation and Yukon Housing collectively were paid down by approximately \$4 million that fiscal year, which would leave us to expect that there would have been a further reduction of about \$4 million from that total of \$216.4 million that was reported in the Public Accounts for the fiscal year ending on March 31, 2022.

So, could the minister confirm, of what appears to be roughly \$21 million in new borrowing — could he confirm what the amount of that new borrowing is for and what that money was borrowed for?

Hon. Mr. Silver: We're having a bit of difficulty following the bouncing ball from the member opposite as far as

— from that Public Accounts. We will look to see what information is pertinent to his answer. But at the same time, we are making our submission. We are working toward the Public Accounts. All of the borrowing, again, from Public Accounts to Public Accounts gets publicized at that time to be open and transparent to show the differences and changes at that time.

Mr. Cathers: Madam Chair, perhaps I didn't explain that as clearly as I could have, but just to simplify it again, looking at the publicly available information that we have received most recently from the government, according to page 23 of the Public Accounts for the fiscal year ending in March 2022, the government reported — quote: "... the total debt is \$216.4 million at March 31, 2022..."

The minister just indicated to this House that the current amount of long-term debt has grown to \$233.4 million. My question is: Between that number of \$216.4 and the new number of \$233.4, what additional borrowing did the government take on?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, we will be reporting a complete package of the borrowing for the Public Accounts and through that procedure. We would have to see what we can pull together right now. I know that the people in Finance right now are trying to see if there is any other information that we can add right now to the member opposite's point about — we did pay off some money in our loans, which is the prudent thing to do when you are borrowing. We will see if there is any additional information as far as that delta that we can share with the member opposite before the FAA policies of providing that information with the work with the Auditor General of Canada through the Public Accounts system, which we are currently working on.

Mr. Cathers: It is a little concerning to me that the Minister of Finance doesn't seem to know what new borrowing they have done in this fiscal year to increase the long-term debt, but I will look forward to whatever information they can provide later. The minister indicated that the current maximum borrowing amount for the line of credit is a \$300 million line of credit. I had asked but did not receive an answer: Can the minister tell me what the interest rate is on that line of credit?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Our line of credit is based upon what follows CIBC's — our bank that we are using currently — prime rate. Their prime rate as of October 3 — so, again, it's hard to answer the question — of this year is 6.45 percent. The next Bank of Canada interest rate announcement, which typically influences CIBC's prime rate, is scheduled for October 23, 2024, but there is also an additional discount factor that is applied, as the line of credit is secured through a competitive public tender. As a result of the competitive process, the discount factor is not disclosed, but knowing what the prime rates are, we know that we are not over those.

Mr. Cathers: On this line of credit — we understand that the maximum amount that can be borrowed is \$300 million — based on the minister's previous indications as well as what officials provided at the briefing, we understand that the amount that they have borrowed has fluctuated throughout the fiscal year. Can the minister indicate how high that has gone? What is the maximum amount of that the government has used

during the fiscal year, and what is the current balance of the line of credit? How much of that line of credit facility is the government currently using?

Hon. Mr. Silver: My apologies to the member opposite; could he repeat the question?

Mr. Cathers: I am happy to repeat that. Again, the minister indicated that the line of credit is a maximum amount of \$300 million. Based on the indications that we have received from the minister himself as well as from officials during briefings, we understand that the amount the government is dipping into it has fluctuated throughout the year. The two questions are: What is the maximum amount that the government has borrowed under that line of credit in this fiscal year, and what is the current balance of that line of credit? How much of that are they currently using?

Hon. Mr. Silver: This question is a question that the member asks at every turn. We do not continuously track those numbers. It would be quite the exercise of human resources. But what we do is the Public Accounts. The deadlines for getting those numbers in — we follow those. We work with the Office of the Auditor General to report how we are using that money and then we put that money toward our Public Accounts.

What we could say is — obviously, if we have those lines of credit, we need them. We need them at certain times when we are in cash crunches waiting for recoveries. Sometimes, you will have federal programming that is 100 percent recoverable, but it is not 100 percent recoverable instantaneously. So, there is a need for the use of these lines of credit and they are appropriately maximized to accommodate what we need in a way that allows us room to not worry as well.

Again, the member opposite does ask this question on a regular basis. We give him the same answer — because the lines of credit usually vary based upon a number of variables throughout the fiscal year. These figures are not typically provided as well when it comes to the actual usage outside of the Public Accounts. The Office of the Auditor General is very pleased with the way we report, and we have no questions or issues there.

To go backward, the member opposite did ask about the differences in borrowing, and if he does turn to page 69 of the Public Accounts, the difference, or the delta, between those numbers — 22, 23 — is explained on that page and it goes through with the numbers — the line items of the Development Corporation, the Hospital Corporation, the university, et cetera — to explain that delta.

Mr. Cathers: Madam Chair, I would assume that the minister is referring to the upcoming Public Accounts, since page 69 of the last Public Accounts that we have received regards contractual rights and doesn't seem relevant to the total amount of borrowing.

Moving on to the question of — we understand, based on the minister's indication, that the amount of long-term debt, which was previously reported at \$216.4 million, has now grown to \$233.4 million. The government also has an \$800 million debt limit, which I would point out, Madam Chair, is something that they have had relatively recently. In fact, it

doubled to \$800 million four years and roughly two weeks ago, in September 2020. Of that \$800 million, we understand that \$233.4 million is made up of long-term debt and the government also has a line of credit.

How much of an increase to that borrowing limit of \$800 million has the government asked for, and what do they plan on spending it on?

Hon. Mr. Silver: We did, in second reading, outline our emerging pressures and also our federal borrowing increase limits. The conversation therein and our preparation here in the 2024-25 first supplementary estimates — we are contending with new pressures — as, again, we spoke about in our second reading — which have emerged since the mains in the spring.

Notably, this includes our ongoing response to the Eagle mine heap leach failure, also an active wildfire season, and continuing pressures in health care, which are a reality that we are seeing play out right across Canada. That is why we are working with our federal partners to seek an increase in our borrowing limit.

Now, this does not mean that the government will take on significant debt, as I mentioned in our second reading speech, but it is necessary to provide us that flexibility to manage peaks and valleys in the government's cash flow. The Yukon continuously assesses its financial tools to ensure that we are using the most appropriate tools to advance our priorities. If the government does make any adjustments to its borrowing plan, then we do intend to do so in a way that is sustainable and transparent to Yukoners and to the Legislative Assembly's processes.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Madam Chair, again, I appreciate that the Minister of Finance doesn't want to tell us how much of an increase to the debt limit they have asked the federal government for, but that doesn't mean they can't tell us that amount. This is a significant policy decision that this Liberal government has provided very little information to justify. Again, we know that, with long-term debt, according to the Minister of Finance, standing at \$233.4 million, a substantial amount of borrowing room remains under an \$800 million borrowing limit, which again, I remind this House, the Liberals asked for and had the debt limit doubled just four years ago to that \$800 million level.

So, how much of an increase to the borrowing limit have they requested from the federal government?

Hon. Mr. Silver: As we've said a few times now, that work is in progress, and we will report back when we get an increase to that limit.

We also have explained many times that, when we first got in to government, the Yukon Party had a substantial amount of debt — loans — on the books, and we now are using lines of credit, which does use up some of that 800 room. We have also identified that there are health pressures; we have identified that there are pressures in the mining industry; we have also talked about wildland fire management and floods. So, this is a work in progress, Madam Chair. The officials are working very closely with their federal counterparts while we determine those long-term requirements.

Mr. Cathers: If the Minister of Finance is insistent on refusing to be transparent, of course, I cannot do anything more than ask him the question, but the record will show that he has made the choice not to be transparent with the public about what this Liberal government has requested from the federal Liberal government.

I'm going to move on to a specific amount of borrowing that the government slipped out through an order-in-council last week but has not provided any information publicly about it that I'm aware of. In two orders-in-council last week — addressed borrowing and lending for the Yukon Development Corporation. Order-in-Council 2024/156, under the *Yukon Development Corporation Act*, issued the borrowing and lending directive, 2024. Under that amount, it indicates — and I will quote from it: “The Yukon Development Corporation is directed, in accordance with this section, and subject to the approval of the Management Board

“(a) that it may borrow funds from a chartered bank in an amount not to exceed \$27,254,000...”

Now, the OIC does go on, but to keep this simple, my question for the minister is: What is the Yukon Development Corporation borrowing \$27.2 million for? What is the purpose of it, and — I'll just leave it there for the moment. What is the purpose of this order-in-council?

Hon. Mr. Silver: The new borrowing — it's a government-approved increase of \$27.254 million of long-term debt for Yukon Energy Corporation, 2024. The future long-term debt will be repaid with money earned from the sale of electricity. The Government of Yukon provides — pre-approves — all external debt acquired by the Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation that would impact the government's borrowing limit, so Yukon Energy Corporation borrowing that enables the company to invest in new generation and transmission infrastructure while also maintaining the current infrastructure, ensuring reliable, affordable, renewable energy for Yukoners.

That breakdown of the long-term debt is within their work with utilities to make sure that they have their financial statements in order and also, at the same time, allow them to use money to invest in times when we need to catch up and keep up but also looking forward to issues of concern, as we move down the road in the Development Corporation and the relationship that they have with the Energy Corporation to provide the important services of energy to our citizens.

Mr. Cathers: The Minister of Finance made reference to new generation being developed by the Yukon Energy Corporation. What new generation is he talking about? Because based on the last available information, all of the elements under the government's 10-year renewable energy strategy are either cancelled, behind schedule, or well off the rails. So, what new generation is covered under this \$27.2 million loan?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I will leave the details of the total budget, what the borrowing is for and what future projects — for example, battery power, which is being developed as you go up toward the highway, but again, this is more information than I would — let's just say it this way: I know that the minister responsible would be better suited to talking about the

initiatives to date — for example, the initiative in Watson Lake for \$18 million or the Haeckel Hill wind project to date for \$13 million or the Burwash/Destruction Bay millions of dollars there or the Dome projects that are currently in or to talk about those future projects that we are looking forward to as well to help us provide energy — but just to know that the Yukon Development Corporation is working with its federal partners, federal funders, to identify new sources of funds to support the development in future.

I know that the Premier has done lots of work in Ottawa as well to showcase our needs, and it is very, very welcome news to hear some money from the federal government when it comes to preparing for our future energy projects, but again, I am not going to steal any thunder from either of those two individuals, and there will be plenty of opportunity for them to talk about their strategies and initiatives moving forward.

I gave the member opposite the financial numbers that he was looking for, and any further information can be garnered through those corporations.

Mr. Cathers: With all due respect, the Minister of Finance gave me nothing in response that provided any level of detail. He talked about a wide range of projects and talking points that could have referred to anything from wind to battery storage to transmission to generation and provided absolutely no clarity about what it might be for.

The amount that we are talking about, again, is due to a Cabinet decision to approve an order-in-council that not only authorized but directed the Yukon Development Corporation to borrow \$27.2 million for something. Now, surely, the Minister of Finance has some idea what that Cabinet decision pertained to and what project or projects that \$27.2 million is going for.

I will give the Minister of Finance a minute while he gets instructions from the Government House Leader about this, but again, we are asking for transparency. Surely, when Cabinet made this decision to direct the Yukon Development Corporation to borrow \$27.2 million, they knew what it was for. Simple question: What is the money for?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Simple answer: The corporations will be here to give a vast amount of information past what I can give in those departments. So, the member opposite might want — because it sounds good to say that we are being not transparent or not open — those corporations will be in here to discuss the budget. They will have more to say about that money. I will leave it at that. Suffice to say that I don't know where their timelines are for their communications, and I would not interfere with the good work that the minister does, but the numbers from a financial perspective in general debate have been given, and more information specific to the corporations will be given when those corporations are here with the minister to talk about the future of energy in the Yukon.

Mr. Cathers: Well, clearly, we'll have to follow up with a letter to the minister responsible regarding this.

I would just ask the minister to clarify whether I heard him correctly. I believe he referenced an amount of \$13 million from government for the Haeckel Hill wind project. Is that correct, or did I mishear the number that he referred to for that?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, this is the Arctic energy fund and, yes, the number that I quoted for Haeckel Hill projects — four projects that have been approved for funding so far. Haeckel Hill is one of those and it's \$13.07 million.

Mr. Cathers: In the interest of moving on to individual departments since it seems the Minister of Finance is either unwilling or unable to detail what that \$27.2 million is going for, I will move to wrap up general debate and pass that on to the floor and the Third Party if they wish to ask questions.

I would, though, ask the minister to, if he's able to, confirm — since he's referring to \$27.2 million in borrowing that was approved via Cabinet decision last week — again, a decision that should be fresh in the minister's mind.

We know that with projects done by Yukon Energy, often a portion of costs is passed on to ratepayers. Can the minister tell us — and it should be fresh in his mind since the decision was made by Cabinet just last week — how much of this total amount of \$27.2 million is being passed on to ratepayers to pay? Are there any additional amounts that are being financed separately from this borrowing that are being passed on to ratepayers? What is the total rate increase on power bills likely to be as a result of this decision for these projects, whatever those projects may be, since the minister won't tell us what they are?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I will answer the questions that are germane to the Department of Finance and I will allow the Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation to answer the more specific questions about rate and all that. The member opposite kind of already knows the process, but it's fun to have this little back-and-forth.

Again, when it comes to the borrowing that you're seeing right now with the YDC and YEC, it's routine borrowing. It converts short-term loans to long-term loans. It is there to maintain — as the member opposite knows very well from his time in the past as the minister responsible, there is a regulated debt-to-equity ratio. Any other information past that, I would ask my colleague across the way to pose those questions to the minister responsible when he is here in the supplementary exercise for the current supplementary bill.

Mr. Cathers: I do look forward to finding out how much of a rate increase people can expect on their power bills as a result of this and what these projects are for.

As indicated, I will be wrapping up my comments here in general debate and will again just speak for another moment to provide the Third Party critic time to take the floor, should they wish to do so. I will conclude my comments at this point and thank the officials for the information that they have provided to the Finance minister and for any that has been shared. I look forward to hearing more in departmental debate.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Bill No. 215, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2024-25*?

Seeing none, we will proceed to clause 1. The bill's schedules form part of clause 1. One of the schedules is Schedule A, containing the departmental votes.

The matter now before the Committee is Vote 27, French Language Services Directorate, in Bill No. 215, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Would members like to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 27, French Language Services Directorate, in Bill No. 215, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Is there any general debate?

French Language Services Directorate

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Merci, madame la présidente. Je prends la parole cet après-midi au sujet du budget supplémentaire des dépenses de la Direction des services en français.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise this afternoon to speak to the supplementary budget for the French Language Services Directorate, and I am going to give my remarks in both French and English. I will repeat them so everyone will know.

J'aimerais tout d'abord présenter le sous-ministre, Philippe Mollet, et le directeur, André Bourcier, de la Direction des services en français et leur souhaiter la bienvenue à l'Assemblée législative. J'aimerais également remercier le personnel de la Direction des services en français pour ses efforts à améliorer l'accès aux services en français au Yukon. Ils sont une équipe formidable.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I would like to introduce and welcome Deputy Minister Philippe Mollet, for his first time here, and Director Andre Bourcier to the Legislative Assembly. I would also like to thank the staff of the French Language Services Directorate for their dedicated efforts to increase access to services in French in the Yukon. They are a fantastic team.

Au cours des derniers mois, nous avons d'ailleurs réussi à obtenir un financement supplémentaire de Patrimoine canadien. Ce financement a pour objectif d'augmenter l'accès aux services juridiques en français au sein du système de justice. Cela représente une augmentation de 200 000 \$ pour la Direction des services en français pour l'exercice 2024-2025. De cette somme, 80 000 \$ iront aux services centralisés et 120 000 \$ iront aux partenariats et aux soutiens stratégiques.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Over the past months, we have been successful in securing additional funding from Canadian Heritage to increase access to French language justice services surrounding the court system. This represents a \$200,000 increase for the French Language Services Directorate for 2024-25, of which \$80,000 is under central services and \$120,000 under partnerships and strategic support.

Cette année est la première année de cette initiative triennale d'une valeur de 600 000 \$. Cette augmentation nous permettra de travailler avec le ministère de la Justice pour

soutenir deux organismes du Yukon qui offrent des services et des renseignements juridiques à la population yukonnaise. Il s'agit de la Yukon Public Legal Education Association et la Société d'aide juridique du Yukon, qui offre des services d'aide juridique, comme fournir gratuitement ou à très faible coût les services d'un avocat ou d'une avocate aux personnes à faible revenu.

This year marks the first year of this three-year initiative worth \$600,000. Thanks to the increased funding, we will work with the Department of Justice to support two Yukon-based organizations that provide legal services and information to Yukoners: the Yukon Public Legal Education Association and the Yukon Legal Services Society, which offers legal aid services such as providing a lawyer at no or very low cost to low-income individuals.

Nous travaillerons avec ces organismes pour élaborer des protocoles, traduire des documents et renforcer les capacités bilingues de leur personnel.

We'll work with them to create protocols, translate documents, and build their employees' bilingual capacities.

Le projet appuie une priorité énoncée dans le cadre stratégique sur les services en français 2023-2025 visant à offrir un meilleur accès aux services juridiques en français au sein du système de justice, par exemple à l'aide juridique, aux services aux victimes et au soutien en droit familial.

This project supports a priority outlined in the 2023-25 strategic framework for French Language Services by — quote: "Increase access to French-language legal services surrounding the court system, such as legal aid, victim services and family law support."

Le projet triennal est entièrement recouvrable et ne nécessite pas d'équivalent temps plein supplémentaire.

This three-year project is fully recoverable and does not entail additional full-time employees.

Le budget supplémentaire comprend également 83 000 \$ à reporter de l'exercice précédent pour le projet visant à tirer parti des technologies pour améliorer l'accès en français aux services de santé. Ce projet quinquennal qui a débuté l'an dernier est une bonne voie puisque la Direction des services en français et le ministère de la Santé et des Affaires sociales élaborent deux stratégies ayant pour but d'améliorer la prestation des services en français : une stratégie de collecte des données pour savoir quelle langue de service préfère la patientèle à des fins de planification et une stratégie de solutions numériques proposant des moyens pour accroître l'accès aux soins de santé en français.

The supplementary budget also includes \$83,000 as a carry-forward from last year for the project leveraging technologies to increase access to health care services in French. This five-year project, which started last year, is well underway at FLSD, and Health and Social Services are leading the developing of two strategies to increase the timely delivery of French Language Services: a data collection strategy to identify a patient's preferred language of services, which will help us plan for the future; and a digital solutions strategy that recommends ways to expand access to French language health care.

Dans le cadre du budget supplémentaire des dépenses, nous transférons également 219 000 \$ des services centralisés au programme de partenariat et de soutien stratégique afin d'appuyer le travail qu'effectue le ministère de la Santé et des Affaires sociales dans ce projet.

As part of the supplementary estimates, we are also transferring \$219,000 from central services to the partnerships and strategic support program to support the work that the Department of Health and Social Services is doing on this project.

L'initiative est également conforme à une priorité énoncée dans le cadre stratégique sur les services en français 2023-2025 qui consiste à renforcer notre infrastructure de santé pour offrir des soins primaires en français.

This initiative also aligns with the priority outlined in the 2023-25 strategic framework for French Language Services by strengthening our health infrastructure capacity to deliver timely primary care services in French.

Madame la présidente, voilà qui conclut mes remarques sur le premier budget supplémentaire des dépenses de la Direction des services en français. Je suis prêt à répondre aux questions des députés sur le sujet.

Madam Chair, this concludes my remarks on the first supplementary estimates for the French Language Services Directorate, and we welcome any questions from the members opposite.

Ms. Clarke: I would like to thank the officials for joining us here today and for the briefing that was provided on the supplementary estimates from the French Language Services Directorate.

I want to highlight the work that the directorate is doing to leverage technology to increase access to French services, especially in health care, legal aid, and education. So, it's important for the French-speaking community to have access to as many services as possible in their first language.

I don't have any questions for the minister today, but as always, I want to express my appreciation for the work that all staff are doing to improve the services.

Salamat.

Ms. White: Merci madame la présidente. C'est un plaisir de prendre la parole devant l'Assemblée pour discuter des services en français et les réalisations de la Direction des services en français.

Just like my colleague, I'm also very pleased with the ongoing work of the French Language Services Directorate, and it's always such a challenge — it's always such a challenge to hear, because when we get to this in debate, it's very hard to criticize because of how far we've come.

So, just to — mainly for the new deputy, in 2011, when I was first elected, I tried to debate the French Language Services Directorate for the first time ever in this Assembly. It had never been debated. It was buried in the depths of Highways and Public Works. I asked for a debate. I asked for it in French, and the minister's side erupted. It had never been debated before.

What we've seen since 2011 is we've seen massive advancements in the provision of French language services by Yukon government but also huge changes for the francophone

community — one that has really signalled the respect that Yukon government holds for them and then the importance of upholding the *Languages Act*.

So, it was very easy to debate for a really long time. I had a lot of questions. I had a lot of questions because the department budget had always been the same. It was the same number — the transfer from Ottawa and nothing additional.

I had lots of questions, because francophones couldn't go to the hospital and ask for service.

It was so bad that there was a time during Question Period when I asked questions in French, and it very much highlighted how francophones would feel going to the hospital, which is: If someone can't understand, then how do they respond?

So, when we get to this place here where we are in the supplementary budget of 2024 — we have come such a long way that there is no criticism. There is only probably just a real — I don't want to say "excitement", because that is kind of overstating a budget, but there is always the pleasure in seeing how far the department has come and continues to push those boundaries.

I have said before that the French Language Services Directorate has easily the best printed information that they hand — it talks about the directorate at a glance. It is by far my favourite document because it's so easy to understand, so big props to the communications person in their office. I think that some of the things that it highlights is that it's due in large part to francophones that so many language groups in the territory are able to get services when they go to the hospital or for medical support.

I say that because when I look at the documentation that we were handed, it says that the top five languages that were requested between January and December 2023 — the first one was Cantonese; the second was American Sign Language; the third was French; the fourth was Mandarin; and the fifth was Tagalog. That is something that we as a territory should be infinitely proud of, and it is in large part because of the ongoing advocacy of the francophone community who have continued to tell us that we can do better, that we can support people in their first languages, and they honestly helped us to get here.

So, I also don't have any questions for the minister, but again, just to share my admiration for the work done by the French Language Services Directorate and the ongoing work done, because they continue to push the envelope in a way that other places where French is a minority language don't see. So, we have a lot to be proud of in the Yukon.

One more note for the minister — the minister has done an incredible job of learning French since he has taken on this role, and it is one that is important to note, because what it signals to the francophone community is a respect I believe that the minister shares. So, the advancement and his ability now to speak — it's hard to believe, actually, how far he has come in such a short amount of time.

Félicitations. J'ai beaucoup d'admiration pour tout ce travail et je connais le stress qu'on peut ressentir quand on s'éloigne de ses notes.

The value you put on the language, the value that you put on the francophone community by continuing to learn, is really

important. With that, Madam Chair, I want to say thank you, and if the minister has anything else he would like to add — I just want to say that it is francophones who helped get us to the point that there are four other language groups that were on the top list of requesting services in their language of choice at the hospital, and that is a really big deal.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will just say thanks to the members opposite for their compliments to the department and to the francophone community here in the Yukon. I will just let Yukoners know that some of the seed funding that I was talking about in the supplementary budget, including the money that came from earlier that we are working on with Health, has led to this way where we can have iPads that are there so that you are looking at someone as you seek this support to have translation, and because we tap into translation services in the background, we are able to get all these other languages there too. So, it is correct — and of course, you need that if it is a visual medium like American Sign Language.

The other thing that has happened is that we found that, once health care professionals had the comfort of knowing that there was someone there to help them talk to the patients and to help translate, that they themselves would bring forward their abilities in, say, French or other languages. They were nervous before because when you are dealing with health, it is so incredibly important; you don't want to make any mistakes. You are afraid sometimes to move over into another language where you may have some missteps, but with that translation service there, it actually — what we have seen is that it has fostered our health care professionals to practise in a fuller way, which has really been great to see. We are excited to see this expand to other things, like Justice, for example.

We were asked about a year and a half ago now to give a presentation on this to the ministers responsible for French language across the country, and we have been promoting it nationally. We think that it is a really good program. Again, a shout-out to echo the remarks of the member opposite to the department and the team there who have been working so hard to improve services for the community but also to the community itself for being such great advocates around this. It is good to work alongside them.

The members opposite, in their critic roles, and I — we all attended an event this past Friday that had a real sense of pride in the Yukon. It was a national event being held here for French media awards. As is typical for Yukoners, we were very proud to show off the Yukon and, in particular in this case, to show off francophone Yukon.

Merci à tous les Yukonnais et à toutes les Yukonaises.

Thanks to all the French-speaking Yukoners for their work. Again, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak on the floor today.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 27, French Language Services Directorate?

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

Ms. White: Madam Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 27, French Language Services Directorate, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 27, French Language Services Directorate, 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 27, French Language Services Directorate, 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 \$283,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of nil agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$283,000 agreed to French Language Services Directorate agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is Vote 10, Public Service Commission, in Bill No. 215, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Would members like to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 10 minutes.

Recess

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

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 10, Public Service Commission, in Bill No. 215, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Is there any general debate?

Public Service Commission

Hon. Mr. Silver: Before I begin my opening remarks, I would like to welcome the newly minted Commissioner of the Public Service Commission, Meagan Lang — her debut in the Legislative Assembly, so I'll ask the members opposite to take it easy on her. We're very grateful for her leadership in the Public Service Commission.

I'm pleased to present the supplementary estimates for the Public Service Commission for the fiscal year ending 2024-25. As the central department responsible for overseeing the public service, the Public Service Commission administers a wide range of government-wide human resource programs and services. Throughout policy direction and guidance, we are a support — our job is to support departments and agencies in recruiting qualified individuals to build a workforce that reflects the diversity of Yukon.

Beyond recruitment, the Commission manages pay and benefits, pension administration, and collective bargaining. These efforts ensure that the public service remains a strong and sustainable institution for the long term. In our pursuit of

excellence, we remain committed to adapting to emerging demands and needs, all while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

Turning to the financial details — there are changes in the Public Service Commission's supplementary amount for the 2024-25 fiscal year resulting in an increase at this supplementary of approximately \$4.73 million. The primary driver of this increase is the corporate fund for employee future benefits, which will rise by approximately \$4.01 million.

This adjustment to the employer's current and future obligations aligns with the updated actuarial valuation completed in June 2024, reflecting factors such as accumulated service, wage rates, and other demographic trends affecting retirement and pensionable service buyback.

This increase also reflects the employer's share of increased extended health premiums for retirees. As of April 1, 2024, monthly benefit premium rates were adjusted due to higher usage, increased costs per claim, and expenses related to high costs, especially of drugs, vision claims, paramedical services, out-of-country expenses, and insurer administering fees. Currently, the employer covers about 85 percent of premium costs for most employees, with variations depending upon employee group. For retirees, the employer's contribution is determined by their level of service at retirement and types of coverage and ranges from zero percent to 65 percent, with retirees covering the remaining costs.

Additionally, we are seeing a \$711,000 increase in estimates to the workers' compensation premium costs. This increase is primarily due to higher total payroll costs for government employees stemming from collective bargaining agreement ratified in June 2023 as well as increases to section M salaries. The effect of this rise in total payroll is further compounded by an increase in premium rates established by the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board, which rose from 1.84 percent to 1.93 percent of eligible payroll costs effective January 1, 2024.

Madam Chair, the Public Service Commission remains steadfast in its commitment to strengthening the Government of Yukon's public service, ensuring that this continues to drive effective programs and services for Yukoners. I appreciate the opportunity to present the supplementary estimates for the Public Service Commission, and I will cede the floor to the members opposite.

Ms. McLeod: Madam Chair, I would like to welcome the new Public Service Commissioner to the Legislature today. As I understand it, it might be the same chair that her dad sat in during his time. Thank you for joining us. I want to also thank the officials for the briefing on October 4, which was last Friday.

Now, this budget amount of \$4.7 million is a targeted expense relating to public service benefits. My question is: How often is this recalculation done, and are Crown corporations done separately, or are they also captured in this budget amount?

Hon. Mr. Silver: The corporations are done separately, but they do meet twice a year. I will start with a little bit of background here as well. April 1, 2024, the monthly premium rates were adjusted — again, as I mentioned, due to those high

rates and the higher costs proclaimed — and also supported high specialty drug costs, vision claims, paramedic services, out-of-country expenses, and also insurer administrative fees — and again, this is not a situation that is unique to the Yukon. We are seeing many plan sponsors and insurers country-wide experiencing similar challenges, but I am proud to say that the Government of Yukon's benefit plan is one of the best in the country, offering retirees the same extended health care coverage as employees — a rare benefit that sets us apart from many other jurisdictions where retirees either do not receive benefits or they pay a higher percentage compared to their employer.

Ms. McLeod: The minister made reference to this in his opening comments, but of course, he will recall that there was quite a shock on behalf of public servants who saw a huge increase to their benefit premiums. Now, what plans are in place to ensure that this doesn't happen again?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Each fiscal year, benefits are reviewed and may change, potentially affecting contribution rates for employees and retirees. The question asked is: How do we, I guess, change our policies or how do we reflect — that high costs don't happen again? It's very hard to predict the future and the Joint Management Committee has quite the task in front it. It's a committee comprised of both employee and employer representatives to determine the benefit plan design and also to set up the premium rates and operate on a consensus basis.

This committee will meet in January 2025 to determine the adjustments that are needed to the benefit plan to do those designs and benefit premiums for the next year. We're supported by Mercer, a national benefits consulting firm. The committee ensures that the Government of Yukon's benefit programs are cost-effective, competitive, and aligned with industry standards as we work with Mercer. The plan members will be notified of premium changes through either e-mail or mail by February, which is a quick turnaround from the meetings that they have in January. Active employees will also be notified by a global note.

If there is a suggestion by the member opposite as far as how the management committee meets or how we get supported by Mercer or if there is anything in there that they can suggest as far as helping us — but again, as I said, it's very hard to predict the future. I am very happy that, compared to other jurisdictions, the employer — the government — covers approximately 85 percent of those premiums for most employees through that cost-sharing. It does, of course, vary by employee group. Again, the coverage that we have for our retirees is among the best in Canada. There are different government organizations that do not contribute at all to the retirees, although I do believe that they will allow those retirees to pay 100 percent up front to the program that they instill for their public service.

Ms. McLeod: As a result of that large increase that retirees sought and were clearly very unhappy with, how many of those people left the program at that time?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I don't have a number here, so I do not know, but we will endeavour to get back to the member opposite with a number.

Ms. McLeod: I thank the minister for that commitment.

When will the next employment engagement survey be conducted?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I really do appreciate the question from the member opposite, as the survey is a key tool in assessing the health of our overall environment within the public service. It is conducted every two years. The most recent survey was held from May to July 2024. Preliminary analysis of the 2024 Yukon government employee engagement survey shows that employees continue to be satisfied with their jobs and committed to the organization. The results are being analyzed, but we are very pleased to see this positive trend.

Ms. McLeod: Are the results of that engagement survey public or posted somewhere on the website?

Hon. Mr. Silver: So, each department will receive a detailed report on their engagement levels. It is the responsibility of the deputy ministers to address these results. The Public Service Commission, in our role, provides the departments with the resources to help identify and to implement strategies to improve workplace health and engagement across the public service.

Now, once all the results are in and analyzed, they will be published on yukon.ca and on the internal site, Yukonconnect, and results will be shared with all senior management teams and employees once available.

Ms. McLeod: I'm going to wrap up. I have no further questions for the department at this time.

Just one further question, though, was if the minister could tell us when he rises when they might expect that date to be — when those results will be posted.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I'm very hopeful that it will be this fall.

Ms. White: I would just like to get started with a statement that came out from the minister today on the Yukon Association of Education Professionals' collective bargaining. I guess that I am looking for clarification as to the purpose of the statement and the decision of the Minister of the Public Service Commission to put that out today.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Can the member opposite tell me which statement?

Ms. White: Absolutely, Madam Chair. I will just take an opportunity to read it into the record.

So, it is published today and it is a statement from the Minister of the Public Service Commission on the Yukon Association of Education Professionals' collective bargaining. It says that the minister has issued the following statement — and I quote: "The Government of Yukon values the work and contributions of education professionals in nurturing the intellectual, social and personal development of Yukon students. Yukon teachers are amongst the highest paid in Canada, with average salaries more than 30 per cent higher than in British Columbia.

"The Government of Yukon's representatives have been meeting with representatives of the Yukon Association of Education Professionals in September and early October 2024 to establish a renewed collective agreement. The next steps in the bargaining process involve conciliation with the assistance

of a conciliation board. Until the legislated negotiation process concludes no legal job action can be authorized or commenced.

“We remain committed to securing a new agreement that preserves Yukon educators as amongst the highest paid in the country and is fiscally responsible.

“The package that Government of Yukon proposed accounts for the current fiscal situation impacting many Canadians, is consistent with the agreements reached in other jurisdictions and would maintain Yukon teachers as amongst the highest paid in the country.

“The Government of Yukon has offered wage and other monetary improvements equivalent to just above 12 per cent over three years. In contrast, the Yukon Association of Education Professionals is seeking wage increases equal to 24 per cent over three years and other monetary improvements equal to another 5 per cent, for a total of 29 per cent over three years. This is not fiscally responsible and is not consistent with settlement patterns across Canada.

“Where the compensation provided to some groups of the Yukon Association of Education Professionals members is not market competitive, we have proposed significant increases beyond the general wage increase. This includes a 40 per cent increase in wages for teachers on call, whose rate of pay is significantly below market and a \$2,000 annual allowance for education assistants. We remain committed to securing a new agreement that preserves Yukon educators as amongst the highest paid in the country and is fiscally responsible.”

That is the specific news release that I was asking about.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I appreciate that from the member opposite. I wasn't trying to be facetious. We made statements in Question Period and also put out a press release that does — as I see, the statement is the front line. So, I really didn't know if the member opposite was talking about any of my statements in the Question Period or my statements in the news release.

Why did we put this out? Well, it's in response, really, to the October 6 Yukon Association of Education Professionals' press release and the response that we got from our teachers and from our parents. It was concerning and we wanted to make sure that we had these numbers out and present while we hopefully continue to negotiate with the association.

Ms. White: I apologize to the minister for not being more specific. I guess that I could have been more clear about which statement. I thought I said “press release”, but I didn't.

So, when the minister chose to put out something like this — does he believe that this is not bargaining in public? Is this seen as good-faith bargaining?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I'm absolutely not negotiating in public. I am merely stating what our negotiators have already discussed at the table.

Ms. White: When the minister said “... with average salaries more than 30 percent higher than in British Columbia...”, what was the purpose? Was that just sharing of information, or were there other things behind that line?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Definitely sharing information.

Ms. White: When the press release says that Yukon teachers are among the highest paid in Canada and it goes on to talk about how highly paid they are and it goes on to say that

— pardon me. It says — and I will just quote again: “The package that Government of Yukon proposed accounts for the current fiscal situation impacting many Canadians...” So, when the minister talks about the package that the Government of Yukon proposed and talks about it in a public way, is that negotiating in public, or is that still part of the private negotiation process?

Hon. Mr. Silver: One might make the argument that the member opposite is trying to get me to negotiate in public with the questions that we're hearing today.

Listen, the package that we proposed accounts for the current fiscal situation impacting many Canadians. This is not my first round of negotiating with unions. I have always taken a very measured approach.

I want the negotiations to happen where they are supposed to happen, which is among our negotiators. We look forward to continuing to make sure that Yukon teachers are among the highest paid in Canada — absolutely. We need to make sure that we are moving forward in a way that gets agreement done as quickly as possible and to continue to make those teachers get the pay that they deserve — absolutely.

The Yukon has offered wage and other monetary improvements equivalent to just above 12 percent over three years. This maintains the Yukon teachers' status as among the highest paid teachers in Canada. In contrast, as I said today, YAEP is seeking wage increases equal to 24 percent over three years and other monetary improvements that add another five percent. This is a total of 29 percent over three years. This is not fiscally responsible and is not consistent with settlement patterns across Canada.

When the compensation provided to some groups of YAEP members is not market-competitive, we have put in proposals to make sure that we do, in that classification, which is teachers on call, make sure that they are also provided wages that have an increase. This isn't me negotiating in public; these are conversations already had at the table after we responded to a press release from the teachers' association. The increase that we included in our negotiations to date would have included a 40 percent increase in wages for teachers on call because we believe, again, that the rate of pay is significantly below market — and also a \$2,000 annual allowance for educational assistants.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that the minister says that he feels that I am pressuring him to negotiate on the floor, but from my perspective, he's doing that all on his own.

So, when he has just made the statements that he has just said, which sound like they're closing the door on what the YAEP has brought forward, I guess I want to know how, from his perspective, negotiations are supposed to continue in an open and honest way if the minister is releasing statements like this and then having these conversations on the floor of the Assembly?

Hon. Mr. Silver: So, I'll just start by saying that we have consistently expressed our willingness to engage in meaningful and constructive negotiations with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals. We're going to still continue to follow the schedule. We know that the

conversations have broken down and that the request of the chair has come from the association. We are now looking at a timeline — the chair will be involved in — and we will go through either that conciliation or arbitration, and we will continue to move through this process.

So, that's how I hope that things will continue to go — according to the next scheduling updates for bargaining. There are times already set.

But again, we felt that we needed to communicate our willingness in the past, including our offer to commence bargaining in April and through to May and June. We thought it was important, as we see these press releases, to talk about the communication that happened, the dates that were set, the times that the association was not available in the summer, and how we have met with the YAEP at the bargaining table on September 11, 12, 18, and 19 and also on October 1 and 2. And before reaching an impasse, we provided several dates in October and November to the YAEP.

We also said today that we've made huge strides in these conversations and that the dates that were set were down to just the monetary side of things and that, on the non-monetary side, there seemed to be very good conversations and lots of agreement.

The member opposite says: How do we continue? We continue by moving down the process that has been set out.

Ms. White: You know, Madam Chair, I'm struggling right now to try to understand the position of the minister where he is saying that there's an openness, an interest, and a willingness to continue negotiations, but in reading the minister's own press release today, there is an undertone, from my perspective, of hostility.

As we have this conversation today, the minister says he hopes that I am not trying to get him to negotiate on the floor, but in reading this, it seems that the minister has put out the boundaries. He has said that teachers in the Yukon are the highest paid in the country — 30 percent more than British Columbia — and he has gone on to say that — just saying what the YAEP has asked for — so I guess I am still trying to understand how he believes that this is not setting a tone for those future discussions.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I would say to the member opposite that when we get press releases from the Yukon Association of Education Professionals with comments like: YEAP votes 95 percent in favour of job action or YEAP negotiations not a priority for YG, then at some point, we want to be able to — now that we are at this stage — make our comments. When we are talking about our willingness to be at the table — we are very, very willing to be at the table, so that is why we talked about those dates and those conversations.

When we talk about whether or not we want to get a deal that continues to allow the teachers in Yukon to be paid higher than most other jurisdictions in Canada, there is no hostility in that statement at all actually, so I am not sure why the member opposite would infer that. We have said that we want to get back to the table, we want the process to continue, and we want to provide a very fair wage. Twenty-nine percent over three years is not financially responsible, and we hope that we can

get to a process, whether it be through conciliation or arbitration or continued negotiations, to get closer with the association.

I was very pleased to see members of the association in here today for the tributes for World Teachers' Day. That was great to see. No hostility from our group at all, just more really wanting to get to the table, because neither party has tabled a final offer, but we have agreed that further bargaining at this time would not be productive with the widening gap that remains on monetary issues.

Ms. White: Can the minister remind me what was negotiated for Yukon government nurses? What increase was negotiated for that group of Yukon government employees?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I am not going to speak very much about nurses, because I kind of know where the member opposite is going as far as comparison numbers.

We remain committed to securing a new agreement that preserves Yukon educators as among the highest paid in the country. Nurses and other health professionals required significant increases to match compensation in other jurisdictions. We are doing exactly the same thing with our teachers. We are looking across the country and deciding, together with these negotiations, what are responsible, top-of-the-line salaries compared to other jurisdictions in Canada. We could go down that road of comparing times and places in the past about nurses compared to teachers. I'm not going to get into that. I'm more concerned to make sure that — while we are talking about teachers now — we remain competitive, including our teachers on call and including making sure that we have those competitive wages and hopefully maintaining, you know, our position as being 30 percent more than the average pay of BC teachers.

Ms. White: What was the purpose of the department sending the minister's statement out to all parents in Yukon schools?

Hon. Mr. Silver: We have received a lot of concern from parents and teachers about the news release from the Yukon Association of Education Professionals on October 6 with the title in bold that YAEP "... votes 95 percent in favour of job action..." We wanted to make sure that folks knew that the YAEP is not in a legal strike position and that no job action can be authorized or commenced until a conciliation or arbitration process has concluded.

Ms. White: Just for clarification purposes: Did the YAEP news release get sent out to all parents? Can the minister confirm that also happened?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I cannot speculate as to how parents and teachers get hold of these things, but I do know that they called.

Ms. White: I mean, I appreciate that this is not the Minister of Education I'm speaking to; it's the Minister of the Public Service Commission, but it was my understanding that the kind of system-wide Yukon student-parent kind of communication was designed specifically in alert of emergencies.

So, does this press release go out to every Yukon parent — like, does that fall along those lines of this being an

emergency so that the government chose to send out a system-wide notification?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Not being the Minister of Education, I'm not positive as to what the parameters are about how that could be used as a communicating tool. I do know, as the Minister of the Public Service Commission, that when we have concerns at this level about suspected job action happening sooner than later or happening now, then it's important to communicate to our teachers and to our parents that we remain committed to securing a new agreement that preserves education, Yukon educators as among the highest paid in the country, and that it is fiscally responsible but also that we are not in a legal strike position and just that the YAEP has requested a declaration of impasse.

Ms. White: So, just for clarification purposes then, did the release come directly from the office of the Public Service Commission to all Yukon parents?

Hon. Mr. Silver: No, it did not.

Ms. White: Can the minister tell me where or how the press release from the — or, sorry, I guess not “press release” — statement. It says it's a statement — how the statement was forwarded to all parents or caregivers from Yukon schools?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I cannot, as I am not the Minister of Education.

Ms. White: So, just to confirm then, is the minister telling me that it was the Minister of Education who chose to send out this statement to all Yukon parents?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I am saying that it came out from the Department of Education, and I am not the minister responsible.

Ms. White: So, just in understanding that it came out from the Yukon Education communications for public schools at yukon.ca, if it's the minister's statement and he stands by this statement as the Public Service Commissioner saying that this is not negotiating in public, can he not help us understand how this statement was then sent from this e-mail — so, publicschools@yukon.ca? Can he help us understand who directed that this statement get sent out to all Yukon parents?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I cannot, because Education sent a statement out to every parent using the “all parents” e-mail. We did not know that this was necessarily being done, but this was from the department. Again, I am not the minister, but the minister will be up in debate and can have that conversation.

As far as the Public Service Commission, this is not a message that came from the Public Service Commission.

Ms. White: When the government touts the one-government approach and no silos, can the minister help me understand how this is not siloed if he can't tell me how his statement got sent to all Yukon parents? Can he explain to me where the silo exists right now between the Public Service Commission and the Department of Education?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I wouldn't say that this is an example of a silo; this is more an example of operational procedures.

Ms. White: I appreciate that the minister thinks that these are procedures, whereas I think it's silos. I am just looking for clarification how — maybe now that I know that this statement, for example, has gone to all Yukon parents, does the

minister believe that this statement will possibly colour the support teachers have going forward? Was that his intention with this statement?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, the member opposite is hearing me say that my opinion on things — she is asking me what my opinion is; I am not going to be negotiating here; I'm not going to be talking about my opinion. I am going to be here to say that the Public Service Commission did not send out a message. This is a procedural thing through the Department of Education, and it's a great question to ask when the department is in here.

I will continue to say that, when it comes to negotiations, I am going to stick to what we are prepared to say, because we do not want to be negotiating here in the Legislative Assembly. I will take the criticism from the member opposite that I don't know what's going on at all times in all schools — sure, I will take that criticism on the chin; no problem — but, again, I am not going to speculate and say what my opinions are. I am going to remain professional and make sure that we, as a negotiating team, do our utmost to get back to the table and to make sure that we hopefully get to a place where we can come closer together with the association to make sure that we continue to provide the pay that is at the top of Canada when it comes to a very, very important job that is very close to my heart.

Ms. White: I have now been notified that it has also been sent to all Yukon teachers. So, does the minister view this as an intimidation tactic, as negotiation has ground to a halt — is probably the most appropriate way to say it.

Does the minister recognize that this could be viewed as intimidation by those at the negotiating table?

Hon. Mr. Silver: My view is not important; I am not going to speculate on my view when it comes to the importance of these negotiations and will leave all the conversations between the government and the association with those negotiators.

Ms. White: Is the minister not a government representative of the Public Service Commission, who has said that negotiations have stalled? Is the minister not a member of the government who has said that teachers are now making on average more than 30 percent of British Columbia? Is the minister not the government who is part of this being sent to Yukon parents and education staff?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Madam Chair, I am not a representative of the Department of Education, and I am also not a negotiator.

Ms. White: Is the member a representative of the Liberal government, the Yukon Liberal government?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I see where the member opposite is going, but again, I am not going to be goaded into doing negotiations inside of the Legislative Assembly. I am going to continue to make our side of the presentation, even as the Yukon Party off-mic decide to kibitz and talk. At the same time, we believe that we want to keep the negotiations moving forward. My opinion on things, you know, is beside the point of the member opposite starting this conversation by saying that we shouldn't be discussing this outside of negotiations, and now she wants to continue to get me on record saying things when I'm not the Minister of Education. I am also very

concerned about making sure that we have the proper — our information — out there, following up from press releases that we have seen from the Yukon Association of Education Professionals. I will keep the speculating and the opinions to the member opposite.

Ms. White: I will absolutely correct myself after I read Hansard, but I don't remember saying that I specifically was saying negotiating or not negotiating on the floor. I was asking the minister if this was negotiation on the floor, if this was negotiation in public by putting this out — and the minister has told me that I should be talking to the Department of Education, which is fantastic, because they are up next. I am going to highlight my concerns about this statement going out. It's the first time that I can remember this coming from a Public Service Commissioner during a negotiation period. I don't even remember it during the Yukon Party, and you know, the minister and I will remember that they weren't particularly pro-union, but this might be a whole new level.

So, I will move on maybe to less contentious items — who knows, at this point? Actually, I will let the minister respond, and then I'll get into the other questions.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Madam Chair, I appreciate the opportunity, but I don't think I heard a question in there.

Ms. White: It's true; it was 100 percent a statement, and I thought maybe the minister would want to clear the record — clear the air — maybe something like that.

Can the minister tell me what the government's policy is on how job postings go up — whether they go internally or externally and how that process is decided?

Hon. Mr. Silver: In a nutshell, each region of each department is responsible for these activities, and the public service must be representative of the people they serve and make sure that our skills are there and that we are equipped properly to implement the administration of the government's policies.

Every hiring decision that we make, whether it's internal or external, is extremely important because it does shape the success of the organization. While the Public Service Commission will provide overall direction — I'm kind of moving toward probably what the next question is — you know, what our role is — we do provide overall direction for staffing processes — individual departments the discretion to decide whether to post openings internally or externally.

Ms. White: Why does it take anywhere from 12 to 18 months for the Public Service Commission to classify a new position?

Hon. Mr. Silver: It's a big job and it's a small shop, but I know that the team does an extraordinary job of making sure that they can prioritize and move forward as quickly as they possibly can.

Ms. White: Can the minister help us understand what's involved in a job classification and why it could take 12 to 18 months to go through that process?

Hon. Mr. Silver: As the member opposite can well imagine, there is a lot to consider with a classification change. There are union considerations — whether or not this change moves out of a union position or not — whether or not it's a

new hire or an old hire or a new job or whether or not a region changes between departments. There is a plethora of reasons why this is something that the Public Service Commission and its employees there take very seriously, want to do a proper job of, yet it is complicated.

Ms. White: Are there times when that timeline can be sped up in situations of urgency — for example, when a job or a new job is looking for a classification and it is urgent to fill that position?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I guess the short answer is yes; there could be a prioritization, but there would have to also be good reason. The system is set up in a way that the department already takes things into consideration as far as importance and tries their best to move expeditiously through that system. I don't know if the member opposite is asking about a specific job hiring or a specific classification. As opposed to me guessing in the dark what the member opposite is specifically talking about, I'll just leave it there.

Ms. White: So, I wasn't actually asking about a specific, but I will go into a bit of generalities. We're in an Assembly where we have a Clerk and we have a Deputy Clerk and we're now needing to look at classification to get the third person in. So, if it takes 12 to 18 months, it means, as an example, that we will be understaffed in this Assembly, so I'm just wondering if there is a way to speed up that process.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I'm not going to get too much into HR issues here in the Legislative Assembly, especially when it pertains to the Legislative Assembly, but I will say that the department understands that this is a concern. Six months is actually the average. I don't know where the member opposite gets the number 18.

We did hire two more 1.0 FTEs to make sure that this process is expedient.

Ms. White: It was merely an example. The 12 to 18 months is what has been shared in other job-creation specifics. When I get told, as the critic in the area, that it takes 12 to 18 months — and asking the Minister of the Public Service Commission, it's because it's ultimately a staffing thing. It's not a criticism of the office. To be perfectly frank, part of the reason I'm asking the question is that I don't understand how that process goes. I don't understand what information or what has to get done. It seems to me that 18 months — even at the longest possible — seems to be a very long time to look toward classification.

So, in asking the question, it is trying to understand how those decisions are made.

In 2022, the Public Service Commission commissioned a report entitled *Work Environment Assessment of Psychological Health & Safety at Government of Yukon* in response to rising long-term disability claims.

That report recommends several next steps. Among them was to convene before year-end an internal psychological health and safety champion committee and to develop a psychological health and safety action plan. I have the report up online, so what I want to know is: Was this recommendation completed — the psychological health and safety champion committee? Has an action plan been set up? Has the champion

committee been set up, and has a psychological health and safety action plan been developed?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I will answer about the psychological health and safety. I just want to make one more comment on the previous questions. I have to apologize. On the one hand, I tell the member opposite that I need a specific example and then I say that I won't talk about HR. I recognize that this is not an appropriate way to answer a question, so I apologize for that.

I do agree that when you get into 18 months, we are looking at something that needs to change; therefore, that is why there is the addition of those two FTEs. I think that the department is cognizant of that and now it's good to see a six-month average. My apologies to the member opposite.

When it comes to psychological safety, that's an emerging area of workplace health and safety that impacts a lot of things. It impacts employee retention, rates of injury, and operational costs for organizations. As an employer, we acknowledge that, similar to our commitment to physical safety, our responsibility for fostering workplace psychological well-being extends beyond events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. It constitutes an ongoing obligation that oftentimes lacks a single quick solution.

The Public Service Commission worked with leading experts in psychological health and safety to assess Yukon government workplaces using 13 factors that can impact the mental health of employees in the workplace from the national standard of Canada for psychological health and safety. Several recommendations were identified to improve the safety of our workplaces within all stages of the employment life cycle, from hiring and onboarding through to exit and termination.

To date, the Public Service Commission has actioned a few items here — and I will list them off here — in response to addressing employment life cycle from hiring to onboarding — sorry, there are a few different initiatives addressed from cumulative stress, sexual harassment, burnout, and also other workplace factors. So, here are some of the recommendations that were identified and responded to.

The first one is revising GAM 3.48, which is the corporate health and safety, to include elements of psychological safety and ensure consistency and standards throughout Yukon government workplaces. We redesigned our approach to harassment investigations by establishing the investigations office. We provided and promoted a cumulative stress management program for employees exposed to trauma and stress as a routine element in their role in Community Services, Education, Justice, and Health and Social Services. The Public Service Commission continues to make strides in other areas that have a positive impact on psychological health and safety of their employees, such as cultural safety and conflict competency training. These are initiatives under the *People Plan* and the launch of the values and ethics code. We are also providing support and training to enable leaders to create healthy workplaces, including leadership pathways. Also, the government is a national leader in the government sector, being one of the first to take a comprehensive approach to addressing workplaces using the best practices in psychological health and safety, and it is something that we're very proud of.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. Is there a psychological health and safety champion committee, and is there an action plan?

Hon. Mr. Silver: They are not in place yet, but they are part of the implementation of our *People Plan* over the next three years.

Ms. White: In this report from 2022, recommended next steps, 4.b., "As part of the PH&S Strategy/Action plan," it says: "identify 1-2 'quick win' action steps that can be taken..." So, have there been any quick-win action steps taken for this report? By "quick win", I would think that two years is probably — I mean, in government-speak, it could be quick — but do we have anything that reviewed as quick wins for this plan?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I would say that the items I just listed that place us as leading the nation would probably be considered some quick wins. We did contract Dr. Samra, one of Canada's leading workplace psychologists, to assess our risk areas, including those 13 factors, and I would say that the longer term plan that is spelled out in the *People Plan* would be a follow-up to the rest of the recommendations implemented.

Ms. White: I appreciate that from the minister; that is a fair point.

In the follow-up questions — the minister can let me know if it is in the *People Plan* — but within the report, it says that all departments should have a detailed psychological health and safety action plan. Can he let me know if that is being created or if that is now under a different umbrella?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Yes, that is all laid out in GAM 3.48.

Ms. White: Has the Public Service Commission developed a mission, values, and ethics statement as was called for in the report, or is that under a different umbrella as well?

Hon. Mr. Silver: In the summer of 2023, we launched the *Values and Ethics Code* for public servants to help ensure that employees understand the common values to guide public service work and expected behaviours in the workplace. Yukoners have come to expect that the Yukon government public servants will deliver programs and services in a manner that meets the highest standards of integrity, ethics, and professionalism. The *Values and Ethics Code* integrates existing laws and policies that guide the conduct of public servants — such as the *Public Service Act*, the conflict-of-interest policy, and the respectful workplace policy — into a single, ready-to-use document. We have online training for the *Values and Ethics Code*, and that is available to all Yukon government employees.

I think that as of September 24, we had 894 employees who have completed the course, with ongoing efforts to have all employees complete this course. The *Values and Ethics Code* also provides increased clarity to the employer to help resolve human resources issues, providing clarity for all employees about the common values to work in the code and also that this code is a new corporate human resources policy in the *General Administrative Manual* — the GAM — Volume 3, as we discussed.

Ms. White: Sorry, that got confusing, Madam Chair. I just wanted to bring the minister's and his deputy's attention —

I'm going to read an abridged version of an e-mail. This hasn't been caseworked and is a bigger, broader question. I will give it a shot. It says: "I'm not sure who to put this issue out to, since I am semi-retired. I have been getting gigs doing things and working part time to make ends meet. I took a full-time job for half a year in 2023 and left my government-extended health plan while my employer paid for Blue Cross. When I tried to reinstate the government plan, I was told I could not. I found out that the Yukon is the only region in Canada that does not allow this. It's really crazy, because now I have to pay for all of my prescriptions and extended health care out of pocket. I need physio but cannot afford it. I am 61 years old, so do not qualify to get old age coverage. BC government has just announced that it will cover HRT prescriptions for women..."

Pardon me, that probably goes beyond it. So, the issue is that this person was covered under the Government of Yukon extended health benefit. They got a six-month contract; then that employer paid for Blue Cross. They left their government extended benefits, and when their contract ended, they weren't able to buy back in.

Is the minister aware of other jurisdictions that do similar things, and is there a reason why retired government employees aren't able to re-access that same coverage?

Hon. Mr. Silver: It is hard to comment not knowing the specifics of this particular case or what agreements this previous employee got into with another employer. This is something that, in order to serve this individual properly, a casework would probably be the best time to answer the specific questions. As far as my knowledge of other jurisdictions, I would have to get back to the member opposite again as to what is offered in other jurisdictions.

Ms. White: So, then, not talking about specifics, is a retired Yukon government employee who currently has access to the Yukon government extended health care plan — are they able to leave that plan and then re-sign up for that plan?

Hon. Mr. Silver: It does depend. I want to get some more specifics from the Public Service Commission before I commit to an answer on that one.

Ms. White: I appreciate that from the minister, and if it can just be in a legislative return. I am not sure if the Yukon Party is interested as well, but it doesn't need to be discussed. It was mostly that I didn't know that you could lose your government extended health benefits and then you couldn't get back into it — just for clarification for people going forward.

With that, I have no further questions for the Public Service Commission.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 10, Public Service Commission?

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

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 10, Public Service Commission, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 10, Public Service Commission, 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 10, Public Service Commission, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$4,725,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Capital Expenditures in the amount of nil agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$4,725,000 agreed to

Public Service Commission agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 215, entitled *Second 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.

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 215, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Is there any general debate?

Department of Education

Hon. Ms. McLean: Madam Chair, I rise today to present the Department of Education's first supplementary budget for 2024-25. I would like to thank our department officials who are here with me today: Deputy Minister Mary Cameron and director of Finance Andrea McIntyre. I would also like to thank all of the department employees for their work in delivering on our budgetary priorities.

Our department remains focused on building an education system that is safe, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of all Yukoners. We continue to work closely with Yukon First Nations, education partners, and our school communities to ensure that we are delivering the best possible learning environments for students while also supporting our educators and staff.

This year, our focus includes expanding our efforts to student well-being, school safety, and meeting the needs of our growing school communities, such as Whistle Bend.

Before we jump into financial details of the supplementary budget, I would like to speak briefly about the department's key initiatives. Our commitment to inclusive education continues to drive many of our decisions. We remain dedicated to the

reimagining inclusive and special education — also known as RISE — initiative, which is aimed at creating environments where every student can thrive, regardless of their individual challenges.

Ready-to-Learn Schools remain a central pillar of our approach. By addressing the impacts of stress on students, we are helping schools become places where all learners can succeed. As part of this, we continue to add school wellness specialists and First Nation wellness support roles across the territory, ensuring that students have access to culturally appropriate support and care. Over the next two years, we will continue to add new full-time positions to support the goals of RISE and other initiatives, and we aim to have 81 additional roles in place by 2026.

Our work to support the success of our students starts with our early learners. Providing affordable, high-quality early learning and childcare is another key priority for us. I am proud of the work we are doing to invest in early childhood educators' professional development.

In September 2024, we hosted a conference for early childhood educators from across the Yukon to come together and learn from each other. Over the course of two days, over 350 attendees from communities including Whitehorse, Dawson City, Carmacks, Watson Lake, Mayo, Haines Junction, Teslin, Pelly Crossing, Burwash Landing, Faro, Ross River, and Carcross had the opportunity to deepen their knowledge, explore innovative practices, and forge connections with peers in the field of early learning education. We are also doing important work to modernize the *Child Care Act*. In September, we published a “what we heard” report summarizing feedback from the review of the *Child Care Act*. This input will help modernize the new act to help ensure that it provides children with high-quality, varied, and nurturing learning experiences that support their growth and development.

Creating safer schools continues to be a driver of the department's work. In August of this year, we shared an update to the public on progress to ensure safe and inclusive schools through implementing initiatives such as the student protection policy training support for 2SLGBTQIA+ students and staff and enhanced school infrastructure. A six-month progress report on work to make schools safer was provided to the Yukon Ombudsman, demonstrating a commitment to creating supportive learning environments for all students.

The Government of Yukon is actively working with Yukon First Nations and Canada as partners in the joint renewal of the joint education action plan for 2025-35, also referred to as the JEAP. In the meantime, we continue to collaborate with Yukon First Nations to implement actions that support the priorities of the joint education action plan 2014-24 in the four priority areas that include K to 12 culture and language, authority control and responsibility, sustainability, support and success, and closing the academic achievement gap.

We continue to work with Yukon First Nations and partners to monitor and improve student outcomes by identifying and analyzing root causes that can negatively impact a student's learning.

The Department of Education is in the process of developing a 10-year integrated outcome strategy for Yukon learners. We are engaging with our partners prior to finalizing the strategy to ensure that we are taking the time to do this work in a good way. The integrated outcome strategy for Yukon learners will help us to better understand what students need to thrive. It will also help us make better decisions based on facts and current data.

We continue to support adult learners as well. On September 12, the department hosted the 30th annual Yukon Apprenticeship Excellence Awards. This year's awards celebrated 60 years of apprenticeship training in the territory. I attended the awards and was able to personally congratulate some of the amazing recipients. There were 50 new certified journeypersons, 47 recipients of an award of excellence, and two recipients of an industry award of excellence. These awards are an opportunity to come together and celebrate the accomplishments of current apprentices and journeypersons and the business organizations and mentors that nurture and support the growth of the Yukon's skilled trades and technology sector.

Thank you for the opportunity to highlight this important work. I will now speak more specifically about the supplementary budget requests, but I first wanted to highlight the significant progress that the department is making in fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments for our students.

The Department of Education is requesting a net increase of \$6.855 million in this supplementary budget, with all changes occurring within our O&M budgets. The department is requesting a net decrease of \$3.155 million in this supplementary capital budget.

This funding will allow us to continue delivering on key priorities, including the force growth in school busing contracts and increased personnel for Whistle Bend Elementary School.

There are several key drivers for changes to the Department of Education budget:

(1) Administration and support — total increase of \$653,000. A large portion of this increase is driven by the renegotiated busing contract that was signed in April 2024. This contract ensures that our students can continue to travel to and from school safely and reliably. We are requesting \$486,000 to cover the contractual increase. An additional \$167,000 is required for Whistle Bend Elementary School, which opened its doors this school year. The funding will cover 3.5 new custodial positions and necessary supplies to maintain the school, ensuring a clean and safe environment for its students and staff.

(2) School authorities — total increase of \$658,000 due to increased enrolment in our schools. We are requesting an additional \$483,000 to fund 5.8 new full-time teaching positions and 1.5 clerical staff positions. These staff members will help us meet the growing needs of our school communities and ensure that our students receive the support they need to succeed. Additionally, Whistle Bend Elementary requires \$175,000 to support its site-based budget, which covers

program materials and utilities as the school expands to meet community demand.

(3) Student well-being and inclusion — total decrease of \$300,000. We are seeing a decrease of \$300,000 in this area due to the changes in our partnership with Victoria Gold Yukon Student Encouragement Society. Under a new memorandum of understanding, the society will now distribute funds directly to recipients, reducing the need for government transfers. This change reflects a shift in the administration of these funds but does not affect the overall support provided to students. The society will still distribute \$400,000 to recipients, including \$100,000 from the Department of Education.

(4) The corporate services and programs — total increase of \$5.844 million, and the largest driver of this change in this supplementary budget is a \$4.622 million increase in funding for the early learning and childcare infrastructure program. These funds provided by the federal government are part of our ongoing effort to build enhanced childcare infrastructure across the territory, increasing capacity and accessibility for families. This funding is fully recoverable from the federal government and will have a net-zero impact on the territorial budget.

We are also requesting an additional \$1.222 million for post-secondary grants, reflecting inflation and an increase in the number of students pursuing post-secondary education. This increase ensures that we continue to support Yukoners as they advance their education beyond high school.

(5) There is a capital budget total decrease of \$3.155 million. On the capital side, we are requesting this decrease related to the Burwash school project, also known as Kêts'ádañ Kù. This reduction reflects a revised forecast for the project, which will see a deferral of expenditures to future years while the project continues to progress. The updated timeline means that some of the funds will be reallocated to future budget cycles.

This supplementary budget reflects our ongoing commitment to supporting Yukoners through a responsive and dynamic education system. The increases that we are requesting will allow us to address growing demands on our schools, continue our focus on student safety and well-being, and support early learning and childcare initiatives across the territory. These investments are critical to ensuring that every student in the Yukon has access to a safe, inclusive, and high-quality education.

It is an exciting time in education. In the past few years, we have seen unprecedented changes, and I really look forward to seeing where we can go next. We know that there is more work to be done; there is always more work to be done. With the support of this Assembly, we will continue to build an education system that meets the needs of learners and prepares them for a future where diversity, empathy, and understanding are at the forefront.

I will now take questions from my colleagues.

Mr. Kent: I thank the minister for her opening remarks, and I just want to thank the officials for the briefing that we received last week. As always, it was very informative, and we appreciate the information that they provided at that briefing. I know that there is limited time here today, and there are a

number of issues that I want to talk about in Education. So, hopefully, there is an opportunity for the department to come back into the House on another day when we have a little bit more time.

I did want to talk to the minister about the capital planning and the construction that is underway. EA allocations in schools is something that I'm going to bring up as well as the CASA agreement on the capital, specifically the École Whitehorse Elementary replacement project, and a whole host of other things that I did want to talk about.

Just with the time that I have today, I will just try to get a couple of questions on the record, and the first one is with respect to a letter that I sent to the minister last week. I did bring this up as well with officials at the briefing. The first issue in this letter is with respect to the discretionary capital funding. My understanding — and it has been confirmed by multiple schools that are under the direction of the Department of Education — so, not the school board schools but the ones that are run by school councils — is that the discretionary capital funding that the schools would use to purchase desks or chairs or other smaller items has been frozen or deferred. From officials, I understand that the deferral is scheduled to potentially come off in November.

Again, from the briefing, it is my understanding that this was something that was a whole-of-government approach or request. I will let the minister explain what exactly that ask was, but I am curious why the discretionary capital funding for schools was chosen to be frozen as part of this whole-of-government exercise that took place, especially in light of some of the other items that we see in the supplementary estimates. The one that I referenced for the minister was a \$6.187 million increase for the Department of Finance operation and maintenance — while we have that, while we are seeing reductions and frozen capital in our schools — again, I am just trying to get a sense for why this decision was made and why it was targeted toward these smaller amounts of purchases that each and every school relies on and is usually spent at their discretion.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I just want to be clear that there has been no freeze on spending; it's really capital spending deferral. The Government of Yukon's approach to capital spending is driven by its overarching priorities and fiscal responsibilities. All departments, including the Department of Education, follow established guidelines to ensure that funding is allocated efficiently and effectively across public service. At this time, all government departments are deferring discretionary capital spending until later in the fiscal year.

But for clarity, non-discretionary capital has not been deferred. Non-discretionary capital spending — which is necessary to ensure health, safety, and well-being of students and employees or to fulfill contractual agreements — remains a priority for schools.

The Department of Education has a structured process for schools and program areas to request discretionary spending. As with any funding requested, it requires a detailed justification to demonstrate why a request is non-discretionary. Each request is evaluated on a case-by-case basis to ensure

alignment with the government's goals of maintaining essential services while managing public resources responsibly. These decisions are part of the government's broader commitment to meeting both immediate and long-term goals in ensuring that critical needs are addressed while maintaining fiscal sustainability.

I just want to be clear that there is a process, and we work very closely with each school community around this type of spending, and we'll continue to do that.

Mr. Kent: So, can the minister tell us when the decision was made to defer this discretionary capital funding? How much is deferred until — I guess I'll ask again too if she can confirm that "later on in the fiscal year" means November. Is that when these funds will be freed up?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The directive was received on July 5 of this year, and the Department of Education advised administrators through an administrators' update at the beginning of the school year. We will be communicating out again through this type of communication — just clarifying statements, since I have heard from the member today that there may be questions. I hope that folks will talk to the Department of Education about that so that we can be clear.

The deferral is only in place for discretionary capital budgets and schools. Other non-discretionary capital budgets or capital budgets currently under contract are not subject to this deferral. The deferral process is in place for discretionary capital funds until the end of November. This timing schedule is expected to allow discretionary capital funds to be accessed at that time. We will update administrators at that time through that communication process.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

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

Chair's report

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 215, entitled *Second 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: 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 5:28 p.m.

Written notice was given of the following motion October 7, 2024:

Motion No. 1021

Re: Dawson regional land use (White)

Written notice was given of the following motion for the production of papers October 7, 2024:

Motion for the Production of Papers No. 31

Re: testing and remediation of lead levels in school water (White)

The following written questions were tabled October 7, 2024:

Written Question No. 57

Re: *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* funding (Clarke, Y.)

Written Question No. 58

Re: Nisutlin Bay bridge (Hassard)