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HANSARD

Thursday, November 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 |

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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, November 7, 2024 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Introduction of visitors.
Visitors introduced

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Remembrance Day

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, imagine the weight of the sound when the guns stopped firing at 11:00 a.m. on November 11, 1918 — instead of artillery, the sound of your own pulse feeling almost deafening. Imagine the relief that you have succeeded, held firm, and that you would be returning home. Imagine the sadness that you would be leaving some friends behind who were not fortunate enough to survive to the armistice.

I would like to share a few excerpts today from Michael Gates' book entitled *From the Klondike to Berlin*. August 4, 1914, was pleasantly mild, though overcast in the Yukon, and the movie theatres in Dawson were filled to capacity when Yukon Commissioner George Black read out the telegram in the Palace Grand Theatre. The response to the call for volunteers was immediate. Howard Grestock, Boer War veteran, was the first to volunteer, but he did not live to see the end of the war. Joe Boyle, one of the Yukon's most prominent mining entrepreneurs, sponsored a machine gun battery of 50 men, which was said to have been one of the most highly decorated units of all the Allied Forces. Then Commissioner George Black stepped down from his comfortable position and enlisted. Two hundred and twenty-five men joined him in what became known as the "Black Contingent". Several members of the Yukon Council took up the flag, leaving barely a quorum to carry on the business of the government.

Over 600 Yukoners volunteered, out of a population of 5,000. High school students enlisted, some lying about their age to do so. Brothers joined up, as did fathers and sons. Two men mushed all the way from Herschel Island to enrol in Dawson. George Pearkes, a Mountie stationed in Whitehorse, was quick to sign up when the war was declared. Pearkes rose rapidly through the ranks to a position of command, and earned the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest military honour, at Passchendaele in October 1917.

Rowland Bourke, a doctor's son, had attended school in Dawson City before the war. Small of frame and with poor

eyesight, he was rejected by the Canadian Armed Forces, so he sailed to England where he was accepted into the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve. In command of a small motor launch, in a period of less than three weeks, he earned both the Distinguished Service Order and the Victoria Cross for his actions along the Belgian coast.

Not all were so fortunate. Nearly 100 Yukon names belong to the list of the war dead. Charlie Phillips was one of the first to die, in the East African campaign. Albert Brown was a teller at the Bank of Commerce in Whitehorse. Alfred Cronin worked as a clerk for Northern Commercial store here as well.

These men gave their lives for a cause that they all believed in. In the process, they helped move Canada ever closer to nationhood. Nearly 100 Yukon men rest in 56 cemeteries on four continents. Only 100 or so others returned to the Yukon after the war.

We shall speak the words that we may never say lightly:
 Lest we forget.

Applause

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to Remembrance Day. I want to thank all those who are here today and who were here yesterday and all those who served.

Every year at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, we gather at memorial parks, community halls, workplaces, schools, and homes to stand in honour of all those who have fallen. Together, we observe a moment of silence to mark the sacrifices of many who have fallen in the service of their country and to acknowledge the courage of those who still serve.

Canadian veterans have served and continue to serve throughout the war in a range of conflicts. Canadians have seen war from the front lines, actively engaged in peacekeeping missions throughout, and responded to action or disaster response right here at home.

On Remembrance Day, we honour and remember all veterans. We honour their sacrifices and their courage and we remember what we have gained from that sacrifice. We honour those who fought and those who provide health care or support; we honour all those who represented Canada and what our country represents.

We also recognize and support our military families. We recognize and honour all the fathers, sons, mothers, and daughters who have supported and endured alongside Canadian veterans.

I want to take a moment to highlight — the Premier did a little bit earlier — an individual who spent many years working in the Yukon who was awarded one of the highest honours from Britain — the Victoria Cross — which only 99 Canadians have ever been awarded.

Major General George Pearkes — Victoria Cross — joined the Royal North West Mounted Police, serving in the Yukon from 1906 until he was able to purchase his discharge and enlist in 1915. He was 29 years old and an acting major during the Battle of Passchendaele when the following deed took place for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross: for most

conspicuous bravery and skilful handling of the troops under his command during the capture and consolidation of considerably more than the objectives allotted to him in the attack.

“Just prior to the advance, Maj. Pearkes was wounded in the left thigh. Regardless of his wound, he continued to lead his men with the utmost gallantry, despite many obstacles.

“At a particular stage of the attack his further advance was threatened by a strong point which was an objective of the battalion on his left, but which they had not succeeded in capturing. Quickly appreciating the situation, he captured and held this point, thus enabling this further advance to be successfully pushed forward ... He showed throughout a supreme contempt of danger and wonderful powers of controlling and leading.” That’s why he got the Victoria Cross. This was an excerpt from the Government of Canada’s website, originally cited from the *London Gazette*, January 11, 1918.

I want to thank those who put time and effort into remembering, especially our legions across Canada. I say this every year: As a young soldier posted in Germany in the late 1980s and seeing the memorials and participating in Remembrance Day at Vimy Ridge in France, I do understand the ultimate sacrifices that were made for our freedoms here today. I’m a proud serving member of the Canadian Armed Forces still. I want to highlight all of my fellow military people, the Rangers, the RCMP, and our Yukon communities that will be participating in and organizing ceremonies.

Our service to our country is not unnoticed, so let’s remember and honour all of those Canadians and Yukoners past and present. They were young as we are young; they served giving freely of themselves. To them, we pledge, amid the winds of time, to carry their torch and never forget. We will remember them.

Lest we forget.

Applause

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I stand on behalf of the Yukon NDP in recognition of Remembrance Day. Today I pay tribute to veterans past, present, and future.

Yesterday after our morning meeting, my co-workers and I stayed sitting around the table. We were talking about Joe and Red and the tributes for the day. We got to talking about our own understandings of war and conflict, fortunate that all of us were removed from it personally, but it highlighted the importance of remembrance and the act of remembering.

My own grandfather served in the army, but as a kid, I only knew this because of a small photo in a frame by the stairs — a headshot of grandpa, young and handsome in uniform. I only knew parts of the story because these stories were tied to others, like my grandma flying to Whitehorse to meet my grandpa just after having gotten married during the construction of the Alaska Highway. Or my grandma learning to drive so that she could get the family car between Edmonton and Trenton, Ontario, hitting a duck on her way with four kids in the car. The family was on their way to France to meet up with my grandpa. What I didn’t ever hear until after he died were the stories of him being in a tank or that, after an incident with a car, my gran

told him that if he didn’t stop drinking, she would leave with the kids.

I heard the story of another grandpa who died as a result of PTSD when he was only 40. He left behind four children, and his grandchildren never got to meet him. I heard the story of grandparents fleeing Denmark and how that touched everything going forward. And I heard of a granddad and a father who served in the Indian army and a family still reeling from that service.

I think of all the stories I’ve heard and quiet retellings at the legion, stories that aren’t history or the stories shared with me by friends who are peers and who aren’t grandparents or how some of these memories become scars and some scars are harder to heal than others.

I think of the friend who, every year, reminds her friends on Facebook that Remembrance Day isn’t a holiday; it’s a day of observance, a day of gratitude. You don’t wish a veteran happy Remembrance Day; you thank them for their service.

I honour those in this room and everywhere whose own stories of service are part of their makeup. The ripples of conflict go far; the experiences of our veterans become the memories or sometimes the scars of their families. The privileges that we have in Canada were not and are not free. People have paid the cost for the democracy and the freedom that we have.

Remembrance Day isn’t about the political decision to enter wars; Remembrance Day recognizes the men and women who have borne the cost of those decisions. It lets the families of soldiers know that you care about the sacrifices that they have all had to make. It honours the veterans of the past, it shows respect for those serving in the present, and it fosters hope for the future.

If for some reason you choose not to observe this day, then I ask that you do so quietly so that your voice doesn’t drown out the voices of the veterans who need to be heard.

Lest we forget.

Applause

In recognition of National Indigenous Veterans Day

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I rise to pay tribute to National Indigenous Veterans Day. On this day, we pay tribute to the important and countless contributions made by First Nation, Inuit, and Métis soldiers and veterans.

For over 200 years, Indigenous people have proudly served in uniform in times of war and peace. According to Veterans Affairs Canada, more than 4,000 Indigenous people served during the First World War. At the time, this meant that one in three people enlisted were Indigenous.

During the Second World War, over 8,000 Indigenous soldiers served in the Canadian Armed Forces. Among them, and representing the Yukon, were Elijah Smith, John Adamson, and three brothers: Archie, Dan, and Alex Van Bibber, citizens of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations and Selkirk First Nation. There were also Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in citizens Charlie Isaac and George Walters.

I would also like to recognize the support that Indigenous communities provided to the war efforts through donations of

money, clothing, and food. Mr. Speaker, one notable contribution came from the community of Old Crow. During the Second World War, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Chief Peter Moses walked from Old Crow to Alaska where he sold the community's winter furs for \$400. Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation sent the money to London, England to support children orphaned by the bombing raids. In 1943, Chief Moses accepted the British Empire Medal in honour of his people for this honourable gesture.

Looking today, there are more than 2,700 Indigenous members of the Canadian Armed Forces, with some having served in deployments like Canada's mission in Afghanistan. This includes Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation citizen Doug Tizya, who completed two tours in Afghanistan with the 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. Now retired, Corporal Tizya earned the Sacrifice Medal for sustaining a wound on his second tour. In 2022, Yukoner May Gudmundson honoured him with a sewn Quilt of Valour.

Mr. Speaker, in the not so distant past, Indigenous veterans overcame many challenges to serving, such as adapting to cultural differences, travelling great distances to enlist, and facing unequal treatment upon returning home. For far too long, Canada's colonial legacy and discrimination led Canadians to overlook and underappreciate Indigenous service members and veterans.

In 2023, the Assembly of First Nations established a veterans council to promote the contributions of Indigenous veterans in all conflicts as allies to Canada. We acknowledge Champagne and Aishihik First Nations elder and veteran Chuck Hume, who was a former representative, while Teslin Tlingit elder and veteran Carl Sidney, present today, is the AFN representative on the veterans council.

In 1994, the Province of Manitoba established Aboriginal Veterans Day; 30 years later, November 8 is now a national day for recognition and remembrance of more than 200 years of military service by First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities. In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge past wrongs experienced by Indigenous soldiers and veterans. We are indebted to them for their sacrifices and express our lasting respect for their contributions and service.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all Yukoners to join me in honouring Indigenous veterans' sacrifice and devotion and in remembering them for generations to come. Lest we forget.

Applause

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition in recognition of National Indigenous Veterans Day, which takes place tomorrow on November 8. On this day, we remember and recognize the significant contributions of Indigenous veterans during the First World War, the Second World War, the Korean War, Afghanistan, and on many of our peacekeeping missions. We also recognize and honour those who serve today.

Thousands of Indigenous people have voluntarily enlisted in the Canadian military over the years to help Canada's war effort and we remember and recognize their service. Indigenous people from across Canada have served in the Armed Forces

during the Second World War, fighting in all major battles. Unlike most who enlisted, in order to serve their country, Indigenous Canadians had to overcome unique cultural challenges to find their place serving their country.

Their sacrifices were immense, and those sacrifices and accomplishments are remembered today as a continued source of pride for their families and their communities. Their contributions were well-received, and most Indigenous members of the military found acceptance as partners in the country's war effort.

The casualties of war included many of the officers and decorated soldiers, and I would like to share the stories of two of these Canadian soldiers, as highlighted on the Veterans Affairs website.

John McLeod served overseas in the First World War and was a member of the Veterans Guard during the Second World War. Six of his sons and one of his daughters enlisted. Two sons gave their lives — the ultimate sacrifice — and another two were wounded. In 1972, John's wife, Mary, became the first Indigenous woman to be named Canada's Memorial Cross Mother, placing a wreath at the National War Memorial in Ottawa on Remembrance Day on behalf of all Canadian mothers who had lost children to war.

Thomas George Prince, from Manitoba, volunteered to be a paratrooper. He served with the elite Canadian-American commando unit called the First Special Service Force, which became known to the Germans as the Devil's Brigade. He earned the Military Medal during a battle in Italy and the Silver Star, an American award for gallantry, for his reconnaissance work in France. These awards were presented to him by King George VI at Buckingham Palace.

The brave Indigenous men and women who left their homes during the war to contribute to the struggle for peace were true heroes. The extra challenges that they had to face and overcome make their achievements even more notable. We thank them and those who serve today.

Lest we forget.

Applause

Ms. Blake: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP in honour of National Indigenous Veterans Day. Today and every day, we acknowledge the contributions of the Indigenous peoples, including First Nation, Inuit, and Métis, in the defence of peace and human rights. We honour the courage, commitment, and sacrifices made by these brave people who step forward to serve in times of need.

The acknowledgment and celebration of Indigenous veterans bears even greater significance given the history of discrimination and lack of recognition for Indigenous soldiers returning from service or seeking veteran benefits. Thousands of Indigenous veterans sacrificed their lives, their Indian status, and their freedom for us to live in the Canada that we know today.

Indigenous peoples continue to answer the call and to play a critical role in Canada's effort to promote and protect our peace and security. Today and every day, remember and honour the Indigenous veterans who lost their lives and those who are

still with us. We think of the sacrifices that they have made with humility and gratitude.

Lest we forget.

Applause

Speaker: I would like to ask all present to stand as we observe a moment of silence in honour of Remembrance Day.

Moment of silence observed

Speaker: They shall not grow old, as we who are left grow old:

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We will remember them.

Please be seated.

Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling the Yukon Judicial Council annual report 2023, which is tabled pursuant to section 37(2) of the *Territorial Court Act*.

I also have for tabling the Yukon Law Foundation annual report 2022-23, which is tabled pursuant to section 150(2) of the *Yukon Legal Profession Act, 2017*.

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?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to provide funding for CPAP machines when recommended by a health care provider.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to table amendments to the *Yukon Dental Profession Act* that would allow dental hygienists to practise independently of a dentist.

Ms. Clarke: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to follow through with their commitment to address drainage issues on Whistle Bend green streets, ensuring that the drainage plan in the tender package, including the construction of drainage swales, is followed and work is subsequently inspected to confirm adherence to the plan upon completion.

Speaker: Is there a ministerial statement?

This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: École Whitehorse Elementary School replacement

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, yesterday this House passed a motion calling on the Government of Yukon to launch a formal process to consider alternative locations for the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary School.

Does the minister have any intention at all to act on this expression of the democratic will of the Yukon Legislative Assembly in any way at all?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise today to talk about our government's investment in important infrastructure for our Yukon schools.

I think that, reflecting on yesterday's debate, despite the revisionist history presented by the Yukon Party, our government has met with Softball Yukon, Sport Yukon, and the Takhini Neighbourhood Association to discuss the relocation of École Whitehorse Elementary to the Takhini Educational Land Reserve.

We conducted public engagement in the spring of 2023 with Whitehorse residents about school capital planning. We heard from 932 Yukoners, with 97 percent of the survey's respondents living in Whitehorse and the surrounding area. They told us about what they wanted in their school infrastructure. We have met with and heard from the Takhini Neighbourhood Association about their concerns about the impacts on traffic and greenspace, and we have engaged with sports groups about the need for sport infrastructure; likewise, we have heard support from parents and the school council and other Yukoners who believe that a French immersion school in Takhini is a good idea, because this is a central location for students in the neighbourhood with young families.

We considered many locations. I will continue to build on this and reflect on our debate yesterday.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I suppose we will take that as a no. The public consultation that the Liberals conducted in 2023 was a full year after they had made the decision and announced it, but we will have time to discuss that, I'm sure.

When the minister made this announcement back in the summer of 2022, it came as a shock to everyone in the school community. It was a shock because this was a massive decision and was made without any consultation prior to the decision being made at all. Since then, I have heard and my colleagues have heard from many folks in the school community, both within Whitehorse Elementary and beyond. I can tell the minister that there are plenty of good ideas out there that deserve to be considered.

Why is the minister so reluctant to hear from Yukoners about the location of this school?

Hon. Ms. McLean: At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, my job is to ask myself what is best for children and act in their interests. I have a mandate letter from the former Premier, the current Premier, to work toward a replacement school in Whitehorse. Whitehorse Elementary was chosen for that, and we have made a decision to move forward with placing that school at the Takhini Educational Land Reserve.

There were a lot of considerations. We considered the Whistle Bend land reserve, which is unsuitable because it's not centrally located. We looked at the site at Grey Mountain Primary School, but there is already a high concentration of schools in Riverdale. We considered the land right next to Porter Creek Secondary, but this would place significant pressure on the current school infrastructure and prevent expansion of either school in the future. The current location for École Whitehorse Elementary is not a suitable location.

We have taken great consideration of this important decision. Again, Mr. Speaker, I will keep children at the centre of my decisions in this important role on behalf of Yukoners.

Mr. Dixon: The fact remains that the decision to locate the school at this particular location was made without any public consultation or any consultation at all with those directly affected by it. At this point, Mr. Speaker, it's starting to seem like nothing more than stubbornness from the Liberal government. We know that the government will not be able to get this project moving for at least 18 to 24 months due to municipal planning processes, so there is no urgency from a planning perspective. So, why is the minister so intent on charging ahead with this location despite the clearly expressed concerns of Yukoners and despite a majority of the Yukon Legislative Assembly voting for a public engagement process to reconsider this location?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, reflecting on the debate that we heard yesterday, the Yukon Party continues to simplify the — you know, the depth of the work that goes into replacing a school. It takes several years to do this work. We're currently in phase 2; we're working with our contractor to look at all of the various assessments that need to happen. We're very engaged with the project advisory committee — happy to continue to work with them on this very important project. We are — you know, at the end of the day, I have named out, you know, the locations that were considered. We believe the experts who champion the need for modern educational facilities with access to greenspace and preferred environment for our young learners.

Again, I will keep children at the centre of my decisions and not continue to politicize. I feel like education — you know, the Yukon Party continues to politicize education infrastructure. These are needs. They fell short, Mr. Speaker — during their time in government, they fell short. They built a school — F.H. Collins — that was much too small; they didn't consider Yukoners' views then, so now they're trying to give me this type of — I don't accept it; I'm sorry.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Whistle Bend traffic

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I have some questions for the Minister of Community Services about concerns that I have heard from residents in Whistle Bend.

The concern that I have been hearing the most about is the traffic congestion that so many folks in Whistle Bend face daily. One solution that continues to be discussed is the idea of twinning or expanding Mountain View Drive. This is clearly a

project that would require support from the Yukon government and the city.

Has the Minister of Community Services done any work with the City of Whitehorse to examine the feasibility of expanding Mountain View Drive to address the serious traffic concerns in Whistle Bend?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to answer questions from the member opposite on municipal affairs, but I want to remind Yukoners this afternoon that we actually had a ministerial statement on Whistle Bend that the members opposite blocked. So, we were more than happy to talk about Whistle Bend; the members opposite decided to block that ministerial statement because, at the time, they did not really care about what's happening in Whistle Bend, what we had to say about Whistle Bend, or even having a debate about Whistle Bend.

But here it is today; they are coming forward with questions about twinning the roads. We now have a new council that has just been elected in Whitehorse. I'm going to be listening to what the mayor and council bring to me about their concerns and their priorities for the City of Whitehorse, and we will certainly listen and work very closely with the Whitehorse council and any council in Yukon to hear what their concerns are. We will work with them and do what we can to support those municipalities.

Ms. Clarke: As I said, Mr. Speaker, I continue to hear concerns from residents in Whistle Bend about the traffic congestion they face every day.

Another solution that some residents think would help is the idea of adding a third entrance into the community. This solution would require the support of both the city and the Yukon government to advance and complete. Can the minister tell my constituents if the Yukon government has considered working with the city to construct a third entrance to the Whistle Bend neighbourhood?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Once again, it would have made a great answer or question with the ministerial statement. We didn't get that; they blocked it because they don't want to hear these things.

I've heard about traffic congestion across the City of Whitehorse. It's not a new issue; it's something there.

I want to know if the member opposite has actually written to the city council to express the concerns of her residents since the roads reside within a municipality and it's actually a municipal responsibility — that they would have to come to us with plans.

The other thing I hear from the member opposite is that she is dictating a solution to a problem that she has heard. That's great, but I actually will rely on the traffic experts, both within the City of Whitehorse and, if asked, through Highways and Public Works or Community Services, to actually do the work.

I'm not going to come with pre-baked solutions for the citizens of Whistle Bend. I want to hear from the council what their priorities are and what their solutions are from the City of Whitehorse. I'm not going to impose those on the citizens of Whistle Bend from this position.

Ms. Clarke: According to the minister's briefing notes from this spring, the Land Development branch of Community Services is considering the development of the site known as "Whistle Bend south bench". According to the briefing note, the site is located on the south side of Whistle Bend Way, which is the right side of the road when turning off the Mountain View traffic circle.

The note says that the branch has completed feasibility work, including geotechnical work and noise and dust studies. Can the minister confirm that this project will include a gravel pit? Can the minister tell residents in Whistle Bend if there will be public consultation on these plans? If so, when?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Really, I think what the member opposite is alluding to is the very real work that we have undertaken for the last eight years to get more lots before citizens of Whitehorse and actually grow the city. We're doing that because the territory's growing incredibly fast. I think we've had — we were just talking about it today — a 30-percent growth in the territory over the last eight years. Why is that? It's because of the focus we put on the economy, on mining, on our social programs, and on our supports for citizens. We have made this an absolutely incredible place for people to live, and they're actually responding to this.

Now, as I've said, that has some — it comes with issues. Those are better issues to deal with than the alternative, and that's heavier traffic and more pressures on some of our systems.

But, honestly, Mr. Speaker, we are working very hard to get more lots before Yukoners. We know the Yukon Party abrogated their responsibility on this, and they didn't build the lots that they needed to keep up with the lot inventory we needed. We came in with a deficit, and we've been working very hard. The development that we're doing in Whistle Bend is integral to the work that we're doing to provide homes and services for Yukoners. We're not apologizing for that. We're going to continue to do that. We've been working in tandem with the city council and with citizens throughout that process. We're going to continue to do that.

Question re: Medical travel accommodations

Ms. White: In 2023-24, nearly 5,000 Yukoners travelled from the rural communities to a hospital in the territory. But we know that hundreds of rural Yukoners chose not to travel for medical treatment because of the cost; this is unacceptable.

The Liberal's 2021 platform included creating a medical travel lodge in Whitehorse. *Putting People First* recommended creating residences in both Whitehorse and Vancouver to support those navigating care away from home — a report that the Liberals have accepted in its entirety.

In the spring of 2023, there was a unanimous vote in favour of an NDP motion to create a health lodge in Whitehorse. The minister commented on what a smart idea this was. We are closing in on the end of 2024. We have heard from Yukoners, we have had the debates, and now Yukoners are looking for action on these promises.

When is this government going to fulfill its commitment to building or sourcing a medical travel lodge in Whitehorse for rural Yukoners?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Our government, of course, is committed to supporting eligible Yukoners to access the services they need, including medically necessary travel, both here in the territory and outside of the territory. I don't hesitate to note that this is not something that is supported in all other provinces or territories in the country. This is a unique service to Yukon in particular, and the one that we have here was developed to support Yukoners. Our program includes expanding in-territory programs to ensure that more Yukoners can access care closer to home.

We understand that certainly some people still need to travel outside of their home communities to receive medical services, and we are very committed to supporting this necessary travel. We have done so by increasing the current medical travel subsidy to \$174 per day for overnight outpatient services and to \$88 per day for same-day travel and for approved escorts. This amount is adjusted to inflation based on the consumer price index and is calculated as of April 1 of each year.

In 2023-24, the medical travel subsidy rate was \$166 per day, so that increase has supported Yukoners in a way for their travel.

Ms. White: Well, \$174 a day doesn't go far in Whitehorse if you're talking about a hotel as well.

Medical travel is not a vacation, and people need reliably available and affordable accommodation. Also, unlike vacations, people don't have weeks or months to plan for it. Sometimes, they are left scrambling to find a place to stay the next day or even on the same day. The cost of last-minute accommodation bookings are frightening, never mind all the emotional and mental stress of figuring out a way to pay for it all.

We have countless examples of how public health lodges are working elsewhere — the medical health lodges in Yellowknife and in Edmonton for citizens of the Northwest Territories, and there are public health lodges for Nunavut citizens in six different cities. These lodges also provide food and transportation, further decreasing the cost for their citizens. We know this works, we know that this government pledged to get this done, and we know that we are still waiting for the Liberals to live up to their own commitments.

Will this government fulfill its commitment to build a medical travel lodge in Vancouver?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The Department of Health and Social Services has been working to explore avenues to respond to recommendation 2.6 from the *Putting People First* report. I appreciate the question today and the opportunity to address this and to remind Yukoners that many of the *Putting People First* recommendations are being worked on simultaneously.

In particular, 2.6 suggests the creation of medical residences in Vancouver and in Whitehorse, and we are conducting a data analysis to better understand the need and to assess associated costs, because there may well be innovative solutions. We are considering interim solutions, including

working with hotels to set aside blocks of rooms for reservations. For leasing existing spaces, I'm aware of some private businesses — hotels in Vancouver or in Victoria, at least — where there is a reasonable rate provided to individuals who are there for medical travel reasons. Our work also considers leasing existing spaces and exploring an additional subsidy for low-income earners.

We are aware that some First Nation governments, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector are interested in possible solutions in this area. We will continue to explore those partnerships to support this goal.

Ms. White: Since 2019, this government has been saying that medical travel lodges are a good idea, and then in 2023, this government also said that it would secure hotel rooms in the interim. In 2019-20, there was an average of 19 Yukoners per day on medical travel requiring an overnight stay in Vancouver, and we know that, in 2023-24, there were more than 4,400 medical travel cases out-of-territory, including scheduled medical appointments and medevacs.

Thousands of Yukoners have waited for this government to live up to their promise of those hotel rooms, and I'm quite sure that a territorial government has the capacity to negotiate a deal with a hotel. I'm also quite sure that it shouldn't take 18 months to do so. So, why are Yukoners accessing medical travel still waiting for this government to meet its promise to secure hotel rooms in Vancouver?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question, but I think that we need to make sure that Yukoners are reminded that a financial subsidy is provided to Yukoners who need to travel for the purposes of medical travel. It is now currently \$174 per day; it is \$88 for a half-day or same-day treatment and also \$88 per day for an escort, if necessary. We doubled that amount for Yukoners some years ago in conjunction with our commitment to providing safe and supported medical travel. It is not designed to pay for every cost but certainly designed to support Yukoners. It has continued to increase based on the cost of living.

We are considering interim solutions, including working with hotels to set aside blocks of rooms. We have to properly analyze how — and assess how — to best meet the needs of Yukoners.

We are aware that there are also partners who are interested in this space, including First Nation governments and non-governmental organizations. We are working to explore partnerships to support this goal. Further analysis and communication with our partners is necessary at this time, Mr. Speaker, to best understand the options and to ensure cost-effective, efficient, and equitable solutions, noting that we are financially supporting Yukoners who need medical travel.

Question re: Takhini River bridge on Mayo Road

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, the Takhini River bridge on the Mayo Road is one of the narrowest bridges on Yukon's highways. There have been accidents on the bridge and its approaches, and many people have had near misses and close calls — near and on it. As the Minister of Highways and Public Works knows, I have raised this issue many times. The number

one issue that people raise about it is how dangerous the narrow bridge is for vehicle traffic. While I am glad that the government has identified \$8.5 million for the Takhini River bridge project, we have yet to hear them confirm if the road surface on the bridge will actually be widened. So far, the indication seems to be that the main focus is on adding bike lanes.

Will the minister confirm that the government will widen the Takhini River bridge for vehicle traffic?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question from the member opposite. I certainly acknowledge the member opposite's dogged questions with respect to this matter over the course of the last three and a half years.

Our government is committed to integrating active transportation into our highway infrastructure projects wherever possible. In 2022, the Yukon government secured federal funding through the active transportation fund to enhance safety and accessibility by adding separated sidewalks on both sides of the Takhini River bridge, creating an active transportation crossing. The total project value was \$8.5 million, with a federal contribution of \$6.2 million.

As the project advanced, detailed engineering assessments revealed that the bridge was not suited to support the additional weight of two separated sidewalks on both sides. As a result, we are currently assessing options that would allow for the use of a single sidewalk with safe highway crossings.

When the Takhini River bridge is eventually replaced, we will ensure that active transportation pathways are fully integrated into the project. We will also ensure that bridge width, sightlines, and approaches are considered.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, while some people do want to see a walkway for pedestrians and cyclists added to the Takhini River bridge, it is not the main safety issue or the main public priority. The number one issue that people raise about the Takhini River bridge is how dangerous the narrow bridge is for vehicle traffic. The government's announcement about the project and responses by ministers since then seem largely focused on adding bike lanes, but it seems like that is missing dealing with my constituents' top concern.

The bridge is used every day by hundreds of my constituents and is a vital link to rural communities north of Whitehorse. People want the government to widen the bridge for vehicles or replace it with a wider bridge, not spend \$8.5 million on bike lanes.

The minister's responses to me suggest that they may widen the bridge, but so far, the government has stopped short of actually committing to widening it for vehicle traffic as part of this project. So, will the minister please make that commitment here today?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, actually, I did receive reports with respect to Yukon bridge widths across the Yukon, and I can confirm that the Takhini River bridge is approximately average as far as its deck width. Given the contributions that the member has made over the years, that surprised me because I thought that it genuinely was significantly narrower than average on a cross-Yukon jurisdictional scan, but it's not.

I understand the member opposite's concerns with respect to the bridge width. Yukon Highways and Public Works recognizes that there are concerns related to sightlines leading to the Takhini River bridge. Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to enhancing safety in this area, which includes improvements to sightlines and line painting wherever possible.

This fall and winter, we will conduct a thorough assessment to identify effective solutions and we will develop a plan to implement these safety improvements as quickly as possible.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, even the minister's colleague the Minister of Community Services acknowledged earlier this year that the Takhini River bridge is what he called a "dangerous crossing". Since the government made the announcement of \$8.5 million set aside for the Takhini River bridge project, I wrote to the Minister of Highways and Public Works urging him to ensure that the bridge is widened for vehicle traffic and have raised this issue in the Legislative Assembly multiple times.

The narrowness of the bridge is the most serious safety issue and concern of the public and fixing it is the number one public priority for the Takhini River bridge project. Improving sightlines on the approach is also important. Can the minister please tell us what the scope of the project currently is and what issues they intend to address, and will the minister please tell us when public consultation about the Takhini River bridge project and the details of it will happen?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the questions from the member opposite. They were a little bit repetitive, but in the event — I asked for information about the Yukon and our 5,000 kilometres of roads and the many bridges that we have, and I asked for information as to what the average bridge deck widths are. I received that information back, and the Takhini River bridge is average as far as a cross-Yukon jurisdictional scan.

That doesn't mean that the department is not looking at things like improvements to sightlines and line painting. The department installed speed display signs on the approaches to the bridge to reduce speed and to help increase road safety. "Share the road" signs were also installed in both directions. The intent of the signs is to encourage drivers to be mindful of oncoming vehicle traffic and other bridge users, such as cyclists.

The condition of the bridge is regularly monitored as part of our bridge inspection program. A shout-out to the hardworking staff at Highways and Public Works who maintain the Takhini River bridge and many other bridges in the Yukon.

Question re: Hydroelectric facility maintenance in Mayo

Mr. Kent: I have some questions about the hydroelectric facilities in Mayo for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources.

We've been told that the Mayo hydro plant has been offline recently due to problems with the penstock. Can the minister tell us if the problems have been fixed? If not, when will they

be? If they have, how long was the facility offline? Does the minister have a cost estimate for the repairs?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I believe that the repairs are underway right now. I will have to come back with information about timeline and costs.

Mr. Kent: On the Yukon Energy website, there is an RFP currently advertised for Mayo rock slope remediation and surge tank replacement that closes on November 20. Rock slides in 2022 and 2023 caused Mayo A to be offline for approximately six months. This project that is being advertised is to take place in 2025 and 2026. According to a ministerial briefing note from January of this year, the estimated cost was \$3.7 million for the slope remediation alone.

Has that amount changed? Does the minister expect Mayo A and B to be offline during this work? If so, for how long? Will this necessitate increasing the number of rented diesels in the minister's fleet?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: There is a lot of work needed at Mayo in and around our Mayo facilities. We're also doing re-licensing of the Mayo generating station.

There have been problems to the spillway, to the slope, to the penstock, and what Yukon Energy tends to do is try to find the time to do that work when it will put the grid at less risk, period. Of course, it really matters how critical that work is and the timing of it.

What I will note for us here is that, earlier this week, there were questions about the investment that Yukon Energy is making and suggesting that it wasn't a good investment — from the members opposite; yet I think that it is. This is about our electrical system overall and making sure that we continue to modernize it, continue to invest in it, and make it sustainable or strengthen it for the long term. This is Yukon Energy doing the good work that is needed, and there is a lot of work needed in and around Mayo right now.

Mr. Kent: The only individual in this House who criticized investment in Mayo B is the minister's colleague the Minister of Finance.

On November 28, an expression of interest issued by Yukon Energy Corporation closes, and it is — quote: "... to assess the interest and qualifications of contractors for the construction of proposed additional spillway capacity to an existing dam in Mayo, Yukon and rehabilitation of its existing spillway."

This sounds like a very large project that may take quite an amount of time to complete and will cost a significant amount of money. Can the minister tell us what the budget is for this project? Can he also share when this project is scheduled to start and how long it's expected to take and if we can expect the power plant to be down for all of or portions of the work?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, our criticism previously about the Yukon Party was not that they invested in renewable energy — just the opposite. It was about how they financed that investment. When we landed here, there was this \$40 million that had magically appeared that had to be paid back without a plan for it to be paid back.

What we're talking about here is making sure that Yukon Energy is doing the good work that it needs to do around Mayo.

My one note here about the Mayo water levels, which has to do with the work on the penstock, is that they are low right now. They are maintaining minimum flows as required by their water licence, but they are doing the work, and they are hoping to have that back to normal by mid-month.

I will check in with them about all the work that's planned and the timing that is happening for that. It is important that we do this investment in our energy infrastructure across the territory.

I tabled a document yesterday or maybe it was the day before, and in it, it showed how much we have been increasing renewable energy here in the territory both in terms of production and sales, and that has been happening over the years, because we believe in renewable energy.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

Motion re appearance of witnesses

Committee of the Whole Motion No. 16

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I move:

THAT from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, November 7, 2024, Sara McPhee-Knowles, Chair of the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, and Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform members Dana Sundby and Ryan Campbell-Clarke appear as witnesses before Committee of the Whole to answer questions regarding the final report of the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes:

THAT from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, November 7, 2024, Sara McPhee-Knowles, Chair of the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, and Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform members Dana Sundby and Ryan Campbell-Clarke appear as witnesses before Committee of the Whole to answer questions regarding the final report of the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

Is there any debate?

Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Count.

Count

Chair: A count has been called.

Bells

Chair: Order.

All members in favour, please rise.

Members rise

Chair: All members opposed, please rise.

No members rise

Chair: The results are 17 yea, nil nay.

I declare the motion carried.

Committee of the Whole Motion No. 16 agreed to

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

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

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 215, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Request for Acting Chair of Committee of the Whole

Chair: At this time, I will ask if there is a volunteer to be Acting Chair so that I can participate in the debate.

Member for Takhini-Kopper King rises

Acting Chair (Ms. White): Is there any general debate?

Department of Health and Social Services

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am very pleased to be here today to speak about the first supplementary budget for 2024-25 for the Department of Health and Social Services. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the department officials who are here with me today. I am joined by the relatively new Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services, Matt King, although not new to a deputy minister role. I also have with me the Assistant Deputy Minister of Corporate Services, Paul Payne, and the director of Finance, Melanie Wallace. Thank you to all of them. I would also like to thank them and their teams for their work in developing this supplemental budget and their ongoing support for the health and well-being of Yukoners.

I am really pleased to provide this important update on the steps that we are taking to enhance our health care system and

social services system and to respond to the issues and the priorities of Yukoners.

I look forward to some questions about the supplementary budget and support for these expenditures. As we go forward, I would like to also recognize the tremendous work of everyone at the Department of Health and Social Services and providers across the territory. The staff and officials are the backbone of Health and Social Services — the care they provide to Yukoners and Yukoners' access to crucial services, support, and coverage every day. My gratitude and that of all Yukoners cannot be overstated.

The Department of Health and Social Services first supplementary budget reflects the important delivery of health and social services supports and coverage for today and tomorrow as we strive to improve and enhance care. This supplementary budget includes important funding in our response to the challenges that are presented by growing demand for health care services. This supplementary budget sets out funding to support an immediate approach to enhance the Whitehorse General Hospital's access to acute care beds, and this supplementary budget also provides funding to ensure that our legislated programs are appropriately funded to meet the current levels of demand and to strengthen our health care system.

Even as we work to incrementally respond to the pressures of our health care system and staffing, we are moving forward in a collaborative manner with our partners, guided by a shared vision to ensure that Yukoners have access to a person-centred and sustainable health and social care system. As we advance this work — and the important work needed and requested by Yukoners — I want to once again thank everyone across our health and social care system for all that you do to support Yukoners every day.

The Department of Health and Social Services first supplementary operation and maintenance budget for 2024-25 is a total of \$646.7 million. This represents an increase of 8.8 percent over the 2024-25 main estimates. The number of FTEs within the department is a total of 1,645.20 full-time-equivalent positions for the 2024-25 fiscal year. This includes an increase of 28.8 full-time equivalents over the 2024-25 main estimates.

We're also presenting a revised capital estimate of \$13.1 million, which is an increase of \$3.7 million compared to the 2024-25 main estimates.

Changes in this supplementary budget are connected to the response to bed capacity constraints at Whitehorse General Hospital as well as allocating funds to partner organizations to enable greater access to supportive housing for the winter.

An increase of \$52.4 million in operation and maintenance funding will support the department to meet the growing costs associated with the delivery of health and social services care and ensure that the needs of Yukoners are met.

I'm pleased to speak about some of these important highlights.

There is an increase of \$777,000 to partner with the Safe at Home Society to implement and run a supportive housing program at 408 Alexander Street. Work is also underway to

open the Hearth, a permanent and affordable housing initiative with a planned 67 self-contained suites.

We are providing an additional \$1 million within the Department of Health and Social Services to support the families of children with disabilities through the disabilities services unit because we recognize that care and support for care is crucial to those living with disabilities and their loved ones.

We're also providing an additional \$400,000 to respond to increased demand and the availability of new vaccine products as we move into the fall season.

The fall COVID-19 and flu vaccines rolled out on October 1, 2024, and there are two new RSV vaccines that were available starting on November 1 of this year — just a few days ago. The new RSV products are aimed at protecting those most at risk from RSV infection, including infants, those aged 75 and older, and those aged 60 and older living in long-term care. The fall vaccination campaign is an important long-standing mechanism for protecting Yukoners, especially the most vulnerable, from severe respiratory illnesses. I encourage all eligible Yukoners to reach out to their primary care providers or a pharmacist for more information.

This supplementary estimate includes an increase of \$420,000 to reflect the new honoraria rates for Emergency Medical Services community responders introduced earlier this year. We recognize the commitment of community responders in providing crucial coverage for EMS in communities and provide an honorarium for on-call services, training, and all operational deployment. In January 2024, we raised the on-call honorarium from \$3.71 per hour to \$7.70 per hour to better reflect the work and the time that these responders take on.

There is an increase of \$2.1 million for phased long-term care optimization at Whistle Bend Place and an increase of 21.8 full-time-equivalent positions. \$1.2 million is to support the creation of 12 long-term care rooms at Whistle Bend Place to accommodate the move of 10 residents from the Thomson Centre and to open two new long-term care rooms. This includes the move of the Wind River Hospice House to an adjacent space. \$894,000 supports an additional six long-term care rooms that are supported in the 2024-25 fiscal year at Whistle Bend Place to alleviate wait-lists for long-term care.

Our government is also responding to growth within insured health services in areas such as hospital and physician claims and the delivery of pharmaceutical programs. As our population is rising and aging, the cost of delivering health care has increased. We are providing additional funding to meet growing costs of insured health services.

We are providing an additional \$34 million to continue to respond to growth in the delivery of our legislative programming. There is also an increase of \$475,000 to enable release and distribution of the new Yukon health care identification cards this fall, in 2024, characterized by improved security, integrity, and quality.

Since the 2018-19 fiscal year, our government has increased the Yukon hospital services O&M budget by 77 percent. We are pleased to continue our partnership with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to advance our shared priorities

and ensure that Yukoners have access to the services and the programs that they require. In the first supplementary estimates for 2024-25, we are providing an O&M increase of \$10.4 million for Yukon hospital services. This increase is supporting pressures experienced at Whitehorse General Hospital around bed capacity and orthopaedic services. This includes 10 new acute care beds and additional funding to support the Yukon Hospital Corporation's orthopaedic program to increase the number of joint replacement surgeries in the 2024-25 fiscal year. There is also funding available to support the opening of the mental wellness unit this winter and capital funding for the renovation of the secure medical unit.

Once again, I want to thank everyone at the Department of Health and Social Services, all of our health and social services care system partners, and the front-line workers for all that they do every day to support Yukoners. While we continue to face challenges — and no one denies that there are challenges — we are also working together to meet those challenges, implement new programs, and deliver important services across the Yukon Territory.

The first supplementary estimates for 2024-25 reflect our government's commitments to supporting our health and social services system to succeed. From implementing initiatives to ensuring that our legislated programs meet uptake levels to meeting the funding needs of the Yukon Hospital Corporation, we are taking important steps and advancing the work that will impact Yukoners each and every day. I look forward to answering questions about the first supplementary estimates for the Department of Health and Social Services.

Mr. Cathers: I would also like to welcome the officials here. I am going to start out by asking about the surgical services renewal project for Whitehorse General Hospital. To begin with, this is something I would note that, when we raised this issue earlier in the Legislative Assembly in response to being criticized for failing to act on this request from Yukon hospitals for six and a half years, the Premier's defence was basically to claim that they had only been failing to act on it for five and a half years.

I would note as well that while I am pleased to finally have a copy of the "Surgical Services Renewal Project: Vision/Strategy, Clinical Service Plan, & Functional Program", that is not the complete range of documents related to the project. It does not include the costing level design that I had requested. I would also note that I requested this in the spring specifically, I followed up with a letter to the minister in early summer, and it was not until we tabled and called a motion for the production of papers, almost six months after I made the original request, that the government agreed to finally release it, so not very transparent.

In reading through it, we can see why they were reluctant to share it with us, because it does confirm that government has known for years that there was an urgent need to act on the surgical services renewal project. Quoting from the executive summary of the document — just for the reference of Hansard, I am quoting from the document that was tabled recently, "Whitehorse General Hospital: Surgical Services Renewal Project". On page five, it indicates — quote: "... WGH's

Surgical Services will already outgrow its space as of 2018 based on current slate times and staffing models."

It also goes on to note that, by five years from then, 2023 — actually, I will quote that part as well: "Through 2023 (5 years from now), the need continues to grow, to 10% over current capacity (3 ORs)." It then goes on to note — on subsequent pages, it indicates that the "Schematic (costing-level) design will be followed by detailed operational planning and budgeting, high level costing, and Business Case development before being presented to Government." It identifies the expected timing for that as April 2019. This is a quote from page 6. It then goes on to talk about the timelines for that.

We know as well from the letter that the minister provided that as of 2019, they anticipated that this surgical services renewal project might be complete by now. Instead, the government hasn't started it, nor have they updated the costing for the project. The minister provided me with a cost estimate of \$187.2 million based on 2018 costing and indicated that included both capital and operation and maintenance costs. She also noted in that letter that the estimate is now outdated, and they don't have a revised timeline or costing.

Again, for a project that the government thought might be complete by now, they haven't even updated the costing of it. It also notes — in looking through the report, it identifies the population projections that were used at the time and indicated that, under their high-end scenario which was called the "access scenario," it was projected that 3,688 cases would be completed at WGH by 2032-33.

Again, the relevance of that is that the population growth and the growth in demand grew faster than that report thought they were going to reach by 2032. At that level, according to this surgical services plan, they indicated that, to meet that need, the surgical services area would need to roughly double and we would need four ORs.

Well, as we know, the surgical services area has not doubled. What is doubly concerning is that the government has not only not started shovels in the ground on this project but they haven't even updated the costing.

Again, just for the reference in terms of the size, I'll quote from page 81 of that document — quote: "The required expansion area equates to a footprint equal to all the existing surgical services area, MDRD, Housekeeping Services, Material Management, the Morgue and Plant Services Carpentry Shop. Analysis during costing level design is required to identify the optimal location for this proposed expansion."

So, I have a few questions for the minister about it. First of all, what location has been identified for this project? Secondly, does that total cost estimate from 2018 of \$187.2 million include adding the addition that was required to add new beds? Or was that just for the surgical services area? Would she share the costing level design with us, so we can actually see the details of this project that have been developed so far?

Finally, just to give the minister a moment to look for that information — and officials — I would quote from what the then-president of the Yukon Medical Association said this

summer in July to the *Yukon Star* in an article from July 19 entitled “Hospital needs more beds, surgical capacity: YMA”.

After talking about population growth and expectations, the then-president of the YMA said — and I quote: ““Based on the above statistics, the capacity for surgical services and the total number of inpatient beds needs to grow in order to keep up with both the historical and projected growth in demand for services...””

Again, that’s a quote from the then-president of the Yukon Medical Association.

My question is whether that costing includes the space required to add additional bed capacity, and if not, would the minister provide us with what the cost estimate is for that project as well as the current designs — conceptual design or whatever stage it is at — for both the surgical services area expansion and modernization and for adding more bed capacity at Whitehorse General Hospital?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: We, of course, recognize at Health and Social Services and at the Yukon Hospital Corporation that surgical care is essential for an expanding population here in the territory. We also note that demand for surgical services has increased at a more rapid rate than was previously anticipated and/or that the previous data modelling suggested. Of course, the surgical services strategic master plan was a point in time — a snapshot. There were estimates there; we know those to be incorrect at this time based on our current population and based on the current demand for surgical services, and we continue to work to support this increase and plan for a comprehensive and sustainable future with more efficiency, service delivery, and patient safety.

Surgical services planning requires two primary streams of work: long-term planning and redevelopment and sustainability of the current service at the same time. Starting in 2012, the Yukon Hospital Corporation developed and followed a strategic master plan, and that plan identified capital development needs through 2035, which included: a new emergency department, which has been completed; an MRI machine, which does exist here in the territory for services for Yukoners; a mental wellness unit; and then expanding the surgical services wing. The mental wellness unit is near completion.

I note, Acting Chair, that we are on schedule based on the priorities set in that strategic master plan despite the fact that there was a world pandemic intervening between 2020 and 2023. We continue to work hard to make sure that we are following a strategic master plan and yet updating it all at the same time to make sure that the redevelopment of the surgical services and all services at Yukon hospitals are the best that they can be for Yukoners.

That work also includes expansion and inpatient bed capacity, with anticipation of an additional 30 inpatient beds at Whitehorse General Hospital. I will note that the original plans for Whitehorse General Hospital did include more beds than we have currently and that the plan was reduced at the time, which is neither here nor there, but certainly didn’t include the vision that we would have hoped for at the time.

In 2019, the Yukon Hospital Corporation conducted long-term planning related to the future needs of surgical services at Whitehorse General Hospital. This is a large and complex long-term planning initiative with a five- to seven-year time horizon. It required comprehensive stakeholder involvement to ensure appropriately meeting the needs of Yukoners, care providers, and funders. A needs assessment and high-level functions service program were completed with the engagement of surgeons, other physicians, surgical nursing, and support staff.

However, this work is currently on hold due to the priorities at that time of the pandemic and current health system pressures. Of course, part of that work continues through the expression of interest that was put out by government, about which we have had much conversation in this Legislative Assembly. That closed on October 17. We are waiting for an assessment of the work that will be done. It will include updating a review of the strategic master plan as well as more up-to-date cost estimates and a full assessment of the infrastructure needs of Yukon Health and Social Services across the territory — not just the hospital, although this will be part of that work.

I think that there was a question regarding the location of the surgical services expansion. Presumably, no decision has been made with respect to that, but it would make sense for the infrastructure at Whitehorse General Hospital to be expanded. I haven’t heard in any of the conversations that we have had with physicians and surgeons — there has been no conversation that I understood to be different from the fact that we would be looking to use the current infrastructure and expand services.

The \$187-million estimate did include some space for beds at the Whitehorse General Hospital, but again, those are 2018 numbers. Costing for the project going forward will be part of the information that we receive with respect to consultation on expansion of infrastructure for Health and Social Services and for medical services here in the territory, so I don’t have that work.

It is underway as part of the consultation that I have spoken about. It will certainly be part of updating the concept of continuing to meet the needs and priorities set in the strategic master plan. With respect to expanding services, as I’ve said, it’s on schedule following the priorities that were set in that report.

Lastly, there was a comment — and I don’t think that there was a question, but I’m happy to note that our relationship with the now former president of the Yukon Medical Association and the incoming new president, Dr. Bryant, of the Medical Association is a relationship that we have worked very hard to maintain and to have thrive. We look forward to continued partnership with the Medical Association of the territory, because it is only through that work that we will be successful in providing better service for Yukoners at the Whitehorse General Hospital and throughout the territory.

Mr. Cathers: Again, what is really concerning is just the apparent lack of urgency in the minister’s response to this situation.

Again, as I noted, looking at the surgical services plan itself, it notes that, at that point in time, they're already saying that WGH's surgical services — quote: "... will already outgrow its space as of 2018..."

That document then identified what they believed at the time, based on population estimates then, would be needed in 2032 for surgical volume to meet the needs of that volume of surgeries and indicated that the surgical services area would need to be roughly double the size it is now and include four operating rooms.

We've already seen a situation where the current number of surgeries being performed in the space at Whitehorse General Hospital is beyond what it was expected to be at in 2032.

So, it's no wonder that our hospital and doctors and other health professionals are feeling the strain associated with trying to provide that many surgeries out of a space that is simply not adequate for the size that is needed, nor does it meet, in some areas, the current standards that would be incorporated for a design of a facility of that type due to the age of that facility.

The minister made a remark about the reduction of the hospital's plan size. I would point out that it was back before I was even old enough to vote, so this is an old decision by a government that has long since left. I would question the relevance of it at this point in time, because the real question now is what information this current government was provided with about the expected needs of the hospital back in 2018 when this was initially presented to government and then finalized, apparently, the following year in 2019.

Again, at that time, the estimates for population growth were driving the plan that said that the surgical services area needed to roughly double to meet that expected demand, but here we are with the demand for surgeries already above that target. What I didn't hear in any of the minister's comments was the timing for updating the cost estimates for the surgical services renewal project and proceeding forward with the remaining elements necessary, leading up to construction of that facility, where her own letter did acknowledge that, at the time, it had been envisioned that the project might be complete by now. Unfortunately, it was allowed to collect dust for years.

Can the minister confirm — she indicated that it was expected to be at the hospital campus where the addition of the additional bed capacity would be, which is certainly not a surprise. Would that involve removing part of the hill? I understand that was a consideration. Again, I did ask before, but I didn't receive a commitment — could the minister commit to sharing with us the designs that have been completed to date so that we can actually understand and take a look at what is being contemplated for both the addition of surgical services space and new space for bed capacity?

I would also note that the minister made reference to the expression of interest and the broader look that government is doing at the needs of not just the hospital but also Health and Social Services as well. That doesn't change the fact that, if you are taking a broad look at something, it shouldn't delay the urgency of acting on a surgical services renewal project, since we know that the current hospital is completing more surgeries

than is appropriate for the space, and they desperately need that expansion.

Again, I would ask the minister if she could commit — when is the government going to do that detailed work to actually proceed — or I should say the government and the Yukon Hospital Corporation — when are they going to do that detailed work to advance construction of that facility, and what is the current expected timeline for beginning construction of that facility?

The concerns that we have heard from the Yukon Medical Association and doctors who, contrary to the minister's assertions about how wonderful the relationship is — when doctors are coming forward publicly again and again and again expressing concerns about things including the lack of action on the surgical services project, that is not a sign that everything is going smoothly in that relationship. Ultimately, what I think is fair to say in the concerns that we have heard from doctors is that their primary concern is about the impact that this has on patients and the fact that they believed that this project was necessary years ago. In 2021, they identified the surgical services renewal project at Whitehorse General Hospital as an urgent need, according to the then-president of the Yukon Medical Association in his comments to CBC in April 2021. They haven't seen the action; they haven't seen a timeline; we haven't seen a timeline, and the government has not made any announcements or commitments to move forward with any sense of urgency on this badly needed project.

So, again, when will the government actually start doing the more detailed work on this project, and what are the timelines for design and construction?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Madam Acting Chair, thank you for the question.

What I can say is that there is no debate about the urgency of providing great care for Yukoners, including through the surgical services that we have available in the territory. What I can also say is that work is currently underway. We have publicly spoken about a consultant needed and the consultation process in order to obtain a full review of the infrastructure of health systems here in the territory. A review of that infrastructure is long overdue.

We will be looking at how and where services are delivered to Yukoners across the territory. Part of that will, of course, be Whitehorse General Hospital.

So, if it is unclear, it should not be — that we agree that this work is urgent and that the work is currently underway at the department. I do not have a timeline available for the member opposite for the completion of that work or for an announcement of the plans for that work. We will work closely with our partners in order to do that work. It is not something that I can or would announce here because, that work is being done with the Yukon Medical Association and the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the Whitehorse General Hospital.

What I can speak about is that we know that Whitehorse General Hospital is seeing growth in all service areas, leading to higher patient volumes. The member opposite has mentioned — about having surpassed current surgery estimates for some time in the future, but we have done that. Our population has

also increased by 30 percent in the last 10 years. There is nobody who was predicting that.

We have delivered some 4,400 surgeries this year. I don't believe that the member opposite is saying that in any way those surgeries have not been completed in a most safe manner, although he alluded to more surgeries being completed than there was space for at the hospital. I assure you that the Whitehorse General Hospital and, more importantly, the service providers and our surgeons and medical professionals take patient safety to be the most important of their goals. I can also indicate that safety is a primary concern and that all of those surgeries are being delivered in a safe manner at the Yukon Hospital Corporation.

We understand that the higher patient volumes, the increased patient needs, and the increased complexity of care and acuity that come with the increased population here in the territory — and the Yukon Hospital Corporation expects these trends to be sustained through the next fiscal year and beyond. This is why we are here with a supplementary budget to support the Hospital Corporation as well as our physicians through insured health.

The Yukon Hospital Corporation continues to plan for the future of surgical services at the Whitehorse General Hospital, and in the fall 2022, subsequent to the report that we have mentioned with respect to strategic surgical services being available in 2019 — work in the fall 2022 by the Hospital Corporation was done with the support of an independent expert, and they undertook a full review of the surgical services and developed a plan to support surgical services sustainability, which was published in January 2023.

So, not the fact that nothing was being done — the hospital has undertaken several human resources strategies to address nursing vacancies in surgical services. As of September 2024, there is only one full-time-equivalent permanent nursing position vacancy in surgical services. All other positions have been filled and this has reduced the higher cost of a travel nurse or agency nursing and also permitted an increased number of surgeries to be done.

In December 2023 and again in the first supplementary budget for 2024-25, the Government of Yukon announced additional funding for the Yukon Hospital Corporation to support the current level of surgical services at that time. The Yukon Hospital Corporation has experienced sustained growth across services year over year. The following are some specific examples for the period between February 2023 and 2024: We have a 16-percent growth in in-patient days; hospital occupancy pressures have increased; a two-percent growth in the emergency department visits; a five-percent growth in the number of surgical procedures completed; a nine-percent growth in laboratory visits; a 35-percent growth in chemotherapy services; a 24-percent growth in demand for medical rehabilitation services; and an increase in overall total imaging exams. We note that these are important growth factors as a result of an increased population, an older population, and more complex and more acute health issues being brought to the forefront.

I can also note that there have been a number of short-term improvements made within the existing surgical areas to mitigate challenges. This work is done in collaboration with the Yukon Hospital Corporation and with the surgical services and the surgeons and physicians who operate in this way. We have instituted a flexible operating room suite to help move some day procedures out of the main operating rooms. We have instituted a scope reprocessing unit that was developed adjacent to the flexible operating room suite. We have introduced a post-anesthesia care unit and trained post-anesthesia staff to help improve the quality of patient care post-surgery. We have worked to improve patient access and flow through the patient registration and preoperative clinic and outpatient clinics — like the cast clinic and the minor procedures being co-located in the surgical services hub. There has been some streamlining there.

Work is ongoing with the orthopaedic surgeons group to determine how to best support the staff and patients given the rising demand for orthopaedic surgeries. This includes investment in increasing the number of total knee and total hip replacement surgeries completed each year.

What I can note in response to the specific question is that I do not have a timeline to provide to the member opposite at this time. What I can say is that the urgency is understood by all surgeons, medical professionals, Health and Social Services, and the Yukon Hospital Corporation and that this work is currently ongoing to move forward to provide better services to Yukoners.

Mr. Cathers: I am just going to ask one question here before handing the floor over to the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin. I do want to ask the minister about wait times. We know that wait times for a number of procedures, surgeries, and diagnostic tests as well as screenings were significantly longer than target times. Very concerningly, we learned that mammography wait times for non-urgent had grown to almost three years, according to the CEO of the Yukon Hospital Corporation last November. The number that he cited was 35 months. We know that the wait times for cardiac were twice the targeted time, with over 320 people on the wait-list as of last year expected to wait six months. MRI for non-urgent was significantly longer than the target and the wait times for audiology were over two years. We have heard that concern from Yukon seniors recently. What is the government doing regarding those wait times? Can the minister provide me with the current estimated wait times for those procedures that I mentioned?

I would also move on to — one of the reasons for the problem is the continued problem of the shortage of funding for hospitals, which was what Ernst & Young called “chronic underfunding” of the hospitals in the report that they did on the four years they reviewed under this Liberal government. We know that in the last fiscal year, in the 2023-24 main estimates, the government provided Yukon hospitals with just over \$95 million in O&M funding, which means that they were short about \$30 million in O&M funding at the start of the year. Under intense and repeated pressure from the Yukon Party Official Opposition and from Yukon doctors, the Liberal

government finally did give our hospitals an additional \$30 million in two instalments that year, but that still created problems where they implemented caps and cuts in November and December on a number of procedures to stay within their budget.

So, according to the 2024-25 main estimates, the amount for this fiscal year is not as large as the actual needs were for last year. It's roughly \$14.3 million — than what the actual estimate O&M costs for last fiscal year were. So, a \$14 million-plus shortfall is not comforting. I would point out that the real need would actually be larger than that because there will be cost increases from the previous year, so the real needs would be substantially higher.

I would also just note that the minister made reference to a press release announcing funding. I would remind her that the press release was when she was publicly corrected by a surgeon for being creative with her facts.

I note that, while the government has added some additional funding in this supplementary, the revised total is still less than the actual O&M costs for the last fiscal year and a significant amount of the new money is for new costs, including Thomson Centre.

So, I have two questions in closing: How much additional funding for O&M have our hospitals requested for this fiscal year? Does the minister expect that the hospital will have cuts and caps this fiscal year to stay within their budget, or will there be an extended surgical services shutdown as they did last year just to meet within their inadequate budget provided by the government?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: While I appreciate that the member opposite thinks that their characterization of hospital budgets and funding is the reality, I reject their characterization that the Yukon Hospital Corporation has been chronically underfunded since approximately 2018-19. This government has increased the budget for the Hospital Corporation by more than 77 per cent year over year. That is a total since then.

What I can indicate — and I don't know how budgeting was done previously, but our government works very closely with the Hospital Corporation to estimate what they might need for their main budget for any given year. This year, 2024-25, the total was approximately \$110 million. That amount was put in the main budget. That amount was allocated to the Hospital Corporation based on their own estimates of what the cost of running the hospital would be. What we know as a result of pressures that come and continue — based on all of the things that I have said earlier, like growth in population, increased acuity, increased complexity of medical situations — and ultimately, we meet with them to discuss financial situations and pressures at least every two weeks. We will continue to do that and to manage the costs in that way.

Supplementary budgets are appropriately used to bring forward additional costs, and that is the method by which the Hospital Corporation is met by the Yukon government in collaboration with the needs from the Hospital Corporation. We work to meet their funding needs at all times. Year over year, we provided funding through core and then additional transfer payment agreements commensurate with the need of the

Hospital Corporation as determined by the Yukon Hospital Corporation board.

Since the 2021-22 fiscal year, we have worked with the Hospital Corporation to respond to funding requests that were identified, as I have said, during the main and supplementary budget exercises. That is an appropriate way for us to manage. We maintain an ongoing cooperative and collaborative relationship with the Hospital Corporation as we respond to new and emerging pressures together to assess funding needs. Over the past year, we have worked closely with the Hospital Corporation to improve our reporting processes, enabled by the review of work completed by external parties in the fall of 2023.

The 2024-25 first supplementary estimates have budgeted \$120.8 million for the Hospital Corporation services — O&M — as well as \$8.7 million for capital expenditures, for a combined total of \$129.5 million.

I look forward to providing additional information to the member opposite. I am mindful of the time, and I would like — I will take my seat so that perhaps the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin can present a question that I'm happy to respond to, either if there is time today or at a future time.

Ms. Blake: I welcome the officials and thank them for being here. With the time that I have, I will ask about nurse practitioners. We hear concerns from nurse practitioners about pay structures. Could the minister explain which positions of registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and nurse practitioners get retention bonuses? Which of these positions get recruitment bonuses? And with the briefing note from spring 2024, it states that both retention and recruitment bonuses ended on March 31, 2024. Can the minister explain how retention and recruitment bonuses for nurse practitioners, registered nurses, and licensed practical nurses will work going forward?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I much appreciate the question. I look forward to being able to answer it. I have quite a bit of information regarding nurse practitioners here in the territory and specifically with respect to the questions that have been asked about the retention and recruitment bonuses going forward. What I can say in the short amount of time that I currently have is that we have recently just changed the nursing regulations to expand the scope of practice for nurse practitioners here in the territory, to expand the number of drugs that they can prescribe, and to expand the scope of practice in connection with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association to make our system more flexible and to reduce non-safety-related barriers, and also to eliminate the necessity and make it easier for nurses, nurse practitioners, and licensed practical nurses to work here in the territory.

Unfortunately, Madam Acting Chair, seeing the time, I will move that you report progress and look forward to further questions.

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

Motion agreed to

Appearance of witnesses

Acting Chair: Pursuant to Committee of the Whole Motion No. 16 adopted earlier today, Committee of the Whole will receive witnesses from the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

In order to allow the witnesses to take their places in the Chamber, the Committee will now recess and reconvene at 3:30 p.m.

Recess

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

Appearance of witnesses

Chair: Pursuant to Committee of the Whole Motion No. 16 adopted on this day, Committee of the Whole will now receive witnesses from the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

I would ask all members to remember to refer their remarks through the Chair when addressing the witnesses, and I would also ask the witnesses to refer their answers through the Chair when they are responding to the members of the Committee.

Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes, I believe you will be introducing the witnesses.

Witnesses introduced

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thank you and welcome to the Yukon Citizens' Assembly. I know that we couldn't get 38-plus chairs here today, so I appreciate that the Assembly has chosen several members to represent them. Today, we have the chair, Sara McPhee-Knowles; we have Dana Sundby and Ryan Campbell-Clarke, who are members of the assembly.

I will also take a moment — if we could please welcome other guests from the assembly here today. We have Iris Merritt and Brent McDonald, who were members of the assembly, and Christy Huey and Michael Vernon, who facilitated the assembly. I think that Christy was the deputy chair.

If we could welcome them all as witnesses here in the gallery today, please.

Applause

Chair: Would the witnesses like to make brief opening remarks?

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: My name is Sara McPhee-Knowles, and I had the great privilege of chairing the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. I am delighted to be here this afternoon with two citizens' assembly members: Dana Sundby and Ryan Campbell-Clarke. The citizens' assembly were volunteers tasked with examining electoral systems and making a recommendation as to which system would be the best for the Yukon, and they did an exceptional job. They wrapped their heads around complicated information, and they had in-depth respectful conversations with one another as they came to the recommendation of ranked vote.

We would like to highlight what a positive exercise in democracy the citizens' assembly was for the Yukon.

Thank you, and with that, I will pass it to Dana.

Ms. Sundby: My name is Dana Sundby, and I live in the riding of Watson Lake. I had the privilege of participating in the citizens' assembly on behalf of all Yukoners. I believe in democracy, and I felt that it was important to volunteer, to participate, because so many of my friends and family are disillusioned with our current electoral system.

We spent our time together on the assembly learning about and evaluating different electoral systems within the Yukon context to see if we would find something that could work better than our current first-past-the-post system or to see if that was, in fact, the best system for the Yukon.

First, we determined what we wanted in an electoral system, including regional representation, fairness, simplicity, and better voter and candidate participation. Then we examined the different systems considering these values and the unique features of the Yukon.

As we learned more, I changed my mind several times, because every system has benefits and drawbacks. Some systems are great at providing an outcome where the seats match the votes, but they don't work well in regions with a small number of seats, like ours.

Our recommendation of a ranked vote is a system that we felt best reflected our values and would serve Yukoners moving forward. I was truly impressed that such a diverse group of people could come together and agree on a recommendation in a kind and respectful way that valued each member's opinion.

It was an honour to serve our fellow Yukoners in this way and hopefully improve democratic processes for all of us.

Mr. Campbell-Clarke: Good afternoon. I'm Ryan Campbell-Clarke, one of the two members selected from Copperbelt North for the Yukon citizens' assembly.

I moved to Yukon in 2016, built my life here, and planted my family's roots here. I'm proud to call myself a Yukoner.

I volunteered for the citizens' assembly because I saw our current electoral system as one of the factors that is driving political polarization. In our first meetings, it really seemed unlikely to me that a group of such varied backgrounds and perspectives could find consensus on anything, let alone something as important as the process to elect our representatives.

Humans are naturally inclined to focus on the differences, but the process of the citizens' assembly focused on our similarities to determine the common values of Yukoners. We applied these values to come to consensus on a recommendation. We delivered the recommendation that we believe is the best for the Yukon, because we are Yukoners.

Chair: Are there any questions for the witnesses?

Mr. Dixon: I will join my colleagues in welcoming our witnesses to the Legislative Assembly today, both those who are appearing on the floor as witnesses and those who are either listening in from the gallery or outside.

I would also like to begin by thanking the 38 members of the citizens' assembly for their time and for their efforts in this exercise. Any discussion about our democracy is an important one. While our caucus has concerns about the process as a whole, we certainly appreciate the time that these individuals

put toward this. We know that they approached it with the right intentions and that they approached the work earnestly.

I will jump into a number of questions on behalf of our caucus. I would like to begin by asking some questions about cost. Can the witnesses please provide a breakdown of the cost of the entire exercise — staffing costs, advertising costs, travel, rentals, payments to consultants, and any other significant costs associated with the operations of the citizens' assembly?

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: Thank you for the question. The question was about the cost of the overall exercise. I have an overall anticipated final spend of \$470,000. We still have a few invoices to come in, in the last couple of weeks of the assembly's work. That is our anticipated final spend.

Our initial allocation was for \$750,000. There were a number of categories that were enumerated, so I can give more specifics if that is what's desired, but I can tell you that our anticipated final spend will be \$470,000.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the answer. At some point, perhaps later on, we can get a more detailed breakdown of that \$470,000, but for now, I think that is certainly sufficient for today.

Does the citizens' assembly have an estimated cost of conducting the recommendation to include a question on the next ballot?

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: Thank you for the question. To be clear, the member is seeking the cost of conducting a plebiscite?

Mr. Dixon: I understood the recommendation was for a referendum, but perhaps the plebiscite could be costed out as well — whichever they have.

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: I think that question would be best directed to Elections Yukon. The overall cost of the assembly was within our purview, but next steps are outside of our scope.

Mr. Dixon: Understood; thank you very much for the answer.

Speaking of which, though, can the assembly comment at all on the difference between a referendum and a plebiscite? Does the assembly have any thoughts on the difference between the two? Did they give any consideration as to whether either or the other was more appropriate for the recommendation? Did they have any discussions at all about the difference between the two and whether or not they ought to include those specific words in the recommendation?

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: In all of our conversations, we referred to a public vote, the mechanism of which would be up to the Legislature.

Mr. Dixon: Of course, I'm sure that the citizens' assembly was aware of the work of the select committee on the citizens' assembly and the Special Committee on Electoral Reform which existed before it, which, of course, used the term "referendum", and that's why I wondered.

My question was just whether or not there was any discussion among the assembly about the difference between a "referendum" and a "plebiscite" and whether or not any consideration was given to that. So, I just want to maybe confirm that — I think what I heard then is that there was no

discussion about the difference between a "plebiscite" and a "referendum", but I would like to have that clarified.

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: At various points during the citizens' assembly process, we spoke about that there are two options for which this question could go forward to a public vote: a referendum or a plebiscite. But the assembly was really clear that their role was to recommend a question that could be put to the Yukon public — that is how it is phrased in the duties of the chair. So, we were focused on — in the time that we had for our meetings — getting to a recommendation that we felt would serve Yukoners and ensuring that our scope was not going beyond into spaces that would be better suited by other bodies. So, there were certain discussions about that, and there were — you know, members of the citizens' assembly raised questions about — you know, understanding that there was a *Plebiscite Act* available and that there would need to be referendum legislation drafted, but there wasn't a strong preference or any consensus coming from the assembly on that question.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the answer from the witnesses.

At one point during the work of the citizens' assembly, the assembly had to address the advertisements from Fair Vote Yukon that were seemingly quite similar to those of the citizens' assembly, and there was a public statement from the citizens' assembly at that point clarifying their advertisements.

Can the witnesses discuss why they felt the need to issue that public statement during their work on that matter?

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: So, the reason for that public statement was that we had received some phone calls from members of the public who thought they had received a mail-out from the citizens' assembly and they were asking questions. So, we wanted it to be clear that we had not sent any mail-outs, and that was the reason for that public statement.

Mr. Dixon: I certainly heard from members of the public as well who were confused about the competing advertisements between the citizens' assembly and Fair Vote Yukon, as they did look similar and were dealing with similar subject matter. I appreciate the explanation from the witnesses on that front.

Next, I would like to ask about the recommendation itself. So, when taking into consideration the variety of issues that Yukoners are concerned with, it's the view of our caucus, at least, that electoral reform ranks lower in terms of the priority when compared to a number of other issues. Despite that, we certainly recognize that electoral reform is very important to a number of people.

The most active of those tend to be associated with the movement referred to as Fair Vote, either Fair Vote Yukon or its national affiliate, Fair Vote Canada.

On September 13, 2024, Fair Vote Canada issued a statement on the work of the Yukon's citizens' assembly. I won't read it entirely, but I will note for the Legislature what I feel to be the salient quote — and I'll quote: "As an organization for proportional representation, Fair Vote Canada (and its chapters) cannot support the Citizens' Assembly's recommendation for Alternative Vote. As a winner-take-all system, Alternative Vote does not reflect the values Fair Vote Canada campaigns for..."

So, can the witnesses reconcile this?

The group that has been one of the biggest supporters of the work of the citizens' assembly and encouraged the creation of the citizens' assembly and, to my knowledge, is the only group that I've seen public statements from supporting the citizens' assembly's work actually disagrees with the recommendation that they have made. So, in our view, the majority of Yukoners don't have this as a top priority, but those who do have it for a top priority have disagreed with the recommendation.

So, how does the citizens' assembly respond to that statement from Fair Vote Yukon?

Mr. Campbell-Clarke: Fair Vote Yukon and Fair Vote Canada advocate for a very particular electoral system, which is proportional representation. That is but a single system that you can use for voting. There are many systems for electoral reform. They were probably hoping that we would come to the idea with a recommendation of proportional representation, but when we as Yukoners analyzed all of the values that were important, proportional representation was not something that we could come to consensus to recommend. To be frank, it was never one of the final solutions.

Fair Vote Yukon is an advocacy organization for a single system, and because we didn't pick their system, they are, of course, going to be unhappy with our decision.

Ms. Sundby: We did take a good look at proportional systems. When we look at them in the context of the Yukon, it's very problematic because of our geography. We have a large population in Whitehorse and small populations in the communities, and I think that there is already the sentiment that Whitehorse makes all the rules. If we had a proportional system, it would basically have the voters in Whitehorse choosing the representatives for all of the Yukon.

We felt that it was very important that each specific region and community have their own voice in the Legislature, so we really felt that it wasn't an appropriate system for the Yukon. It's a good system in larger centres, but for the Yukon — not the best.

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: I would just like to add that there is a very particular derivation of proportional representation that Fair Vote Yukon advocates for. It was given to us as a submission and Dave Brekke presented to the citizens' assembly as part of a panel. It's a very complex system. It's not easy to understand and it's not easy to explain. One of the values of the citizens' assembly members was simplicity and accessibility. They were very consistent with sticking with those values as they made their decisions.

I would also like to say that we had 38 members. We met over four weekends, so about 16 hours of meetings per weekend times 38 — it's almost 2,500 hours of meeting time, and so I think it was really remarkable that we had volunteers willing to give that level of time to this topic and I would argue that this shows how important it is.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the answers from all three witnesses very much, and in the case of the first two, I certainly don't mean to sound like I am advocating for proportional representation. I am clearly on the record numerous times about

the faults of proportional representation and I don't advocate for it.

My question is more around the fact that — in my time as an elected official, I have heard about electoral reform from a very select group of Yukoners. They tend to be the same folks — one of them was named by the witnesses earlier — and they tend to be associated with Fair Vote Yukon. The ones who are most passionate about electoral reform have been those folks, in my experience.

What I am asking about, I suppose, is: How do we reconcile the fact that the one group that is most passionate about electoral reform — the one group that has been advocating most for electoral reform over the last number of years and was in some ways instrumental in the creation of the citizens' assembly — actually disagrees with the ultimate recommendation of the citizens' assembly? How should we take that? As Members of the Legislative Assembly who are accepting the report from the citizens' assembly, how should we reconcile the fact that the stakeholder most interested in seeing this work happen ultimately has rejected the recommendation from the citizens' assembly?

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: Something that I think is really important to understand and recognize about the citizens' assembly is that we had a roughly representative group of Yukoners who took part. We had two members from each of the 19 electoral districts, which gives us geographic variation in the group. We had a relatively even split — a few more men than women — and skewed a little bit older, but we had a really diverse range of really regular folks as part of the citizens' assembly. I think what was really wonderful to watch about that group and how they worked was the way that they listened to each other, and they listened for those differences and they worked to bridge those gaps.

Advocacy groups are not representative of a population, and I think that the beauty of the citizens' assembly and part of why they were able to work so well together is because of that approach of having a roughly representative group. I think, in terms of an advocacy group and their values and what suits them the best, those values chosen by the citizens' assembly were different from the values of an advocacy group. I understand that they have been advocating locally for a very specific system here for quite a long time and they have advocated for a proportional representation system.

The system recommended by the citizens' assembly is not a proportional system; it's a majoritarian system. However, some of the features of that system would allow for cooperation and allowing voters to express more preferences, and those are the things that were more important to the citizens' assembly members than having a proportional system. Local representation was also extremely important, and if you have a proportional system, your district magnitude — the number of members elected per district — goes up, so you lose that direct connection to your MLA, and that was something that was really, really important to the citizens' assembly. I would argue that the way that you can reconcile that is that the values that were chosen by the citizens' assembly and that guided their decisions were different from the values of an advocacy group.

Mr. Dixon: Thank you very much for the excellent explanation from the witnesses. I appreciate that.

In addition to Fair Vote Canada — or Fair Vote Yukon, in this case — and in addition to their advocacy and general support of proportional representation, they have also raised specific concerns about the alternative vote system. They have raised concerns that the alternative vote system explicitly benefits one political party over all of the rest. In their view, that is the Liberal Party.

How does the citizens' assembly respond to the criticism from Fair Vote Canada that the recommendation is explicitly beneficial for one political party over the others?

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: Thank you for the question. Something that I think is an important feature of ranked vote or alternative vote is that it tends to encourage parties to broaden their base of support. Whether that would explicitly benefit a single party or not really depends on the parties and their choices. Systems affect voter behaviour and systems affect party behaviour, and these things have reflections on one another. So, I don't think that it would necessarily be the case that only one party would benefit under this system.

One of the other things that has been observed in Australia is more cooperative campaigning, because if you are asking voters to rank their preferences and one party is saying to vote for it first and then vote for another party, it tends to reduce the level of antagonizing campaigning and that was viewed as positive. I think that's how I would answer the question.

I believe that Ms. Sundby would like to continue.

Ms. Sundby: One advantage of the ranked vote system that we recommended was that it results in a lot more sincere voting. In our current system of first past the post, I may really like party A, but I really don't like party C, and I know that party B has a lot of support, so I would vote for party B instead of the A that I really like just to make sure that C doesn't get in. That's called "strategic voting". In a ranked vote system that we're recommending, I could vote for even the candidate that I like — even an independent candidate — as my first choice and I don't have to worry as much about my vote being wasted.

So, before, if I voted for a small independent candidate with a small base of support, my vote wouldn't make sure that party C wasn't elected. But now I can rank my vote so my first choice can be for that independent candidate that I really like and my second choice can be for my second-choice party and so on. It results in a lot more sincere voting than our current system does and we think that this is a real benefit.

Mr. Campbell-Clarke: So, when we analyzed all the different electoral systems, we didn't consider individual parties when we were making these decisions. We didn't think: Will this benefit one party or another?

The only part where parties came up was: Does this benefit parties as a whole, or does it help independents more? Does it cause more parties to form or does it cause less? But we never really considered how it would affect the outcome of an election, because we don't know how people are going to vote in a different system. As Sara said earlier, systems change how

people vote. Systems change how parties behave. It's just not something we can feasibly know.

Even saying that this system benefits any particular party now — we don't know that. We don't know how Yukoners rank, because we don't know how people sincerely vote here in the first place because we have strategic voting with the current system.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the comments from the witnesses and I thank them for those.

To the final point, though, one of the witnesses noted that they didn't look at how it would impact elections or the outcomes of elections because we can't know what future elections may hold. But we know that during the course of the debate federally about the proposal to move to an alternative vote system, it was possible to do that — to look backward at previous elections and to determine what the impact would have been on previous elections.

Of course, that was done in spades about 10 years ago or so when the federal government was looking at electoral reform, and when it became obvious that the electoral reform that was being proposed by the federal government at the time was probably not quite genuine — looking back, we now know that the Prime Minister had an explicit agenda pushing for an alternative vote system, something that the Prime Minister has now admitted post facto.

In fact, back in 2015, it was a correspondent with the CBC, *Éric Grenier* — he's no longer with the CBC. He does a great podcast now on political systems, polling, and politics in Canada.

In that article, Mr. Grenier stated — and he had done an analysis looking at previous elections over the last 10 years or so — quote: "Preferential ballot boosts Liberals ... It is also the option that is most likely to help the Liberals win more seats." That was based on his backward-looking review of previous elections based on his analysis.

So, I am wondering if the witnesses can explain whether or not they considered the impact that this would have on the political parties. Naturally, the current political parties will wonder what this recommendation will mean for us and our constituents. I would like them to explain if that discussion — that backward-looking review of previous elections and how it would impact those — was part of the consideration for the assembly at all?

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: Madam Chair, so, a big part of this question has been making inferences about what happens federally in past federal elections, and the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform was really studying options for the Yukon. If this was an exercise taking place federally, some of the conversations would have been different. There are some really unique factors here that influence elements of the voting system, such as the really large difference in population between Whitehorse and the other communities that affects a lot of elements of how you would do districts and different things like that. Also, there are elements such as everybody knows each other; that is really different. Most people know their MLA. We have a very small electoral quotient here, and so I think that there are some unique Yukon factors that would

be different from in the federal context. That would be my first point.

We did have an expert, Dr. Jonathan Rose from Queen's, who created some options papers or scenarios that are included as an appendix to our report. He did look at some past elections and made a lot of assumptions. We know that the assumptions are very simplified and so I would be really cautious about looking at past election data and saying that under a different system, there would have been this different outcome — in part because we don't have good data at the territorial level about what people's second preferences would be.

As I had already noted, systems change voter behaviour. Voters make adjustments based on the systems that they are in, so if you are using data from an election conducted under first past the post, it may very well play out extremely differently than if it were under a different system.

Those are the kind of two elements that I would offer in response to that question. I will see if my colleagues have more to add.

Ms. Sundby: I guess I would just reiterate that we made these choices based on our values. I think that, if we were assessing the federal electoral system, we likely would have come up with a different recommendation, but we really feel that this is the best for the Yukon based on our own unique features.

Mr. Campbell-Clarke: Just to address the question about how we think it will affect individual parties, every system causes parties to have to change, so, of course, we expect that, in a system that requires more broad majority support, every party is going to have to appeal more to everybody. That was definitely one of the things that we found was a benefit to this, because it means that, because people require more broad support, parties will need to appeal to a broader section of the voter base.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the answers from the witnesses very much. I should note that I don't necessarily agree with either Fair Vote Yukon, Fair Vote Canada, or Mr. Grenier's observations. I simply wanted to hear the witnesses responses to those, which have been put to them both by Fair Vote and publicly previously.

I believe my third of the time here has elapsed, so I will conclude by thanking the witnesses for their time, and I appreciate them answering what may have been somewhat difficult questions. I appreciate that very much, and I appreciate the insights they have given today.

Ms. White: It is an absolute pleasure to be able to ask questions here in the Assembly. I actually want to go backward. I want to go back into your report. I want to know how it worked, how it looked, and how it felt. In going through, for example, the preambles of "Who we are" and "Why we Volunteered", can you just give me a bit of an idea so that we get a sense of what that process was? I think that what I definitely felt when I went on the Sunday to receive the recommendation was that there was a very cohesive group of people who looked very different and expressed things in a different way. So, I would like to know how we got there.

Mr. Campbell-Clarke: On the first weekend when I arrived, I was talking to people, and I noticed — I didn't know a lot of people, and I feel that it's weird to enter a room in the Yukon and not know a lot of people — and that was a common thing that was mentioned. So, it definitely was not only, like, from every corner of the Yukon, but it was a very good section of the Yukon that was selected.

Shortly into the meeting, I realized that there were so many different ideas that I had no idea how we were ever going to come to any sort of solution. It actually felt very hopeless, because we hadn't really formed anything yet; we just had a whole whack of ideas that were chaos. As we went through the process, we formed these values. We spent lots of time talking about what was important to us for electoral systems, and through this process, people with very different perspectives and personal values were all able to come to a consensus of what was important to Yukoners as a whole. Putting all of these ideas together made it much easier for us to come to an electoral system that we thought would serve Yukoners.

And it really was — the entire experience — impressive how so many different people could ever agree on anything. Like, I still can't believe that we actually ever came to a recommendation.

I'll pass it on to Dana.

Ms. Sundby: I also felt quite discouraged the first weekend when I realized how diverse we were, and we were from every political spectrum. It really speaks to the great job that Sara and her team did in, you know, laying down the groundwork of the values of how we would deal with each other — how we could be respectful; we don't have to agree, but if we are going to disagree, we are going to do it in a kind and respectful way and look for common ground, and we did that as we worked through the process.

The experts who we listened to were helpful, and we were able to ask any number of questions, and honestly, every question was answered. We really did get into the nitty-gritty of: Well, you know, how do we keep fringe parties from winning the vote in a small riding, or is that something we should even consider, if the voters want them? We asked a number of difficult questions, and they were all answered. We were able to work together and look at it through the lens of the Yukon to see, really, what is best — whether you are in Whitehorse, whether you are in Old Crow or anywhere else in the area.

We learned a tremendous amount, and we were able to have all of the questions answered and just work through it together as a group, and it really was a very positive experience. I know that there are a number of members who are now much more interested in being involved in politics and other civic events, because it felt like we actually were listened to and were able to make a recommendation that could make a difference.

Ms. White: That has spurred on two questions, but I am going to start off with the first one, and I think that it is going to lead into the next one. Maybe if the chair could explain to me the groundwork or how — I am interested in knowing, for example, how she prepared her team to get ready to host assembly members. I am interested in how — I don't want to

say “rules of engagement”, but there must have been a discussion on how people would behave in that space. I am interested to know the groundwork that led up to, for example, that first meeting. Then, I am interested to know how, in that first weekend, those bumpers were put in place.

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: Madam Chair, I started in this position as chair on February 2, and we hosted our first meeting on May 24 and 25. It was a very short time period to lay the groundwork. I had the great privilege of working with MASS LBP, which is a firm out of Toronto, and they specialize in citizens’ assemblies. Working with them was a great opportunity to lay out the process and learn from people who have done this a number of times on the best ways to make it happen.

A number of really important pieces came into laying that groundwork for that first meeting. One was the initial focus on values while people were getting to know each other; that was really important. Part of the rules of engagement, although that sounds very serious, was really about talking about shared values for how we were going to work together as a group. That conversation had some acrimonious elements, I will say. There were some people who said: Absolutely, I disagree with that. But we were able to build a space where people felt like they could all disagree and they would be listened to, and that worked really well.

A big part of that was having Ernie Lennie, who was our Elder-in-Residence, present for all of the meetings. He set up these opening and closing circles where everybody got a chance to speak, and he passed around his talking stick, and I think that also helped. It meant that everybody had a chance to raise concerns, ask questions, and for some folks who were quieter, that was the only time that we heard from them — was in those opening and closing circles. And I think having members eat together, mixing up the groups regularly, ensuring that everybody got a chance to work at different tables — all of those helped to build relationships, and having the members trust each other was a big part of how the process was able to work so successfully as they worked toward higher stakes decisions.

Ms. White: That brings me beautifully into the “Our values” section. The reason why I want to highlight that is because each of you at different points right now have mentioned how the work that the citizens’ assembly did was grounded in values. I think that becomes an important part to understand. So, can you help me to understand how it was decided what your values were — how they were decided on and then — because they are presented in the document, and I think that it’s an important aspect to understand the process that came after.

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: Thank you for the question. Getting to the point of the values that are defined in the document was a lengthy exercise. We started in the first weekend — you can see in the picture in the report, there were cards and I believe there were 36 or quite a large number of cards. The groups at tables sifted through them and were prioritizing, and they had the freedom to decide how they would do that in their small groups. So, each small group came

up with — I believe that we had six most important, and then we aggregated from there. There was quite a lot of consistency across the groups, and it was a large group discussion to narrow down the list. Then the groups went out and created definitions, and then those definitions were refined a number of times. So, it was an iterative process to get to that point, and we kept revisiting them. We printed out sheets so that everybody had these with them while they were having other conversations. We had consensus actually on this being the final list in our second meeting — unanimous consensus on that list of values.

Ms. Sundby: This was actually one of the most difficult parts, because we definitely had some disputes in our small groups as to what values would matter, because some of us had values that we really held near and dear. For example, some members felt that equity was very important, but as you can see, it wasn’t on our list because other members felt that, with respect to an electoral system, maybe it wasn’t a value that we wanted if voting is going to work the way it is intended to.

So, there were some tough discussions, and it really did set the groundwork for the respectful conversations that went forward from there. We did all unanimously agree to these values in the end with respect to electoral systems. It was a difficult but very important exercise, because then, we could bring all our other discussions back to these things that we had agreed upon.

Mr. Campbell-Clarke: Just to add, these values keep coming up in our responses, because once we defined them — like, once we decided which ones were important and that we define them — they were our lens to analyze everything through — it’s what we thought were the most important parts of an electoral system for Yukoners. So, it was an extremely useful tool to analyze systems in the further meetings that we had.

Ms. White: I’m just going to ask the witnesses if they could actually walk us through those values. Not everyone has necessarily read the report, and I can say that very few people have heard members of the assembly speak directly about those values. I think that is an important aspect.

So, can I ask the witnesses to walk us through the values?

Ms. Sundby: So, our first value was legitimacy, meaning that candidates and voters have confidence in the system and the outcome, that they are a part of it, and they participate. The process and the outcomes are independently transparent.

The second value is local representation and accountability. Recognizing that each region may have unique needs, it is important that Members of the Legislative Assembly are responsible to the voters of their riding and represent their interests.

The third value is fairness. The electoral system is inclusive and accessible for voters and candidates, not necessarily the parties as much, with transparency throughout the process.

Mr. Campbell-Clarke: The next value is transparency. All electoral processes and information are clear, written, publicly available, verifiable, and open to public scrutiny.

Participation: An equitable, inclusive, and accessible process ensures Yukoners' values are reflected. Voters and potential candidates know how to, can, and want to be actively engaged and understand how their vote counts.

Simplicity and accessibility: The electoral system includes clear and understandable rules, processes, and communications to ensure access and minimize barriers to participate as a voter and candidate for election.

Ms. White: I thank the members for that. Even just here in this Assembly, hearing you talk about what I fundamentally believe should be values that we should all look at when we talk about democracy, it does give me pause, so I thank you for that. I am just going to keep going actually, working my way through the report, because I think that now that we understand that the values are the lens through which the citizens' assembly had the discussions, I think it's helpful.

In the report, the next section talks about the challenges identified with the current first-past-the-post electoral system. Maybe we can get into that. There are two parts to it. It talks about "Criticisms of First-Past-the-Post" and then it says, "We want a system that:", but if the members could help me understand the process and the conversation that went around first past the post. Did you find, for example, any positives? The criticisms are listed, but were there positives?

Can they walk us through a bit about what that discussion looked like, again, understanding that there were people from every electoral district?

Mr. Campbell-Clarke: Like every electoral system, there are positives and negatives of them. The first-past-the-post system is not without positives. The best one — and actually it aligns with our recommendation — is local representation. It has single members in single ridings and that aligns with our local representation and accountability value, so it scored really highly on that. It is extremely simple: You have one vote, you vote for one person, and the person with the most votes wins. That is another benefit.

When we started looking at other values — if we look at participation, a lot of people don't feel like their vote will matter because they don't support the party that always wins the riding or the two parties that always win a riding or they feel forced to vote for a party that they don't like, so they might not actually show up. That goes right into the legitimacy value. It doesn't feel legitimate — I'm sorry; I'm talking about negatives all of a sudden — sorry — but I think I got through all the positives.

Ms. Sundby: When we looked at the first-past-the-post system, we definitely saw some challenges with it. We have already talked a bit about strategic voting — people aren't voting sincerely; they are voting to make sure that the party they don't want doesn't get in, which isn't what we want in a democracy. We want people to vote for the party that they believe in. It often results in somebody being elected with less than 30 percent of the votes. So, if you turn that around, 70 percent of an electoral district did not vote for that person and yet they are in power. They are actually representing the wishes of a small number of the people in their riding.

When we looked at all the systems through these lenses, it was unanimous among the assembly members that we needed something that was better, that represented the wishes of more of the electoral members. So, that is where we just started looking at the other systems and our values to see what would be better. We still wanted a system that would meet all of our values, but we wanted something that would encourage more collaboration and that would encourage the political parties and the MLAs to actually represent the wishes of more members in their riding.

When we do a ranked vote system, it's much more likely that, if somebody has reached a majority, at least 50 percent of the people had voted for them as their first or second choice. So, more people are going to feel like their vote actually matters and it's far more likely that they are going to vote sincerely for the people that they truly want.

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: I would just like to add that, at the start of this process, there were lots of members of the citizens' assembly who were quite strident defenders of the first-past-the-post system that we currently use. One of the things that the members did really well was to listen to each other and really look at the values and look at the different systems. By the time we got to the point in the third of four meetings — toward the end of it — talking about which options would move forward, there was unanimous agreement that it should not be first past the post. I would just like to highlight that. People didn't start there, but through the process of talking to each other and working through the values, that's where they landed.

Ms. White: I appreciate that very much. I appreciate understanding more.

In the report, obviously we talk about what the recommendation is, which is the ranked vote, but can the witnesses share with me some of the systems that they investigated? Were some surfacing near the top before they got shelved? Were there some that lasted until the last minute? I am just interested to know what other systems the assembly investigated.

Mr. Campbell-Clarke: We analyzed a bunch of systems, but they kind of fall into five families. One family is the one that ranked vote falls into; another is the first-past-the-post family. We discussed both of those already. Ranked vote falls into a majoritarian system. First past the post is a single-member plurality system.

But one of the other systems that we analyzed was a single transferable vote. We looked at this as a system for all of the Yukon, but then we also later on looked at it as a system purely for Whitehorse and with using ranked vote for outside of Whitehorse — for rural districts. We ultimately decided that this was just too complicated a system and it had a bit of a Whitehorse bias to it — there was some feeling about that. We didn't come to a consensus on it, but that was the feeling of many people. Yes, that's a summary of that.

I'll pass on the last two systems over to Dana.

Ms. Sundby: Some of the other systems that we looked at were basically proportional representation systems. One of them is what is called a "list PR" or "list proportional

representation” system where basically each party has a list of candidates and everybody votes for the party that they want to. Then, based on the percentage of votes starting at the top of the list, that is who is elected for each party. We didn’t think that was a great choice for the Yukon, so that was actually the first system that was rejected or eliminated by us simply because there is no regional representation. It’s all just done by the parties, so we really felt that wasn’t a good choice with respect to the interests of Yukoners.

One other system that we looked at, you know, fairly significantly was a mixed member proportional system. That is where there are members in each riding who are elected, but there is also a certain number for each party who are elected so that the number of seats in the House accurately represents the votes. But we could not make that system work in the Yukon without adding at least five more seats to the Legislature, and honestly, when I polled my friends and neighbours, I could find nobody who thought that the Yukon government should be larger. So, that was something that did end up being eliminated. Honestly, I think it’s a great system; it’s just not a great system for the Yukon. If we were a much larger territory with many more ridings, maybe that would be a good choice. But the alternative vote system that we came up with was done through the lens of our values and the unique challenges that are reflected in the Yukon.

Ms. White: As an elected person, I often hear that we don’t need more politicians. I think that’s, like, a universal thought. I don’t disagree. There are a lot of stereotypes.

I’m just going to highlight and ask questions.

So, the five that you just walked us through — and I appreciate that — and your minority report, which is included — I believe it’s the single transferable vote that you talked about initially — is all of Yukon but then for Whitehorse only and then a ranked vote.

The one thing I’ll ask when you walk us through the minority report is that you focus very much on the last line of what it is. I think it’s important that folks hear that, despite the minority report, there was consensus reached on that final recommendation.

Ms. Sundby: So, our citizens’ assembly did actually have quite the split — almost a 50-50, but fortunately, we were an odd number — when it came to choosing between the alternative vote that we recommended and basically the single transferrable vote.

So, I’ll just briefly explain the system to you that we didn’t choose. What we were looking at is taking the Whitehorse ridings and dividing Whitehorse into just two ridings with five or six members in each riding. You would still do a ranked vote in Whitehorse, but only three members would be chosen from each riding. So, the Whitehorse voting would be much more proportional, but we could not do that in the communities because you could only have one member.

What we were looking at was a ranked ballot, like we’ve recommended now, for the communities and basically a single transferrable vote for Whitehorse.

We felt that this was complicated and there is already a bit of a perception that Whitehorse gets different treatment than the

communities and that this may not go over really well with all Yukoners just for that reason — that and the counting is more complicated. So, we ultimately recommended the alternative vote.

But the way that our assembly did this — we had a split vote between — well, not quite split — 17 and 18, with 18 for alternative vote. But we then asked all our members: Which system can you live with? Which system would you be satisfied with if we recommended it?

Almost all of our members were satisfied with the alternative vote and we came to a consensus on that, whereas fewer members were satisfied with the alternative vote — a single transferrable vote combined system.

So, we really did have a full consensus where members agreed that this would be the best choice for the Yukon, and maybe in the future if we continue to grow in our ridings have more members, maybe we do need to look at that other system again, but for now, the way that our politics in our ridings are set up, we felt that this was the best system for the Yukon.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that, and I just want to read that last note, because I think that it is important. So, from the minority report, the last line says — quote: “We therefore lend our support to the consensus recommendation of Ranked Vote.” I think the part that I found really interesting was there was an entire section about the process on how that — so many sticky notes. Thank you. The part — I just want to touch on that, because understanding that it was 17 and 18, that means that it was very close. I did notice on the fourth meeting, the September 7 and 8 one, it did talk about some secret ballot questions that happened. So, if someone can walk me through that process and how that helped the group hone down into that final recommendation.

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: Madam Chair, thank you for the question. So, how we structured the movement toward the final recommendation was through a lot of conversations leading up to those secret ballots. The reason for having three of them and that very near split, which was really interesting, was really to allow for folks to be very sincere in their expression of their first preference. We had a number of people who said: Well, I just want to move with the group; I can live with either of these options.

That was borne out when, after that initial secret ballot, we asked the group: Which options can you live with? I believe that of the 35 who were present at that exact moment, 24 could support the hybrid option, with single transferrable vote in Whitehorse and alternative vote outside of Whitehorse, and 30 of the 35 were open to supporting an alternative vote. Then, when we went to a subsequent secret ballot vote of: Can you accept the voting system recommendation made by the citizens’ assembly? — it was 32 yes and three no.

And the overall support for the process that led to that recommendation was 34 yes and one no. So, overall, the process was really strongly supported by the members. I would like to just be really clear that the middle section of the report, starting with the preamble up until “Other Considerations...”, was written in the members’ words. They did that drafting in

the final weekend. The background section was drafted by me and the staff team.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that. It really does show the support and also, I would say, the safety members felt in having those discussions. I think that I would like to ask about the key decisions by members, because I think it's really important, so if witnesses could walk me through what the key decisions were that they recommended.

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: May I ask a clarifying question? Is it being sought to have us answer the key decisions by members for each of the meetings — because that section is available for each meeting — or just for the fourth meeting?

Ms. White: I think that probably I will go with the fourth meeting. I believe it was probably the final key decision.

Mr. Campbell-Clarke: Key decisions made by members on the final weekend were to recommend: that ranked vote be the new electoral system for the Yukon; that voters may indicate as many or as few preferences as they choose; that a single X may count as indicating a vote as first preference; that candidate names be randomized on the ballots; that candidates must achieve 50 percent plus one vote to be declared the winner in their riding; that the name of the recommended system be “ranked vote” as opposed to “alternative vote”, which is the academic name for it; and that members support the process by which they came to their recommendation.

Ms. Sundby: I would just like to explain a little bit of the reasoning behind some of these recommendations, because it might be helpful for you. One of our values was simplicity, and so, that's why we wanted a ballot that wasn't easily spoiled so that if we have a voter who is maybe not sophisticated or just really only likes one candidate, that they still be given the choice that they could mark with an X or they can just mark their first choice or their first two choices when there are four, but we wanted to keep it as simple as possible for voters.

We wanted the ballots to be randomized to stop people from being elected simply because some voters are going: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. So, we wanted it to be a fair outcome that way, and in keeping with our values, we wanted a majority system where more voters are voting for the person who is actually winning. So, that's why we wanted a majority system.

Ms. White: I thank the witnesses for that.

I'm going to go back in the report to page 27, where we have the final recommendation, where it says that you recommend the ranked vote, but I do think that there is an important aspect there, to the right side of the page, where it says, “Additional Recommendations”.

In the process, I know that the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes and I and the Member for Lake Laberge, during the Special Committee on Electoral Reform — it was an intense amount of learning, and I do appreciate the simplicity with which the witnesses have explained the different systems, but I do believe the additional recommendations are critical, and they're key, and maybe if they can walk us through those additional recommendations and why they are making the recommendations.

Ms. Sundby: So, the additional recommendations are that the order of candidate names on ballots be randomized. I

just explained that — so that the 1, 2, 3, 4 voters don't elect the person whose name starts with an A. Our second recommendation is that Elections Yukon undertake an extensive education program to help fully inform all potential voters about the choice they are making in a public vote and consider consulting members of the citizens' assembly on the education program.

All of our assembly members are very invested in this process. We have learned an awful lot and spent four of our summer weekends doing this. We would like to make sure that the public makes an educated choice. So, we think it's really important. It's very hard to vote for a change that you don't understand. So, we really would like to see an extensive effort put into educating the public and are willing to volunteer our time to help with that.

The third recommendation is that the threshold to win a public vote on our recommendations be the same as our proposed ranked vote system — 50 percent plus one vote. We felt it would help explain our voting system, and also, consistency between the two systems makes sense.

We recommended the question that should be on the ballot: Do you support the adoption of a ranked vote system replacing the current system — yes or no? We tried to keep that question as simple as possible rather than using the term “first past the post”, because all of the voters know what system we use, but not everybody knows what it's called.

Ms. White: I thank the witness for that. Just my final question before I pass the floor over is: Based on your experience and the experience of your colleagues in the citizens' assembly, do you believe that a citizens' assembly could be beneficial for the Yukon going forward?

Ms. Sundby: I honestly found the citizens' assembly to be a great experience, and I felt like it was a very worthwhile exercise. We had a huge variety of skill levels, of experience levels, age, geography — and when we brought everybody in the room and we listened to all of the experts on this topic, we very quickly became very educated on this topic. We had extra weekend Zoom sessions with other experts that a lot of us attended. I think that, if you are going to address other big issues, this is a great way to find out what the people actually think is best for their own peers. I would strongly recommend this process — besides it providing the added benefit of making assembly members much more interested in civic matters and being willing to be involved.

Mr. Campbell-Clarke: When we first showed up, I really didn't know what to expect. I didn't know if we would get anywhere. I didn't know how we were going to ever come to a consensus or answer on anything — I have said that multiple times — but it was just amazing how we eventually did.

I think that the citizens' assembly process is extremely impressive in the fact that we were — it's contentious enough to decide who to vote for, but it's a whole other level to decide how you are allowed to vote for someone for your representatives. And the fact that, in really only four weekends, we were able to come together for a consensus on such a

complicated and difficult topic really speaks to the value of the process of the citizens' assembly.

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: I just have one very brief point to add. I think that part of where the process of a citizens' assembly has a lot of value is on questions that are contentious but are not necessarily super technical. You have engineers to design bridges. It makes sense to give questions where really you want to get the wisdom of the crowd; you want a broad cross-section of Yukoners involved to determine something that is deeply within the public interest. Those are the types of questions where a citizens' assembly has a lot of value.

I would like to emphasize, as Mr. Campbell-Clarke and Ms. Sundby already have, that people were really engaged. We did not have attrition throughout this process. People kept coming to these meetings and doing reading and research on their own time in between meetings. The public has a lot to offer if we trust them and give them meaningful work to do. They can be a resource, not necessarily a risk. I think that the incredible power of this tool for public engagement is in viewing the public as a resource.

Ms. White: I was going to try to cut myself — just one follow-up. It was only — I think that the one thing that really struck me on the Sunday when the assembly presented is that there were suggestions, for example, that issues around health care or housing could be tackled. There has been a lot of discussion obviously around that and just based on your own experiences in the assembly, but do the witnesses believe that other topics of importance to the Yukon could be investigated or looked at or solutions proposed by future citizens' assemblies?

Ms. Sundby: I definitely think that the citizens' assembly is a great resource for governments to use to get the wisdom of everyone and honestly even to come up with creative solutions that maybe haven't been thought of yet. I would definitely encourage use of the assembly.

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: If I could offer some context from elsewhere in the world where these have been used. So, we know that there were two other assemblies on the same topic in British Columbia in 2004, which kicked off the global deliberative wave of citizens' assemblies, and in Ontario in 2006-07, but these have been used in Ireland on complex and fraught topics like reproductive rights. France has had a national climate assembly and also one on medically assisted dying. They have been integrated so that there are Members of Parliament along with citizens in these joint citizens' assemblies in Belgium.

These are used in really interesting ways around the world on a variety of topics. I think what we were able to illustrate here is that, although they're resource-intensive, they may not be as expensive as we think. The return on investment — the ROI — for people who participate in other research has been shown to be really high. They are much more willing to run for public office. They are much better public speakers. I was able to see that throughout this process. They get very used to speaking in public and get really good at it, which is a huge benefit. A lot of people talk about that being their biggest fear. People volunteer more, they read the news more, and they're

more engaged after they have participated in a process like this, so I would encourage folks here to consider using a citizens' assembly to tackle a really difficult policy problem in the future.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, I would just like to say thank you to begin with. I really enjoyed when I had the opportunity to provide feedback in the starting phase about what it's like to be an MLA to the group. I also really enjoyed when they presented information to us and opened it up to all the parties to come and hear. I have really been totally fascinated with the questions from colleagues today and the answers given. I just appreciate everybody's time. I am sure that there are lots of people in the background who would have more to add too.

I am up third, so some of the questions that I would ask right away have already been asked, so I get to build on some of the questions that have been put to the members already. But there was a comment about trust that was given just a couple of answers back. I want to just start talking about that sense of trust within the group and how it changed over time from when you started to where you got to. Can I just ask that to begin with?

Ms. Sundby: I can certainly say that, at the beginning of the process, I didn't have much trust at all.

It quickly became apparent that there were many people in the room who had very different political viewpoints than I did — and viewpoints on a lot of different things. I was quite concerned that those people who had louder voices were the ones who were going to make the decision. As we moved through the process and Sara and her team laid down the ground rules and we worked through those very difficult values questions, we got to practise using those values and being kind and respectful while still disagreeing with each other. As we progressed and went through basically more and more difficult questions, using those ground rules it became a very safe place. So, even if you perhaps said it wrong — a few different times, I heard somebody blurt out something and it really did come across as an attack on that person, but we would instead attack the subject rather than the person.

So, we as members really grew to trust each other. Everybody felt that every person in the room was completely invested in this process and really did want the best for Yukoners regardless of our own interest.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thank you so much for that response. Earlier, our colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition had posed questions about the one group, Fair Vote Yukon, but did you get a sense of other input from Yukoners and what they kind of thought about the process? In particular, can you give me a sense of whether you felt that they trusted what you had done either in terms of process or in terms of outcome? Was there a sense that you got from the broader Yukon public?

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: We ran a submissions process where we accepted public submissions from May 25 until August 12. I can report that we received 44 submissions from 41 unique contributors, and these submissions ranged widely in form, content, and tone.

There were 34 that were quite short text submissions, five were letters, and five were really quite fulsome reports. Of these, some of them were advocating for the status quo. About 10 of the ones that supported change were advocating for the status quo and 20 were advocating for change. A lot of these came from members of Fair Vote Yukon and were in support of a proportional representation system, but other systems were mentioned as well. One submission was advocating quite strongly for alternative vote. There were others mentioning mixed member proportional, single transferrable vote, systems that use a ranking plus a party vote, and regional representation plus proportionality. There was a broad range.

Some of them weren't even advocating for a position or anything but were questions more broadly about democratic engagement of the public. There was one submission in particular that expressed appreciation to the citizens' assembly for looking at this question.

I can say that, of the values that seemed to be reflected in those submissions, they were quite consistent with the values identified with the citizens' assembly in terms of simplicity, creative solutions, voter participation, fairness, more voter choice, and local representation, but there was really a broad range expressed in those submissions.

Mr. Campbell-Clarke: Outside of the process, each member was encouraged to discuss what we were doing with close friends and family and to run things by to get the feeling of what wider Yukoners were feeling. It wasn't just these 38 people who were chosen, but it was also to get a gauge of how other people felt. I spent a lot of time — not just close friends and family, but I like playing golf and you get paired with all sorts of random people doing that, and lots of people had all sorts of different ideas. Some people didn't understand what we were doing, and others were really open to the idea of change or open to the idea of whatever we came to because they trusted the assembly itself.

There was a wide variety of ideas, but I would say generally that it was positive feedback. People were interested in what I was talking about. I generally had the feeling that they either trusted me or trusted the assembly in what we were doing.

Ms. Sundby: I also had a positive experience. I think that a lot of people expressed gratitude that we were spending time looking at this because there is a lot of disillusionment with our current system. They were really happy that we were putting the time in and looking at different options to see if there may be something that would serve people better.

After the assembly was done and our recommendation was out, we were also contacted by the media. I found that they were overall quite positive about the citizens' assembly and our recommendations. They just had some good questions for us.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: One of the things that you talked about on your recommendations page on page 27 — and the Leader of the Third Party has already asked a couple of questions there. Did you view it as your responsibility to give this recommendation to the Legislative Assembly? You have listed here what a referendum question should be, so that's great, but I just want to check that your citizens' assembly felt

that it was important that this choice come to Yukoners — that there be that choice and that it be Yukoners who decide what system we should have.

Ms. Sundby: There was a lot of discussion in the citizens' assembly where I think that everybody really hoped that the Legislature would take it to Yukoners and have them vote on this, because we really believe in what we're recommending and we think it is best for Yukoners, but ultimately, they are the ones that have to decide. We're certainly hopeful and optimistic that this will be the choice made.

Mr. Campbell-Clarke: Just to add to that, I think that the most important part of this whole process was that you can't educate every single Yukoner with what each member of the citizens' assembly was able to do. We can't put 40,000 people in a room and debate all these things, so we were a good representation of Yukoners and we were able to come up with what we think is a really good recommendation, but we definitely think that the confirmation of Yukoners voting on it and deciding as a whole on how we're going to move forward is extremely important.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I am going to come back to that education point in a second. You already mentioned it a little bit in previous answers, but I will just ask one more question on a referendum.

When the Special Committee on Electoral Reform met, one of our recommendations was that not only would there be a referendum for Yukoners to decide what our voting system should be but there also be a subsequent referendum after that system had been in place for — I don't know — a couple of cycles or something so that Yukoners could weigh in about whether they think the new system was working well. Did the citizens' assembly consider that, and if so, what was your sense? I didn't catch that in your report.

Ms. Sundby: We did discuss that in the citizens' assembly, but we had no formal recommendation for that; it was a little bit outside of our mandate. But we do know that it was done in New Zealand successfully. I think it would be a good idea.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Before I get to the education question — and I'm totally conscious of the time. I just know that I'm going to run out of time and have more questions than we will ever get to, so I will apologize right up front.

You made that choice — again, on page 27 — to say that you recommended that it be this simple question. I think that the witnesses already said today: You shouldn't put this first past the post in that question because that just complicates things. In BC, we have seen two ways that they did a referendum. One was: Do you like system A or system B or the existing system or system B? And they're saying which one they like. Then once, they tried: Should we go to this new system — yes or no? Could the witnesses just provide some thoughts around those two possibilities — if they had been considered — for how a question should be posed and what led you to the conclusion that you gave to us in your recommendations?

Ms. Sundby: In keeping with our values of simplicity, we recommended basically just a yes-or-no question rather than: Would you like a ranked vote versus a first-past-the-post system?

Yukoners are smart people and they know exactly how our system works, but not everybody can name it, so we wanted to keep it simple. If we have a good education campaign, they are going to understand what ranked vote is and they will know what they are voting for. We really felt that was easier, and it makes it more accessible for those who maybe have some issues with reading or understanding what they are reading.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: It just brings me back to that whole notion of an education campaign. You have talked about it today; you have talked about it in your report — about the importance of it.

I guess I have seen or Canadians have seen sometimes that there is an education campaign, but there can also be campaigns for and against. Can you talk a little bit about what you thought should be there?

I mean, you can't stop people from advocating out there, but from an informal perspective, whether you thought there should be something in place around the pro and the con — or the yes/no — of the referendum.

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: With respect to this question, that was not something that was really within the scope of the citizens' assembly to consider given the timeframe that we were working with, but Elections Yukon I would expect would be looking at whether or not to have funded yes/no campaigns, as was done in BC, or have other regulations pertaining to those.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Can I just move back to the education side of this? You have noted that's the purview of Elections Yukon, but I'm just wondering whether there is anything you can mention. For example, the witnesses just talked about how the level of education we could do would be different for the citizens' assembly, because they are meeting so often and doing so much — but if they had thoughts — and I would love to hear what their conversation was around how to align with the values around the education system and if there was anything that they could impart to us today as we think about how that might happen. It could even be the length of time of education campaign ahead of things, or it could be how we can help to inform Yukoners so that they are best posed and well-equipped to respond to a referendum.

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: One of the things we did in our final weekend meeting was that all of the members spoke about the importance of an education program for Yukoners related to the public vote, whatever mechanisms through which it may take place. I believe that around 11 of them, so over a quarter of the assembly, offered to give advice or assist Elections Yukon. I have already passed on a list, with their permission, of contact information to Elections Yukon for them to assist in any way with that campaign.

I think that some of the things that are highlighted in our report are: plain language; using values; keeping it simple; and having visual explanations. There's a lot of information in the report, and as I mentioned, the middle section was really written

in the members' own words. They became experts in this, so I hope that Elections Yukon will draw on their expertise as folks who, after a two-day crash course in electoral systems 101 with Dr. Rose, really were able to do the work and talk about this stuff in a very intelligent way. I hope that Elections Yukon will draw on them to assist with education of the public.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I have one kind of technical question; I am just wanting to make sure of something. I have heard the witnesses today, and sometimes they have used "alternative vote". Often, they have used "ranked vote". It feels somewhat interchangeable, and I see the recommendation is specifically to call it "ranked vote", but then I still see "alternative vote" here and there. I just want to make sure that there isn't some difference in their perspective. If there is a difference, I would love to hear what that is. If there isn't a difference, why did they land with "ranked" versus "alternative" vote? I just want to make sure that I understand clearly where they are coming from.

Mr. Campbell-Clarke: Generally, alternative vote and ranked vote are the same system, but ranked vote is what we have called "alternative vote". It does have a couple of things that we added, one of which is that X is valid for one, so you don't have to rank all of your choices. That is one of the modifications you can make. Alternative vote is the system and ranked vote is our application of that system.

Because it is not as complicated as some other systems, they generally are the same — they are almost entirely the same in every respect except for a couple of options that I have mentioned basically.

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: I would just like to clarify that — going back to that value of simplicity — the members, in advancing a name to accompany their preferred system, we called it "alternative vote" throughout the process and the education campaign, as that is the name that is typically used in the academic literature. They wanted a name that would evoke what it is and be really clear for Yukoners. We had a lot of discussions about name and what to call it and went back and forth a couple of times. The intention there was just to be extremely clear at first glance so that folks would understand — fitting with that value of simplicity and accessibility. "Alternative" implies sort of: Alternative to what? That was part of where that came from. I just wanted to clarify that piece.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will come back to the values in a minute. Oh my gosh, this always happens to me — my mind moves on to the next question. I am now going to have to move on to the next question, because I just lost that one around ranked vote. Let me start with that notion — oh, there it is. In our current system — and it is not really about the fact that it is first past the post, but we contemplate a tie, and I guess that could happen as well in a ranked vote system. You could get down to two candidates, and you could end up in a tie. You could also, in a ranked vote system, have a tie for who is — maybe you have four candidates, and maybe two are tied at the end. Did you discuss how to resolve those types of questions? I didn't catch it — I am sorry if I missed it in this report, but I would love to know whether that was discussed and shared with

Elections Yukon, because those sorts of details become incredibly important some days.

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: That is really an implementation question for Elections Yukon that would have to be sorted out should this come to pass in legislation, and as you noted, we have a system for resolving ties now. I would expect that there would be a similar way of resolving ties based on different counts, and there are electoral systems experts who have explored the finer details of these systems' design decisions who could be drawn upon by Elections Yukon at that time.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Great, thank you. I appreciate that it comes back to the values again. So, let's turn to the values and let me ask a few more probing questions. I appreciated the general questions that were out there.

Can you walk me through a bit — one of the tensions that I felt was around that local representation. Can you sort of talk me through I guess the system that you have chosen and why in a little bit more depth around that tension of "local" and maybe "simple" and how you reached your conclusions there? I'm also interested to hear your perspectives on the systems that you didn't choose and why they didn't work or not. At least from what I've heard from the witnesses today, Madam Chair, it doesn't seem like anything is exactly black and white; there is lots of grey in there. So, I would be happy to hear kind of that trade-off that was felt.

Ms. Sundby: Thank you for your question. When we looked at each of the systems through the lens of our local representation, value, and simplicity, you are right: There is tension between the systems. Our first-past-the-post system is both simple and has local representation, but it often results in the insincere voting and someone being elected who doesn't have the majority of the votes.

So, when we looked at, for example, our second recommendation — or not our second recommendation but our second choice — where Whitehorse has a large-member district with ranked ballots, you know, that isn't as simple; it's more proportional certainly, but it also doesn't have local representation. And we had a lot of discussion about that, because in a different place — for example, in Toronto — I'm quite sure that no one would recognize their MLA in a grocery store; however, we have heard from you when you spoke to us in the assembly that people do stop you and talk to you in the grocery store because they recognize you. We had quite a few members say: If my MLA didn't come knock on my door and talk to me, I wouldn't vote for them; I would vote for whoever did.

So, it's very usual in the Yukon that people know their MLA or at least recognize them and there's that personal connection. So, that local representation is something that's very important to Yukoners — probably a lot more than in other areas where there is a much higher population density and you could walk right past your constituents and they wouldn't know who you are.

So, when we looked at these systems, when we looked at a ranked vote, we felt that this met our values as well in a better way than the first-past-the-post system, because it still had local

representation with one member per riding. It is still fairly simple. It is more complicated than first past the post, but you are still ranking the ballots, and it's a simple 50-plus-one majority. So, that's 50 percent of the vote plus one more vote — not one percent.

So, our other choices, for example, the big districts in Whitehorse and the simple ranked vote in the communities, didn't meet our values as much, because it had less local representation and the counting was not quite so simple for the Whitehorse districts.

If we looked at other proportional systems, we lost a lot of the local representation and that was one of the big drawbacks to those systems, along with the larger government option.

So, one thing that we did discuss quite a bit was actually the electoral boundaries commission, because we can recommend a system, but if the electoral boundaries commission takes all the communities and puts them in one riding, then that changes everything. So, that was something that we would really encourage the Legislature to review as well, because our assembly felt that each community has its own interests and needs to have its own representation. That was very important to all the members on the assembly.

The thing with electoral systems is that there is no perfect system. Trust me; we tried. And really, we did take what's an alternative vote system and modified it the best we could to make it work for the Yukon in the best possible way, but there is no system that is absolutely perfect, that's proportional, that has local representation, that is still simple, that's transparent, and that's fair. So, we really looked at our values and came up with the best recommendation that we could for the Yukon.

Chair: I would just like to remind all members and witnesses to direct their remarks through the Chair.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for your presentation today. I just had a sort of combo question. First of all, thank you so much for all your work. I have a combo question with respect to the ranked vote.

I had some discussions with some of the members at the launch, but perhaps, just for the record, the question I had was: Why did you come up with a ranked vote system that is not mandatory? On page 27 of the report, it says, "We recommend Ranked Vote as a system of preferential voting where each voter ranks some or all of the candidates...", but that is not entirely true, because you can actually just have one vote; it's not "some". I am just wondering about that. I am sure that the assembly looked at various options. I know that Australia generally has mandatory ranking. Ultimately, the citizens' assembly chose that you could still just have one vote, so that's the one question.

The second is that, in the first go-around with respect to votes, in this model, it looks like you would just be counting the first preferences and you wouldn't be going — I guess this is a question — you wouldn't be going to the second or third votes, because you would be trying to establish whether one candidate actually had attained the hurdle of 50 plus one in the first go-around without even having to go to any of the rankings. I think that is how it would operate.

This might just be an operational question for Elections Yukon or the people who would be administering the election: Would you be noting the second, third, or fourth choices in the first go-around, or would you then just have to go back to the ballots and determine what the second, third, and fourth choices were? Would you just hold those in abeyance and have the data ready to be plugged in?

It's an operational question. I would think that it would make sense to have that data ready to go, because it would almost automatically flow down to the second, third, and fourth choices. That may very well be an operational question that hasn't been dealt with.

Was there another question? That was largely it, but you have ultimately chosen a ranking system that doesn't — at first instance — doesn't demand or doesn't compel a voter to rank. You looked at other systems and you came up with this choice. Thank you once again for your work on this citizens' assembly.

Mr. Campbell-Clarke: In terms of the optional ranking, we found this extremely important to make it optional, and because the ballot will look extremely similar to our current ballot, some people may actually go to the ballot box without even knowing that the system had changed. If they go and they put an X in and it's required and they don't read the top that says: You have to rank everybody — then they could end up with a spoiled ballot. That is not acceptable, and we thought that it was more important for people to go to exercise their right to vote than it was to force them to rank. That was an extremely important value that we had for determining optional ranking.

In terms of the — I'll pass it off to Sara.

Ms. McPhee-Knowles: Another element that I think is reflected in the assembly's desire to have non-mandatory voting was that it permits people to have the most amount of voter choice. You can rank everyone, but you don't have to. The City of Whitehorse doesn't require you — in their municipal election, you can pick up to six candidates, and I believe that the average is about 4.7, so not everybody does pick six, and this allows for a similar level of voter choice.

Going back to the earlier question about ties, you are also less likely mathematically to have a tie if you don't require mandatory voting for all ballots, so that was another consideration. We're more likely to have ties here because we have very small electoral districts.

If I could go to the second part of your question on noting second, third, and fourth choices, I expect that would fall to Elections Yukon, but my understanding is that Australia does report back on different numbers of counts as part of transparency.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thank you, Madam Chair, again for those answers. Just sticking with those values for a moment, one of the things that one of the witnesses talked about earlier was — well, the term was “strategic voting”, but I think it was specifically around if there was a candidate or a party or a platform or a leader or something that you didn't want to vote for, you would vote differently in the current system. I'm just wondering if they can frame that in the values for me — like, why that was a concern — and also, to just turn right around,

on the proposed ranked voting system, how those values would be improved over the existing system.

Ms. Sundby: In looking at our values, when we're talking about “strategic” or what is also called “insincere voting” where you are voting to make sure that someone isn't elected, that really doesn't support our value of legitimacy. If you have a legitimate vote, you really should be voting for the person who you believe would be the best leader, not trying to make sure that someone you think is the worst leader isn't getting elected. So, our ranked vote system is instead a way to encourage people to vote sincerely so that those who they believe would be the best leader is the first choice on their ballot — where they don't have to worry as much about who is being elected, because they can put as their second choice the person who they think would be the second best leader.

So, we really thought that this system was an advantage over first past the post with respect to legitimacy and also participation; right? A lot of people just don't vote because they are frustrated with the options; they don't think that their vote matters. Whereas in a majority system like this, their vote is going to matter. Their first choice might not get elected, but their second choice could make the difference between who wins the seat and who doesn't.

At the end of the day, when you're elected in your riding, you know that you have 50 percent of the votes. It might not be 50 percent of the first votes, but you have a fair number of the second votes, so there are a lot of people who feel like they have played a role in electing you.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I know that we are running out of time. Some other referenda that have been out there have required — in this referendum, one of your recommendations is that it receive 50 percent plus one vote, so a yes or no. Sometimes these questions also have imposed that you have to get so many ridings to vote for it or you have to get a certain threshold. In the Yukon in the past several elections, our voter turnout is 70 to 75 percent — north of that. We had slightly lower in the middle of COVID, which may have been the reason or maybe not, but is it your sense that if a referendum was held during a general election and the voter turnout was typical for the Yukon in that range of 70, 75, or 80 percent, would your sense be that it would be a fair way to hear from Yukoners about what system they believe is best?

Ms. Sundby: When we came up with the recommendation that the vote should be accepted at 50 percent of the vote plus one, we really didn't contemplate the turnout because we know that the Yukon has quite high electoral interest and turnout — more than most areas — but we felt that it needed to stay with our value of simplicity and we felt that 50 percent plus one is simple to understand. It's very easy to explain the system at 50 percent plus one and also to explain whether or not it would be accepted at that same level.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I know we're out of time, and I just think, on behalf of all the members of the Assembly, we would just like to acknowledge the witnesses and thank them for their frank responses to all of our questions. I will just say that if they or their colleagues from the assembly come across other thoughts that have been —

Chair: Order.

The time is now 5:30. I shall now rise and report.

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

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.

Also, pursuant to Committee of the Whole Motion No. 16 adopted earlier today, witnesses appeared before Committee of the Whole to answer questions regarding the final report of the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

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.

The time being after 5:30 p.m., this House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. Tuesday.

The House adjourned at 5:32 p.m.

**The following sessional papers were tabled
November 7, 2024:**

35-1-180

Yukon Judicial Council Annual Report 2023 (McPhee)

35-1-181

Yukon Law Foundation Annual Report November 1, 2022 to October 31, 2023 (McPhee)