



# Yukon Legislative Assembly

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35<sup>th</sup> Legislature

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## HANSARD

Tuesday, November 12, 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
<b>Hon. Ranj Pillai</b>	Porter Creek South	Premier Minister of the Executive Council Office; Economic Development; Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation
<b>Hon. Jeanie McLean</b>	Mountainview	Deputy Premier Minister of Education; Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate
<b>Hon. Nils Clarke</b>	Riverdale North	Minister of Environment; Highways and Public Works
<b>Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee</b>	Riverdale South	Minister of Health and Social Services; Justice
<b>Hon. Richard Mostyn</b>	Whitehorse West	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board
<b>Hon. John Streicker</b>	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
<b>Hon. Sandy Silver</b>	Klondike	Minister of Finance; Public Service Commission; Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission

### OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

#### Yukon Party

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

### THIRD PARTY

#### New Democratic Party

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

### LEGISLATIVE STAFF

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

**Yukon Legislative Assembly**  
**Whitehorse, Yukon**  
**Tuesday, November 12, 2024 — 1:00 p.m.**

**Speaker:** I will now call the House to order.  
 At this time, we will proceed with prayers.

*Prayers*

**Withdrawal of motions**

**Speaker:** Prior to proceeding with the Daily Routine, the Chair wishes to inform the House of a change made to the Order Paper. Motion No. 1109, which the member from Porter Creek Centre gave notice of on November 7, has not been placed on the Notice Paper, as the motion is not in order.

**DAILY ROUTINE**

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

**INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS**

**Speaker:** Introduction of visitors.  
*Visitors introduced*

**Speaker:** Are there any tributes?

**TRIBUTES**

**In recognition of the Yukon Film Society and Yukon Theatre**

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to two significant anniversaries in our local film sector.

First, I would like to recognize the Yukon Film Society on 40 years of fostering cinema and media development across the territory. When the society first established roots in 1984, the movie industry was a different place, but as the needs of Yukoners changed, this group of volunteers kept pace. The Film Society — whether the transformation from 35 millimetre to digital productions to streaming platforms — flourished in the process, evolving into the professionally run organization that it is today.

Notably, the society has raised the Yukon's status on international screens by producing the Available Light Film Festival, Canada's largest feature film festival north of 60. This festival is for many not only one worth travelling to the Yukon for but also a much-anticipated way to escape the Yukon, making the most of our endless winter nights.

Today the Film Society serves as a champion and critical support network for creative professionals across the north. In fact, it is because of the society's hard work and dedication that we also acknowledge another major anniversary today: 70 years of the Yukon Theatre's iconic presence in downtown Whitehorse. The theatre is a venerable part of Whitehorse history. Since 1954, its neon sign has beckoned moviegoers to escape into new worlds, experience different cultures, and meet new people.

When the theatre closed during the pandemic, the Yukon Film Society rallied support to revitalize the historic Yukon

Theatre and ensure that Yukoners would continue to have access to the great cinema, both new and old. Thanks to their hard work, the theatre reopened to continue serving as a social hub and venue for special events.

I extend my gratitude to the Yukon Film Society and its many volunteers over the decades for their passion and energy. Your work honours our past while simultaneously supporting the success of future generations of media artists. If you haven't checked out the old and improved Yukon Theatre, I encourage you to do so. There is a great selection of films lined up that are guaranteed to delight, challenge, and transport.

Again, congratulations on these major milestones and thank you again for the work that you have done and continue to do on behalf of Yukoners.

*Applause*

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize the 70 Years of Yukon Cinema event, which is being held until November 25. The host, the Yukon Film Society, is celebrating its own milestone this year: their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The Yukon Theatre opened its doors on December 3, 1954, so it will be officially 70 years old in a few weeks. For those of us who have a long history in the Yukon, we will have memories of the theatre in its earlier days. Whenever coming to the city for a school event, we would run from one theatre to another — the Yukon and Capital theatres. This month, there will be screenings of some of the biggest hits over the years that we never thought we would see in theatres again.

The December 3, 1954 opening movie *The Glenn Miller Story*, starring Jimmy Stewart and June Allyson, will be shown, along with movies like *Boogie Nights*, *Goodfellas*, *Pretty in Pink*, and many more exciting films showcasing 70 years of developing stories and ideas, movies from all the decades, from box office hits to cult classics to local Yukon films.

A feature master class workshop, "Anatomy of a Scene", will be held on November 24 with renowned Canadian director Atom Egoyan. He will focus on the role of director, setting up shots, and all things movie — such a great round out to an amazing two weeks.

The Yukon Film Society has been a huge part of the arts and culture scene in the Yukon since 1984. The Available Light Film Festival has become a much-anticipated event showcasing northern, Indigenous, and international films for all to enjoy.

The move to save the Yukon Theatre from closing permanently during the pandemic was a decision that earned thanks and recognition of the entire community to keep an incredible piece of Yukon history, along with the iconic Yukon Theatre sign, for future generations. So, thank you to the Yukon Film Society for their ongoing work in support of the arts, and to all board members and staff of the society, congratulations on being part of a long history of Yukon Cinema.

Now, everyone in here, I'm sure, has a favourite movie quote. One of mine is from *Forrest Gump*: "My mama always said life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get." Happy screening.

*Applause*

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to two incredible anniversaries for film in the Yukon: the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Yukon Cinema and the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Yukon Film Society.

I have a friend who is a photographer, and at the time of her very first trip to the Yukon, she was really into taking pictures of buildings. As she explored Whitehorse, she kept her eyes peeled for interesting buildings. When she saw the Yukon Cinema, she immediately knew that she found what she was looking for. The photo she took is one of my favourites that she has ever taken, and while I don't want to downplay her photography skills, how could it not be? The Yukon Cinema is nothing short of epic.

Every time I walk down Wood Street seeing the once-again glowing neon sign, it reminds me of another era, a time before Netflix and YouTube and TikTok, a time even before VHS when the only way to experience the magic of film was to leave your home, stand in line, buy a ticket, and join a room full of people sharing the exact same experience, a time when each film was something to be treasured because the next one was at least a week away. Even now in a time of infinite choices when it comes to media, nothing has exactly replaced the movie theatre experience, and I couldn't tell you if it's the movie theatre popcorn or the sound of an entire crowd gasping at the exciting bits, but there is nothing else quite like it and I feel incredibly lucky that there is an experience that we can still have here in the Yukon.

That brings me to the Yukon Film Society. So, Yukoners will remember how a few short years ago, both movie theatres closed, leaving the Yukon without a single choice. But in the words of many a movie trailer, "Out of the darkness, a hero emerges" — and for the Yukon, that hero was the Yukon Film Society. They took a huge leap — a huge risk — when they took over the cinema. It's a pretty big challenge for a non-profit to operate a building that is extremely vintage both in its excellent design and perhaps also in more practical ways.

They have truly risen to that challenge. Whether it is hosting a film festival, sharing the latest blockbuster, hosting live music, or presenting lesser known gems, the Yukon Cinema is bursting with life and that is all thanks to the Yukon Film Society.

I want to point out a really important aspect of a cinema, and that is to give young people a place to go. There are not many public spaces in which youth can enjoy themselves independently, and the Yukon Cinema is one of them. So, thank you to the Yukon Film Society for filling that gap.

I haven't even touched on all the other services from the Yukon Film Society — from workshops and equipment rentals that make film-making accessible to everyone to producing the Available Light Film Festival, a spectacular event on a scale that many might not believe was possible in a place of this size. All of that happens because of the hard work of an incredible group of people. From staff to board members to volunteers, they give it their all, and the Yukon is a much richer and more vibrant place because of it.

I have to give a special recognition to their long-time artistic director, Andrew Connors, who has been a driving force behind the Yukon film scene for many years.

On behalf of the Yukon NDP, I want to wish Yukon Cinema and the Yukon Film Society a huge congratulations on their epic anniversaries.

*Applause*

### **In recognition of Nurse Practitioner Week**

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to nurse practitioners as we mark national Nurse Practitioner Week.

Nurse practitioners hold a unique and essential role in our Yukon health care system and they provide comprehensive primary care in a variety of settings. They practise independently to assess and treat illnesses, prescribe medications, and collaborate with other health care professionals to ensure coordinated, person-centered care. They specialize in family, adult, or pediatric care, meaning that Yukoners receive tailored support to meet their diverse health needs.

This past year has seen notable advancements that recognize both the importance and the growth of this vital profession. Today, 16 nurse practitioners work within the Yukon government, contributing their skills to clinics and communities across the territory.

In addition to the nurse practitioners working in Community Nursing, over the past year, we have welcomed two nurse practitioners to the Whitehorse Walk-In Clinic, two at the Constellation Health Centre for a total of five there, and an additional nurse practitioner at the Referred Care Clinic for a total of four there.

Nurse practitioners also provide dedicated services in private clinics. I would like to acknowledge Shawn O'Donovan Shipman and Michelle McCulloch, who run the Yukon Sexual Health Clinic and the Yukon Women's MidLife Health Clinic. Their dedication and leadership in these specialized areas have made a significant impact on the health and well-being of countless Yukoners. Shawn and Michelle's commitment to providing expert compassionate care ensures that patients receive the support that they need during critical stages of life. Their clinics also play a crucial role in supporting the professional development of nurse practitioners through mentorship and hands-on training, enriching our community's group of skilled health care professionals.

We must also take a moment to recognize Lee Halliday, a long-serving Yukon government employee and a leader in the nurse practitioner profession. Lee's contributions have helped to shape the role of nurse practitioners in our territory and supported the development of a strong health care workforce.

Through regulatory changes made to begin this month, nurse practitioners now have greater flexibility and fewer restrictions on the types of medications that they can prescribe. This development enhances the ability of nurse practitioners to meet patient needs effectively and demonstrates the collaborative effort to expand their scope of practice. Recruitment and retention of skilled health care providers,

including nurse practitioners, is a priority under the *Health Human Resources Strategy*. The nine-percent salary increase for nurse practitioners, effective January 1, 2024, has strengthened our ability to attract and retain these valued professionals.

Our Yukon health system transformation relies on the continued expansion of our nurse practitioner workforce. Their tireless work and professionalism truly make a difference. This national Nurse Practitioner Week, I encourage everyone to acknowledge and thank these incredible individuals for their contributions to the health of us all.

*Applause*

**Ms. Clarke:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to Nurse Practitioner Week, celebrated November 10 to 16. I am honoured to reflect today on the unique role that nurse practitioners, or NPs, play in our health care system. This week is for celebration of the dedication and compassion of nurse practitioners, who play a significant role in health care across Canada in a variety of health care settings such as hospitals, clinics, long-term care facilities, and community health centres. They are part of the front line of health care delivery, bringing skilled and patient-centred care to communities. Nurse practitioners are an important part of the solution to health care shortages and increasing complexity of care.

NPs are nurses with additional education and nursing experience allowing them to perform duties beyond the scope of practice of a registered nurse. They work collaboratively alongside other health care professionals to deliver high-quality patient care.

Some of these additional duties include diagnosing and treating illnesses, ordering and interpreting tests, prescribing medications, and performing medical procedures. NPs also provide continuative care, which is essential for improving health outcomes. It allows them to understand and anticipate patient needs, whether it's managing chronic conditions, promoting preventive care, or supporting families.

In the Yukon, we are very thankful for the nurse practitioners in our hospitals, clinics, and rural health care centres. My colleagues and I thank all Yukon's nurse practitioners as well as all dedicated health professionals for your compassion and care in serving Yukoners.

Salamat po.

*Applause*

**Ms. Blake:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to Nurse Practitioner Week. Nurse practitioners are the compassionate pillars of health care, blending medical expertise with a deep commitment to patient-centred care. They are often the ones who stand closest to patients, advocating tirelessly, listening intently, and offering comfort in moments of vulnerability.

Skilled in diagnosis, treatment, and patient education, NPs manage complex cases, provide preventive care, and work alongside doctors and other health care professionals to build a holistic care system that meets the unique needs of each patient.

Beyond their extensive clinical skills, nurse practitioners bring empathy and understanding, spending the time needed to get to know patients and their stories. They often serve as guides and supporters through difficult health journeys, offering not just treatment but also genuine encouragement and hope. Their dedication and flexibility have made them essential in health care, often stepping up to serve in rural underserved areas and throughout public health crises.

NPs bridge gaps in the health care system, bring much-needed relief to overextended doctors, and ensure that patients receive timely, high-quality care.

Nurse practitioners remind us everyday of the importance of kindness, resilience, and dedication in the healing process. NPs are a perfect example of what reimagining our health care system can look like. They are not exactly new, but their rise in recent years represents our society's desire to do health care differently. NPs aren't intended to replace other roles but to complement them and make our health care more patient-centred and effective. We extend our gratitude to all nurse practitioners across our territory for their hard work.

Mahsi' cho.

*Applause*

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

#### **TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS**

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling today a letter from Yukon University dated November 8, 2024.

**Ms. Clarke:** Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling today a letter sent to the Government of Yukon from the Whistle Bend Elementary School Council, dated November 7, 2024, asking for the completion of the sensory room for students.

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling today a letter from the Association of Yukon Fire Chiefs, addressed to the Minister of Community Services, entitled "Follow-Up on Funding Concerns for the Yukon Fire Marshal's Office".

**Speaker:** Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

#### **NOTICES OF MOTIONS**

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

THAT this House sends condolences to the family of former British Columbia Premier John Horgan.

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

THAT this House urges the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources to consult with the residents of the Nygren subdivision and the surrounding area about the proposed land treatment facility near their homes and to consider options for

an alternative location that is farther away from people's water supply, has a clay base, and avoids high winds.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to review and improve the maintenance standards for the Alaska Highway in southeast Yukon, particularly as they pertain to snow-clearing.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the Porcupine caribou herd from oil and gas development.

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

## QUESTION PERIOD

### Question re: 5<sup>th</sup> and Rogers site development

**Ms. McLeod:** Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of Education made some surprising statements about the potential location of a downtown school. One location that she suggested was 5<sup>th</sup> and Rogers. Now, as Yukoners know, this lot was sold to a group of developers for a dollar last year with the promise that it would be developed for housing and would include 300 units.

So, can the minister confirm that the Yukon government is now considering using this lot for a downtown school?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Mr. Speaker, thanks for the question. Our government is very proud of the investments that we are making in educational infrastructure. Recently, I made a statement regarding our work toward a downtown school. Our government is exploring options to build a new school in a downtown Whitehorse area. In the coming months — well, now — we are engaging with partners, stakeholders, and community to understand future needs and working to identify potential school locations. This is very important work.

We certainly see that in the vision as the downtown grows. I think during my statements that I made last week in the debate that was brought forward by the Yukon Party to not build the school in the Takhini Educational Land Reserve, I talked about areas that were considered when discussions were happening around the location that is now at the Takhini Educational Land Reserve. Certainly, one of the parcels of land downtown is 5<sup>th</sup> and Rogers and certainly also a consideration — potentially even if the group that is building there considers it viable.

**Ms. McLeod:** Mr. Speaker, another location that the minister mentioned last week was the City of Whitehorse's municipal services building lot, which is where the old building is currently being torn down. This was an interesting location for the minister to suggest because the cost of the demolition is approximately \$1.7 million, which was funded through the federal government's housing accelerator fund. That means that

in order for the City of Whitehorse to receive that funding, they need to ensure that the site is used for housing.

If they use the site for something other than housing, that \$1.7 million would be clawed back by Canada. So, if the Minister of Education goes ahead with choosing that location for a new school, is the Yukon government prepared to cover the cost of the \$1.7-million demolition of the old building?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Mr. Speaker, last week when we had the debate, I was talking about different locations that could be considered. One of them was, as we have stated today, 5<sup>th</sup> and Rogers. We talked about the City of Whitehorse building as well.

I think it is just creativity on behalf of the Yukon Party today. What I was working toward was just talking to Yukoners about what the considerations are. Again, I think you have to think about creative solutions to locations downtown. If we are considering a school downtown, we have to look at all of the existing parcels of land. That is one of them.

I am really reflecting on the debate that has been going on around the Takhini educational land reserve and the replacement of the École Whitehorse Elementary School. I think we have established that the Yukon Party really does not prioritize building schools. I don't think they have good solutions.

I am happy to continue to answer questions about this.

**Ms. McLeod:** Mr. Speaker, it was also surprising that the minister has mentioned the City of Whitehorse's MSB lot because of the issues with its zoning.

Only four and a half months ago, Whitehorse City Council unanimously voted in favour of rezoning that parcel of land to allow for building heights of 30 metres and to ensure that any future use of the site includes residential development. It would seem that the City of Whitehorse may not be aware of the minister's plans to consider this site for a new school.

Can the minister tell us if there has been any consultation with the City of Whitehorse about this location, and if not, when can the city expect that consultation to begin?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Mr. Speaker, again, we do see a vision for a school downtown. We do have one right now until approximately 2028 once we have the new school opened at the Takhini Educational Land Reserve that will replace École Whitehorse Elementary School. I was thinking about it again over the weekend, and I just — some history I think is really important here. Again, the Yukon Party did not prioritize school infrastructure during their time in government. What they did prioritize in 2012 was building a maximum-security jail. That was built right adjacent to the Takhini Educational Land Reserve.

Why didn't they build it at another location? What did they talk to the Takhini neighbourhood about then? The Yukon Party really had no vision for this land reserve; that's clear in this debate. Now they want to give me advice on this project.

The YP had no vision for education; they still don't; they just want us to stop the project. Why? I think that they want to make this a political issue, and the Leader of the Yukon Party did it right in the press scrum last week talking about an election — over a school? It's ridiculous.

**Speaker:** Order please.

**Question re: Fire Marshal's Office funding**

**Mr. Cathers:** Earlier this Sitting, the Minister of Community Services told the Legislature that the Fire Marshal's Office is funded adequately and he dismissed concerns about equipment and resources available to our community fire halls. In response to those comments, the Association of Yukon Fire Chiefs has written to the minister and provided a Yukon fire service status report card.

The letter and report card paint a much different picture from what the minister said. Here's a quote: "The FMO has seen little to no budget increase in over ten years." And: "We are particularly troubled by comments made over the past year that dismiss the validity of the fire chiefs' concerns. These comments, along with the absence of substantive engagement, leave us questioning the seriousness with which these matters are being addressed."

So, can the minister commit to finally taking the concerns of Yukon fire chiefs seriously and working with them to resolve the serious issues that they face?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for the question. I think the actions of our government with regard to the funding and the support that we're giving to our fire services speak for themselves. We undertook a review of all our fire services across the territory to make sure that they were functioning well. That review is still being rolled out as we speak. We made the recommendations of that final report public, and we're working through them now, as a government, to make sure that the Fire Marshal's Office and the fire service is well-supported and well looked after.

We also have received a second letter — this is the second letter. We got our first letter from the Association of Yukon Fire Chiefs in April, I might remind the members opposite. I think that they received a copy as well. We have worked through all of the requests that the fire chiefs made in that letter in April. In that letter, they asked for an increase in honoraria and we just debated that in the House today — \$250,000 roughly to the fire service for that. They asked for — frequent changes in the staffing of the Fire Marshal's Office. It is now fully staffed. We hired five new positions there. They wanted — a lack of transparency and a competition in the previous recruitment process for fire marshals, and we included a seat for them on the recruitment process.

We have one. Now we have another letter and I will look at that too.

**Mr. Cathers:** It is disappointing to again see the minister dismissing the fire chiefs' concerns. One specific concern raised by the chiefs is the lack of adequate personal protective equipment. According to the report card, the minister is receiving a failing grade and gear is not being replaced as needed, placing firefighters' health at risk. Here is how the fire chiefs explained it in their letter — quote: "Some of these funding shortfalls, such as damaged PPE ... lead firefighters to face an unacceptable choice between exposing themselves to

known toxins or not performing their duties. This is a decision they should never be forced to make."

They are also particularly concerned by the delay in replacing the SHOT rescue truck and worried funding for this much-needed truck may be redirected to cover other shortfalls.

Will the minister now admit that he was wrong when he dismissed concerns about inadequate resources for our fire halls and commit to actually working with the Association of Yukon Fire Chiefs to fix this serious problem?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Mr. Speaker, as anybody in this House knows, I have been talking about personal protective equipment for firefighters for a very long time. It is certainly a passion of mine having come out of the workers' compensation system, and I certainly know the importance of that. That is why, Mr. Speaker, in the last two weeks, in hearing these complaints from fire chiefs, I actually asked the department to set up meetings to find out exactly what they need and how we might meet those requests. The deputy minister and the assistant deputy minister responsible for the fire corps have reached out to the fire chiefs. They are looking for more detail. The department officials are the ones who will assess what the needs are, what we can provide, and where we can get that information from. My officials are currently waiting for an answer from the Fire Marshal's Office on that meeting request.

**Mr. Cathers:** It is concerning to see the minister again refusing to meet with the Association of Yukon Fire Chiefs.

Another failing grade that the Minister of Community Services received in his report card from the Association of Yukon Fire Chiefs was the lack of a clear plan for fire hall replacement or renovations. The report card specifically notes that the minister has made no progress on completing plans to address the Klondike Valley fire hall.

Can the minister tell us what the plans are for the Klondike Valley fire hall?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to talk about all the things that we have done to improve the materiel for the firefighters in the territory. We continue to provide funding to maintain the equipment, apparatus, gear, and training resources needed for Yukon's unincorporated fire services.

In early 2024, Mr. Speaker, a new pumper truck and new tender truck went into service in the Ibex Valley and Hootalinqua fire hall to replace aged-out vehicles. This was an investment of more than \$950,000. The Fire Marshal's Office provided \$16,000 this fall to AYFC to support their annual conference in Dawson. The Fire Marshal's Office will soon be issuing a request for proposals for upgrading SCBA equipment and replacing aging turnout gear, to be purchased and delivered this fiscal year. This will be an approximately \$190,000 item for the turnout gear and another \$110,000 for the breathing apparatus equipment that I just mentioned.

In partnership with the other Yukon government departments, the Fire Marshal's Office maintains a contract with a local dispatch company to provide 24-hour dispatch services to volunteer fire halls across the territory. The cost of this service for the volunteer fire service for the Fire Marshal's Office alone is more than \$350,000 per year.

Starting in 2023, a multi-year contract at more than \$92,000 was put in place for testing the fire hoses in use at volunteer fire halls across the territory. In May this year, we did a multi-year contract valued at \$285,000 awarded to inspect, test, service, and maintain the Fire Marshal's Office's fleet of vehicles.

I am happy to go through the fleet of —

**Speaker:** Order, please.

**Question re: Educational assistant and teacher-on-call training**

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, this government made a commitment to provide a one-year training plan program for educational assistants and teachers on call by 2024 in collaboration and consultation with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals, Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon, and Autism Yukon. We are now nearing the end of 2024 and are still waiting to see this commitment fulfilled. The YEAP has repeatedly called for the department to fulfill this obligation. This government seems to think that if they ignore teachers for long enough, the problem will simply go away.

When will this government live up to their CASA commitment to provide a one-year training plan for EAs and TOCs developed in collaboration with their partners?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Mr. Speaker, one of our commitments included providing a one-year training plan for educational assistants and teachers on call. We have engaged with our education partners, including the Yukon Association of Education Professionals, Autism Yukon, the Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon, and also the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, on this action. We have an updated training plan timeline to move this forward, which has recently been shared with all of our partners. We continue to work through many of the details in the implementation of this commitment and will be happy to bring forward more information as it progresses.

Staff have met with Autism Yukon, the Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon, and the other partners to discuss the commitment multiple times. Although the formal training plan is being developed with stakeholders, we are continuing to provide training access to teachers on call through YGLearn and the Yukon government online learning platform. We have been consulting and collaborating with all of our partners and will continue to do so to ensure that our approach is developmentally and culturally responsive, and I think that's very key in this commitment.

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the Yukon Association of Education Professionals, Autism Yukon, and the Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon don't feel the same as the minister does about steps being taken.

This government has had almost two years to get this training plan program implemented. If the Liberals truly cared about meeting the needs of Yukon students and education professionals, this training plan program would have been prioritized and implemented by now, but instead, Yukon education professionals, students, and parents have been left waiting.

Can the minister explain the reason behind this delay to the training plan program?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Mr. Speaker, again, we have worked with folks along the way on this. The Department of Education — as I have noted, their training has been made available. Those platforms will be used as well in the formal training plan, so training is being made available to teachers on call and others.

The Department of Education also provides \$475,000 in annual funding to the Yukon Association of Education Professionals to provide training and professional development activities related to professional growth, curriculum implementation, and other priorities. This is an important commitment, and we are working diligently with all of our partners on the full implementation of this commitment and will continue to work with our partners, as I have stated, and have it fully in place with the endorsement of all of those partners.

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, we are less than two months away from 2025. When will this training program be fully implemented?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Mr. Speaker, again, we are working with all of our partners to determine the next steps and to finalize this training plan. It is, again, an important commitment that our government has made and we will continue to work with all of our partners.

There is also the consideration that we are in collective bargaining. That is a consideration at this stage. When we do have collective bargaining, we have to consider the sensitivity around completing and finalizing work. There are a number of projects that have advanced significantly and we are now in a bit of a holding pattern as well to finalize. The integrated outcomes strategy is another really good example of that — where we are waiting to do final consultation with the YAEP on that important project. Those are all the considerations that we have.

**Question re: Whistle Bend school sensory room**

**Ms. Clarke:** Mr. Speaker, last week, the Whistle Bend school council wrote a letter to the Yukon government to express their concerns about the fact that the sensory room in the new school is not yet complete. The sensory room is an important part of the therapeutic supports for students in need. According to their letter, they made this request several months ago before the school opened in August.

Will the minister commit to working with her department to ensure that the set-up of the sensory room is completed immediately?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to rise today to speak about this important new elementary school that just recently opened for this school year. We have worked very hard to ensure that we were able to have a good transition of students and we are continuing to invest in this school.

The budget for 2024-25 contains \$2.5 million to complete the Whistle Bend Elementary School, so these are areas where there may be work that needs to be completed along with some of the finer details. This is an important aspect of the school.



As I have talked about a few times, accessibility and inclusion are extremely important. We are working through Ketz Construction on the gold standard endorsement from the Rick Hansen Foundation.

I have done several walk-throughs of the school. When I did so the last time, there was a room upstairs that was designated for a sensory room, and we've moved it to a larger room to be more accommodating.

**Ms. Clarke:** Salamat, Mr. Speaker. According to the school council's letter, they are particularly interested in the completion of one particular therapeutic aspect of the sensory room known as the "bubble tube".

Here's what they said — and I quote: "The fact that this request was made nearly three months ago, and the tube is still not functional, is both disappointing and unacceptable."

Will the minister commit to developing a clear action plan to address this matter and urgently communicate that plan to the school council?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Mr. Speaker, again, it's incredibly important to us to ensure that our schools are inclusive and accessible for students. These sensory rooms are a very important part of our infrastructure. We will continue to work with Highways and Public Works around the completion of any deficiencies. Of course, the letter was just received late last week. We are working to communicate with the school council and will be following up and working with them. They are one of our partners in the governance of the school at Whistle Bend.

Again, it's an exciting great news story that we have a brand new elementary school with this level of detail and thought put into it around accessibility and inclusion. It's a new bar for Yukon in terms of what we want our schools to be like and how we want our children to advance within them.

So, I'm happy to work with the school council and we will be following up.

#### **Question re: Dawson City daycare**

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Mr. Speaker, early this year, I asked the Minister of Education for an update about the work on the plans to expand the Little Blue Daycare in Dawson. The minister said that they had provided funding for the expansion design and planning, but she stopped short of committing to funding for the actual construction.

Can the minister tell us whether or not the government will support the construction of the Little Blue Daycare expansion in Dawson?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Mr. Speaker, I know that folks are well aware that we have certainly worked to invest in early learning childcare in our territory. We have invested extensively. I think that our budget is about \$42.5 million this year; that's our investment, including the federal investment. The Government of Yukon is committed to high-quality early learning and childcare that is accessible, affordable, and inclusive.

We certainly are aware of what the needs are at the Little Blue Daycare. We continue to support them, and I'm happy that we were able to sign an agreement with the federal government recently around infrastructure, which is new money that will be

working to invest into childcare centres and facilities across the Yukon — absolutely continuing to work with the Little Blue Daycare society to advance those discussions and to support them in their applications going forward.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** The minister's briefing note from the spring of this year lays out the work that has been done by the society. It shows that blueprints and the design have been completed and there are updated cost estimates. There is also a feasibility study that shows that an expanded facility is financially viable. One missing piece is land.

Can the minister tell us if her department has discussed available land in the community for the proposed expansion of the Little Blue Daycare?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Mr. Speaker, again, I'm very happy to be working to advance early learning childcare in our territory. This is a long commitment from our government to support the Little Blue Daycare and its expansion. The society is focusing their planning around parcel K next to the old McDonald Lodge site in Dawson City. We are working to support that, and there are a number of departments that are involved in this.

Again, Mr. Speaker, this is a high-priority area for our government, as I have stated. We are investing \$42.5 million this year in early learning childcare. We just signed an agreement with the federal government for an additional \$7,689,753 over the next three years. I have a planned meeting with the federal minister at the end of this month at a federal-provincial-territorial ministers' meeting. We certainly will be discussing other ways that the federal government can invest.

#### **Question re: Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act amendments**

**Mr. Kent:** Mr. Speaker, according to the spring briefing notes, the Yukon government and the Council of Yukon First Nations have been working on submitting amendments to the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act*, or YESAA, since sending a joint letter in December of 2020 to the Government of Canada. The note goes on to say, "The Oversight Group continues to advance the targeted amendment, while taking steps to identify the requirements and process for initiating the full review of YESAA and the Regulations to follow."

At a recent ECO briefing, officials told us that the proposed amendments have now been submitted to Canada, so can the Premier tell us when exactly those amendments were submitted?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Mr. Speaker, I will have to go back and take a look to make sure I have the exact time, but it was presented to Canada in the summer, if not earlier, in time for the Fall Sitting. I am happy to get a legislative return to make sure that I am accurate on the date.

**Mr. Kent:** Mr. Speaker, that note also says that, following consultation workshops with industry, First Nations, and others in 2022, a "what we heard" document was produced. Can the Premier tell us if that document is available publicly, and if so, where we can find it? If not, are there plans to make it available?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Mr. Speaker, I will check with the department to see who they have engaged with on that topic. I know that the federal government, I believe, had some meetings set up as well in their time here, I believe through Minister Vandal's office at the time, but let me just make sure. I know that at one point there were some discussions that were occurring with stakeholders here. I know that the member opposite specifically asked — I believe; maybe he can clarify — about further consultation and whether there should there be a further consultation before moving ahead.

I would love to see, if the member opposite — just so we know the stance of the Yukon Party. Do they want to see a further consultation on this, thinking that there might need to be more clarification, or did the work and the unanimous support of the First Nation leadership — do they believe that was enough as this moves into legislative drafting?

**Mr. Kent:** Mr. Speaker, we would expect that the federal government will have to do further consultation. This is obviously their legislation, so we will wait for them to do it.

However, this legislation is important to all Yukoners, as it assesses the impacts of projects and recommends whether they should proceed or not. When we go back to 2017, the previous Premier promised a collaborative framework to industry to deal with timelines and reassessments of projects.

Many in the industry are wondering — and many Yukoners are wondering — when these proposed amendments will be made public, and when does the Premier expect Canada to begin their consultations on them?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I think the start of that was a comment by the member opposite saying that he would expect Canada would come out and do consultation. Now he is asking when I am going to do consultation or ask Canada to do consultation.

As we both know, I think what we have come to understand — and the member opposite understands quite clearly — is that it is Canada who will have that timeline, as he stated in the opening of his question. So, we will wait and see when Canada is going to do it. We want to see that consultation done. We think it's incredibly important. Of course, it is important to point out that it was the collaboration of having unanimous support at the chiefs table to get this done versus what we saw — the destabilization of investment under the activity that the Yukon Party took part in, in their previous time in government.

**Speaker:** The time for the 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. 17

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Madam Chair, I move:

THAT from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, November 12, 2024, Dr. Lesley Brown, president and vice-chancellor of Yukon University, and Chris Mahar, chair of the Governance Committee of the Board of Governors for Yukon University, appear as witnesses before Committee of the Whole to answer questions regarding the operations of Yukon University.

**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 Tuesday, November 12, 2024, Dr. Lesley Brown, president and vice-chancellor of Yukon University, and Chris Mahar, chair of the Governance Committee of the Board of Governors for Yukon University, appear as witnesses before Committee of the Whole to answer questions regarding the operations of Yukon University.

Is there any debate?

**Ms. White:** Madam Chair, to be perfectly frank, we were taken a little bit by surprise today when we were told that Yukon University was appearing this afternoon as witnesses in the Assembly. As the House knows, the Department of Health and Social Services has had very little time for debate and we know that it's the first supplementary budget up for debate after.

#### *Amendment proposed*

**Ms. White:** Therefore, I move:

THAT Committee of the Whole Motion No. 17 regarding the appearance of witnesses from Yukon University be amended by replacing the time "3:30 p.m." with the time "4:15 p.m."

**Chair:** The amendment is in order.

It has been moved by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King:

THAT Committee of the Whole Motion No. 17 regarding the appearance of witnesses from Yukon University be amended by replacing the time "3:30 p.m." with the time "4:15 p.m."

**Ms. White:** Madam Chair, the reason for this specific amendment is to allow for the debate on Health and Social Services to go forward. My anticipation is that we would have a recess at 4:00 p.m. We would start with the witnesses at 4:15 and go until the end of the day.

I am hopeful that we can have this broader conversation on Health and Social Services and still have a good conversation with the Yukon University witnesses.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Madam Chair, just on the amendment, I would still stick with the 3:30 p.m. time, and then if the witnesses are done early, we can move back to Health and Social Services. I appreciate the amendment; I don't agree with it. When we arrange to have witnesses here, what we will end up doing is have the witnesses in the back waiting, and so I would prefer that we move ahead as is. I appreciate the amendment as it is brought forward.

**Mr. Kent:** Madam Chair, I believe there is time to let the witnesses know that the time has changed from 3:30 p.m. to 4:15 p.m. so that they can adjust their schedules accordingly.

I would just like to reiterate what the NDP House Leader said. It is disappointing when we find out at the morning House Leaders' meeting about witnesses appearing that afternoon. We were given no indication whatsoever that Yukon University witnesses would be appearing at all this fall, let alone being given a few hours' notice in the morning from House Leaders that they are coming in the afternoon. I find that also very disappointing.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Madam Chair, when I have talked with my colleague the Member for Klondike, he has explained to me that when he was in opposition, the Yukon Party gave no notice of witnesses coming in, so it was always on the day of. At the House Leaders' meeting today — that is when I raised it. I have always done my best to try to give advance notice; I just missed it this time. My apologies to the members across the way, but I have made all attempts to provide advance notice. If you look at our track record of bringing in witnesses, we have been very consistent at bringing in witnesses.

I gave notice this morning at 9:45. That's when the members opposite got word that we were seeking to bring in Yukon University.

**Chair:** Are you prepared for the question on the amendment?

**Some Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Some Hon. Members:** Disagreed.

**Chair:** I think the yeas have it.

*Amendment to Committee of the Whole Motion No. 17 agreed to*

**Chair:** Is there any further debate on the main motion as amended?

Are you prepared for the question?

**Some Hon. Members:** Count.

### Count

**Chair:** A count has been called.

### Bells

**Chair:** All those in favour, please rise.

*Members rise*

**Chair:** All those opposed, please rise.

*No members rise*

**Chair:** The results are 17 yeas, nil nays.

*Committee of the Whole Motion No. 17, as amended, agreed to*

**Chair:** The matter now before the Committee is continuing 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 continuing 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 would like to ask if there's a volunteer so I can participate in debate.

*Member for Takhini-Kopper King rises*

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

### **Department of Health and Social Services — continued**

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

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Madam Acting Chair, what I would like to do is have everyone recognize and welcome the Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services, Matt King, and the assistant deputy minister, Paul Payne, also here with me today. I thank both of them for joining me.

My recollection is that there was a question last week when we ended off about nurse practitioners and their pay scale. I think there was also a question about nurse bonuses, which I am happy to also address if I have time in the remaining time I have right now. Otherwise, I would be happy to address it as we go forward.

With respect to nurse practitioners, I'll note that the Yukon government has recognized the essential role of nurse practitioners in delivering high-quality, patient-centred health care here in the territory. I know that is a priority for us. We recognized nurse practitioners and their great expertise today in a tribute here in the Legislative Assembly. We have a total of 16 nurse practitioners employed with Health and Social Services as of October 30. This includes staff at the walk-in clinic, at the Constellation Health Centre, the Referred Care Clinic, and in Community Nursing. Recruitment is ongoing for additional nurse practitioners in Community Nursing.

I asked for the number of vacancies. I understand there to be three at this time, but I can confirm that number. So, we are actively recruiting for an additional three nurse practitioners in the territory. The Yukon government has introduced more nurse practitioner roles within Health and Social Services in the past year, demonstrating our commitment to expanding primary care options, and our government has been actively creating new opportunities for nurse practitioners to support Yukoners.

As I have noted, the access clinics here in the territory — a front line for individuals, in particular for individuals who are not attached to a medical professional — a walk-in clinic here in Whitehorse, the Constellation Health Centre, which we know is doing amazing work to have individual patients attached to a health care provider — they are also providing front-line services for individuals. All of their nurse practitioner positions are filled. The Referred Care Clinic has added an additional position of a nurse practitioner, and now that total is four for them.

Nurse practitioners in the Yukon are not exclusively employed by the Department of Health and Social Services. Other organizations and private practices in the territory can also employ nurse practitioners, which can contribute to the variety of the number of nurse practitioners that we have here in the territory. Some data sources, such as the Canadian Institute for Health Information, may include NPs across various sectors or temporary staff. We are working to better understand the Canadian Institute for Health Information methodology and their reporting of the total health care workers in the territory. We are working with them to determine their numbers.

With respect to addressing the health human resources needs, which is, of course, a top priority, our efforts to recruit and retain nurse practitioners and other health professionals remain active and strong. We have worked with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association to modernize the nurses regulation. A public announcement of that — with the Minister of Community Services and me — occurred last week. We focused on a number of changes but the scope of practice for nurse practitioners being a primary one. It allows them to administer a broader range of medications, which is incredibly important for front-line health care professionals.

The Yukon government also acknowledges that the compensation for nurse practitioners is a critical factor in recruitment and retention. This is why we are actively working to attract and retain nurse practitioners by offering competitive salary packages, benefits, and incentives.

Nurse practitioners are paid according to the nurses' group, which, in the Yukon Employees' Union as of November 5, 2024, the total salary of a nurse practitioner, including allowances and bonuses, is \$170,793. This places Yukon above the other territories, above Alberta and British Columbia. But recognizing that, in January 2024, nurse practitioners in the Yukon received a nine-percent increase in salaries. This was in addition to the three-percent general wage increase, bringing the minimum hourly wage to \$65.23 and a maximum of that range to \$75.79. That places the Yukon above the national

median of the 2023 data, but it's important to note that wage rates in other jurisdictions have changed due to recent ongoing collective bargaining agreements, and, of course, the upcoming collective bargaining agreement process will happen here in the territory in the next number of months.

In addition to the salaries, the Government of Yukon offers up to a \$12,000 market adjustment allowance per year, a \$7,500 signing bonus for newly hired nurse practitioners, and an exam fee reimbursement for new graduates within two years of their graduation, and we also pay their annual registration fees. The Government of Yukon also remunerates nurse practitioners who work in private clinics via a contract model.

I hope this is much of the information asked for. If not, I'm happy to return to this topic.

**Ms. Blake:** Thank you, Acting Chair, and I would like to welcome the officials back.

So, we continue to hear concerns from nurse practitioners about pay structures. Just to follow up on the response from the minister and for those listening — and I'm sorry if I'm asking the minister to repeat the information, but could the minister explain which positions of registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and nurse practitioners get retention bonuses? Which of these positions get the recruitment bonuses? According to the briefing notes 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? Can the minister explain why nurse practitioners do not have their own pay grid?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Thank you to the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin for the question. Again, I want to emphasize that the Government of Yukon recognizes the essential role of health care professionals. I was pleased during the tribute today to hear from the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin the recognition that nurse practitioners are a core essential role in the transformation of our health care system. Yes, reimagining our health care system involves us looking at patient-centred care, at wraparound services, at integrated health clinics, all of which nurse practitioners are an essential part of.

We are lucky enough to have many of them in communities running health centres or supporting the running of health centres, and we will continue to want to expand those individuals and people with their education and qualifications in those places and in other places across the Yukon government to provide health care.

Our government offers competitive wages and benefits to attract and retain health care professionals to the territory. To address the high vacancy rates and turnover — which is being experienced in Canada and actually across the world — and to reduce the reliance on agency nurses, the Government of Yukon introduced new pay grids and retention allowances for nurses and nurse practitioners.

Registered nurses and nurse practitioners continue to receive a signing bonus of \$7,500 for newly hired registered nurses and nurse practitioners, and this will expire, at this time, on March 31, 2025. It continues to be used as part of our attraction program. They also receive an annual retention

allowance of \$3,000 and an annual retention payment of \$15,000, but that expired March 31, 2024. Those individuals who were employed already by the government received that retention payment of \$15,000 up until March 31, 2024. An additional immediate retention allowance of \$15,000 also expired on March 31, 2024. So, now we have a \$7,500 signing bonus for newly hired RNs and LPNs until March 2025.

Nurse practitioners also receive an annual market adjustment of up to \$12,000. Licensed practical nurses receive a signing bonus of \$4,500 for newly hired LPNs under a letter of agreement. That is currently scheduled to go until March 31, 2025. An \$8,000 immediate retention bonus was available to licensed practical nurses who were employed prior to March 31, 2024, and an annual \$8,000 retention bonus expired in March 2024.

Registered nurses in rural health centres receive a \$7,500 signing bonus until March 2025. They also previously received an immediate retention bonus for those who were employed prior to March 31, 2024 — that was \$15,000. An additional \$15,000 annual retention bonus — again, that expired on March 31, 2024, but those were the bonuses that were put in place at the time. Two \$3,000 annual retention bonuses, for a total of \$6,000, were available at the time. I am not sure if that is still available; I would have to check on that. A community nursing allowance of between \$4,000 and \$8,000, depending on the length of service, was available to community nurses, and primary health care nurses in charge received an additional \$10,000 annual bonus. Again, that was retention, and it expired in 2024.

These bonuses — and some that remain — were introduced to address recruitment and retention challenges, improve competitiveness, and reduce reliance on agency staff in the Yukon. We know that they have been successful. The Government of Yukon also provides examine fee reimbursement for all nursing groups and continues to do so. The Government of Yukon and the Yukon Hospital Corporation pay annual professional fees for nurses and continue to do so through a letter of agreement for the signing bonuses and examine fees reimbursement for registered nurses, nurse practitioners, and licensed practical nurses. It is scheduled to expire on March 31, 2025. Nurse retention and recruitment incentives were provided to union and manager positions requiring a nursing designation from December 2022 to March 2024.

Some of those continue to remain. I can indicate that we are — to be clear, there are two — registered nurses' \$3,000 annual retention bonuses continue to be available — just to clear that up.

I want to make sure that I have addressed the breakdown of those. I think that the last part of the question was why nurse practitioners do not at this time have their own classification. As I said earlier, licensed practical nurses make up to \$170,000. I am just looking for that number, but I can get it back. There is an opportunity for — first of all, they are paid higher than nurse practitioners in Nunavut and Northwest Territories, BC, and Alberta. We have to remain competitive. We have to continue to look at the competitive rates of pay, bonus

availability, and recruitment bonuses. As I have said, those are what is in place between now and March 2025, and we look forward to continuing to discuss these important issues with recruitment.

**Ms. Blake:** I thank the minister for her response to those questions.

I just returned from a weekend visit in Old Crow, and one of the questions that I was asked frequently throughout the community was what the government's plan is to fill a full-time position for a child welfare social worker in the community. I believe that right now they have a visiting social worker who comes to the community. The community is asking if there are any plans of the government to have a full-time social worker based in the community of Old Crow from Family and Children's Services.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Thank you for the question. Making sure that we have services of all kinds that help support Yukoners in communities is critically important. Social workers are vital to Yukon's health and social services system. They provide specialized support that addresses the overall well-being, mental health, and access to resources. They play a key role in helping individuals and families manage complex challenges from disability support to income assistance to family care and protection services.

The Department of Health and Social Services has a total of 66 social workers currently working in various branches, and we're actively recruiting to fill any vacant positions. A social worker is employed as an outreach worker here in Whitehorse at the library, and at the Jim Smith Warming Centre, a social worker is on-site to help clients. Those are two programs that I am very proud of to support community members. Social workers are spread across various program areas to best meet the needs of diverse populations. I can give more information about that. I have information that the — let me just check one detail.

With respect to the Old Crow Health Centre — which I have had the opportunity, as has the deputy minister, of visiting not that long ago — which is truly a spectacular community resource, the social worker who is assigned there currently comes into Old Crow for two weeks at a time and then spends two weeks in Dawson City — so, not too far away but certainly not in the community. We understand that this is the service that is provided. She resides there for two weeks at a time. It is a female person, as I understand it, who will continue to check the needs of the community and determine if there is a change in the service that is required there.

I can also provide this information: The Mental Wellness and Substance Use services in Dawson City — and that catchment area includes services to Old Crow — and a mental health support worker in addition to the social worker and a child and youth counsellor both travel to Old Crow monthly, and a clinical counsellor travels to the community biweekly.

When I was there, I did have a conversation with the health professionals who work in that health centre and commented that, in my estimation, certainly people would want to be coming and working in that health centre, helping to serve that community. It is a beautiful facility and space. The

surroundings for individuals and the infrastructure that we can provide are critically important for not only the workers there but also for individuals who come to seek services in those kinds of improved locations.

I should note that both the child and youth counsellor and the mental health support worker travel to Old Crow monthly and the clinical counsellor travels to the community every two weeks. In the interim, these clinicians are available by phone if they're not there in Old Crow. Mental Wellness and Substance Use services staff collaborate with the Vuntut Gwitchin government throughout each visit to provide responsive and relevant programming in the community.

**Ms. Blake:** To follow up to the question, the other question that I was frequently asked over the weekend in Old Crow was: How many emergency placement homes exist in the community of Old Crow if children have to be removed from their home environment? What work is being done by the government to increase the number of emergency placement homes in the community of Vuntut Gwitchin?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Can I just ask the member opposite if the reference is to child protection locations as opposed to something else? I just want to make sure I understand the question.

**Ms. Blake:** The reference is to child protection.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Family and Children's Services is part of the Department of Health and Social Services. It is critically important. We have information that the number of children placed in 24/7 resourced homes across the territory has unfortunately increased. We are very keen — and I know the department is keen, as are our First Nation partners who use all of the provisions of the *Child and Family and Services Act* — to make sure that we can keep children connected to their communities and only in out-of-home care when absolutely necessary. We also have the opportunity to use agreements with family members, et cetera, so that children can remain in extended family out-of-home care, if that can be appropriate. However, we are always, as you have noted in your question, looking for resourced homes where children can be placed if necessary in emergency situations.

I don't have the exact number from Old Crow, and I can endeavour to get it, although I will be quite careful about saying an exact number, but I can probably give you a range like "between five and 10" or "less than five" or something — if that's the answer; I don't know the answer at the moment, but we can try to ascertain that either today or at a later date.

As of August 2024, there were 190 children in out-of-home care, with 96 children in the care of the director and 94 in extended family care. So, that is an improvement. We want to make sure that is always an option. The number of children in out-of-home care does far exceed the number of caregivers, and I wouldn't expect that to be any different in all communities, and we are always seeking foster parents who can help with emergency out-of-home care and provide loving homes for children who are in stressful situations.

We also manage group homes through Yukon's transitional support services. Family and Children's Services is actively recruiting community caregivers and extended

families to increase placement options for children in out-of-home care. Family and Children's Services continues to explore options with families, with Yukon First Nations, to reconnect children with their communities and their cultures. If placement resources have been exhausted and there is an unexpected placement pressure or need, such as requiring emergency placements due to lack of an extended family caregiver or a community caregiver who is available, young children may be placed in a specific group home if it is tailored to their needs. That is not generally what happens in communities. We work very hard in small communities to make sure that children can stay close to family members.

Transitional support services' staffing model requires at least two workers in each group home, but that is more common here in Whitehorse, and the focus on having children stay in their communities, in their homes, is something that not only did we work very hard to put into the *Child and Family and Services Act* — in the preamble to that act, it was built with a collaboration of Yukon First Nations and our community partners to make sure that children can and will have cultural components to that care, and certainly, I will take the opportunity to encourage any families or caregivers or community members who think that they could provide such a home on a short-term basis to let us know.

There is support; there is training available; there is individual support during that period of time, and I know that we all have the same goal of having children then return to their homes, but sometimes, it is necessary for community members to help as well.

**Ms. Blake:** Under Adoption Services, in note 3, it indicates that the fluctuations seen in the number of completed home studies over the three periods is because the completion of home studies is dependent on the staff and resources available to do the work. Does adoption currently have a designated social work team? If there isn't a social work team, what is the plan to establish a team for adoptions? The other question is: What is the reason for short-staffing in adoptions?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I appreciate the question. As of August 24, 2024 — so, a few months ago — approximately 39 percent of social worker positions were filled and recruitment efforts continued to be ongoing. We are prioritizing high-risk child protection referrals where a child is in immediate risk of harm as well as high-risk families and children or youth in out-of-home care. The team who works in Family and Children's Services includes foster care as well as adoption planning as part of that work. I can advise that we are prioritizing, of course, the high-risk cases.

Yukon First Nations and the Council of Yukon First Nations have expressed concerns in the First Nation Health and Social Development Commission meetings that we regularly have with them that not all children, youth, and families are receiving the services that they are entitled to. We are working very hard to make sure that this is rectified. The Yukon First Nations and the Council of Yukon First Nations provide culturally relevant primary and secondary prevention programs but do not provide the protection services at this time, so when children are taken into care, plans are done for them. Yukon

First Nation governments, communities, and the Council of Yukon First Nations work together to make sure each child has an individual, culturally relevant plan of programs for them.

Child protection supervisors have taken on additional cases to support front-line child protection and social workers. These additional cases have limited the supervisors' support and guidance that would normally be provided to the assigned childcare protection workers, so that work is stressed, for sure. We have staffed six of the 10 new child protection social worker assistant positions created to support social workers with administrative duties.

Staff retention is difficult due to vacancy numbers and the inability to support long periods of leave or temporary assignment requests, although we must be flexible and make sure that we have individuals being recruited to these positions since child protection staff are also responsible for after-hours support provided by Family and Children's Services. The remaining staff are now required to take on more after-hours shifts, so that is a factor.

I can also advise that we have been advertising for an adoption coordinator, and that position is expected to be filled very quickly. The competition is underway. In addition, a competition is underway for a number of positions, including caregiver social workers. These positions lead to adoption home study, which has been asked about. Plus, they assist with training, and there is currently one of those positions vacant.

That is the current state which I think is being asked about in this question about home studies and adoptions. We certainly do not want any adoptions delayed because of the opportunity for a home study to be completed. That work needs to be prioritized, but frankly, it is prioritized behind emergency social services for children.

**Ms. Blake:** I am going to move on to the *Canada-Yukon Agreement to Work Together to Improve Health Care for Canadians (2023-24 to 2025-26)* document.

This document describes an agreement for terms between the Canadian federal government and the Yukon territorial government to provide funding for four shared health priorities and for mental health substance use and addictions services. One of the elements of this agreement is a commitment by Yukon government to work with Yukon communities to provide support to create and implement community wellness plans. These plans will be a strategic framework that outlines the goals, objectives, and actions to promote the overall well-being and health of a community.

The plan needs to address multiple dimensions of health, including physical, mental, social, and environmental well-being. The development of community wellness plans is also closely linked to the Minister of Health and Social Services' 2023 mandate letter, which says — and I quote: “Respond to the Substance Use Health Emergency by taking innovative and bold actions, including prevention and harm reduction efforts and the implementation of collaborative programming with partner governments and organizations.”

In the few visits I have had in the community of Old Crow, I have been asked about this.

Can the minister provide an update on the progress of these community plans, what actions are still to be completed, and what is the timeline for those actions?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Thank you for the question. The shared health priorities agreement for this fiscal year with Canada totals \$7,940,000. That funding is distributed with respect to a number of priorities, including the substance use health emergency, community wellness plans, land-based healing, and others. I do have some specifics that I can help with, with respect to the budget.

The Department of Health and Social Services' operation and maintenance main estimates for 2024-25 include \$1.2 million, as previously approved, and an increase of \$267,000 for six individuals to continue to advance the work of the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy*. There is \$4.3 million for the land-based healing funding initiatives. There is \$1.3 million for 5.5 individuals for the residential managed alcohol program, which I am pleased to say — I understand — has its first resident over the weekend, and we are expecting up to three more in the near future, noting that they have to be assessed to be part of the program, of course, and we need to have individuals there who are truly being supported by that work.

These increases, as I have noted, are supported through the “Working together to improve health care for Canadians” agreement that has been asked about. As part of that work, I can also note that community wellness planning is under that umbrella, and community health and wellness planning engagement is the next phase in implementing the health authority here in the territory. Every Yukon community has unique characteristics and needs and resources and challenges, and they must all be considered to effectively address their health and wellness concerns.

Community health and wellness plans are tailored. They are specific to communities, and they articulate the community's vision for health and wellness. I also note that we are working through Justice on community justice plans and community safety plans, and certainly, we want to work together with communities to make sure that we are not taxing their resources but also making sure that community health and wellness must also include community safety.

These health and wellness plans aim to provide a process and a mechanism for a community to build a vision and to provide direction for health and wellness in their community and to participate in health and wellness planning that takes into account all of the community assets and needs. “Wellness” is certainly broadly defined as “a state of being in good health and as an actively pursued goal”. This active pursuit could include but is not limited to health care service provision; it could be education, safety, and justice — as I have said — and cultural initiatives. Communities will work within their own definition of “wellness” as part of the community wellness planning process.

For many, “wellness” is defined as a balance of physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional factors, and we will develop community health and wellness plans through community engagement with health and social service providers, non-

governmental organizations, First Nation governments, private sector providers, and other government partners and members. We have also partnered with the Council of Yukon First Nations to ensure that cultural safety and consistent liaison with Yukon First Nations is essential throughout this process. I can also note that, with respect to the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy*, it is important — I think part of the question is about actions to date.

In September 2024, two informal sessions were held about planning a youth initiative for community members, organizations, and leaders interested in creating a healthier future for Yukon youth using the evidence-based approach. These are actions that are included in the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy*. Back in June 2024, in partnership with the federal government and local NGOs, we launched the new Canada-Yukon housing benefit rent subsidy for individuals fleeing gender-based violence. The program, administered through Yukon Housing, provides more than \$2 million annually to help survivors of gender-based violence to obtain and maintain safe housing. This is something that I am very proud of with respect to our government. We absolutely must support individuals who are fleeing gender-based violence. This does become part of the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy*, because we have to provide safe spaces for individuals and support them in the work that they want to do.

We have expanded the hours of the supervised consumption site to be open seven days a week, including statutory holidays. That was back in February 2024. We also completed renovations to supported an inhalation space in that supervised consumption site back in May 2022, one of only very few in Canada. We worked very closely with the experts in the field. We were told that this is the way that individuals are addicted to substances and that this is the kind of support they need.

We continue to focus on working with our partners to make sure that opportunities for implementing that strategy go forward. That strategy must be implemented — everything from an individual basis all the way up to government's responsibility and everything in between — community groups, individuals, businesses, and families. We are working closely with our partners to make sure that we can focus on the items that are in the strategy and, in addition to that, focus on items that they bring forward for solutions that we can support however we can.

**Ms. Blake:** I will use my last question to ask about the substance use emergency. I often hear from front-line workers who are responding to emergencies when we are losing people to overdoses. One of the common questions I hear from those who work at the front line or who are emergency responders is concern about people who survive an overdose. Is the Department of Health and Social Services tracking outcomes of people who survive overdoses? Does the department have a way to measure the recoveries of those who overdose and survive? Is there any form of tracking for those who experience permanent or long-lasting injuries as a result of an overdose? How is the department connecting with people who have

survived an overdose and are experiencing ongoing physical and psychological effects from an overdose?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Thank you for the question. I think that this is an important opportunity to outline one of the very important reasons that we are seeking to amend and improve our health care services in the territory, working to a more integrated health care system. Individuals are closely connected depending on their interaction in the community with services either at 405 Alexander, services that exist at the Referred Care Clinic, services that exist through safer supply but also at the clinic for services run by Blood Ties and the connections at Blood Ties. If that is the case, I am only speaking about a particular group of individuals who are connected to those services in the community.

There are many people unfortunately who end up surviving an overdose who are not connected in those places. Maybe they are connected to a private health care professional, maybe to a clinic of some kind — maybe to no health care professional at all — but integration of these services is absolutely critical.

I can note that government has collaborated with the health system and the community partners on the development of — as we have been speaking about — the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy*. The primary purpose of the strategy is to provide a road map for action on how the Government of Yukon, working with partners, can reduce substance use-related harms in the territory. We have been somewhat successful — not only government but the entire group of individuals who worked so diligently on this strategy and on reducing toxic-drug-related deaths — but one death is too many.

The *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy* is a living document designed to evolve over time as it adapts to the changing needs of the communities and incorporates ongoing feedback from our partners. I can also note that the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy* has an oversight committee that has been formed for additional assessment and oversight of the strategy's implementation. The intention is to provide accountability and oversight for substance use health emergency-related actions from various perspectives, including the Council of Yukon First Nations, the RCMP, and the Yukon government. This perspective that is being asked about here is an extremely valid one.

The objectives of the oversight committee are to share information and to contribute to the ongoing evaluation of the implementation of the strategy, to review status updates and situation reports from the strategy's project manager on the 43 recommended actions, to assess the progress of the implementation and coordination of the strategy with a whole-of-government and territory-wide lens, and to provide feedback, guidance, and expertise as needed. It is also to identify and consider potential future recommended actions and amend and include these actions in the strategy if appropriate.

Again, I think that the question being asked here about individual follow-up for folks who survive an overdose and come into contact with the medical community, service providers, and with others, including, for instance, Blood Ties, who have a whole opportunity — when individuals come to



their facility — to engage with them on a level that requires them to be provided with additional services, not — I mean yes, drug-checking — yes, important — a safe place to consume — absolutely critical. But in addition to that, what other opportunities are there for supporting an individual? Is it housing? Is it employment? Is it other things that they might need? And the opportunity to follow up with those individuals through that — but it's not coordinated in a way — through this oversight committee is one way, but we know that services are being provided, like those that I talked about in this question: at the Referred Care Clinic, for instance, at the safe consumption site.

I also note that the committee membership currently includes representatives — the oversight committee — sorry — to get back to that. It includes representatives from the Council of Yukon First Nations, the RCMP, and various departments within the Government of Yukon, including Health and Social Services and Justice. The committee also ensures that the strategy is coordinated with the federal *Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy* and several other territorial initiatives, things like *Putting People First*, the territory's youth strategy, *Creating Home*, the downtown Whitehorse safety response action plan, and *Changing the Story to Upholding Dignity and Justice: Yukon's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-spirit+ People Strategy* — again, one of the primary documents of its kind in Canada — and as well, coroner's recommendations and the coroner's inquest report that came from April 2024.

I don't know that this — I hope that some of this information helps to provide a background for the work that can be done and the need for us to continue our efforts to have an integrated health system that allows the partners and the individuals who provide the service — front line and otherwise — to collaborate with one another, to feed this information into one location, and for us to be able to provide the services in a coordinated manner.

**Mr. Cathers:** Thank you, Madam Acting Chair, and I would also like to thank the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin for handing over the floor to me so that I can continue with questions.

I want to begin first of all — the minister made mention, when we were last debating this department, of work done by the Hospital Corporation to do what she referred to as — quote: "... a full review of the surgical services and developed a plan to support surgical services sustainability, which was published in January 2023." That, for the reference of Hansard, is page 6052. We checked on the hospital's website and were unable to find that January 2023 document being published.

My first question is if the minister would commit to providing us with that in a timely manner. My second question relates to the questions that I asked the minister about wait times the other day. Specifically, I asked about wait times for mammography, having grown to almost three years; according to the CEO of the Hospital Corporation last November, wait times for cardiac care had grown to twice the targeted time, with over 320 people on the wait-list; MRI wait times being

significantly longer than the target; and wait times for audiology being over two years.

Again, as I asked last week, what is the government doing regarding those wait times, and can the minister provide me with the current estimated wait times for those procedures that I mentioned? As the minister has typically been using her full time, I will also move on to the question about hospital finances and the fact that we know that, the last fiscal year, the hospital began short of operation and maintenance funding by almost \$30 million, receiving just \$95 million-plus in O&M funding in the main estimates, when their actual needs at the end of the year turned out to be almost \$30 million higher at \$124.7 million.

Looking at the Public Accounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024, there are a few notable things that jump out. Accounts receivable is identified as a risk in the audited financial statements. The amount unpaid has shot up dramatically compared to the previous year, from \$4.7 million to \$14.4 million, and that is found on page 306 of the Public Accounts.

Who owes our hospitals money that they haven't paid, and why did the amount skyrocket? Well, the biggest culprit is the Government of Yukon. As of March 31 of this year, they owed the hospital \$11.6 million in accounts receivable, according to the Public Accounts, and were responsible for almost all of the \$10-million increase in delinquent bills from the previous year. The Public Accounts also say that 28 percent of accounts receivable were over 90 days past due. The government owes over 80 percent of the accounts receivable.

So, how much money did the government owe our hospitals that was over 90 days due as of March 31 of this year, and how much does the government currently owe our hospitals that is over 90 days due?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I am happy to try to get most of this information forward. The surgical services work that was done in January 2023 does not exist on the hospital website. I will have to check with the hospital about that and determine the status of that document. I am happy to do so and determine whether or not it is available for distribution.

I can speak about the wait times. We might have run out of time about this last week. With respect to audiology, hearing services has experienced prolonged wait times for hearing assessments due to persistent audiologist vacancies. Effective in November, there will be limited capacity to conduct hearing aid consultations and fittings due to the vacant audiometric technician position. All clients who are referred for hearing assessments are triaged and prioritized based on the clinical need, and as of November 2024, wait times for hearing assessments are: for urgent care, up to one week; for pediatrics, up to three weeks; for high-priority cases, up to three weeks; medium-priority cases can be 18 to 24 months; and low-priority cases can be more than that. Clients can obtain hearing assessments privately at their own expense or using private insurance coverage. Of course, they might be able to do so outside of the territory as well if they happen to be there.

Hearing Services is focusing available hearing aid consultation appointments on priority groups, including

children needing hearing aids, adults with sudden hearing loss, and individuals experiencing debilitating tinnitus due to exceptional auditory complications. There is a wait-list in place for clients needing hearing aid consultations who do not fall into the priority groups, and Hearing Services can provide the results of the hearing assessment to their client to bring to a private clinic if that client chooses to purchase their hearing aids privately.

We are actively recruiting to fill all vacant positions. We encourage interested applicants who meet the requirements to apply. Currently, we are using private contractors to see the highest priority clients while we explore other options to meet the needs of Yukoners.

I can note that the annual and high-risk screenings for mammograms are being completed within 14 months, with a goal of 12 months, and routine screening mammograms are completed within 28 months, with the goal of completion every 24 months. Remember that individuals can refer themselves as well for mammograms.

For the fiscal year 2024-25, the Hospital Corporation is projected to complete more than 4,500 mammograms, and this represents nearly a doubling of the mammograms compared to two years ago.

At present, cardiology wait times in the territory are approximately six months; however, cardiologists triage patients and prioritize based on urgency. Patients can be seen out of the territory as needed. The target is three months.

Whitehorse General Hospital is supported by three visiting cardiologists who provide eight visits per year and two visiting pediatric cardiologists who offer two visits every year. These are incredibly important services for Yukoners that they can have here at home. In the 2023-24 fiscal year, 1,517 patient appointments were provided through the cardiology program. The Yukon Hospital Corporation is expecting to see the same number or slightly more patients in the cardiology program in the fiscal year 2024-25 compared to last fiscal year.

Yukon hospitals follow national guidelines for triaging MRI referrals to ensure that those with the highest need are supported first. MRI wait times are as follows: Urgent MRI cases aim to be supported within seven days and are completed within this target; semi-urgent MRI cases aim to be supported as close to within 30 days as possible, and semi-urgent exams are being completed within 70 days; non-urgent MRI cases aim to be supported as close to 180 days as possible, and these are being completed within 192 days. For the fiscal year 2024-25, the Hospital Corporation is projecting to complete more than 3,200 MRIs.

Those are the four that were being asked about with respect to current wait times.

With respect to the hospital finances, particularly the Public Accounts and questions about accounts payable, I will need to confirm the information and respond to the member opposite for the question. What I can say is that those Public Accounts are a snapshot in time, as are all looks at budget items. I can't provide the information about what sort of cash flow might be over 90 days. I can assure the member opposite that we work with the Yukon Hospital Corporation constantly. We

have weekly meetings with them regarding finances. We are working very closely together based on, first of all, what the Department of Health and Social Services wants to do and what the Yukon Hospital Corporation wants to do to make sure we are providing the best possible service — and what the independent reports last year recommended would be the case.

Those Public Accounts are a snapshot in time. Some of the notations with respect to expenses that the member opposite noted could be based on out-of-territory care for patients, time lags with respect to how those things are paid for by other governments — by the Government of British Columbia or the Government of Alberta. There was a delay with respect to the nurses' bonuses that were being calculated for hospital employees. There are a lot of patient revenues that are accounted for in the accounts payable and accounts receivable calculations.

The folks in Health and Social Services will look at the questions specifically and try to determine the answers, and we will provide them going forward.

**Mr. Cathers:** I do just have to note, since the minister suggested that some of that large increase in accounts payable might be due to other governments, that I have the Public Accounts in front of me. The amount listed for other governments, such as the provinces she listed, is \$864,000 that was owed, a slight increase from the \$808,000 the previous fiscal year. The big increase, though, is in the amount that the Government of Yukon owes to the Yukon Hospital Corporation. I would encourage the minister to review that and to come back with more information.

Again, as I noted, according to the Public Accounts themselves, as of March 31, 2024, approximately 28 percent of the accounts receivable were over 90 days past due.

As I pointed out to the minister, over 80 percent of the accounts receivable were owed by the Government of Yukon — not any other level of government — to the Yukon Hospital Corporation. Again, the chronic underfunding and chronic neglect by this Liberal government of our hospital is unfortunately continuing. We also know that it got so bad — the state of crisis was so bad — that this government actually took the step of calling in the military to help out at the hospital. What we haven't heard is how many military personnel were sent up to assist. So, what is the total number of health professionals from the Canadian military who have come to work within our hospital system? Where were they, how long, and what did they provide in terms of services?

Moving on to another matter, which is the government's walk-in clinic, we have asked but not received clear information about: What were the total capital costs of setting up the walk-in clinic, and what would the total O&M cost be for the first year of operation? As well, we would appreciate a breakdown identifying what the monthly lease costs are at that facility, the number of employees, and what those types of health professionals are at the walk-in clinic. I understand that the doctors had been on contract. I would appreciate if the minister could confirm that and confirm how many doctors are contracted there and what the rate payable to physicians is through those contracts. Again, we have asked for some of this

information before but have yet to receive a clear picture on what the capital and O&M costs are associated with setting up the walk-in clinic and with running it.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Thank you for the chance to get this information. I am very pleased to talk about both of these topics. I appreciate that the member opposite thinks that things are so bad that we have called in the military. The truth is that this was an innovative opportunity for us to have medical professionals come here and support hospital operations and also, almost more importantly, for them to maintain their medical professional experience and knowledge by working here at the hospital.

The program welcomed health professionals from the Department of National Defence's Canadian Forces Health Services group to work in Yukon health care settings to maintain and enhance their knowledge and skills between their deployments. Through this partnership, Canadian Forces Health Services nurses and other regulated health professionals have been working in the Yukon to learn, advance, and share their expertise while enhancing our health care services across the territory. It is a truly innovative response.

The Department of National Defence nurses have been working in the Watson Lake and Dawson City community hospitals since May of 2024. A medical radiation technologist has joined the diagnostic imaging team at the Whitehorse General Hospital under the memorandum of understanding. The program has been successful for both the communities and the visiting nurses and has supported workplaces. Lengths of individuals' visits depend on placement and can be for a few weeks or up to months at a time. The number of health professionals participating depends on their availability and interest. We are very pleased to have this partnership with the Department of National Defence.

The other question being asked here is about the Whitehorse walk-in clinic. In January of 2023, we committed to improving the delivery of access and health care across the territory as part of the confidence and supply agreement. The Department of Health and Social Services opened a walk-in clinic on December 18, 2023, and I look forward to it coming up to its anniversary. On April 29, the walk-in clinic opened at its permanent location at 108 Jarvis Street. The walk-in clinic continues to provide care for people without primary care providers.

During operating hours, the clinic is serviced by an interdisciplinary team, including two permanent nurse practitioners and two physicians, contracted to provide regular clinic hours for a number of months at a time and, going forward, to continue to work with professionals who will come to work at the clinic — physicians.

We continue to work with our partners at the Yukon Medical Association to recruit various part-time contract physicians to provide primary care at the walk-in clinic. This provides medical professionals with the opportunity to work in that setting and also with the integrated care team to get a chance to work with a number of individuals and help provide care to the community.

Yukoners seeking an appointment can visit the clinic but are encouraged to call the number. The clinic is open Mondays to Wednesdays from 9:00 until noon and then 1:00 to 5:30 and on Thursdays and Fridays from 9:00 to noon and then 1:00 to 4:00. We look to expand those hours as we go forward. I can indicate that, as of July 31 of this year, the clinic has provided care to over 3,362 patients. The walk-in clinic is fully staffed by one clinic manager, two nurse practitioners, two licensed practical nurses, three medical office assistants, and one social worker in addition to the physicians.

We budgeted \$1.43 million for the 2024-25 budget year to support operations of the Whitehorse Walk-In Clinic.

I can indicate that — other questions that were asked. The annual lease fee is slightly over \$108,000. I can also note that the walk-in clinic capital costs were approximately \$1.3 million, including demolition, renovation, equipment, and bio-medical equipment needed to operate the clinic. I can lastly indicate that physicians are paid depending on their other practice. Otherwise, they get approximately \$230 an hour for the first two days a month and approximately \$200 an hour for the other days that month that they might sign up to work at the clinic.

I believe those are the answers.

**Mr. Cathers:** I appreciate that the minister did provide some information. I would, however, note with regard to her characterization of calling in the military for help with the hospital crisis as "innovation" that this government has called in the Canadian military for help with flooding and for the hospital crisis. I will give them credit that at least they didn't try to call for help with flooding "innovation" as well.

Certainly, calling in the military is a sign of just how desperate the situation has gotten.

I would like to ask the minister as well a number of other questions. Could the minister tell me the number of EMS volunteers by community and provide an update on the current status of training? Also, could the minister provide an update on the health authority? In the spring, they budgeted \$9.5 million for this and the hiring of 28.5 full-time-equivalent positions. Could the minister let us know how many of those 28.5 positions have been hired now and what the pay scale is for the new CEO and whether that individual has been hired? In the spring, the minister indicated that none of those 28.5 new full-time-equivalent positions would be for front-line health care delivery. Could she confirm that is still the case or whether that has changed?

Finally, looking at the Public Accounts for the fiscal year ending on March 31, 2024, we see that this Liberal government forced Yukon hospitals to borrow almost \$8 million just to cover solvency requirements of the employee pension plan, which, of course, is a departure from what the previous government — ourselves — did in providing them with the cash to meet those needs. To quote from page 297 of the Public Accounts: "In 2023, the Corporation was requested by the Government of Yukon to obtain a loan with a financial institution to cover the current year's Pension Solvency and Letter of Credit obligation. The Corporation obtained a loan from CIBC for \$4,867..." — million — "... with a

commitment from the Government of Yukon to provide debt servicing support.”

We also see from the previous page that the interest rate that is being paid to this financial institution is 5.3 percent. On the previous page as well we see that the hospital loan with the government for the over \$3 million that the government loaned to them, instead of giving to them, for the loan — or to cover the pension costs, pardon me — is still over \$3 million in total of that loan amount that the government loaned the Hospital Corporation to cover part of the pension solvency deficit. Worse, the government continues to oddly charge the hospital almost four percent interest on that loan, and despite the Premier’s recent rhetoric about loans, we see that this loan is, in fact, repayable in its full amount at the end of the term of the loan. So, the government is making money charging interest to Yukon hospitals. Will the minister agree to forgive that \$3-million loan to the Hospital Corporation?

Additionally, one more issue that jumps out at me from Public Accounts is that, in the fiscal year ending this March, two departments broke the law, and specifically in the case of Health and Social Services, it related to medical travel subsidies. Can the minister tell us why the department did not comply with the law, and as minister, of course, the minister is responsible for making sure that the department follows the law. As Attorney General, she bears an additional responsibility of ensuring that the government follows the law, so I would ask the Attorney General and Minister of Health and Social Services what steps the Attorney General is taking to ensure that the Minister of Health and Social Services complies with the law going forward.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I appreciate the question. There is not time today to respond in any way, so I assure you that I will respond when we get the opportunity to do that.

Seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Acting Chair:** I declare the motion carried.

Pursuant to Committee of the Whole Motion No. 17 adopted earlier today, Committee of the Whole will receive witnesses from Yukon University. In order to allow the witnesses to take their places in the Chamber, the Committee will now recess and reconvene at 4:15 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. 17 adopted on this day, Committee of the Whole will now receive witnesses from the Yukon University.

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.

The Member for Mountainview will, I believe, introduce the witnesses.

### *Witnesses introduced*

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** The witnesses appearing before Committee of the Whole today are: Dr. Lesley Brown, president and vice-chancellor, and Chris Mahar, chair of the Governance Committee of the Board of Governors for Yukon University. I would ask my colleagues to help me in welcoming them to the Assembly today. Thank you so much for being here.

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

**Ms. Mahar:** Thank you, Madam Chair, Hon. Minister McLean, and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the opportunity to speak with you today. I would first like to acknowledge that we are present on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta’an Kwäch’än Council.

I am here as a member of the Yukon University Board of Governors and chair of our Governance Committee. I am pleased to appear before you today with our president and vice-chancellor, Dr. Lesley Brown.

Madam Chair, our visit today comes on the heels of a very exciting announcement for Yukon University. On October 29, Yukon University was named as the 97<sup>th</sup> member of Universities Canada, which is an organization that represents universities across the country. We are very happy to provide any further context should questions arise, but until then, I am so pleased to congratulate Minister McLean, her team, and indeed all members of the Legislature on this national recognition confirming Yukon University to be among the ranks of universities in Canada.

This recognition means that this territory has built a university that can stand independently and with the assurance that our graduates are receiving an education that meets the same standards of quality as any other university within the member organization. In many ways, this outcome confirms a national recognition in our transition from college to university status.

We are now closing in on the completion of our third year of our strategic plan, *Becoming*, and now, with our Universities Canada membership confirmed, we are well on our way to delivering on the full potential that this university promises.

In this regard, we are pleased to confirm the current development of three degrees that will provide graduates in key demand sectors of the territory. In the health sector, we are developing a bachelor of social work degree as well as a bachelor of nursing degree. In the education sector, we are developing a new bachelor of education degree. As you know, two of these degrees — the social work and education — are already offered at Yukon University.

At the present time, these degrees are offered in partnership with another university. Now, and with our Universities Canada membership confirmed, Yukon University is moving to host our own degrees in these fields. In doing so,

the university will be more responsive in content and in teaching practices to the specific needs of the north.

The bachelor of nursing degree is a new commitment for the university, and Yukon University is proud to work with our government partners to contribute to the advancing of aspirations of the *Health Human Resources Strategy* that was released last year and, in doing so, ensure access to a pipeline of educated nurses for the territory and indeed the north.

In September, the university announced the appointment of a new chancellor, Shaan Tlein Carol Geddes, who is a citizen of the Teslin Tlingit Council and a long-term friend of Yukon University. Carol has been a member of the Board of Governors of the college and of the university, serving for the past 13 years. She is a prominent Canadian filmmaker and author, and she is also an alumnus of Yukon College. Carol will be installed as the ninth chancellor of Yukon University at our convocation ceremony in June 2025.

Many, many thanks to our former chancellor, Jemena James Allen, who served as chancellor of the college as well as the university.

Madam Chair, as we recognize chancellors of Yukon College and Yukon University, I would like to take a moment to recognize member Geraldine Van Bibber, MLA for Porter Creek North, who served as the sixth chancellor of Yukon College. Thank you, Ms. Van Bibber; you have certainly helped to set the path for post-secondary education in the territory.

On the topic of graduation, in June 2024, Yukon University celebrated 188 new alumni who collectively earned 36 degrees, 50 diplomas, and 102 certificates. Of these 188 graduates, there were 39, or 21 percent, who self-identified as Indigenous. Of those 39, 11 earned a degree.

I look forward to providing further updates on the development of the new science building, known as the “Polaris project”, during the question period.

Until that, I will share that the construction is on track for spring 2025 and that the project cost remains at \$49.7 million.

**Chair:** Order.

**Mr. Kent:** Madam Chair, I thank the witnesses for appearing here today.

Earlier today, the Minister of Education tabled a letter dated November 8, 2024, that was in response to questions that — outstanding questions or responses I guess to the questions that we had last year in November 2023. Just curious if the witnesses can tell us why it took almost a year to get these responses.

**Ms. Brown:** Madam Chair, can I ask for just a repeat of the last part of the question? I’m sorry; I didn’t catch it.

**Mr. Kent:** Madam Chair, again, this is a letter that was tabled earlier today by the Minister of Education, dated November 8, 2024, in response to questions that were outstanding from the witnesses’ appearance last November — so, November 20, 2023. I’m just curious if the witnesses can tell us why it took almost a year to get these responses.

**Ms. Brown:** Madam Chair, thank you for the question. I will take responsibility for the delay in receiving the returns. There is no other reason — there is no reason.

**Mr. Kent:** I appreciate that. So hopefully, if there are outstanding issues, we can get a more timely response after today’s appearance.

Just a quick question: When were the witnesses informed that they would be asked to appear this fall, and when were they informed that they would be asked to appear on this specific date?

**Ms. Brown:** Madam Chair, I’m sorry; I don’t know the specific date offhand, but I think it was within three weeks ago that we received the date — would you say?

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

**Mr. Kent:** I thank the witness for that. That’s helpful; it just gives us a sense of when they were informed that they would be appearing.

When I was on the website earlier today preparing for this afternoon, just looking for some stuff, I went under the “Institutional publications, plans and reports” — I believe that it’s under the “About us” tab on the website — and under that is “Yukon University Statistics”. It said that it “Includes fast facts covering annual student enrolment figures, graduation statistics and in-class student survey results.”

When I clicked on that tab to get a sense of where we are at, it says that access is denied and that I was unable to access that information. I am just curious if the witnesses can say if that is something that is done on purpose to restrict access to that or is there some other reason that I can’t access those university statistics?

**Ms. Brown:** I apologize to the member for the inconvenience in trying to access information. It certainly does not uphold the type of institution that we want to be and uphold our commitment to transparency.

If I may offer an explanation, I would say that we are in the process of updating our landing pages for Yukon University, and I expect that it was simply an unfortunate coincidence.

**Mr. Kent:** We will look forward to that hopefully being rectified, and we can get a sense for what the statistics are on that page. I know they are included in some of the reports, but I was hoping for some more up-to-date information from that particular page on the website.

The witnesses talked in their opening about membership in Universities Canada. I am curious if they can answer some financial questions about that process. How much was spent on the application process by the university? If the witnesses can tell us what the annual dues are to be in that organization and then if they can also compare the cost. I believe that the Yukon University also has a membership in Colleges and Institutes Canada. Can they confirm that and what the cost comparisons are between the two organizations?

**Ms. Brown:** The cost of application to Universities Canada was \$18,000. The annual fee for the Universities Canada membership is as yet to be determined, but it is a rate that is pro-rated to the size of the institution. I anticipate that it will be an annual rate that will be within the cost of our CICan membership — somewhere between \$15,000 and \$20,000.

**Mr. Kent:** I am sorry. Did the witness say that we are still a member of Colleges and Institutes Canada, which I

believe she referred to as “CICan”? Are we still a member of that as well as of Universities Canada?

**Ms. Brown:** Yes, the university is still a member and shall remain a member of Colleges and Institutes Canada.

**Mr. Kent:** I wanted to jump over to some recent announcements by the federal government with respect to the intake cap on international students. In a news release dated September 18, 2024 from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, there was an announcement made of a further reduction on the intake cap of international student study permits for 2025 based on a 10-percent reduction from the 2024 target of new study permits issued and then stabilizing the intake cap for 2026 such that the number of study permits issued remains the same as 2025. It says that, for 2025, this means reducing study permits issued to 437,000 nationwide. I am just curious what the effect is on Yukon University with respect to study permits for international students. Are we seeing a reduction? What is the corresponding impact on revenues of the university from that reduction?

**Ms. Brown:** Thank you for the question. I will respond with respect to the federal policy changes on study permits. I will update the members that the territory was allocated a total of 250 permits. Yukon University shares the territorial allocation with Alcan Air, which offers a flight school. At the present moment, Yukon University international students utilized 38 percent of the territory’s 250 study permits allocation.

So, in response to the member’s question, even with an anticipated 10-percent reduction in 2025, I don’t foresee a significant impact of the study permit allocation on the enrolment of international students at Yukon University.

**Mr. Kent:** In an op-ed that was published in *The Hill Times* on September 25 of this year — it was written by Gabriel Miller, who is coincidentally the president and CEO of Universities Canada — he states — and I will quote: “The federal government’s haphazard moves over the last year to cut the number of international student permits threaten this vital part of the Canadian economy. International students enrich classrooms and help fund Canadian education. Recent policy changes are damaging our ability to attract the talent we need for the future, pushing universities deeper into deficit and hurting Canada’s ability to compete.”

I am just curious if the witnesses would like to comment on this statement made by the president and CEO of Universities Canada with respect to what they are calling the federal government’s “haphazard moves” over the last year to cut the number of international student permits.

**Ms. Brown:** I also anticipate that the federal policy changes will have an impact on the number of international students studying in Canada. As I have said previously, we do not anticipate that there will be an impact significantly as a result of the study permit changes.

I will follow up, however, and clarify that there are some other federal policy changes that will bring anticipated impacts to Yukon University, and those federal policy changes pertain to not just the number of study permits that are allocated, but

they pertain to the specific programs in which students can enrol in order to receive a post-graduate work permit.

At this point in time, those programs are highly prescribed and do not align with the current program complement or the suite of programs at Yukon University. We are awaiting further information to see if there will be any diversification of these restrictions. We anticipate that there may be, and we are hopeful that, if there is opportunity to participate in any conversations, Yukon University can have a seat at that table and express what our territorial needs will be.

In the absence of that — and specifically should there not be any diversifications of the program offerings — the university is anticipating that the enrolment of international students will begin to decline.

**Mr. Kent:** I appreciate that.

In a CBC article, Mr. Miller also said that, with the chaos from the new policies likely pushing talented students who would contribute much to Canada to turn elsewhere instead — he is quoted as saying: “It’s really costing Canada the people we are gonna need to be doctors, to be engineers, to be entrepreneurs.” Obviously, this is a big concern with some of the larger institutions down south, and it sounds like that concern may trickle up here as well.

Some other decisions that were made by the Government of Canada — I am wondering if the witnesses can tell us if they are having an effect on the trades training here at Yukon University. In late July 2024, the Government of Canada announced that they were ending their apprenticeship incentive grant and their apprenticeship completion grant and would not be accepting applications for these grants after March 31, 2025.

I did, earlier this Sitting, introduce a motion on the floor of the House urging the federal government to reconsider these plans, but I am just curious if the witnesses can tell us if there is any impact from those grant cuts on what they are seeing for enrolment or if some of these students who are affected are looking to the university or others to step in to help with the money that they will not be receiving from the federal government.

**Ms. Brown:** Madam Chair, thank you for the question. I am unable to comment directly about impacts at the federal level on the students who are currently enrolled in our apprenticeship programs, but I will add that — and perhaps offer some speculation or inference — I will add that our enrolments in our apprenticeship level as well as our pre-apprenticeship courses are absolutely thriving.

**Mr. Kent:** I will be interested — we will follow up, obviously, with the minister and with others to see what sort of effect that this loss of grant money from the Government of Canada has on apprentices who are training locally.

I did want to jump over to something that I asked about when the witnesses were here last year, and that is a student engagement survey. At the time, my understanding was that the last student engagement survey was conducted in 2021. The witnesses explained that they were looking to choose a new model on how that student engagement survey would be conducted.

I am just curious if they can comment on where they are at. Has the model been chosen yet, and when do we expect the next survey?

On November 20 of last year, the president told the House that they expected it to be — quote: "... the next year or so." Are we on track for a student survey? Then I think they wanted to go to an every-two-year rotation, so is that also part of the plan going forward with the student engagement surveys?

**Ms. Brown:** Madam Chair, I'm going to have to defer on that one and perhaps return back with a more fulsome answer.

**Mr. Kent:** Last year, we also talked about an employee engagement strategy, so I'm just wondering and curious if that work has been initiated, and if so, when can staff of Yukon University be expected to see an employee engagement survey come out?

**Ms. Brown:** Madam Chair, thank you for the follow-up question. Happy to provide an answer on this one. The employee engagement survey has been issued, has been completed. It was issued for the first time within the institution by a third-party vendor, therefore providing an arm's-length assessment of the data. The data have been analyzed; the data have been shared — the results have been shared with the community, and the results are available for employees of the university from my website.

**Mr. Kent:** Are those results also available publicly, or is it just for employees of the university?

**Ms. Brown:** At this point, those results are available only for employees of the university. They have been shared at the HR-board level.

**Mr. Kent:** Are there plans to make those public? I know that, for instance, with the Yukon government employee engagement surveys, when they are conducted, those results are made public. So, are there plans in place for the university to follow suit?

**Ms. Brown:** The answer to that question would not be within my purview; that would be an answer for the Board of Governors.

**Mr. Kent:** Would we request that from the Board of Governors then? Would the president suggest that we write a letter to the Board of Governors to request whether that information will be made public?

**Ms. Mahar:** Yes, I can take that back to the board, that interest, and we are just tabulating the results of that, so once the board gets that, I will share that.

**Mr. Kent:** So, the results are still being tabulated. But as those results are being tabulated, employees of the university are able to access that before that is complete? Sorry, I am just trying to figure out what stage we are at with respect to the employee engagement survey.

**Ms. Mahar:** My apologies, Madam Chair. They are complete, and they have gone to the HR-committee portion of the board but have not come to the board just yet.

**Mr. Kent:** I thank the witness for that clarification, and we will look forward to getting some information back, perhaps from the Board of Governors, on whether or not they are going to release the results of the employee engagement strategy.

Sorry, just to follow up on that quickly, the witness mentioned that it was issued and completed by a third-party vendor. I am just looking for some timing around that. When was the survey issued, and when was it completed and submitted to — I think that it has been submitted to the HR committee but not to the board yet.

**Ms. Brown:** Perhaps it might make the most sense for us to add a timeline with that data in a return rather than speculating or trying to recall.

**Mr. Kent:** Thanks very much; I appreciate that. So, we'll get a timeline with a return on the employee engagement survey and then some follow-up information, from my understanding, on the student engagement survey and where we are at with the model with respect to that.

I did want to jump over to the Polaris building now. In the letter that was tabled earlier today, the eighth point — an update on the Polaris project — quote: "We are looking forward to construction beginning on the new science building in Spring 2025. We are issuing tenders in Fall 2024 to secure contractors for next spring's construction season." It goes on to describe the building. My questions are around the tendering schedule.

Ketza Construction Corporation put out a notice on Facebook last week that they are the construction manager for the new Polaris project at Yukon University. They are pleased to invite qualified subcontractors to the tender call closing on December 10, 2024. My question is with respect to the contract for Ketza Construction to be the construction manager — if the witnesses can tell us when that was tendered and how that contract was tendered and perhaps how many bids were submitted and if I can be directed to a website or somewhere that provides the information about the bid amounts and bids submitted, similar to Bids & Tenders Yukon, that would be helpful.

**Ms. Mahar:** Yes, the Ketza Construction contract was awarded in January 2024. It was a public tender and it was distributed through the MERX system.

**Mr. Kent:** So, you have to sign up for a membership I think to access MERX, so I'm unable to access it. Would the witnesses just be able to tell us the value of the construction manager contract that Ketza Construction was awarded?

**Ms. Mahar:** Can we ask for just five seconds?

Yes, I'm sorry about that; we don't have the exact amount with us today, but we will get that back to you.

**Mr. Kent:** I'll appreciate getting that information. When it comes to the contract for the construction management and then the subsequent subcontractor contracts that are due to be issued later this fall, will Yukon University be following the Yukon government's First Nation procurement policy when they issue and award those tenders?

**Ms. Brown:** First of all, Madam Chair, we now have an answer for the previous question — apologies for the delay. The lowest bid was \$3.4 million.

If you will allow us grace for another five seconds, we might be able to answer the second question.

**Mr. Kent:** Madam Chair, while they are getting that information, I have a couple of other questions with respect to this project. I know that they mentioned the final cost in their

opening statements, but hopefully they can repeat that number, tell us what the revised construction schedule is, and then perhaps give us a breakdown of — we know that the federal government has committed quite a substantial amount to it, but where is the rest or the balance of money coming from for the project?

**Ms. Mahar:** Our total so far of the estimated project cost is \$49.7 million. Of course, going out to the subtrades will give us more certainty on that project amount. We anticipate the project beginning in the spring of 2025. There have been some challenges getting development permits. One of the main delays was water pressure to the campus area. Of course, it is always challenging to get that type of work done before winter hits.

In spite of that, we expect that it will proceed in the spring and to have everyone up and ready to go. We hope to have it open in 2027. We are still looking at a 26-month construction period.

As for where the money is coming from, we have confirmed, in total, \$44.5 million of the \$49.7 million, and \$26 million is coming from CIRNAC, \$13 million from the Yukon government, \$5.3 million from NRCan, and another \$200,000 from other federal departments. We appreciate that this is a bit short and we are actively working on closing that gap. I prefer not to say anything because there is nothing signed and I don't want to close anybody else in, but we are confident — and also through the Yukon Foundation — that we will be able to come up with the remainder.

**Mr. Kent:** Will the university be starting construction even with the \$5.2-million funding gap that exists? Will they start construction before that is closed, or will they wait until they have all the resources in place? Of course, this is pending additional or potential costs after the bids come in, or perhaps it's less, but will be they waiting to tender until that funding gap is closed?

**Ms. Mahar:** We hope to have that gap closed, and regardless, at that point in time, that will become a board decision, but there will be a strategy in place before that work begins.

In relation to the First Nation procurement policy, the university did not expressly follow the Yukon government policy, but the process and the project is specifically taking First Nation procurement into account. Certainly, advertising is targeted to First Nations and their corporations. Negotiations have been taking place and that has been made expressly clear to Ketza as well — the need for First Nations.

**Mr. Kent:** Can the witnesses expand a little bit further on why they did not follow the First Nation procurement policy that is set out by YG? I know there is no requirement for them to do so, but I am just curious why they would not have followed that policy that YG has in place for their contracts?

**Ms. Brown:** I am unaware of the requirement for the university to follow government policy, and so we are following in accordance with best practice in order to ensure priority to First Nation businesses.

**Mr. Kent:** Sorry — perhaps the witness didn't hear me — I said that I understand that there is no requirement for the

university to follow the government's policy; I was just curious why they chose not to in this place, and the witness answered that question for me.

Just a couple of questions — I wanted to jump over to the financial statements. A question about — I'm on page 24 of the Yukon University notes to the consolidated financial statements for the year ended March 31, 2024. Just a couple of questions here. From 2023 to 2024 — these are the fiscal year ends — a couple of things jumped out at me. The contract services went from \$5.8 million to about \$6.98 million — just curious if the witnesses have any explanation for that fairly large jump in that line item. This is on "Expenditures By Object" on that page.

**Ms. Brown:** If I may, I would just like to close the loop on the previous question regarding the First Nation procurement policy and to confirm to the member and to the members that the university is developing its own procurement policy in alignment with best practice among post-secondary institutions across Canada.

With respect to the financial results for 2024 versus 2022-23 in contract services, I am very pleased to provide a specific breakdown for the reasons for the variance between 2022-23 and 2023-24. With respect to the variance, I would just like to clarify that the difference — or the total value in each year is comprised of expenditures from core allocation as well as expenditures from restricted or third-party funding.

In 2023-24, the core allocation, which I expect that the member is interested in learning about, was \$3.7 million. In 2022-23, the core allocation or core expenditures was \$3.3 million, indicating a delta of about \$400,000. That \$400,000 is comprised of: \$90,000 to secondments; \$80,000 to annual insurance premiums; \$63,000 related to costs of exploring whether or not our science building would or should include health programs; \$52,000 to various facilities contracts; \$37,000 to process mapping contracts, as we continue to seek efficiencies in our ongoing operations and the expenditure of our resources to uphold those operations; \$27,000 to contracts for research; and \$47,000 in other miscellaneous contracts.

**Mr. Kent:** I appreciate that. Jumping over to the next page, it is note 17, Government of Yukon contributions. In 2023, it was just slightly over \$40 million — \$40.067 million — and then, in 2024, it went down to \$39.369 million approximately. So, I am just curious if the witnesses will comment on that. It looks like the operating contributions have gone up, but other contributions and services received without charge have gone down, while pension funding contributions have stayed level. I am just looking for a comment from the witnesses on what went down in other contributions and services received without charge.

Madam Chair, that concludes my questions for today. After this, I will turn it over to my colleague the Member for Takhini-Kopper King and thank the witnesses for coming today.

**Ms. Mahar:** Our overall operating contributions have gone up, as you mentioned. So, that is our core funding. Other contributions have gone down slightly. That changes year to year depending on the priorities and demands. For example, if



it was the start-up of a particular program, that would change — those change every year.

The big change, though, is related to services received without charge, and that was because there was, on the Yukon government-side, on the building side of things, an increased amortization that was put through in 2023. I am not certain — and it would be for the government to answer — but I believe that probably related to a new accounting — the asset retirement obligations. That was the big difference, and we are now back to normalized at 2024.

**Ms. White:** Pardon me, Madam Chair; I was just waiting to see if the witnesses were working on any additional answers for my colleague the Member for Copperbelt South.

Welcome, of course, to the Yukon University representatives. We are delighted to have them here.

I am going to jump right in with collective bargaining. In the last collective agreement signed by the Yukon University Employees Union, there was a clause known as “Letter of Understanding N”, and it stipulated that, if Yukon government workers received economic increases that are more than what was negotiated by the Yukon University workers and if the university received that same increase in funding, the university would work with the union to increase wages by the same amount as Yukon government.

Did the university request a funding increase from the Yukon government to match the 10.5-percent wage increase that Yukon government workers received?

**Ms. Brown:** Yes, the university worked with Yukon government to seek more funding.

**Ms. White:** What was Yukon government’s response to that request?

**Ms. Brown:** I might defer this question to the minister given that it is a question about the government’s response.

**Ms. White:** So, in full disclosure, I have been contacted by employees of Yukon University who are frustrated by the fact that they didn’t get the 10.5-percent wage increase that Yukon government employees did.

I appreciate that the university did request that increase from Yukon government. So, without the witnesses saying yes or no that it was positively or negatively responded to, then it just leaves me knowing that the Yukon University employees are short. Based on the number of e-mails that I get, they are frustrated.

I guess the next question would be: Did the witnesses communicate that with the Yukon University Employees Union to say that they did request that funding increase to be able to meet that 10.5-percent wage increase that Yukon government employees received?

**Ms. Brown:** I am 90-percent confident that the answer is yes, but I will need to assure with 100-percent confidence — so I will seek a deferral on this one.

**Ms. White:** I look forward to getting that response.

Where did the Yukon University wages fall in comparison to other Canadian universities? How do we compare?

**Ms. Brown:** Again, I will follow up with a more comprehensive, thorough evaluation of how our wage tables compare across the country. I extend apologies to the member.

This is not information that as president I have at my fingertips at this moment.

**Ms. White:** I absolutely appreciate it. I am going to add a couple more questions then to go on that.

I am also interested in knowing how wages compare with similar positions within Yukon government. I am interested to know if there has been job loss between the university toward the Yukon government because of that wage difference. I will just put those out to get a response back.

Something that maybe the witnesses can answer is: How many vacant positions are there at the university currently?

**Ms. Brown:** I would like to thank the member for the question. I am very happy to provide updates on comparable positions between Yukon University and Yukon government, but I do want to extend the caveat that the data set will be quite limited given that the purposes and the mandates of both of those organizations are very different. The data set would only be inclusive of operational or administrative positions, but I am very happy to look into that.

With respect to the total number of vacant positions at the university at this point in time, again, it is not information that I am able to share at this juncture, but I can add some context and indicate that we have increased significantly our number of permanent staff positions over this past year and we have filled a number of vacated positions that have been vacant for a few years; I just don’t have the exact number of positions.

**Ms. White:** Just understanding that some of those positions that have been recently filled have been vacant for a number of years, I am wondering if there is trouble recruiting for the university, and if there is, is there a sense of why that is?

**Ms. Brown:** I think that every organization within the territory probably has trouble recruiting. We are a small population with the same complexity of problems, challenges, and opportunities as every other territory and province and region in this country. I don’t expect that our challenges, however, in recruitment are any different from any challenges that other sectors have or may be experiencing at this point in time.

**Ms. White:** Can I get an update on the status of the current round of negotiations?

**Ms. Brown:** Madam Chair, bargaining commenced on November 2.

**Ms. White:** I do thank the witness for that. Maybe going forward in this one, if we are looking at the wage matching, maybe looking toward different language than what existed before just based on the challenges that I understand happened again on the letter of understanding and that reopener clause and understanding that there are more traditional ones that guarantee that ability to go back. But I do appreciate that negotiations have just started.

Can the witness tell me or describe the university’s current financial position — where we’re standing, how we feel about it? Yes, I just want to know where we’re at.

**Ms. Brown:** Madam Chair, the university is operating within its revenue constraints. In January of this past year — a very modest surplus of just over \$200,000. If you look at our consolidated statement of operations for 2024 versus 2023,

what you will notice is that we have demonstrated a near 5-percent increase in our revenues alongside a near 10-percent increase in expenses. On the revenue side, we are existing with stable government funding. We have a slight increase in our tuition revenue as a result of an increase in enrolment, and we also have some revenue that is generated as a result of interest income.

On the expense side, we have a 10-percent increase in our direct instructional costs and instructional support, demonstrating a greater investment into the faculty and in classrooms. We also have had a financial adjustment to a new faculty pay grid, and we also have new appointments in existing programs. Our administrative costs have increased slightly — 15 percent — slightly outpacing the increase in instructional support; however, that 15 percent is a timely investment reflecting our evolution and our maturation as a university as we shore up our processes and invest in positions that are going to ensure the efficiency of our operations and therefore stabilize and support our primary business and our primary imperative, which is education.

**Ms. White:** I thank the witness for that answer.

I am really familiar with the university footprint, especially housing. Is there currently enough student housing available for the university students?

**Ms. Brown:** The direct answer and the simplest answer is that there is not. No, there is not enough housing available to university students. That answer, however, is an answer that you would get from every university president in this country.

**Ms. White:** Absolutely. More housing, more students — it is pretty straight-across math.

Are there any plans to increase student housing in the next couple of years?

**Ms. Brown:** It is definitely a live topic for us — a hot topic for us. It is something that, as we look to the future, is our next priority for capital expansion. Prior to creating the business case demonstrating the need for student housing, we will be working on collecting data. We will be working on looking at our existing spaces that we have to ensure efficiency and maximizing what we currently have as a housing footprint.

We will also be looking at our intake policies and existing policies around, for example, who gets priority access to housing and how long students can stay in housing — lots of work.

**Ms. White:** I thank the witness for that. I do appreciate the challenges and the complexity of that — absolutely.

I am going to keep moving on. Does the university have a sexual assault policy? If they do, how does one find it?

**Ms. Brown:** Yes, the university has a sexual violence policy. It is a legislated requirement and you can find it on our policy page. It may be under review at this point in time.

**Ms. White:** It turns out that I was looking under the wrong language. I was looking for “sexual assault” and it was “sexual violence”.

Is there a difference for reporting between staff or students, or is it the same process for both?

**Ms. Brown:** Students would be supported in an event of sexual violence through the office of the registrar. Faculty and

staff — our employees — are supported through our human resources office.

**Ms. White:** Just trying to find it very quickly online. Has it been updated since — it says “next review date”, on the document I can find, is September 2021. Is that the most current one, or is there a more current one?

**Ms. Brown:** The policy is currently under review.

**Ms. White:** I thank the witnesses for that. That will explain why that is outdated.

In the 2023-24 annual report for the MMIWG2S+ action item 2.9, it says that Yukon University has been invited to become a signatory of the MMIWG2S+ strategy. Can the witnesses update me on that?

**Ms. Brown:** Madam Chair, before I do, I would like to commend the work of Minister McLean on this strategy. It is an exceptional document and a very important framework to ensure safety.

With respect to Yukon University, Yukon University was very pleased to submit our updates to the first-year implementation, and I expect that they will be included in the report.

**Ms. White:** I do appreciate that answer from the witness.

Just a follow-up on that, action item 3.2 says that post-secondary education and professional development is to improve funding for access to relevant career counselling, post-secondary education programs, and community education outreach. It says that the milestones are aimed at Yukon First Nation governments, Yukon government, and the federal government, but many of these are appropriate for consideration by the Yukon University as well.

So, has the university made efforts to increase representation of Indigenous women and two-spirit+ people in teaching and other roles at the university?

**Ms. Brown:** Absolutely. The university, in fact, prioritizes hires of Yukon First Nation people and members of marginalized communities. If I may extend beyond our employee base, I would also like to recognize the efforts of our provost and registrar for the completion of the university’s first strategic enrolment management plan. Within this plan, there is an articulated commitment toward the recruitment of Yukon First Nation students.

**Ms. White:** I would like to dig into that a little bit, please, if the witnesses could just expand on that plan and whether we have seen any results. I was initially invited to the convocation at the university probably more than 10 years ago, when my roommate Alex was initially graduating. I showed up at the university totally inappropriately dressed for the event. Then it became my cheer line, my high-five line, started by myself on the side of the sidewalk, because I was not appropriately dressed for the event. But I can say that, in the years that I have been doing it now, graduation is one of the absolute best times. Seeing the students going through that graduation, including in regalia, for the different degrees and things that are being granted — it’s very exciting.

If the witness has some additional information on First Nation involvement, I would love to hear it.

**Ms. Brown:** I can update the member that, at the current time, 2024-25 academic year, the composition of Indigenous students at Yukon University is currently at 23 percent. As my colleague updated, we had a very successful graduation last year, and we conferred 36 degrees, of which 11 were earned by First Nation students.

I will follow up on the initial part of the member's question, which was about the strategic enrolment management plan. This is a document that has been approved by both of the governing bodies of the institution — our university senate as well as the Board of Governors. It is a framework document and an operational document that is internal to the university. It articulates our goals as well as our strategies for enrolment over the next five years.

I'm very proud to share that the university and the board have approved a growth target for the university with an aspiration of 20-percent growth to 2030 over the next five years. Within that 20-percent growth, as I have said previously, there is a prioritized action toward the recruitment of Yukon First Nation students, which will be implemented by investments that have been made and will continue to be made. For example, we have some Yukon First Nation student navigators as well as recruitment personnel, and we have also dedicated I think pretty much the entirety of the registrar's travel budget toward recruitment travel throughout the territory for visits to each of the Yukon First Nations — to each of the communities throughout the territory.

**Ms. White:** I thank the witness for that. That is exciting news. Along some of that exciting news, for me, it's always trades or the northern mining innovation and the courses offered there. Could the witnesses give me an update on the current possible registration in the trades and apprenticeships, which trades are being offered, whether they are just at the Whitehorse campus or if there are some being offered remotely?

**Ms. Brown:** Madam Chair, very enthusiastically, I can provide the member with an update on our trades enrolments. At our apprenticeship levels, for fall 2024-25 — so at this present moment in time — we have 26 students enrolled, with a significant additional enrolment anticipated later in the fall and in winter 2024-25. The reason for that is that the trades students run at a cycle that is off-cycle from the traditional academic year. So, those 26 are not the full complement that we expect for 2024-25. We are expecting to exceed previous enrolments. Last year, we had 116 in our apprenticeship levels and, the year before, 101.

Our pre-apprentice trades enrolments courses are absolutely thriving, as I mentioned earlier. This year, we currently have 32 learners enrolled with more anticipated, just like the trades — anticipated later in the winter and later in the fall.

Our previous annual enrolments were 40 last year and 46 the year before.

With respect to the specific trades that we are offering, the university is currently offering all years of apprenticeship training for carpentry, electrical, welding, and heavy equipment

technician. In the final year, the apprentices can challenge their red seal exam.

As I have referred to, we also offer a pre-apprenticeship training in all of these trades every year, and we are looking forward to offering apprenticeship training in pipe trades and air conditioning and refrigeration mechanical in the near future.

**Ms. White:** I appreciate that, for those four, we are able to do the full training here. I look forward to the additional two.

I know at one point, my partner was looking at doing HVAC tech and refrigeration and was going to have to go to Alberta and was not looking forward to it. I appreciate that this is closer to home.

Are any of those programs — actually, I don't know which ones. There were cooking programs being run in communities, which I think were phenomenal. It wasn't so much necessarily pre-apprenticeship, but it was very impressive to be at the Carmacks arena opening and to have all of the food prepared for the feast by students who had just done the Yukon University course, cooking in their own kitchens. So, maybe the witnesses could explain to me what that is and how many of those courses are running this fall.

**Ms. Brown:** I would like to start by recognizing our understanding of the need to be offering trades training in our communities. It is something that we hear all the time when we are travelling throughout the territory. We have committed and we have articulated our vision toward enhancing and building out the most central community campus in Dawson — most centrally located — to become a trades hub. We think that this would be a great way to serve the geographical breadth of the territory.

In follow-up to the comment made about the culinary students, that is a program that is also offered in our Pelly campus. I am sorry, but I can't remember the name of the program, but it is an initiative to prepare young students to be able to serve in the culinary field in various industries. It has been very successful and I was able to attend the graduation in Pelly and it was a very compelling experience.

We have also travelled with our existing culinary students who are housed at our Ayamdigut Campus. We have travelled with them to our Old Crow campus and we were able to share some of their skills and their expertise in Old Crow, which was very well-received and we look forward to doing that going forward.

I do have a long list of trades offered in communities and it might make most sense for me to share that directly with the member. I am happy to do that now — but if you have other questions.

**Ms. White:** I can find the list of trades online. I have often championed the importance of what are sometimes still considered as alternative careers over traditional education streams, as a tradesperson myself. I can tell you that any of the folks who are taking the introduction to culinary, as far as workplace goes — until I became Leader of the Yukon NDP, I made more money as a camp cook than I did as an elected person. So, there is money to definitely be made in trades and having worked in remote mining camps in the Yukon, I often

worked with community members — and to know that they could take over my spot would be a fantastic thing.

I realize that we are nearing out of time. I would like to thank the witnesses for coming. I look forward to seeing the growth in the trades. I am pleased to know that, years ago when I was told that they wouldn't take their foot off the trades as they went to become a university, they recognized the importance of trades in the territory and the origins — I am happy to see that they have continued on, so I thank the witnesses for their time.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Madam Chair, on behalf of Committee of the Whole, I would like to thank Dr. Lesley Brown, president and vice-chancellor, and Chris Mahar, chair of the Governance Committee of the Yukon University Board of Governors, for appearing as witnesses today. Thank you very much. I will work with the witnesses on any returns that may be required based on the testimony today, so thank you so much.

*Witnesses excused*

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

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

*Motion agreed to*

*Speaker resumes the Chair*

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

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

### Chair's report

**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. 17 adopted earlier today, witnesses appeared before Committee of the Whole to answer questions regarding the operations of Yukon University.

**Speaker:** You have heard the report from the Chair of Committee of the Whole.

Are you agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Speaker:** I declare the report carried.

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

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

*Motion agreed to*

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

*The House adjourned at 5:28 p.m.*

### The following filed documents were tabled November 12, 2024:

35-1-280

Responses from appearance as witness in November 2023, letter re (dated November 8, 2024) from Lesley Brown, president and vice-chancellor, Yukon University, to Hon. Jeanie McLean, Minister of Education (McLean)

35-1-281

Completion of Sensory Room Setup, letter re (dated November 7, 2024) from Whistle Bend Elementary School Council to Emma Eaton, Student Support Services, Department of Education (Clarke, Y.)

35-1-282

Follow-Up on Funding Concerns for the Yukon Fire Marshal's Office, letter re (dated November 9, 2024) from John Smith, Vice President, Association of Yukon Fire Chiefs, to Hon. Richard Mostyn, Minister of Community Services (White)