



Yukon Legislative Assembly

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HANSARD

Wednesday, October 27, 2021 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2021 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 — Emily Tredger, MLA, Whitehorse Centre

CABINET MINISTERS

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

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

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Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
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Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, October 27, 2021 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

Speaker's statement — in recognition of shooting incident in Faro

Speaker: Yesterday, the lives of the residents of the Town of Faro were forever changed because of a tragic shooting incident in that community. Our hearts go out to the community and to the victims and their families. It is always a shock when these things happen, and sadly, they happen with too much frequency.

We must all be vigilant in our calling out of the violence. We must always have a society that does not tolerate it.

I want the community of Faro to know that all of the members have you in their thoughts today and that all members will do what we can do to support your community as you go through the initial shock and into the grieving process.

I now call on all members to rise and we will have a moment of silence.

Moment of silence observed

Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of changes made to the Order Paper. Motion No. 170, standing in the name of the Leader of the Official Opposition, was not placed on the Notice Paper, as it is identical to Motion No. 169, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge, and identified to be called for debate later today.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of personal privilege

Ms. Tredger: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of personal privilege to correct the record. Yesterday, under Notice of Opposition Private Members' Business, I misidentified the electoral district of the member in whose name Motion No. 168 stands. Motion No. 168 stands in the name of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.
 Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Media Literacy Week

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to national Media Literacy Week, happening from

October 25 to 30. National Media Literacy Week is meant to educate people on how to navigate the flood of information online, help Canadians become better digital citizens, and ensure that they have the tools to identify and stop the spread of misinformation. This has never been more important, and I can report that Canada's Centre for Digital Literacy has a website with useful educational videos, seminars, and online activities to help fight and better inform Canadians.

There is a social media campaign and resources for children, teachers, and parents. There are five themes to this year's awareness week: use, understand, engage, access, and verify.

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO and the Canadian Teachers' Federation are involved with supporting this important initiative. The goal is to grow critical thinking skills and give children tools to defend themselves from cyber bullying, to create more awareness about diversity and gender in media, to understand consent and use of personal information, such as photographs, to reduce online harassment and hate, and to make decisions based on the most credible information. We can all learn to be more discerning and careful as we collectively shape the values and cultures of our online spaces. This is vital now, when we need our entire community to come together through this pandemic — especially when making decisions about vaccinations and other guidance from medical professionals.

Canada's Centre for Digital and Media Literacy has a useful website where Yukoners can learn more at www.mediasmart.ca. There is also the digital Yukon Literacy and the Yukon's Information and Privacy Commissioner. The commissioner's website offers helpful tips, useful information, educational games, and lesson plans. This week is also a reminder to all of us in government to be extra cautious that we are providing clear, accurate, and timely information.

We want to be a highly credible source of information for Yukoners that people can rely on to inform their choices. Once again, I encourage everyone to take the time to learn more about digital media literacy, get informed, and help reduce the influence of misinformation.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition in recognition of national Media Literacy Week taking place from October 25 to 30.

This campaign promotes digital and media literacy across Canada and is filled with events and activities organized by media, schools, libraries, and more. Many of these events are organized with students and children in mind, but, of course, everyone can benefit greatly from increased media and digital awareness.

Hosted by MediaSmarts, Canada's Centre for Digital and Media Literacy, the campaign this year highlights a different media theme each day of the week: use, understand, engage, access, and verify. "Use" represents the skills needed to safely and effectively use media, computers, and Internet. "Understand" is a set of skills to critically analyze and evaluate media. "Engage" represents making and using media to express

ourselves and participate in our community. “Access” involves safely and ethically finding and navigating media. “Verify” and find out if online content is accurate and reliable. These themes can be discussed in a variety of ways with students of all ages to explain media literacy and how to determine the credibility of a source, article, video, and more.

In the ever-changing age of social media, it can be difficult to determine whether the information that you are reading, and in turn sharing, is relevant, up-to-date, researched, and verified. We have seen the power of the Internet in transforming minds and swaying public opinion. With social media platforms conveying messages often sprinkled with parity, deceit, and misinformation, people, young and old, are often faced with a credibility dilemma. Do I believe it? Is it funny or disrespectful? Should I share it?

As a parent, I preach and remind my children every day that the Internet is a powerful tool. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, are a part of everyday life. Used well, they can add to your learning experience at university and make you more employable when you graduate, but used poorly, they can cost lasting damage to you and others. Knowledge and information are at our fingertips. The first step to harnessing that knowledge is learning what to do with the information that we find.

Thank you to all those working to promote media, digital literacy, and awareness this week. Remember to enter the digital world not only with an inquisitive mind, but with a cautious one as well. I believe that education is key to developing engaged, informed, and active citizens.

Applause

Ms. Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to national Media Literacy Week. As my colleagues have mentioned, there is a theme for each day of this week, and today’s theme is “engage”. MediaSmarts’ website says — and I quote: “The ability to engage using digital media ensures that Canadians are active contributors to digital society.”

As more and more of our society goes online, from schools to workplaces to art galleries and news media, the ability to engage with digital media becomes more and more important. These are not skills that we are born with; we have to learn them. So, I would like to thank the parents and educators who work to make sure that Yukoners can engage with competence and compassion.

As I continue to look through MediaSmarts’ resources, I particularly appreciated a tip sheet called “How to push back against hate online”. Because so much of our world is online, we are all responsible for making sure that it’s a safe place. Thank you to the many Yukoners who work to make their online world safe for everyone.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I have for tabling the Yukon Hospital Corporation year-end review, 2020-21, which is tabled pursuant to section 13(3) of the *Hospital Act*.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees? Petitions.

PETITIONS

Petition No. 4 — received

Clerk: Mr. Speaker and honourable members of the Assembly: I have had the honour to review a petition, being Petition No. 4 of the First Session of the 35th Legislative Assembly, as presented by the Member for Watson Lake on October 26, 2021. The petition presented by the Member for Watson Lake meets the requirements as to form of the Standing Orders of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

Speaker: Accordingly, I declare Petition No. 4 read and received. Pursuant to Standing Order 67, “The Executive Council shall provide a response to a petition which has been received within eight sitting days of its presentation.”

Therefore, the Executive Council response to Petition No. 4 shall be provided on or before Tuesday, November 9, 2021.

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Ms. White: I rise to give notice of the following motion: THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to expedite the installation of a window in the sensory room at Hidden Valley Elementary School.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT the acting chief medical officer of health appear in Committee of the Whole prior to the end of the 2021 Fall Sitting, with advance notice of the date of the witness’ appearance provided to the Legislative Assembly by the Government of Yukon.

Ms. Blake: I rise to give notice of the following motion: THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to grant the chief medical officer of health order-making powers under the *Public Health and Safety Act*.

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

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Sexual abuse within elementary school

Mr. Kent: We have consistently been raising questions and concerns about the supports available for staff, parents, and especially students at Hidden Valley Elementary School in response to the sexual abuse scandal at that school. The Minister of Education has consistently responded saying that

additional supports are in place and that the department is coordinating support.

Yesterday, the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate raised some significant concerns about that claim by the minister. The Yukon Child and Youth Advocate said — and I quote: “I think the school itself is working really hard to try to support families, but I wouldn’t say that the coordinated effort that I was looking for has happened yet.” So, does the minister stand by her claims that the department is adequately coordinating supports at the school?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you for the opportunity to rise today to speak to our school system, really. I know that folks are well aware of the devastating incidents that happened at Hidden Valley school, and I recognize that children are at the heart of this and that many folks have been impacted, including the school community, the staff, the families, and the children. There is nothing more important, of course, than the well-being, safety, and protection of students. I have stood in the House and talked at great length about the extra supports that have been put in place. I have obtained from the department some very clear indications of what is different at Hidden Valley Elementary School this year in terms of supports. I actually had a really good conversation with the Leader of the Third Party today, raising a very specific concern about a family that is not receiving the supports that they need at this time. I am following up, I hope — if the information is provided directly to me, I will follow up directly on this situation.

Mr. Kent: The Child and Youth Advocate also said that she is worried that the systemic review that her office is conducting could be sidelined and that the so-called independent investigation that the Liberals have launched could overshadow it. Here is what she said to media — and I quote: “I don’t want to be sidelined. I really want the Child and Youth Advocate Office, which is the voice and rights of young people, to be more forefront, than pushed to the benches.”

Last week, the Premier told us that his government was working with the Child and Youth Advocate hand in glove. It seems like the Child and Youth Advocate has a different impression.

Can the minister clarify whether the government is fully supporting the Child and Youth Advocate’s review?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I have stated time and time again that we share the Child and Youth Advocate’s interest in ensuring the safety and protection of Yukon youth and ensuring policies and supports are in place to do what they are intended to do, which is to keep our children safe. The advocate’s review focuses, of course, on Education’s policies, protocols, and actions taken after allegations were brought forward.

I am in support of — and the department is working with — the Child and Youth Advocate. We have worked with her. I think that the part that the member opposite doesn’t include in that media report is that our discussions have been friendly, which means that we are working alongside the Child and Youth Advocate and in no way would ever sideline the Child and Youth Advocate’s work. This is an important review that is underway — one that we’ve highlighted over and over, along

with our independent review, which we launched and is a broader view of all the departments involved.

We also now have another review launched by the Ombudsman and, of course, the RCMP review into their investigation in 2019. All in, we have four reviews happening and we are cooperating with all of them.

Mr. Kent: Just to remind the minister that, in the media yesterday, it is the Child and Youth Advocate who is concerned with being sidelined, so that is something that the minister needs to address.

In the media a few weeks ago, the minister made a commitment to fully cooperate with the Child and Youth Advocate’s review and to provide all of the documents that the independent office is seeking.

Can the minister confirm that the government has waived Cabinet confidentiality and will provide to the Child and Youth Advocate all of the documentation that she has requested on the timeline that she has requested it? I would like the minister to be clear about this and to put that commitment clearly on the record here today.

Hon. Ms. McLean: As I’ve stated time and time again, we absolutely respect the work of the Child and Youth Advocate and share the same interests in ensuring that safety and protection of youth are — through policies and supports in place to do what they were intended to do, which is to keep our children safe. I have stated over and over again that our departments are working to support this review and will continue to do so.

I’m happy to continue working in a collaborative way with the Child and Youth Advocate, and I would be happy to also further reach out and have direct discussions with her around this review if there are concerns that arise.

Question re: Sexual abuse within elementary school

Mr. Dixon: Over the course of the past several weeks, Yukoners who have been seeking answers about what happened at Hidden Valley school have been left disappointed by the answers that the Liberal Cabinet ministers have provided. It has become the norm for the current Minister of Education to simply read her prepared script about all the things that government is doing. Unfortunately, that script has proven to often be wrong.

When the minister told us that there were additional supports going from the department to the school, the YTA had to weigh in and correct her. When the minister told us that they were coordinating support, the Child and Youth Advocate had to weigh in and say that wasn’t happening. When the minister told us that parents and students were getting additional resources, parents had to reach out to us and the NDP to point out that it wasn’t true.

Why do parents, teachers, and independent officers of the Legislature keep having to correct the Minister of Education?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I think that I’ve been clear all the way through in terms of our support to the school community and to those directly impacted by this. I work very closely and sincerely with all of the partners that we have. I will continue

to do so. I actually had a meeting yesterday with the president of the YTA and discussed the letter that was sent to his colleagues and also sent to me to clarify that there was some information taken out of context.

When discussing the no alone zones and other aspects, I was referring directly to the Hidden Valley Elementary School, and we had a really great discussion about communication going forward. We will be writing back to him with the answers to that letter, and we will also be writing to the education community and all the educators to ensure that they are aware that those changes were made to the Hidden Valley Elementary School. I will continue to elaborate on my answer in further questions.

Mr. Dixon: The simple fact is this: The Liberals have chosen to put all of this burden on the current Minister of Education. Even questions that we asked directly to the Premier or the former minister have been ignored and deflected to the current minister. The problem with this is that the minister hasn't been checking whether or not the script that she is reading is even accurate, and it seems that every week we have to ask why something she has told the Legislature either isn't true or hasn't happened.

If the minister is comfortable wearing this scandal on behalf of her colleague, then fine, but the least she can do is start providing accurate information to the Legislature.

Will the minister start doing her job and checking whether the script that she is provided to read is accurate?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, as I started this session, I will continue to be respectful — respectful to the families, to the school community, and to Yukoners — and to take my job very seriously. I am working closely with the school community. I know that I have been forthcoming when there are issues with supports that are to be obtained by families, and if there are issues, I am following up with those directly. I am working hard to ensure that the right leadership is in place with the department to ensure that the supports are in place for all — including the whole school community. That includes the teachers and the educators within Hidden Valley school and all schools.

I do not accept the preamble of the Leader of the Official Opposition. I take my job very seriously, and I am very committed and dedicated to the well-being of our children in this territory.

Mr. Dixon: I do know that the minister does take her job seriously. That's why I am sure that it must get embarrassing for the current minister to constantly have the words that she says in this Legislature either refuted or rebuked by those on the ground who actually know what is happening. We have seen it from the Yukon Teachers' Association, which called her out. We have seen it from the Child and Youth Advocate, who felt compelled to speak to the media about it this week. We have seen it from staff and teachers at the school who feel that the minister has tried to take credit for the work that they have done, and we have heard from parents who still don't feel that the department has done enough to support their children. The problem is that the current minister is too busy trying to shield the former minister from accountability to actually focus on

what matters: that is getting the supports in place for the parents, teachers, and students.

Will the minister stop trying to shield the former minister from accountability and start doing her job to ensure that what she commits to in the Legislature is actually true and actually happens?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, I will state that I will continue to be respectful. I will continue to do my work with integrity, to build relationships, and that is exactly how I have approached my job as Minister of Education — to build relationships. I have been working to meet with all the school councils. I have made myself very available to folks to talk about the concerns that they may have. I sincerely am working to get the right supports in place and to create system change.

I really want to remind Yukoners that the Yukon Party was in power for 14 years, and it is good to see that they are finally interested, really, in education, but I did not see that as a Yukoner during their mandate. I am happy to continue to do the work on behalf of Yukoners. That's what I put my name on that ballot for, and I am so honoured to be in this position. Yes, this is a difficult time, and it took decades to get us to where we are today. I am committed to working hard to change the education system, to fix what's wrong with it, and to move forward.

Question re: Chief medical officer of health authority

Ms. White: It seems everyday that case counts of COVID-19 continue to rise in the Yukon. Outbreaks in schools, communities, and long-term care — all spaces occupied by vulnerable Yukoners.

Before the lifting of most safety measures back in August, we were able to curb the spread of COVID-19 in our territory, but since these measures have been lifted, we have been seeing an ever-increasing rise of cases in the Yukon. Mr. Speaker, we now have more cases per capita than Ontario and Québec combined. Can the minister explain why Yukon is the only jurisdiction in Canada without a mask mandate?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak about the Yukon's response to COVID-19. We have always — as has been stated on many occasions — followed the science, the recommendations of the chief medical officer of health, the acting chief medical officer of health, and proceeded along the lines of those recommendations for the purposes of implementing them to protect Yukoners' health and safety.

In order to do that, we have received recommendations over the last 20 months and worked hard to implement them at every turn, so that Yukoners will be safe. The acting chief medical officer of health has made a recommendation. She classifies it as a strong recommendation for the purposes of mask use, and we encourage all Yukoners to use masks in public places where they cannot be distanced from other people and to abide by that recommendation from the chief medical officer of health.

Ms. White: So, the government has been saying, over and over, that they are following science and the advice of the chief medical officer of health and the acting chief medical

officer of health, but people are still unclear on what these recommendations are exactly.

In most jurisdictions in Canada, chief medical officers have the power to mandate compulsory masking; however, the Yukon's chief medical officer does not have the power under the *Public Health and Safety Act* or its regulations. It was troubling to hear the Premier suggest that the chief medical officer has the power to mandate masks on her own.

Is the minister opposed to empowering the chief medical officer of health to mandate public health orders?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: It's incredibly important for these issues to be brought to the floor of the Legislative Assembly, but some of the preamble in that question is not exactly accurate. The chief medical officer of health, under the *Public Health and Safety Act*, does, in some instances, have the authority to provide orders for certain parts of the Yukon Territory, whether they be geographic or specific instances of outbreaks, and that authority does exist in the current legislation. An authority for a wide order, Yukon-wide, does not currently exist in that *Public Health and Safety Act*. We are working with the chief medical officer of health on her recommendations, once we receive them, for the opportunity to determine how they should be implemented.

Ms. White: I think that the minister highlighted the problem. It is that communication from government has been muddy at best. She just said that she does, in some instances, have the ability.

So, Yukon's case count is rising daily. As of today, we are at 72 active cases. We are the last and the only jurisdiction in Canada without a mask mandate. We have one of the few chief medical officers of health who is powerless to introduce such a mandate. The government could grant the chief medical officer of health the power to make orders under the *Public Health and Safety Act*.

My question today is: Will the minister commit to granting the chief medical officer of health the power to make orders under the *Public Health and Safety Act*?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: All members of this House need to act responsibly to inform Yukoners of accurate information. Our strong leadership has guided us through the pandemic and kept our economy going strong. We are leading the country in the fight against COVID-19 and we need to keep going.

Our focus as a government remains protecting the health and safety of Yukoners. We are committed to working with our partners and to implementing these new requirements. The mandatory vaccine and the proof of vaccination requirements are based on the recommendations of the acting chief medical officer of health to limit the spread of COVID-19. These measures do align with steps being taken in other jurisdictions across the country to increase vaccination rates and combat the Delta variant.

Our government has been consistent in our response to the pandemic. We always follow the science. We get recommendations from the acting chief medical officer of health, and we work to implement those. We hope that a mask mandate will not necessarily be required when the vaccine rates continue to rise here in the territory. Individuals can — and we

urge them to — consider mask use, as recommended by the chief medical officer of health.

Question re: Sexual abuse within elementary school

Mr. Cathers: This week, the Yukon Ombudsman launched an investigation into the conduct of the Department of Education under the leadership of the now-Deputy Premier. The Deputy Premier mishandled the Hidden Valley school issue so seriously that there are now at least four investigations into what happened under her watch. The Deputy Premier admitted that she was aware of the sexual abuse that took place at Hidden Valley Elementary School. Despite this, she failed to ensure that parents were informed. She even hid this information from her colleague, the new Education minister. As a result of her mismanagement, victims of sexual abuse went without justice for 21 months. They went without supports and suffered in silence.

Will the Deputy Premier now do the right thing, accept responsibility, and resign?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, the only factual information from that whole spiel was the fact that the Ombudsperson is launching an independent review. The minister has been answering questions on behalf of the government in the Legislative Assembly on all issues and talking about the independence of these reviews and how important they are and how we will be absolutely working with all of them and providing all the information that they need.

We've answered this question a lot. The member opposite is taking a lot of liberties as far as what's factual and what's not in their narrative. We, on this side of the House, find it offensive — the way that they are already judge and jurors and have already decided before these independent reviews even start to really get to the issues that are most important to the families, to the children, and to the school system.

Mr. Cathers: Once again, we either see stonewalling or gaslighting from this Liberal government. No one from the Liberals has accepted any responsibility or accountability for this. This is a failure of leadership. Mr. Speaker, as you know, we are asking questions on behalf of parents.

Under the principle of ministerial accountability —

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Order. "Gaslighting" is out of order.

Mr. Cathers: Under the principle of ministerial accountability, the former minister is accountable for what happened in her department, and especially her own actions, as well as the decision not to share information with parents. She is accountable for the 21-month delay in justice and support for victims. The Deputy Premier knew what happened, but she didn't inform parents. As a result, children who were victims of sexual abuse went without justice.

Will the Deputy Premier finally accept that accountability, do the right thing, and resign from Cabinet?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, we've heard the exact same question from the member opposite countless times now.

It's the exact same question each time. We've answered the question. We've talked about the independent review. We've talked about current court cases that are going and the obligations as a department, as a government, to understand. I'm sure the member opposite, with his old roles in ministerial situations, understands that as well, but we see this narrative continuing every day, eking a little bit further about a narrative that the Yukon Party has invented. Every day, as they say it over and over again, they much more firmly believe it.

Mr. Speaker, again, I will answer the question. We have launched an independent review. The Ombudsperson has launched an independent review, the Child and Youth Advocate has launched an independent review, and the RCMP are also reviewing their processes. We will support and give any information necessary to all of these four, and we actively are looking forward to the results of all of those independent reviews so that we can make sure that the system is better for our children and for the school and for the community at large.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, ministerial accountability includes answering questions about your own actions. The fact that the Deputy Premier still does not have the decency to stop hiding behind her colleagues and get up in the House to defend her failures speaks volumes.

We know that she learned of the sexual abuse in 2019. A letter was drafted to notify parents, but the Deputy Premier never ensured that it was sent. We know that the minister was aware of the letter. She has openly admitted to media that she knew about the sexual abuse, yet a decision was made to hide this from parents.

This decision meant that victims went without justice for 21 months and suffered in silence. The former minister is accountable for that decision, that mistake, and that failure, and for that, she must resign.

Will the Deputy Premier finally do the right thing and resign from Cabinet?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate our message on this issue again to the members opposite. There is nothing more important to us, in the Yukon Liberal government, than the well-being, the safety, and the protection of students who are in our care — extremely important. This situation is absolutely devastating; it absolutely is. My ministers have acknowledged that mistakes have been made — absolutely. They have both apologized to parents and to the school community. They have taken steps to get to the bottom of what has happened, to make sure that we can move forward together.

Our government is absolutely committed to rebuilding that trust and strengthening our education system. We are absolutely committed to providing whatever information is necessary to the independent reviews. We are absolutely committed to the school community, to the parents, and to the children. That, on this side of the House, is what is extremely important. That is what the duty of accountability looks like, and these two individuals, who the members opposite continue to berate on a daily basis, are two of the strongest leaders I have ever witnessed in the community, in the Yukon, and I have absolute confidence in both of them.

Question re: Sexual abuse within elementary school

Mr. Dixon: Later today, the Legislature will vote on a motion about whether or not the Deputy Premier should be held accountable for the mishandling of the sexual abuse scandal at the Hidden Valley school that occurred under her watch. We know that this is not a confidence motion — so the NDP has no obligation to the Liberals to support it, as a result of their confidence and supply agreement.

However, I would like to ask the Premier: Has he, or anyone from his office or the Cabinet Office, reached out to the NDP to try to influence their vote on the motion that we will debate later today, calling on the Deputy Premier to resign?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Third Party is a very confident leader, and, again, we have had conversations about a whole bunch of things in the Legislative Assembly.

To say that I would ever try to influence her — well, I guess, a question to both of us, but I would say no. My conversations with the Leader of the Third Party are not to influence. But I like to make sure that I'm open and transparent and make sure that I have conversations with the members opposite. It would be great to do that with the Yukon Party, but, since the election forward, it has been radio silence.

Mr. Dixon: So, the Premier said a few things there. He said that he hasn't tried to influence the Leader of the NDP, but he has said that there were conversations about the motion. Can the Premier tell us what those conversations were with the NDP and whether or not any offer was made to the NDP to try to influence their vote on this motion?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, we have many conversations with the Leader of the Third Party. We have a CASA commitments secretariat that we have ongoing conversations with all the time. We have individual conversations, as well, as leaders, as the secretariat has questions for us to solve.

I'm not going to speak on behalf of the member opposite, and I'm not going to talk to the Yukon Party about the conversations that I have with the NDP, just as the Yukon Party is probably not going to talk to me about the conversations that they also have with their colleagues in different parties.

I'm looking forward to the conversation today; I'm looking forward to what the members opposite have to say, and we, on our side, will say what we have to say, and that will be the conversation. I'm not going to speak on behalf of the NDP. I think that is pretty insulting to presume that I could right now, or should.

Mr. Dixon: I think that it's incumbent upon legislators to let Yukoners know what it is that is influencing their votes on these matters. I think that it's becoming increasingly clear to those who have been following this issue that, throughout the Fall Sitting, some MLAs are more interested in prolonging the life of this government than they are about seeking justice and accountability for the grave mistakes that were made under the watch of the Deputy Premier.

Despite the Deputy Premier admitting that a serious mistake had been made, resulting in the trust being broken

between the school community and the department, and the fact that the mistake caused multiple students to not get justice or the support that they deserved for an additional 21 months, the Premier still said clearly that he has confidence in his minister.

So, my question was simple — whether or not the Premier discussed that matter with the NDP beforehand. He has indicated that he has not, and we look forward to the debate this afternoon as well.

Before I finish, I would like to ask the Premier to confirm that one more time — that no discussion occurred with the NDP.

Hon. Mr. Silver: What we have is the Yukon Party grasping at straws again. Interestingly enough, my phone never rings off the hook with the Yukon Party. Even from the election forward, I had a call from the Leader of the Third Party but no call from the member opposite.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Silver: As a leader, that is usually a protocol. That is usually the protocol — that the people not in office make that call.

Again, Mr. Speaker —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again — grasping at straws. Not once have we heard a conversation yet from the Yukon Party on vaccines, other than to say they do not agree with the chief medical officer of health. Not once have we had a debate about the actual budget. What we are having here from the members opposite is a clear indication of what they have been doing the whole session, which is grasping at straws.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 169

Clerk: Motion No. 169, standing in the name of Mr. Cathers.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Lake Laberge:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that the Deputy Premier should resign from Cabinet due to her mishandling of sexual abuse at Hidden Valley Elementary School.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, at the heart of our democracy is the principle of ministerial accountability. Ministers are expected to take responsibility for the actions of their department, but most importantly, they are expected to take responsibility for their own actions. They are expected to stand in the Legislative Assembly and answer questions about their portfolios and especially to answer questions about their own actions as a minister.

Ministers are expected to be accountable to this Legislative Assembly and ultimately to be accountable to the people of the

Yukon. Refusing to be accountable is not acceptable. Refusing to answer reasonable questions about your actions as minister is not acceptable.

The Hidden Valley school scandal is unprecedented. Never before in the Yukon has a minister been responsible for parents not being informed of child abuse. Never before has a minister repeatedly refused to answer questions about her role in government decisions that resulted in parents not being informed of child abuse.

Never before has a minister been either complicit in, or possibly directly responsible for, government covering up child abuse and not informing parents of other children whom a convicted offender worked with. This is unprecedented in Yukon history.

From the perspective of the public, this story began on July 16, 2021 when, to the great shock of many parents in the Hidden Valley school community, CBC reported that a lawsuit had been filed. That lawsuit named the educational assistant who had previously pleaded guilty to sexually abusing a student and had been convicted, as well as the Yukon government for their handling of the matter. Shortly thereafter, parents in the school community began to communicate with each other about the issue and share their shock and disgust. Parents of other children at the school only learned of the sexual abuse as a result of the work of CBC reporter Jackie Hong.

I want to take a moment to thank Jackie Hong because, without her, we would not have learned about this very serious matter.

A group of parents got together to write a letter to the Minister of Education on July 29, which outlined — quote: "... serious concerns about the lack of action from the Department of Education to protect our children..."

The letter reads, in part: "We are extremely disappointed that the Department of Education did not inform parents of this incident 18 months ago, when it was first reported, so that we could have started the difficult discussions with our children then to see if any of them had been victimized.

"This is unacceptable behaviour from a group of individuals who are supposed to be protecting our children and have their best interests at heart."

Unfortunately, the comments in the July 29 letter from parents proved to be accurate, and it came to light later that there had been additional victims. In the first part of September, the RCMP announced that a total of seven new charges had been added, with two additional victims having been identified. These new charges, and newly identified victims, were all a direct result of the reporting that CBC did in July. The complete failure of the government to communicate with parents resulted in more than a year-and-a-half delay between the initial guilty plea and the new charges involving other victims. These children went without justice and without support because the former Minister of Education, the current Deputy Premier, failed them and failed to do her duty. I should step back in time slightly and note that, following the July 29 letter from parents, I wrote to the Minister of Education seeking answers on behalf of parents and the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate launched a review. Shockingly, the Minister of Education originally

challenged the authority of the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate to do a review before finally relenting and agreeing to cooperate.

Access-to-information requests by media resulted in important documents being made public, which provided some insight into who knew what and when. One of the first important discoveries was the draft letter from the school administration, which would have been sent by the school's principal, dated December 18, 2019. The letter reads in part: "This is to inform you that today the RCMP brought forward charges against a Hidden Valley Elementary School staff member." We know that this letter was sent up through the department to the minister, but it was never sent. Who gave the direction not to send that letter to parents?

The next important document that was discovered was a briefing note prepared for the former Minister of Education — the Deputy Premier — dated March 3, 2020. It was a speaking note for the minister to use in case the issue came up in the Spring Sitting of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, in the immediate leadup to the Fall Sitting of the Legislature, the government made three announcements: One was a commitment to cooperate with the Child and Youth Advocate in her review; one was an announcement that the government had hired an Outside lawyer to do a review that they call "independent", although that has been cast in serious doubt now; and the third was a statement by the Minister of Education and the Deputy Premier, the former Minister of Education.

I won't spend much time today talking about the government's dramatic change of position with regard to the review launched by the Child and Youth Advocate, Annette King, and their original choice to dispute whether she had the authority to do that review. It is worth noting that the Child and Youth Advocate's comments to the media yesterday hardly paint the picture of a government cooperating with the review and instead make it seem that the Child and Youth Advocate review is being sidelined. Quoting from the CBC article about it: "I don't want to be sidelined. I really want the Child and Youth Advocate Office, which is the voice and rights of young people, to be more forefront, than pushed to the benches," King said." Again, these are the Child and Youth Advocate's words as quoted by CBC. I also won't spend a lot of time here today discussing concerns that we have with the so-called independent review.

That review seems to us to be nothing more than a smokescreen intended to give the current minister something to say to get through this legislative Sitting. It lacks the scope to look at the right aspects of the matter and explicitly excludes some of the most important — most glaringly, the actions and involvement of ministers. As we have learned, the contract for the investigation is with the Department of Justice — the minister of which is the Deputy Premier. That's not independent at all, Mr. Speaker.

It's worth paying close attention to the statement made by the two ministers — the current and former Ministers of Education.

In that October 6 statement, they acknowledge that they did not notify parents. I quote: "... the Department of Education did not take steps to inform other parents of the situation at that time. We were respecting the RCMP process and confident that a comprehensive investigation would involve contacting additional students and parents. We now recognize that it was a mistake that other affected parents were not made aware of the situation and that steps could have been taken at that time to better inform and support families. We apologize for this and acknowledge the stress being experienced by the Hidden Valley school community. We can and will do better as we move forward."

Further, they state: "We acknowledge there has been a breakdown in trust between families, Hidden Valley Elementary School and the Department of Education."

That is notable because they admit that, first of all, a mistake was made, and second, that the result of that mistake was a breach of trust between the school community and the Department of Education.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, since the first day of this Fall Sitting of the Legislative Assembly, this issue has dominated Question Period. Yukoners are looking for answers, and they have been looking to the Legislative Assembly to get those answers. Unfortunately, they have been treated to the Deputy Premier's continuous refusal to answer simple questions about her role in this and the insistence of the now-Minister of Education to get up and read the same talking points over and over again, even when parents and the Yukon Teachers' Association have pointed out that the supports and changes that she says are in place haven't actually been delivered and that the minister's talking points are factually wrong. Now, of course, we've seen the Child and Youth Advocate dispute the minister's statements as well.

So, Mr. Speaker, despite our efforts in the Legislative Assembly, and the government's refusal to answer, there are some important pieces of information that we have learned as a result. First of all, when we asked the current Minister of Education when she learned of the sexual abuse at the school, she made the astounding revelation that she learned about the matter from July 16 media reports. That means that, from early May when she was sworn in as Minister of Education until a media story broke on the issue, no one told her. That means that her DM didn't brief her and, most incredibly and glaringly, the former Minister of Education never let her colleague know about this massive scandal involving her department.

Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier is also the Attorney General, and in that role, she has an additional duty to inform her colleagues of any legal matters of significance involving their departments that she knows about. She failed in her duty again. According to the current Minister of Education, she learned about this serious matter from the CBC.

Next we were able to confirm that the former Minister of Education knew fully about what happened. While she refused to answer questions in the Legislature, she did talk to media about it. When asked if she knew about the abuse in 2019, she said absolutely — she absolutely knew. So, Mr. Speaker, that brings us to today.

There are now no less than four investigations looking into this scandal. Later today, there could be a fifth — a public inquiry at the behest of the NDP. There are two lawsuits levelled against the government by parents of children who were abused. There are multiple criminal charges and, of course, this motion for the former minister, the Deputy Premier, to resign.

Two independent officers of the Legislative Assembly have launched investigations related to the Hidden Valley school scandal. Until now, Mr. Speaker, no minister in Yukon history has achieved that dubious distinction as a result of their actions and what a department did under their watch.

The Child and Youth Advocate launched an investigation related to the Hidden Valley school scandal in the summer and, of course, the Ombudsman is investigating now. This is quite simply unprecedented. The Deputy Premier has admitted that she knew about sexual abuse at Hidden Valley school in 2019. Parents were never informed. We know that the minister saw a draft letter to parents that the principal of Hidden Valley Elementary School wanted to send them in late 2019. We know that someone gave the direction not to send that letter.

As a direct result, parents of other children at the school only learned of the sexual abuse after CBC reporter Jackie Hong reported on a lawsuit involving the first known victim in July 2021. Following that, it was discovered that there were other children who had been victimized by the offender when he worked at Hidden Valley school. Those children went without justice or support for 21 months. Since then, we have repeatedly asked questions about when the Deputy Premier knew about the sexual abuse and what she did when she found out. What actions, if any, did she take when she learned about it?

Based on her own statements to the media about her previous experience as a prosecutor, the Deputy Premier is familiar with sexual abuse cases, and so, she has to be well aware of the fact that offenders of this type often have a pattern of behaviour and that, when one victim is found, sadly there are often other children who have been victimized by the offender.

Once she was informed of the sexual abuse case in 2019, the then-Minister of Education, the Deputy Premier, should have been one of the first to realize that parents of other children who were in close contact with the convicted offender absolutely needed to be informed. She failed them.

Let's focus on the draft letter for a moment. We know that the Deputy Premier saw that draft letter in 2019, and she admitted to media that she was informed about the abuse then. Someone gave the order not to send that letter to parents. Based on the Deputy Premier's repeated refusal to answer questions about who gave the order not to send the letter, it appears that it was her who did it. If someone else gave that order, why not stand up and say it?

What we know for certain is that, at the very least, the former Minister of Education knew that the principal of Hidden Valley school had a letter to inform parents written, and she failed to ensure that it was sent. That, in itself, is a serious failure in her duty — doubly so since, at the time, she was the

Minister of Education and the Minister of Justice and had a duty to parents in both roles.

If, through your actions or inactions, sexual abuse of a child is hidden from parents of other children by the government for over a year and a half under your watch, you have failed as a minister. If you think that a failure to inform parents that a department employee who worked with their child has been convicted of a serious crime involving another child is not serious enough to warrant a minister resigning over it, what is serious enough? Every MLA in this House should ask themselves that question.

Parents have asked both opposition parties to ask questions, talked to the media repeatedly, and have written letters and e-mails. They want answers from the former Minister of Education that only she can answer. What did she know and when did she know it? When she learned about it, what did she do? Instead of hearing the real answers that they deserve from the Deputy Premier, parents have been disrespectfully treated by this Liberal government.

Day after day in this Sitting, we have asked questions of the Deputy Premier about her role in this scandal. Instead of answering, parents are insulted by the constant stonewalling of this government and the farce of the current Minister of Education reading talking points ad nauseum while the Deputy Premier refuses to answer reasonable questions. That is not ministerial accountability.

Last week, I tabled a petition in the Legislative Assembly signed by nearly 350 Yukoners demanding answers from the Yukon Liberal government and the Deputy Premier herself. In response to questions from parents, the Deputy Premier criticized the opposition and parents for questioning her conduct and claimed that parents did not want answers to these questions.

After her comments, several parents went to the media to indicate that they found this insulting and that they in fact do want answers to the questions being directed to the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Speaker, MLAs have a choice. The actions of MLAs today in this Assembly will indicate to parents and the public which MLAs are comfortable with the mishandling of this situation and the decision not to inform parents.

It will also show which MLAs are willing to support the Deputy Premier's refusal to be open and transparent with parents and her disrespect for her duty to the public and to this Legislative Assembly. All MLAs in this House need to look in the mirror and search their hearts. If your child was a victim, how would you feel? How would you vote on this motion?

You choose to either condemn this failure to inform parents and the refusal to answer questions or condone it today. Yukoners will remember whether you chose to condemn or support the Deputy Premier's conduct, including her failure to do her duty and her refusal to answer questions.

Yukoners can be forgiving, but they will not forgive or forget who was complicit in this scandal related to sexual abuse of children. They will not forget who chose not to hold the Deputy Premier accountable for her failure to inform parents of other children who were victims. They will not forget who

chose to support the Deputy Premier's continued refusal to answer basic questions about her own role in this scandal involving sexual abuse at one of our elementary schools.

Ms. Tredger: I don't intend to speak for long, because I think this issue is actually very simple. The former Minister of Education made the decision not to tell families about the risk to their children. This was an appallingly bad decision, and it shows that she can't be trusted to make decisions that centre on the needs of vulnerable Yukoners.

As a result of her decision, children were left to deal with trauma on their own. As a result of her poor judgment, children went without support in the worst of times. She cannot be allowed to stay in Cabinet where she will make more judgment calls that will affect people's safety. This is an issue of safety. It is not safe for her to be in the Cabinet. It is not safe for her to be a minister. It is especially not safe for her to be the Minister of Health and Social Services and of Justice where her decisions are going to affect some of the most vulnerable Yukoners.

For this reason, I will be supporting this motion and joining my colleagues in calling for the resignation of the Deputy Premier from Cabinet.

Ms. Blake: When children are in the care of the government, whether it is in our education system, foster care, or a group home, it is the duty of the government to report when there is harm to a child. No matter who you are or what position you hold, we all carry the duty to report when we are aware that a child is experiencing harm. Especially as leaders in our community, we are responsible for the protection of our children. We represent everyone in the Yukon, including our children.

The Yukon holds us to this standard when they elected each and every one of us in this House. This obligation that we have to report harm of children ensures that our children are kept safe and protected while supports can be formed to deal with the impacts of harm that the child has experienced. Every child has the right to be protected from harm. This is clearly identified in the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, a convention that I was able to get immersed in when I worked for the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate office.

Article 3 of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* indicates that all adults who make decisions for children need to think about how these decisions affect children, as the best interest of the child is paramount. Article 4 indicates that the government has the responsibility to protect the rights of all children while helping families to protect the special rights of our children.

Article 34 of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* also indicates that children have the right to be free from sexual abuse, and Article 30 of this convention states that appropriate measures need to be taken to support the recovery that fosters health, self-respect, and dignity of the child. It is the duty of this government to uphold these obligations.

We have been pushing for more support for our children, parents, and educators who have been impacted at Hidden Valley Elementary School. This remains our priority.

The minister, who is now Deputy Premier, is responsible. She is responsible for not acting and for not reporting the moment when she knew a child was harmed. It is for this reason that I will be voting in favour of this motion.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I can't say I'm happy that this motion is on the floor today. Normally, I would be thanking the member opposite for bringing forward a motion, but I think that it's premature, in terms of where we're at.

There's nothing more important, Mr. Speaker — and I've said this time and time again — than the well-being, the safety, and, of course, the protection of students when they're in our care. This issue of sexualized abuse at Hidden Valley Elementary School is one of the hardest topics. I know just how sensitive it is.

I've said this as well: I'm a mother, first and foremost. Anything and everything I've ever done has been about my children. I know that this is every parent's worst nightmare. You turn your children over to caregivers each day with the hopes that they will be safe. In this circumstance, someone chose to hurt them in our system.

Now, I want nothing more than to get to the answers — get the answers to the questions that we've all been asking, and I'm confident in the approach that we are taking.

There are four different reviews that are either underway now or they're commencing soon. The evidence will come with the completion of all of these four reviews.

Now, I've heard some of my colleagues across the way willing to cast that decision about our colleague in this House without all of the evidence. We do not have all of the evidence yet. More importantly, and I know this to be true, the opposing party — the Yukon Party — knows what the responsibilities are for ministers, especially in adhering to crisis and emergency situations.

We had an emergency situation unfold just yesterday in our territory, and Mr. Speaker, you gave some words earlier today about that. Those are dynamic situations and require comprehensive responses. Without all of the evidence, the motion that has been brought forward today is, to characterize it, a cruel example of using trauma of others for political gain here. I do not say that lightly. I have always said that I stand in truth and in kindness, first and foremost. I do not ever seek out opportunity to hurt someone else.

I have had people ask me many times, "Why do you bring this eagle feather to the Legislative Assembly every day?" I have been asked, "Is this for protection?" I said, no, it can't be for protection. An eagle feather can't protect you. What it is, is a reminder of my responsibility and my truth and why I'm here. There can't be anything more important than the safety and well-being of our children.

I am not going to provide a rebuttal to every single thing that the Member for Lake Laberge has brought forward here, but I do want to go through and just summarize the history of this issue. On November 17, 2019, school administration

became aware of a concern about the potential criminal actions of a school employee. The principal immediately investigated this. The situation was referred to the RCMP, and an arrest was made of the staff member in question. The employee was removed from the school immediately upon the allegation being disclosed to the school principal.

The former school employee has not been in the school, or in any school system, since November 15, 2019, and is no longer employed by the Government of Yukon. Additional charges have been brought forward, as of September 2021, for incidents occurring between January 1, 2014, and December 31, 2018.

Subsequent to the news of the lawsuit being published, other potential victims have contacted the RCMP. They disclosed information that led to continued investigations against the former employee.

We are working to actively address the issues. We are focused on taking the needed steps to rebuild trust and provide the best targeted supports to the school community.

I want to hold my hands up and commend the dedicated and sincere work of the Hidden Valley Elementary School administration — the staff who are going above and beyond to ensure that children feel well-supported and safe. This includes monitoring the emotional well-being and psychological safety of the Hidden Valley school community and reaching out for additional supports, as needed; maintaining open and honest lines of communication and collaborating with the school council — that is really vital; and coordinating curriculum resources on health and well-being.

I have lists, as I stated earlier, of different supports that have been put in place at Hidden Valley. I recognize, and I talked about this earlier today, that there may be some family members who haven't been given all of the supports that they need, and I will ensure that I follow up on that directly.

Mr. Speaker, I stand by my words, always, and I know that a lot of additional supports have been put in place at Hidden Valley, and I do want to make note of some of them. Some of them did include some of the immediate protocols that were put in place and changes that were made by the principal at Hidden Valley Elementary School; they immediately implemented a practice where staff texted or notified others when they needed to be alone with a student. This is specific, again, to Hidden Valley.

The principal also implemented no alone zones, where staff may not be alone with students. If someone suspects or sees an adult with a child alone in one of these areas, there is a duty to inquire further.

I have talked a lot about the report on inclusive and special education. I think that the experience that we're having here with this situation is going to further inform that review and that report and the implementation of those recommendations. I think that it gives us more insight, and that's what I see with the reviews that are underway. I will again go through each one of them quickly. I don't intend to speak long today, but I do want to again point out that the supports that have been put in place — and I think that if anyone has not received these supports, I need to know and we need to know that there is

something missing. Supports have been available to families and staff, including on-demand support coordinated by the school community consultant, who is a trained social worker. Referrals to other supports and services are being facilitated, as needed, such as through Family and Children's Services, Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services, and Victim Services.

Some examples include child and family rapid-access counselling, as well as long-term individual and group counselling supports for children and their families, and assistance with how to talk to a child about abuse and how to support children's personal safety, which is why it is so vital that, if folks are not getting these services or they have some reluctance to receive these services, we need to try to find a way to get that to happen, because it's absolutely critical that we are helping parents to help them with their family needs and obtain referrals for appropriate supports and services. Other direct supports are from Victim Services, Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services, and, of course, the Department of Education services.

I want to point out that supports have also been provided to staff, including presentations of services and supports available to them, crisis counselling services through LifeWorks, and information on the broader employee and family assistance program.

I want to just talk a moment about a closed meeting that was held with families and Hidden Valley Elementary School on September 22, which was, as Minister of Education, one of the most emotional days that I have had, for sure. I sat and listened, reflected, and acknowledged the pain of those parents and all the emotions that go with that.

We know that ongoing restorative work will need to happen to continue to rebuild the trust and relationship at the school.

The former Minister of Education and I will also be meeting with families in early November out of deep, deep respect for the trauma that families have been dealing with. We haven't been very vocal about the planning of this event, but I think it is relevant here today that folks know that these steps are being taken, and we are coordinating that with the families.

Again, it's a difficult situation involving our children, and I am committed to ensuring that all Yukoners get the answers that they are looking for through the ongoing reviews. The Government of Yukon is honouring our commitment to parents of Hidden Valley Elementary School and has launched an independent third-party review by a very credible lawyer to look into the Government of Yukon's internal and interdepartmental processes, as well as its policies and protocols to respond to incidents of this kind.

I tabled the terms of reference in the Legislative Assembly earlier in this Sitting, and we are very committed to seeing this investigation through and allowing the reviewer to go where she needs to go to look at all of the evidence that she needs to look at to determine fact-finding and to make good, solid recommendations to us as a government — where things went wrong and the changes that need to happen as a result of that.

The Department of Education is participating with the Child and Youth Advocate's public review of policies, protocols, and actions to ensure that safety and supports at Hidden Valley school are in place for the interest and well-being of students. I, too, heard the interview of the Child and Youth Advocate yesterday on CBC, which is much of what the member opposite has focused his attention on today. What I know is that the Child and Youth Advocate determined her own terms of reference for the review. We are cooperating with that, and we will continue to support that review to happen.

As folks know, on October 25, the Ombudsman announced a review as well, which will examine the decisions, actions, or inactions around communication to families of Hidden Valley school in 2019 and more recently, in August. We will absolutely support that review to happen. I'm looking forward to the findings there.

Finally, the RCMP also launched a complete review of their 2019 investigation by E Division, a major crimes unit from BC, after acknowledging that mistakes were made in their investigation in 2019. I think that this is a very important aspect of all of the reviews. It will bring to light a lot of information that we just do not have right now at our fingertips; we do not have that, Mr. Speaker. The evidence and the answers are coming from all four of these credible reviews and investigations. It will have the facts, and I'm confident in this.

I know the Yukon Party has certainly been working their narrative to cast a shadow over the independent review that Government of Yukon has launched. This is an important process for families. It's an important process for Yukoners. I think that it is unacceptable — again, going back to the politicization of trauma, especially of children and families.

I always think that — things surprise me. These are the things that surprise me. We are all elected members of this Legislative Assembly. We have a responsibility to Yukoners. I hold my responsibility very seriously, but the opposition has a responsibility too. They have a responsibility to not be careless around the trauma of children and the politicization of that.

I, again, always try very hard to operate from a place of kindness and to be clear about what my intentions are. Well, my intentions are very clear, Mr. Speaker, that we will get the answers that Yukoners expect and then we will follow up on what the findings are.

My hope is that the reviews will be done quickly and efficiently. Our review is scheduled to be done by January 31, 2022. If it can be done sooner than that, I will bring that to the public's view.

I want to turn to my colleague. I have had the sincere pleasure of working with the now-Minister of Health and Social Services, Minister of Justice, and the Attorney General for many years and even prior to my work here in the Legislative Assembly. I worked with her as a Crown attorney, in that public prosecutor role. I worked with her in her position as Ombudsman, and I want to say that she brings so much experience, knowledge, and integrity to the positions she has held.

Again, as I have stated, she has served as Yukon's Ombudsman and as the Information and Privacy Commissioner

for the Yukon Territory. She has been a strong Minister of Justice and now, in her second term — and as I have stated — as the Minister of Health and Social Services and the Attorney General.

These are really difficult positions to hold, especially through a global pandemic. On any day, these are really difficult positions to hold, with incredible responsibility. We have been navigating for almost two years a global pandemic, along with all of the other responsibilities that we have.

She has a steadfast dedication to improving the lives of Yukoners. Making decisions based on no evidence is not a precedent that I want to, or that we want to, start. Above all, we need to be focused on the children who are at the centre of these decisions. I have confidence in the integrity and commitment of the minister —

Speaker: Order. The member's 20 minutes has ended.

Ms. White: I feel compelled to speak today, especially in response to saying that it is the children at the centre of this. I acknowledge that there are parents and people who care — and especially people listening, right? There are people listening; there are parents who have appeared here, daily, since it happened, and there are parents I spoke to today, and I said, "Do not come if it will harm you. Do not come here, because this will not be easy."

So, we talk about the children being the centre of this decision. The government uses the line that the former employee has not been in school since — like that is the answer, like that is acceptable, like that is the be-all and end-all. We are talking about changes that are being directed to happen in the school now, but they weren't directed in 2019, because people didn't know what had happened in 2019, and that is the crux of the problem — it is the crux of the problem.

I am going to take people back a little bit, quite a long bit, and this is something I have not spoken about in a public fashion, but I will today, because it is important. I have warned my parents, because it could be quite triggering for them. When I was in grade 2 or 3, I went to Whitehorse Elementary School, and there is a bathroom in the basement of that school. Back when I was in grade 2 or 3, every door to a school was open. People could walk in from any direction. I was a tomboy; I was independent; and I didn't think anything about the hiking boots that were underneath the stall door. I walked past the door, and someone grabbed me from behind, and I fought — I bit, I punched, I screamed, and I ran. There was a man in the bathroom who tried to take me out of that bathroom.

I went to the principal, and the principal called my parents. My dad came in, and the principal said: "What should we do?" My dad was like: "Obviously, we should go to the RCMP." So, as a small child, I looked through books of photos to see if I could recognize that man. I didn't recognize him then, for sure. I have since recognized him — absolutely — but big changes happened. There was a "good touch, bad touch" program that was released in my school. Every single kid was getting this at the same time. I had access to a child psychologist — or I don't

know what they were. There was this nice lady who came and would take me out of class and we would talk about it.

I had nightmares as a child for ages, because I had this weird feeling that was like: “At least it was me, because I was strong enough to fight, but what about my little sister?” Years — I had nightmares for years — but I had access to the help that I needed, because there was a direction that the child psychologist, or that person, would come to my school.

The reason why this is such a big deal is because, in 2019, there was the acknowledgement that there was a problem, that trust had been broken, and at least one child had been harmed, and this is where the issue is. This is not personal. Had it been any other minister, had it been any other person who made the decision or didn’t make the decision or was at the top of the pyramid of that decision, I would feel the same way. I would feel the same way, because the parents should have been informed, and kids should have had access to the support that they needed.

I couldn’t go into a public bathroom by myself until I was in my late teens — until I was almost an adult — because of an incident when I was a child. And I had the interventions; I had people come in; I had that. I was in a French immersion class. I was in the same class from when I was in kindergarten until I graduated from high school, so I was protected by my classmates. I never had to ask for someone to come to the bathroom with me — they would just come, because they knew. Teachers knew that this had happened, because the entire community understood that this had gone on.

We were lucky. It was a stranger; it wasn’t someone from the school community, but systemic changes happened after that. Doors in schools weren’t open unless it was recess. You couldn’t walk in from any door. We all know now, when you go to a school, you have to go through the front door and you walk past the office. There were changes that happened.

The biggest thing right now is talking to parents. Talking to parents is hearing the guilt they feel, because they did not hear, because they didn’t understand that they should have been listening in a different way. That is the crux of the problem: Parents weren’t informed. They weren’t informed. Parents are dealing with guilt, and they are dealing with anger, and they are dealing with sadness, and they listen, day after day, as we are told that things are changing, but the problem is, they are not changing in the way that they are being told. That is problematic.

I appreciate the request to reach out, to let us know — I don’t think it’s that easy, Mr. Speaker. We know that educators are hurting — not just in this one school, but in all schools. Teachers make a decision to teach because they love education, they love children, and they want to be a part of that. This hurts everybody.

So, when we get told things like we are personalizing or that we are judge and jury — a mistake was made, absolutely. We are all told that we need to live up to the expectations that are set on us. We all here know that we try to mirror certain behavior — which is that we make mistakes, we own those mistakes, and we all move on — but you have to acknowledge them; you absolutely have to acknowledge them.

Knowing that community members felt compelled to sign a petition asking for answers — that’s hard, especially because it wasn’t just the Hidden Valley community that signed that petition. The e-mails coming in right now are not only from Hidden Valley parents; they are from parents because they want to know that this will never happen again.

I appreciate that we have an independent review. We have the Child and Youth Advocate review, the Ombudsman’s review, and the RCMP review. Those will all come up with answers, but ultimately, the Department of Education and therefore the Minister of Education failed the school community in 2019.

I can hear my colleagues from the Yukon Party talk about misjustice, but for me, it has never been about justice. For me, it has been about supports, knowing that kids should have had access to those supports then, having conversations with parents who say now that they understand that when their kids were telling them things, that they were saying very specific things, but they just didn’t know to listen for it, because they didn’t know that there was a problem — that’s awful.

To know that there are people in the community right now who are questioning, if they had known, what they would have done differently or what should have been done differently — that was an action that was taken, not letting people know what they should have known, and that is a problem.

We can hear the government saying things like “When the answers come out...” — great; there will be answers — absolutely, and this should never be repeated, but the problem is that this has hurt people now. The only reason this is even being talked about in the Legislative Assembly right now is because an action was not taken.

I had a conversation with a parent today, and we talked about how you would hope — you want to wrap your kids up in cotton wool, so that they can never be hurt. The truth of the matter is you want to teach them all the skills that they need to know so that they aren’t hurt, but you don’t expect that to be in a school situation. You want to know that the school would communicate with you, that the Department of Education would communicate with you to let you know that something had happened.

Had it been addressed in a different way in 2019, I wouldn’t be standing here having feelings on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. I try not to make eye contact with anyone but the Speaker, because this isn’t comfortable. I don’t want to talk about Hidden Valley Elementary School anymore. I didn’t want to talk about it weeks ago, because the trauma exists, but parents are telling us that they want us to keep asking about it. They want the government to know that the things that are being promised aren’t happening. They want us to know that they have been told that they have access to counselling. I can say, well, they’re on wait-lists.

This is not a spot where we should have to have these conversations, because one would hope that the decision would have been different at the beginning. That is why we are having this conversation right now — because that action did not happen in 2019. Parents deserve to know. To me, that is the crux of the issue.

When we talk about keeping kids at the focus and the centre of our decisions, it's those kids — it's all kids — who make us say these words. Every kid deserves to have that protection. Every kid deserves to have that support. Every kid who needs it right now should be pulled out of class so that they can talk to someone and work through it, so that they don't have to deal with these weird combinations of issues of guilt and relief.

Thank goodness I had a professional person to talk to about that, because, let me tell you, as a grade 2 or 3 kid, that is kind of a messed-up thing to think about. There are kids in Hidden Valley right now who desperately need that support. They should have had that support two years ago, because for that entire time, they could have thought that it was their fault, and it was never their fault. They were never responsible.

The adults who had the opportunity to reach out and start this process chose not to, so when all those four reports and investigations come back, let us never repeat those mistakes again. A mistake was made, and that is why we are debating this and having this conversation. To the school community in Hidden Valley, to parents across the territory, I am sorry. I am deeply sorry that the actions that were taken or not taken have affected you so deeply.

I never thought that we would have a chance where we would be talking about whether or not someone should step down from Cabinet, but we are here. Actions were taken or not taken, and that is why we are here.

So, at this point, I would expect that people know where I am voting. I'm voting because of the children. I'm voting because of their parents, because of the supports that they deserved in 2019 that they didn't have access to. So, it's not personal. If it were any other person in this room, I would be saying the same thing, because as humans, we can make mistakes, but as humans, we also have to own up to those mistakes.

So, those reports will come back and they will highlight where mistakes were made, and they will tell us where we should never make them again, but that doesn't change the fact that decisions were made in 2019 that have affected children, and they have affected families, and it's still affecting families, and it's still affecting children.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I'm going to be relatively brief this afternoon in addressing this motion. To be clear, I'm voting against this motion this afternoon. Mr. Speaker, I support my colleague. I have known her for decades. She is a resolute public servant, and she is of unimpeachable character.

We have experienced a terrible crime in one of our schools. As the Minister of Education has explained, the individual was removed from the school immediately. It has now come to light that the criminal investigation was not as broad or robust as it should have been. The RCMP have admitted as much and have launched an investigation into their practices.

The Yukon Education department has admitted a failure in communication. They should have contacted the school's parents once the court process concluded. Both my colleagues have publicly apologized and pledged to investigate how this

happened and to put measures in place to ensure it does not happen again.

We currently have three enquiries underway to probe this matter and to objectively determine and report what happened, when, by whom, why, and how it can be fixed to prevent such things in the future.

As I have mentioned, the RCMP have launched a fourth probe to examine the failings in its organization and the investigative process. Two of those inquiries are scheduled to wrap up within three months. The others have not, to date, established timelines, but they are expected to come relatively soon. At that point, the public will have the facts: who knew what, where, when, and what failings there were.

In the midst of all of this, there are criminal investigations ongoing and civil court proceedings underway. These court proceedings prevent public comments by government ministers, and the Official Opposition knows that. They are protected by this Chamber. The opposition leader has made all sorts of definitive statements, as has the Member for Lake Laberge. Many of these statements are not repeated outside this Chamber before a media mic. In public, they are careful. The language is couched, blurred —

Deputy Speaker's statement

Deputy Speaker (Ms. Blake): I would ask that you speak up.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: In public, they are careful. They couch their language, blur it, use terms like "alleged" — "alleged victims". Why? Because they know language matters. They know there are things that a Justice minister, the Solicitor General, cannot say in the face of court proceedings, which is why my colleague remains silent in the face of the opposition's public campaign of innuendo and supposition. This is an important matter, critical to families and children. We cannot state that strongly enough. That's why I find the Official Opposition's tactics so shameful.

Mr. Speaker, the facts are being gathered. The facts will come out. We have pledged transparency and public reporting of the affair once the details are known. We have admitted a mistake, apologized, and pledged to do better. I await the facts around how that mistake happened and how best it can be fixed.

I support my colleague, whom I know to be a resolute public servant with an unimpeachable character.

I am voting against this motion.

Hon. Deputy Speaker, I will vote against this motion.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I also rise to respond to Motion No. 169, moved by the Member for Lake Laberge. At the outset, I certainly wish to acknowledge the seriousness of the underlying allegations. My comments will be more in the nature of process, and I certainly echo the comments made by the Minister of Community Services.

The Legislature does not involve a truth-seeking exercise. There is no evidence that is proffered here for any sort of scrutiny, in contrast to a court proceeding. As we have heard on a number of occasions, we have four inquiries that are

scheduled: one by the RCMP, one by the Yukon government, one by the Ombudsman, and one by the Child and Youth Advocate.

What I would say is that we anticipate that this will be a non-politicized environment, where the fact-gatherers will get to the bottom of what has occurred in this matter, provide comprehensive and helpful reports, and provide guidance going forward so that, as the Member for Takhini-Kopper King ably pointed out, this should not happen again in Yukon public schools.

On the topic of our Legislative Assembly, the Official Opposition has a narrative, and in fairness, we have a narrative as well, but there is no process here for any sort of tryer of fact or adjudicator or administrative body to make any sort of findings of facts with respect to the matter at Hidden Valley school, which has been the focus of much debate and questions since the beginning of the fall 2021 session. It is, really, in the interest of the protection of the process — the protection, most importantly, of the best interests of the children now and going forward — and also to allow for the most positive and impactful findings that can be acted upon so that incidents such as this do not occur in Yukon public schools.

There is no particular delay that will occur. I understand that some of the first findings will return in December of this year, with other findings coming back in January of 2022. If the findings ultimately determine, or provide, some sort of guidance that there was conduct that ought to be censured or where there ought to be consequences — I am not saying that there ought not to be a consequence of this investigation — it is important, in my view, that we don't proceed with a fairly significant punishment, or suggested punishment, of a Cabinet minister, based on the narratives provided by MLAs in a non-evidence gathering environment.

In my experience, from having been called to the bar for 30 years now, and having been defence counsel for almost 25 years in the territory, I have had the honour of representing thousands of Yukoners. I certainly appreciate the grey that exists, or just the importance of fact-finding, as well as the importance of there being an independent tryer of fact with respect to matters for the fairness of outcomes. At its worst, in a criminal matter, there is the potential for wrongful convictions. We are not talking about wrongful convictions here, but we might be talking about inaccurate findings that we could arrive at with a more thorough approach that is not done by MLAs who are not well-positioned, by virtue of the necessary politicization of this process, to render judgment.

At its worst, in Canadian criminal justice matters, you've had terrible wrongful convictions with persons like David Milgaard, Guy Paul Morin, Donald Marshall Jr., and Thomas Sophonow in addition, of course, to defendants or persons convicted of serious offences in the United States, who ultimately were exonerated through, usually, DNA evidence, but unfortunately, they had been executed. That's extreme — I grant you that, Madam Deputy Speaker — but it's only to highlight that there should be a thorough, thoughtful, professional, and unbiased process that occurs outside of the Legislature.

Every beginning of a Sitting, we receive an exhortation, or prayer, from the Speaker, one that I think applies to the circumstances today: "God give to each member of this Yukon Legislative Assembly a strong and abiding sense of the significant responsibilities laid upon us. Guide us here in our deliberations. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Help us to use power wisely and well. Inspire us to make decisions that establish and maintain a land of prosperity, fairness, and tolerance where freedom prevails and where justice rules."

So, with respect to those words that many of us have heard probably a few hundred times now, an exhortation to use power wisely and well is asking us to have wisdom. Wisdom involves not necessarily acting precipitously, when not apprised of all the facts. Fairness — I've talked about procedural fairness and findings of fact which, I would say again, this Legislative Assembly is not well-suited to engage in that process, and that there is justice.

Justice also involves sober, thoughtful, and professional findings of fact with respect to matters before the courts. This case is before the RCMP. I understand that there are civil lawsuits, there are criminal lawsuits, the Ombudsperson has expressed an interest, and there is a report that has been ordered by the Yukon government as well.

There are a number of processes in place. As I said, this is an Assembly of narratives. It is not an Assembly of final findings, so I certainly support the Deputy Premier and the current Minister of Education in their approach to this matter. I certainly am listening closely and acknowledge that there are concerns. I have heard from the members opposite, but in my view, this is premature and I will be voting against this motion.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak against the motion on the floor tabled by the Member for Lake Laberge.

I want to start by thanking the Member for Takhini-Kopper King for providing a personal story to the Assembly today and giving us such a real example of what probably many people in the Assembly have experienced in different ways. As I sit and listen to different members stand up — you think back to your own life, growing up as a child, and the different things that we all have experienced. I don't speak for any other member of the Assembly, but when I reflect on all of the different interactions that we have had as we grow up, probably many of us here can reflect on different situations that have occurred in our lives and, as we reflect back on them, we think about how they maybe were not appropriate or things could have been handled in a different way. That, I know, was not an easy thing for our colleague here in the Legislative Assembly to share.

As I sit here and think about the fact that this motion was tabled by the Member for Lake Laberge, I also understand, in many ways, why, as an MLA, he brought this forward. I understand that, in that role as an MLA, you want to represent the people in your constituency as absolutely fiercely as you possibly can. I think that goes for all members in the Legislative Assembly, whether you are in government or you are in opposition. Individuals bring their real-life situations to you,

and they look to you to be a champion for them, to represent their interests, and — in many cases, if there is a particular situation that you stand up to for them — to right a wrong.

The Member for Lake Laberge — there is a reason why he has spent more time in this Legislative Assembly than anybody else. That is because the people whom he represents, every time there is an election, send him back here to represent them. That only happens if you work tirelessly on behalf of those individuals.

Although I always love the opportunity to debate — and I would say that, on many, many, many topics, we would maybe have a different perspective — I do respect any member of this House who consistently represents their constituency that fiercely.

Today, although I don't agree, it does make sense to me that this motion has been brought forward. We are talking about an elementary school that happens to be in the riding of Lake Laberge. Many of the children who attend that school live in the riding of Lake Laberge and, therefore, the Member for Lake Laberge is here today ensuring that those individuals know that he has listened and that he is going to take every action that is in his control to make sure that they feel they are represented appropriately, and I respect that.

We all have people who are close to us who have children who attend Hidden Valley school. Some of my closest, closest friends — their children, whom I consider to be like nieces and nephews, attend that school. That is why today is one of those particular days in the Legislative Assembly that is extremely, extremely difficult. When you come in and you have to share your perspective, you know that, because it is in a political forum, things you will share — although you never want those words to be insensitive or to make a situation for families any more difficult than they absolutely are. Because it is in a political forum, after the words of today are shared, sometimes they are then used for political reasons. I'm not going to say that this is going to happen, and it may not. I am saying that my experience in the House has been that. It is so difficult, when you stand up, because you want to be respectful to the families and the folks who are affected by this, and every day has been like that.

I also know that people want, right now, to be able to go back to the families that have been reaching out to them with some level of solution now — “This has happened to you, I have gone out and fought for you, and this is the consequence: I brought a motion forward, this minister has now resigned, and here is a consequence to something that has happened” — because it is much more difficult for us to wait for 30 or 60 days because of what has already transpired and at that time to be able to have a set of answers.

We know that the RCMP is going to go through a process, and I think that everyone in the Assembly believes that an independent process, a very strong process, will be taken into consideration. I apologize because, even on that particular topic, I don't know the time that they have said that they will take, but I know it will be a thorough process with integrity.

It's the same thing — I applaud the child advocate, and the comments that were talked about today ensure that the Yukon

Child and Youth Advocate is making sure that, throughout this process, the work that is being undertaken by her office is done in a way so that it will have the absolute most appropriate scope and integrity. As we talked about, the Ombudsman is going through a process to do the same thing.

I also know, before I speak about the previous Minister of Education, that the current Minister of Education is completely committed to ensuring that her life's work of representing people is going to continue to be done with integrity like it always has been. The difficulty that I have with the motion is that we have multiple processes underway, and we know that there have been comments made, but I also believe that the appropriate thing — and, as reflected upon by my colleague who just shared words and who I consider to be an expert in this conversation because of the many years spent doing this work and representing individuals — I concur with those comments. There are going to be a set of facts that come out, and that should lead us to a number of decisions and hopefully appropriate changes within the system.

We continue to talk every day about the Deputy Premier. I think that we have to reflect on that individual's body of work, too — an individual who has worked with complete integrity throughout a complete career, doing things such as working within law. She had been in the role of Yukon's Ombudsman, where the role was to promote and protect the fairness and delivery of the services of the government. This individual knows as well as anyone — better than most of us in the Assembly — the experience in this role as a minister. This is my neighbour in our offices, and I've watched her every single day since we have started working together, walking into the main government building, always focusing on ensuring that the right thing was done, even if it was going to be extremely difficult politically. It was always making sure that the point of view was to do the right thing. That is what I have experienced working with that individual.

The Minister of Education, as we talked about, launched an independent review into the matter at Hidden Valley Elementary School and made the commitment to the parents of Hidden Valley Elementary School. This work, along with the other reviews that we talked about, we have spoken about at length in this Sitting. Again, for all the members of the opposition who spoke today, I understand where those comments come from, and I understand the vigor with which those comments were shared, but, again, we all know that we are in a position where there is a process in place and that, at the end of that, we will have multiple fact-finding scenarios that will lead to a multitude, I am sure, of direction and directives from different organizations, some of which will take different lenses to look at this.

We have said from the start that, as a team, it is to make sure that we have all the information and facts to make our decisions. I know that the former minister and the current minister who are working on this are both looking forward to making sure that all of the information that is being reviewed comes to light. I've heard my colleagues say that.

There are members of the opposition who know what a day like this is. They know how difficult it is; the Member for Lake

Laberge knows that. Over the years, where somebody calls for — a decision has been made. I'm sure, in all of those cases, all the information wasn't provided to the public, and people were calling for his resignation, and then the decisions were made to not do that. And you know why? Probably because the colleagues, or the Premier of the day, knew there was more information that others who were calling for that didn't have.

That's why today, I think that the experience I've had with my colleague leads me to vote against this. While I fully respect the scenario and the impact that has been made on many, many Yukoners, I also believe, although it's a difficult path, that the right path is to ensure that we have all of the information so that the decisions that get made are done with the fullness of all the facts.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I want to begin by just talking about where I think all of this has to focus. I think the most important thing here is to emphasize how to protect and support children, families, and the school community for Hidden Valley and probably for all of our schools. As the Member for Takhini-Kopper King talked about, it's about making sure that there are supports. She reflected that the Member for Lake Laberge was looking to bring people to justice. I think both those things are needed and also accountability.

Like the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, I began by looking at the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. I read through it. I have a — it's actually a kid's book, which is for helping kids to know the rights of the child, and Article 34 talks about protecting kids against sexual abuse. It is just really tough stuff, given that we have this reality in front of us with Hidden Valley Elementary School. I will also start off by saying that my heart goes out to families and to the school community.

Article 19 of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* talks about protecting children against violence by people who look after them, like teachers, educational assistants, and the government. It also says within it — under Article 16 — that children have a right to privacy. You know, we shouldn't stand up and say, "This child was a victim of sexual abuse" because we should protect them.

I think the one that the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin noted, the one that I think is overarching over all of this, is Article 3, which is that we should always, always work to put the best interests of children forward. Okay, how do we do that here, now, with what happened in 2019, what didn't happen in between, what happened over this past summer, what is happening here today since this Legislature came back, and today with this motion?

The Member for Lake Laberge, when he spoke about bringing the motion today — when he spoke about it yesterday, he talked about how he really hopes that everybody votes — that they express their opinion, that it not be a party vote. Although, when I listen to each of us talk today, it looks like the votes will follow along party lines, but what I want to say is that I am standing here to express my opinion, to share with everybody in this Legislature, and all those who listen, my

thoughts around what is important here, because we are being asked — the motion says that we share our opinion.

In 2019, the Department of Education, the school, learned about this — at that time — potential sexual victimization, and they did what I think was the right thing in that they reported it right away to the department, and the department reported it to the RCMP. That happened, and I think that, when the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin stood up, she said that it was the duty of government to report the harm, which I think is exactly what happened. It didn't happen to go back to parents; although, of course, it did go to the parents of the child who had come forward. The RCMP — what I believe is normal protocol in this — are supposed to carry out a broader investigation, and that didn't happen.

I want to thank Superintendent Sheppard for acknowledging that. I want to say that, in that interim — in the time between 2019 and when we got to this summer, as we were all looking at this in the summer — there was this realization by the RCMP that they had not. I am sure someone within the RCMP realized it at that time, but I don't think it was realized all the way up the chain, but that is what we would need to find out. I think that is what the RCMP's approach right now will be to look at.

Belatedly, but thankfully, it has come now. The RCMP are currently investigating other possible cases. As I said, that should have happened. It didn't. It is happening. Imagine today, if there were some other new case to come forward where there is a potential victimization of children and it were being investigated — man, we would never be talking about it here — not like this. Why not? Because we want desperately to protect those children, that investigation, those families, the school community — we want that to happen in a way that is free from us getting involved in a way that would compromise that need for justice.

One of the things that the Member for Lake Laberge said was, "Why not stand up and talk about it?" Well, there is a reason right there. The ways in which we talk about this have to be extremely sensitive so as not to compromise the work that is ongoing right now. How do you do that? As the Minister of Education has done for almost every day of this legislative sitting, it is to stand and very carefully talk about these things in a way to not interfere with it. That is also true about the past minister. She has, at all times, sought to protect the integrity of that type of investigation. We should all want to do that. I am not saying that we don't, but if this were not a case that had gone uninvestigated for a year and a half or more, we wouldn't be having this conversation this way.

Everyone has talked about it — four reviews. The RCMP are doing a review. I think it's important that they're doing a review. The Child and Youth Advocate is undergoing a review and that is important. Although the Child and Youth Advocate — and I heard her interview on CBC as well — talked about not wanting to be sidelined, but when she talked about her review, it was talking about the Department of Education. What I appreciated about the review that the Minister of Education has initiated is that it is to get at the relationship between the Department of Education, the Department of Justice, the

RCMP, and how all of that communication went on from the time when it was first discovered and reported to today.

The members opposite have used some pretty harsh language about how they don't trust that, although it does sound to me like they trust the other reviews that are underway — the Child and Youth Advocate review and the RCMP review — they have not talked against that, anyway — and now the new review that we have just learned about from the Ombudsman. It appears to me that they believe that these are good things. When I listened to the Leader of the Official Opposition talk on the radio this morning, he said that it's good to have those reviews. I think that they will try to understand where we can and should communicate with families while protecting those investigations. If there were some missteps on our side, where they were and what they should have been or how they should be — and I'm now referring to the Member for Takhini-Kopper King — let us never repeat these types of mistakes again. I agree completely, wholeheartedly.

I want to go back for a moment to something else that the Member for Lake Laberge said in his opening remarks when he stood. He said, "It appears...". Several times he said, "It appears...". When we started here in the Legislature this session, I heard the Leader of the Official Opposition stand up to the media and he said the current Minister of Education is lying. Then, a little after that, after questions came in the Legislature and it started to become apparent that she was not lying, the media asked him: "Are you going to take that back?" And he said at that point, "Well, she's either lying or there were mistakes made", and he started to shift his focus toward the previous Minister of Education — I haven't heard him say sorry, by the way, for saying that the current Minister of Education was lying and that he had made a mistake. But he did make a mistake. He made an assumption. He made an assumption based on the information that he has. That's the same type of thing that we're doing here today: We're making assumptions that the Minister of Education at the time did not do what she should have done around protecting the well-being of children in schools and the families and the school community, including trying to protect their privacy.

I know that everybody here aches for the families of Hidden Valley and the kids. I know that all of us — all of us in this Legislature want to protect those kids and those families and support them.

It is the member opposite's role to criticize. I think that is an honourable role, but I also feel that, until we go through these reviews, we are jumping to conclusions and we are transferring our hurt and frustration for the families onto the minister who was in the role. I think that there are things that we are going to have to figure out. For example, if you are counting on the RCMP to carry out a full investigation and that doesn't happen, what processes do we have in place to make sure that families are contacted to help support them? How would we figure that out? I think that is why we need this review.

Like other colleagues here, I know that, from having worked with the past Minister of Education, the current Minister of Justice — I have seen her fiercely protect people's

rights when there are investigations underway and court cases underway; she is incredibly careful about that. She has two decades practising law. I went on Wikipedia and there are some things I didn't know until I looked. She was the first female president of the Yukon Law Society — she held that for four terms — and she became the president of the Canadian Federation of Law Societies. I think this is the kind of person that is going to care about those legal processes and trying to protect rights. She has fought in her role as a lawyer on child protection cases. That is part of her background, so I think she is someone who knows about this and does care.

All of us have a responsibility to protect the best interests of children — especially those children who are in our care — and I think that, in my experience, the Minister of Justice, the past Minister of Education, has exemplified that.

I look forward to these reviews so that we can share with the public in a way that protects the investigations that are ongoing right now, which I feel like we are not protecting here today. I think that, when those reviews come forward, they will put a shining light on where the challenges were and where the mistakes were and where we need to improve. I'm sure that, if it shows that any of us, as ministers or as MLAs, failed to do our roles with complete integrity, it will be incredibly apparent. It is not apparent to me today, and I think this motion is here because —

I will just say that, while the motion, in its intent, seeks to protect our kids and our families, I don't believe that it is achieving it in the way that was — if I treat it in its most respectful fashion, I don't think that is what it is doing.

Like my colleague, the Member for Porter Creek South, I respect why the Official Opposition brings this forward. I will point out that, since I have been elected in this Legislature, I have heard, on several occasions, members of the opposition call for the resignation of a minister. I am happy to point those out, but what is different today is that we are in a minority government, so we end up with a motion and that is what is different.

I think it's pretty typical for opposition members to say in the public that a minister should resign and that they are not doing their job appropriately. We have launched one and are supporting three other independent investigations into this situation to get to the bottom of it.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all of my colleagues for their words here today. As a teacher in my former occupation, I didn't do a lot of teaching outside of the Yukon — a practicum away, but 15 years of teaching, with two years in Whitehorse and the majority of the years teaching in Dawson City — the opportunity to see the students who were in kindergarten, my first year of teaching, in my last graduating class. What an amazing opportunity that is — to see a whole generation of kids. As I say, as a former teacher, I learned here how seriously those who run the schools, the ones who administer the schools, the ones who teach, the parents — how seriously everybody takes their responsibilities.

Since getting into public office, I then had the ability, as well, to expand even further. I now have the opportunity — am

blessed to have this opportunity — to see first-hand how important the work is by the department and the rest of the government — Health and Social Services — you name it, as far as departments — to ensure that what we do on a daily basis is their responsibility for making sure that we ensure the very, very best for our children.

This is why I, and every other member on this side of the Legislative Assembly, have continued to emphasize that there absolutely is nothing more important than the well-being, the safety, and the protection of students when they are in our care. This is also why my ministers have acknowledged, long ago, that mistakes were absolutely made and that there was a breakdown — a breakdown in trust, communication between the families, the Hidden Valley Elementary School, and the Department of Education. That is why they both apologized to the parents and the school community. I have also been so grateful to see them further showcase their leadership as they took steps to get to the bottom of what happened and to ensure that we do move forward better.

Our government is absolutely committed to rebuilding the trust and to strengthening our education system, something that I took a lot of pride in when I was a teacher in rural communities and in Whitehorse here. That continues on with my leadership with this team. This is absolutely fundamental. This is important work, Mr. Speaker. These are exactly the strong leaders required to undertake it.

We have heard from members on this side of the House speaking about the history and background of both of these dedicated Yukoners — these ministers. A government and a Cabinet should be a reflection of the strength, talent, and leadership of the territory that they represent. I am consistently impressed by the leadership and professionalism of all of my ministers.

Today, I am very proud to stand here and share with all MLAs and all Yukoners that the Member for Riverdale South — who is a remarkable Minister of Justice, Minister of Health and Social Services, and Deputy Premier — has my complete support. She is one of the strongest leaders in the territory. She has dedicated her life to advancing justice in the Yukon and promoting equity throughout our society — decades of work. She has embraced her strengths, she has used them for the benefit of the Yukon, and she has acknowledged when mistakes were made. She has taken actions to make sure that we do better going forward. She has, in the face of political pressure and in the face of opposition members who have abdicated their responsibility to make sound, careful, just, and evidence-based decisions, continued to measure her words to ensure that not just an RCMP investigation, not just a review by the Child and Youth Advocate, not just an independent review by Vancouver-based Amanda Rogers, and not just an investigation by the Ombudsman — she has been measured in her words to ensure that none of these processes could be compromised by the words of the sitting Attorney General. That is what a responsible lawyer, a responsible minister, and a responsible leader looks like.

We heard from Chief Superintendent Sheppard today fielding questions about a tragic situation in Faro. We saw the

absolute desire and need for people to get answers to questions. The response from the RCMP is exactly the same: We do not want to jeopardize this ongoing investigation. That is so extremely important. If we truly do want to get to the bottom of things, we can't jeopardize the legal system. I talked about the responsibility of a lawyer, responsibility of a Minister of Justice, and what a responsible leader looks like. That is what someone who knows the responsibility of being in government looks like.

Now, it's sad to say that, in contrast to this, the opposition is making their own determinations without even waiting for the evidence to become available. They are compromising the work of the investigation as well as threatening any further investigations and reviews that may take place in the territory in the years and decades ahead. These actions, and how the government of the day responds to it, set a precedent. They set a precedent that will govern the actions of everyone and every investigation moving forward. What we say matters, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, I would note that, outside of this Chamber, we've actually seen a very subtle acknowledgement of the need for restraint by others who have experienced the reality of being a minister in government and the needs for measuring one's words. Words do matter, because what you say can have ramifications on legal matters.

The Leader of the Official Opposition, who has previously served as a minister, has, at least in public interviews, measured his language by speaking of "alleged" assaults, crimes, and actions, and rightly so — absolutely rightly so. The Leader of the Yukon Party knows that he must use his words carefully. It is even more important for the Minister of Justice, the Attorney General of Yukon, to speak carefully in order to not compromise ongoing investigations.

Mr. Speaker, when Yukoners watch the work of the Member for Riverdale South, her commitment to the territory, the calibre of her professionalism, and her dedication to advancing justice, it's all palpable. That is what leadership looks like.

Instead of disrespecting the review process, which is designed to provide families and Yukoners with answers, instead of playing politics by jumping to a conclusion and condemning actions — condemning before actually embracing their roles and duties as MLAs to wait for, and carefully study, the facts in evidence — instead of placing political opportunism at the centre of their questions rather than the well-being of victims, I think that the opposition should, in fact, take a leaf from the Minister of Justice's book and embrace the professionalism and leadership that sends us here to the Chamber and embrace that.

This Chamber has already heard this afternoon resounding words of support for the minister, and I am glad to have an opportunity to add my words and support on the record, as well. Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker.

In closing, I am so grateful — so grateful — to be able to work with the Member for Riverdale South, and I will continue to work alongside her with pride. She will remain the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Health and Social Services, and the

Deputy Premier, and she will remain a full and contributing member of Cabinet.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Mr. Cathers: I will be brief in my closing remarks. I would like to begin by thanking all of my colleagues who have indicated support for this motion and thank all of the MLAs who have asked questions on behalf of families. It is clear here today that, on one side of this Assembly, members are concerned with protecting families and children and seeking accountability from the Deputy Premier; the other side is concerned with protecting the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Speaker, only the Deputy Premier can provide answers about her roles and her actions, and nothing about answering those questions that we have asked frankly would compromise court cases or investigations on the actions of children. Refusing to answer, contrary to what government members, including the Premier, have asserted is not about protecting court processes — it is about protecting the Deputy Premier from accountability.

Contrary to what one minister noted, this is actually the first time that the Yukon Party Official Opposition has called for a minister to resign. Even during the group home scandal, the most we called for was the minister's load to be lightened. This is the first time we have called for a minister to resign, and we did not come to this place lightly.

It was after weeks of asking questions on behalf of parents that the Deputy Premier refused to answer — reasonable questions about her role, what she knew, when she knew it, and what she did about it.

Again, I thank all my colleagues who have indicated support for this motion. At the heart of our democracy is the principle of ministerial accountability. Ministers are expected to take responsibility for the actions of their department, but most importantly, they are expected to take responsibility for their own actions. They are expected to stand in the Legislative Assembly and answer questions about their portfolios and especially answer questions about their own actions as a minister.

Ministers are expected to be accountable to this Legislative Assembly and ultimately accountable to the people of the Yukon. Refusing to be accountable is not acceptable. Refusing to answer reasonable questions about your actions as a minister is not acceptable.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Disagree.

Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

Ms. Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 11 yea, seven nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it. I declare the motion carried.

Motion No. 169 agreed to

Motion No. 168

Clerk: Motion No. 168, standing in the name of Ms. Blake.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to review social assistance rates.

Ms. Blake: I am happy to stand up to talk about the motion I brought forward, that this House urges the Government of Yukon to review social assistance rates. As the report, *Putting People First*, stated in 2020 — and I quote: “Taken as a whole, income is one of the most important, if not the most important, determinant of our health ... This is partly because income heavily influences other determinants. Our income affects our access to housing, extended health benefits, and even food.”

2007 was the last time that the social assistance rates were reviewed and raised in the Yukon. I realize that there are increases every April based on the consumer price index, but that has not kept up with the ongoing increases in the cost of living in the Yukon. The consumer price index doesn't capture the reality of living in the Yukon. The current rent comparison between 2011 and 2021 in Whitehorse — the average rent from March 2011 for a one-bedroom was \$746. The average rent from April 2021 for a one-bedroom is now \$1,055. That is an increase of over \$300.

Many renters would tell you that you would be lucky to find something that inexpensive today. The base rate for rent regulations published in 2012 was \$514 for one person. I realize that this amount has gone up thanks to the consumer price index, but I'm guessing that it is nothing close to the current average rent of over \$1,000. Even room and board is up to a maximum of \$460 a month. Individuals would be hard-pressed to find a private room in a dwelling for less than \$600 a month.

For utilities, this is another area where social assistance rates have not kept up. We are being told to expect large increases for heating costs this winter. We have watched as electrical rates have continued to go up while more homes and apartments are heating with electricity, and costs do exceed the maximum allowable amount. Strangely, if an individual is paying combined rent and utilities, come spring, the amount that they receive from the government goes down. Why? Because the maximum rate in the summer and shoulder seasons is less than the winter rates. So, even if you pay the same amount to a landlord year-round, social assistance insists on lowering the amount paid, leaving people to make up the difference from other budgeted items, such as food and incidentals.

Food costs — if we think that social assistance rates have kept up with the cost of food, think again. In the 2012 regulations, a single person could receive \$242 a month for food. If that individual is living in a long-stay hotel with just a microwave or a hotplate, their choices are limited. A family of four could receive \$838 a month, plus whatever increases there have been with the consumer price index. The Whitehorse Food Bank has watched the number of individuals and families utilizing their services skyrocket. Their website states that they are providing food hampers to over 1,900 individuals a month, not just in Whitehorse but in the communities as well. Many individuals and families accessing the food bank are on social assistance.

Let's be clear: Individuals receive a basic food hamper that is only good for three days once a month. Those needing a special diet, perhaps due to diabetes, food allergies, or pregnancy, may receive up to \$30 a month extra if recommended by a physician and if they are lucky enough to have a physician.

Another good reason to review the rates: Under the regulations, if a person obtains food by gardening, hunting, or fishing, the individual is deemed to have received as income the value of the food — certainly a disincentive to anyone trying to be resourceful.

Moreover, for some reason, the system insists that individuals receiving social assistance wait six months before we provide the following: a winter clothing allowance, transportation expenses like a bus pass, a telephone allowance, and laundry services. I could go on. While not assisting individuals with those items, we expect them to apply for work, attend appointments, present themselves for job interviews, but without a phone, access to clean clothes, or a way to get around.

Instead of offering job training and support, or programs that would assist individuals to not remain on social assistance, we make them wait — not one or two months, but half a year. To me, this is backwards. It traps people in a cycle of poverty. We should be helping individuals and families, from the time they first present themselves in an office, to get back on their feet.

In this day and age, many employed individuals are just one paycheque away from needing assistance. During COVID, many more individuals are seeking support. We are facing massive increases in cost, and wages aren't reflecting it. As

more Yukoners turn to social assistance for support, we need to make sure that the system is one that works.

Let's also talk about the Yukon supplementary allowance. It is offered to individuals who are excluded from the workforce. They receive \$250 a month — an amount that has not changed since it was first introduced. Anyone accessing this supplementary allowance must have a form completed by a physician — again, not easy if a person doesn't have a family doctor.

So, the individual, perhaps with a permanent disability or impairment, is left with an extra \$250 a month and the same social assistance rates, possibly for their lifetime. If they must follow the regulations that address the social assistance rates, they are not able to receive gifts over \$125; they are not allowed to have savings of over \$500 in the bank; and they are only allowed to possess up to \$1,500, if it is placed in a trust for burial or funeral expenses.

Now, let's talk about *Putting People First*. The *Putting People First* report goes in-depth on the issue of social assistance. As I am sure the minister understands, health has social determinants. That means that things like income, profession, groceries, housing, and so much more have a direct impact on the health and mental well-being of a person. The report recommends creating a framework and providing support for data management and analysis for social support programs. This work should be completed with associated reporting timelines attached to ensure relevant data is reviewed and reported upon regularly.

And, as I quote from the report: "Conduct a program evaluation of social supports, to determine if current practices and policies are achieving program objectives and are cost-effective, and what the most influential factors in entering, staying on, and leaving social assistance are in Yukon."

By now I hope that the minister understands all the hurdles that come with being on social assistance. So, in response to these problems, I hope that this House votes in favour of our motion to review social assistance rates. I also hope that we begin to move away from the trap of this poverty model entirely. On top of reviewing social assistance, the *Putting People First* report gave this government a direct and immediate solution: that this government must collaborate with the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition and others to implement a guaranteed basic income pilot.

Guaranteed basic income is our path out of poverty. It doesn't discriminate, it doesn't require a person in need to wait months in poverty before they get support, and it doesn't trap people in limbo. Guaranteed basic income means that everyone deserves an income, so that anyone who needs it, including anyone on social assistance, will get access to real income — an income that reflects the true cost of living in the Yukon.

In conclusion, it seems to me that, instead of being the hand up, the regulations and rates are designed to keep people poor. Instead of providing training and supports, the regulations and rates discourage that.

I would ask all the members here to support this motion that will hopefully lead to positive changes for Yukoners who find themselves needing some help. It's time for a review of

both the regulations and rates, but even more importantly, it is time to put the *Putting People First* recommendations into action and make real changes for Yukoners.

Will this be easy and straightforward? No, but I encourage this House to work together with self-governing First Nations and Indigenous Services Canada to review these rates and regulations.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I would like to thank the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin for the motion that has been tabled today. I truly appreciate the scope that was provided to us during the opening statement and the subsequent information that was provided within that scope concerning the review.

I think there were a couple of key items that I really appreciated hearing about that I think are very pertinent to ensuring that this important work is done in an efficient but appropriate manner. The points that really stood out for me were: first, just talking essentially about what is playing out within our total economy around inflation — not that it was used, but as we see rising costs in a number of different household budget items. The other item that was touched on was the fact that we should work with self-governing First Nations, as well as ensuring that we work here with the Yukon government and with other providers. As the member opposite would know, I believe from previous work, there are — not just one — different government entities that provide assistance of this type.

I think that one of the things that we have to take into consideration — I would think that the member opposite, in her research on this topic and the review of *Putting People First*, would have seen that this work talks about the different service deliverers. One thing we have heard, over and over again, is that there are differences sometimes in the services that people in Yukon are provided, depending on who is providing it. There is a baseline of social assistance, but some of the discretionary benefits that can be provided to individuals — there seems to be sometimes a lack of equity there. I think that is really important.

The motion, as it is stated, talks about a review of the Yukon government social assistance, I believe — maybe it is more broadly about social assistance, but at that point, as a government, we have the ability to review the programs that we provide. To be fair, I think that this was the conclusion that opening statements talked about, where it talked about the fact that we do have an obligation to work with other levels of government. We don't want individuals, neighbours, and folks who are in the same communities, who are in a difficult position and need those supports, to not have an equitable experience, just based on whose perspective it is in the delivery and how they look at some of these benefits.

I know individuals who are close and have gone through things, especially when we think about individuals with disabilities and the fact that sometimes there is some real discretion afforded the folks who are delivering those programs. Individuals have to really fight, I know. In the case of at least one family member, it was very difficult. They were in a position to still be working throughout a very difficult time

dealing with a terminal sickness and, at the same time, fighting to ensure those programs.

When you think about *Putting People First*, it does touch on that. It touches on the fact that it is not just about our social assistance programs, but also within our disability services. The other thing that was touched on was that, within this conversation, there are a number of areas that were brought up. There was housing and the cost of housing, which we discuss quite a bit in the Assembly.

We know that there is a true challenge — not just here in the Yukon, but across the country right now — for a multitude of reasons.

As it was touched upon, we are also seeing an escalation in food prices. That is going to put more pressure on individuals — being able to build their own personal budget just based on social assistance.

Then we talked about opportunities moving forward. How can you give people the best foundation? There could be different perspectives within the Assembly around whether that is a program or a pilot program to provide individuals with a guaranteed income — or something that I always think about is providing folks with the right supports as well — in some cases, to create a path that they want to see and that they define. Hopefully, within the Yukon, in a very significant and robust economy, partnered with the fact that we have so many openings for employment right now across multiple sectors — that has become extremely difficult for so many business people to try to provide services to Yukoners and at the same time be able to staff their operations.

A number of things were talked about within the review. The motion itself is quite short but clear, but I think it is a bigger conversation. It's important to understand what the scope of that review could be.

I have to say that I think it is timely and I think it's important, and I appreciate it coming from the member opposite.

With that, I think we will have an opportunity to touch on all those aspects — and how key it is to be reviewing.

To sort of scope out my conversation today, it is also important that we think about *Putting People First*, because I believe that chapter 5 really just focuses on this. There are a lot of recommendations there which have to be taken into consideration.

The other point that I would like to reflect on from the opening comments is that people sometimes are penalized for trying to better their situation. I think that it is something that absolutely must be reviewed.

When the Member for Copperbelt South was the Education minister, I had the opportunity to deliver a program for folks who were maybe looking to recreate their professional career. Some of those folks were on social assistance, and it was at a time when there was federal funding that was available to give folks the right new set of skills, if they didn't have them, and then they would take that set of skills and be able to hopefully find a new type of employment. It was called the “targeted initiative for older workers”.

During the delivery of that program, one of the things that was so frustrating was that I would work with clients, and we together would set a plan in place for them to maybe even seek a job or an opportunity that they had always wanted to do, but earlier in their life when they were bringing up their families or were locked into a particular type of occupation, they didn't get to try that out. What we wanted to do was to really dig deep and see what opportunities were out there and then match them with people's interests. What was really difficult was that, in that program, it provided a stipend. The stipend was offered to offset some costs and take into consideration that those individuals were not able to go out and seek employment at the time and, during that program, it was something to help them along with their expenses. The difficulty was that there was an inequity in that classroom, because, in some classes, individuals were coming in who would receive that stipend. They always had to be ready, if I remember correctly, to take on an employment situation or opportunity if it arose, but at the same time, there were individuals in that class who were on social assistance and were trying to better their situation. But once they started to receive a stipend, that stipend was accounted for on a monthly basis with the case manager who was overseeing their social assistance delivery. So, you would have people being penalized. They would be attending the program every day, they would be learning new skills, and they would be extremely excited about the opportunity to change the trajectory of how things were for them at the time, but it was really defeating to then, on a monthly basis, have that money clawed back from social assistance.

As the member opposite eloquently put it, it is difficult in the current situation, not only in the Yukon but in this country, to be able to receive that level of money and still be in a position to cover your basic bills — your housing, food, utilities — and to make it to the next month.

I appreciate those comments and certainly have watched that in practice, and I think that those are the things that have to be reviewed. It just doesn't meet the goals, I believe, of this government or the programs themselves.

To start off, I think it's important to touch on some of what was heard through the comprehensive review of Health and Social Services in Yukon and subsequently recommended in the *Putting People First* report. The report found that most Yukon social assistance cases, with job loss or unemployment — and the result is people remaining on social assistance for years. The report also notes that, over the past five years, the social assistance caseload has grown at approximately the same pace as Yukon's population.

Social assistance payments in Yukon are among the highest in the country, providing an equivalent of 80 percent of the gross minimum-wage income. This rate is indexed each year to increases in the cost of living.

Social assistance also provides for other discretionary benefits in support — for things like transportation, childcare, laundry, and telephone expenses. Further support is available beyond that through discretionary and emergency aid. I think that this is what we touched on earlier. That's what the report *Putting People First* really focused on — the discretionary side.

In the Yukon, there are three different providers of social assistance: the Government of Yukon, self-governing First Nations, and the Government of Canada. All three are guided by the Yukon *Social Assistance Act* with each provider offering the same basic rates. There are significant differences, however, in how each delivers discretionary aid. As a result, clients can have very different experiences and receive different levels of support.

The cost of living in the territory and the lack of affordable housing leaves many social assistance clients, especially single people living on their own, unable to make ends meet and struggling to make it through each month.

The report goes on to note that Yukon has one of the most supportive systems for moving people off social assistance into employment. Yukoners moving off social assistance can keep 50 percent of their employment income before deductions and still receive benefits such as pharmaceutical coverage and ongoing access to extended health benefits for up to three years after transitioning off social assistance. But, despite this, clients tend to stay on social assistance for a long time and struggle to find ways to improve their well-being and independence. So, while the benefits may be in place to support transitioning people from social assistance back into the workforce, the findings of the report note that many people highlight the need to find employment opportunities and activities that foster a sense of purpose and dignity — moreover, that the health and social system should provide more comprehensive and proactive assistance in helping people to find employment.

I have to say that those comments from the professionals and the subject-matter experts who undertook that work — certainly, it is so timely. We are in a position right now where, in the Yukon on a monthly basis, we continue to see a bit of a fluctuation in our unemployment rates. A couple of months ago, we were in the number two and number three position, essentially — in the lowest unemployment rate in the country. We have moved up a bit. Of course, based on our population, that can fluctuate pretty quickly, but what we are seeing is that probably over a thousand folks are looking for opportunities. But at the same time, we have even more opportunities available. So, part of our challenge is ensuring that we can mobilize as many Yukoners as possible into these new opportunities. It affects everything, and that is why I am stating it today.

It affects the cost of housing. It affects the — sort of — inflationary effects within Yukon's economy. Why? Well, we have Yukoners who, in many cases, do have homes here. They have appropriate places to live but, at the same time, they are in a situation where, if they are not part of our current labour force and they are not finding the right opportunity, we are then in a position where employers — whether Yukon government, First Nation governments, municipal governments, the private sector, or NGOs and non-profits — are in a position where they have to seek out individuals who are from outside of the Yukon. When that happens, it exacerbates our issues around housing. It continues to put on more pressure.

The key is, as we have said, to find individuals who are residing within the Yukon and understand — in many cases, for

those folks who are on social assistance — what we can do better to ensure that they link into those jobs. For many individuals, at least from my experience, it is not a simple conversation at all. I can remember running part of that program in Ross River. The entire class was members of the Ross River Dena Council. They were all women who had grown up in Ross River. They were between the ages of 53 and 64. At that time, if you went into the Ross River Dena Council First Nation administration building, what you would see is a list of a number of jobs. There were many opportunities, whether it was mining companies or exploration. At the time — and I had a lot to learn — I thought it was a simple match. There were all these opportunities, they seemed like they were paying well, and they were all within that community. The individuals whom I was working with, in some cases, were receiving a stipend or some sort of assistance, and I thought that it would be a simple match, but it wasn't. It was stated to me by that group of individuals that they didn't have an interest at that point to work in that sector. They had strong feelings about it. They were looking for other opportunities.

That led to a process of trying to figure out, in a small community where there weren't a lot of different opportunities, how we could match those individuals with things that were going to enhance the quality of their lives.

In that case, we quickly found that we had a group of extremely talented individuals who had been doing traditional artistic work and were being poorly compensated for the things they were producing. That is what led to working with the instructor who was there in order to build a platform where those folks could continue to do the things they did so well, which they loved to do, and for them to be compensated appropriately for that. That is what they believed in, and that is what got them up in the morning, so they could go do those things.

It's not as easy to just match an open job with an individual who is receiving assistance. It has to take another approach. It is something that, at the Department of Economic Development, we are extremely interested in — taking a look at how, in a modern society, understanding that the philosophies and the methodology around a modern workforce have changed and what it means to ensure that skills programs are available — like using new technology, like artificial intelligence to scan appropriate sets of data — and then to understand how we can have the right fits. Again, it is foundational in how we deal with a number of things, like our housing challenges.

I think it is also important for many to touch on, when they are building out challenges with the many expenses that all folks have, like the move that was made here in the Yukon around our early learning and childcare program — it is one of the most exciting undertakings that I have seen, maybe ever, when it comes to the economy. It is the opportunity for a very significant cost for Yukoners to be now managed in an appropriate way.

I know from going door to door and talking to folks in Porter Creek South in 2016 that one of the things that consistently was touched upon was parents coming to the door

talking about the challenges of running a household, making sure that they had appropriate housing, the right supports, food, opportunities for their children, and through that, talking about the exorbitant cost of childcare.

I commend ministers of the day who took that work on — our previous Minister of Health and Social Services, and also Education, taking that work on. Before the federal government had made their commitment to it — I mean, it was just last year that the federal minister was going from province to province and territory and having discussions around having provinces signed on to these programs.

I think that the most courageous thing was to go down that path, knowing that the service was not just about offsetting the costs for folks around childcare, but now giving one of those parents, hopefully, an opportunity, if they so chose, to get out there and to chart their path in their professional life.

When you look at it again from a standpoint of a macro view of the economy, you're in a position where you need more people in the workforce. Again, you hope that those folks already live here. You want to see that happen. That's just going to make things so much easier when it comes to the housing situation. Then again, you're also — in some cases, for folks who are out working, you're now putting more funds in their pocket.

I just think that program was so important to the lives of many who have children. When you're talking about reviewing an assistance program so that it comes in line with the costs every day, I think it's important to understand or to reflect on the fact that there are programs such as that. In that case, it was — for the record, the program was reducing parents' fees by up to \$700 per child a month in full-time participation in licensed childcare and a very good wage increase for the qualified individuals who are delivering that program. When we talk about the entire ecosystem that we have to look at when we're reviewing social assistance, that is also one.

Despite some of these program changes that we have seen, clients tend to stay on social assistance for a long time. They struggle to find ways to improve their well-being and independence. While those benefits may be in place to support the transition of people from social assistance back into the workforce, the findings of the *Putting People First* report note that many people highlight the need to find employment again for a sense of purpose and dignity.

It highlights in the report that the timely referrals to supportive services are important for all Yukoners receiving social assistance. My thoughts are that those supportive services understand the interest of the individuals and are taking a very holistic approach to supporting those individuals to transition.

Referrals can engage people with their communities and help them achieve their goals. Again, part of that work might be doing some deeper work on understanding what their goals are. Many folks have maybe not taken that opportunity to sit down and think about what their long-term goals are. Especially if you are in that situation where you are going from day to day or month to month to try to sustain yourself and your

family, having time to sit back and reflect on what their long-term goals are may not be top of mind.

Then, what are the metrics you use to work through that and figure out your goals? Are you going to go through a period where you are comfortable going through a Myers-Briggs test? Are you going to go through something else that is standardized, such as a college program? You are going to take that and then you're going to be able to understand what really makes you tick as an individual and then putting that together for a long-term plan and finally making sure that the provider understands how to use that information to get you to where you need to go to transition from social assistance.

Again, we want to decrease the time spent on social assistance. We want to increase our workforce attachment and our earned incomes for individuals. We want to reduce the impacts of poverty and empower and enhance individual resiliency.

The report also notes that some of the Yukon's existing policies appear to deter people from moving from social assistance. For example, we have clients with children under six years of age who are not required to look for work, something known to decrease workforce attachment.

I would also be remiss if I did not highlight some of the findings on the housing front. Of course, all of us here in the Legislative Assembly are cognizant of our housing situation. We all know that safe housing plays a huge role, as the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin touched on, in our health and our well-being. *Putting People First* outlines that the proportion of Yukoners in subsidized housing is almost twice the national average — 13 percent across Canada versus 25 percent in the Yukon. This translates to over 700 housing units that are targeted at low-income Yukoners.

What this suggests is that the cost of housing is simply too high for too many low-income Yukoners. I know that the members who have the critic roles for housing — we will continue to talk about our current situation. All one has to do is look around and take into consideration not only those 714 units that we have — just over 714 housing units that are in place — but now the Yukon Housing Corporation is undertaking to build a number of new units to try to make up for the demand through partnerships — which we have touched on — with Da Daghay Development or Boreal Commons. We have a number of other units coming on. Again, we are going to be far above the Canadian average, but we have to look at all of the pieces in this conversation.

We have a very significant demand for new people into the economy. We know that folks who are part of the workforce are being paid very well. The Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes and I discuss the data that we see coming out of Statistics Canada and the Yukon Bureau of Statistics a lot, and what we have seen is this increase in compensation — a very significant increase, and he may touch on that, if he gets up to comment. When you look across the country, we are seeing that — very significant.

We know that there are good-paying opportunities. We know that there are significant opportunities. We know that many sectors in our economy are in a critical need for

individuals to become part of their workforce, and we know that there are individuals who have been connected to social assistance for a very, very, very long time, and so, how do we change the trajectory for many of those individuals?

I think that's an important piece. It's not going to be just about reviewing the social assistance program so that we increase how much we provide. I'm not saying that's not a really important part of the conversation, but I think we have to look at all the other pieces, because it's so important for our private sector — which contributes so much — and all of our other opportunities within the labour force.

So, in 2016, approximately 29 percent of Yukoners were spending 30 percent or more of their income on shelter costs, ranging from rent to mortgage payments. The cost of housing in the territory has a large impact on the amount the government spends on social assistance payments, with housing-related expenses dominating payments made to social assistance clients in all areas — as core payments, emergency payments, and transitional payments.

Shelter-related social assistance payments are increasing faster than the caseload and overall expenditures. In addition, hotels are used in Whitehorse to offset housing needs for low-income Yukoners. The member, on speaking to this motion, talked about the report and our need to work with the Anti-Poverty Coalition. That is a major concern of the Anti-Poverty Coalition: the fact that hotels, especially over the last 24 months when we were going through a challenging time in the tourism sector — we had the opportunity to use some of those units that have always been used in some hotels, but there were more openings, because we didn't see our tourism sector moving the same that it normally does. I mean, our tourism sector, moving into pre-COVID, was contributing more per capita than any other part of the country. It used to be we were number two, and that changed in 2017.

So, we know that we have this really significant tourism sector, and at the same time, we've had this massive constriction and pressure on housing. We did have opportunities for those folks to come in, but as the Anti-Poverty Coalition team has appropriately flagged, what happens as tourism bounces back? That's one of the things we're trying to grapple with, to come up with other sets of options for those individuals. These are all things that we talk about every day at the Yukon Housing Corporation — or Yukon Housing Corporation does, and I get to be part of that conversation.

In addition, as I said, again, it is not cost-effective and does not lead to healthier outcomes over the long term to see individuals in hotels. It doesn't make financial sense. I have looked at those numbers, and we have to have individuals building affordable housing, and we need to make sure that the right business case is made with them. I think that is where the opportunity is.

Usually when you are having conversations like this about social assistance and housing, the difficult part of it is that it is a really challenging conversation, and mostly, the word "opportunity" doesn't come up. In the case of the Yukon, there are many individuals, many development corporations, and there are many NGOs, and they all have the capacity, in the

right climate, to build their assets. Their assets, in many cases, will be part of the housing solution. That is what we have been seeing over the last number of years.

I think the first work with Da Daghay Development happened prior to our government being elected. There was some great work done by the previous government to get some things moving in Whistle Bend, and now we just want to continue to do some of that good work. It was a great trajectory that was set, and I think we also have to take into consideration that model across the Yukon.

That is key to this conversation, as well. We are looking at the largest investment in affordable housing in Yukon history that is underway. It is the work that was done by my predecessor at Yukon Housing Corporation. There was a commitment then made to ensure that there was equity in our communities, because there seemed to have been maybe not the same level of investment across all Yukon communities, and rural communities needed to see that investment — so, that has been committed to.

I know the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin can speak to that. Right now, when you look at what is being developed in Old Crow, you are talking extremely significant. Hopefully, that infrastructure can make for better health outcomes and better life outcomes for individuals. We do have to take into consideration, as we do a review of social assistance, that important work that is underway, that is all being developed. We are looking at probably, from quarter to quarter, as we go into our fiscal year, new spots and opportunities opening for people to be able to find better housing. Again, hopefully that leads to healthier outcomes.

Our government knows that the housing continuum needs to provide options and support for people with a range of incomes, health, social, and housing needs. This all provides a high-level summary of what was heard on the social assistance side of the review of health and social services in the Yukon in the development of *Putting People First*.

I would now like to take a few minutes to paint a picture of what the current economic state of affairs is here. We touched on a few things around the labour force and some of the demand, but I think it's important that it has to be a fulsome conversation versus just looking at one tool that's available — some of the issues, some of the opportunities, and some of the work that the government is doing. It's important to do this, as this is part of the whole picture of where we are and how the recommendations for *Putting People First* fit into all of this.

Yukon employment during COVID-19 — the impacts of COVID-19 have been far-reaching. We all know that it has created a period of highly uneven economic activity and employment across Canada and throughout the territory. It was touched on yesterday during debate that one thing that the Yukon private sector should be very proud of is the fact that their work led to an increase in our gross domestic product. I know that sometimes that measure, certainly by the Third Party, gets pushed on as not being the be-all and end-all. I can see that, but when you think about Nunavut and the Yukon, the fact that we saw growth in the middle of a pandemic is significant.

This has mostly to do with the mining sector. We have talked about this publicly. We were at the Klondike Placer Miners' Association AGM a couple of years ago. The Leader of the Official Opposition was there, and we both had a chance to speak and highlight the fact that we were in a situation where, because of global instability, we saw growth in the commodity price. Of course, that increased investment led to more jobs. We had that happening, and at the same time, Victoria Gold was underway. Again, they were starting to extract and produce, and Minto, as well — it was known as a copper mine — still has gold that's being recovered as well.

So, all of those things in place make Yukon a very special spot, because we've continued to see, over a number of years and decades, that when things get shaky, people move, in many cases, to gold. But there were many areas of our economy that didn't have that same experience, like tourism.

So, StatsCan's labour force survey data shows that, for September 2021, the Yukon had the second highest labour force participation rate at 70 percent. I think that this is something that we should be proud of. We have the second highest employment rate at 65.5 percent among provinces and territories and an unemployment rate of 6.1 percent, so well below the national average. We will see what happens in the next couple of months on the unemployment rate, but right now, there was a bit of a bump, but really, it's in sort of the number one and two spot.

So, that data really tells an interesting story. We know that we have a big participation of folks, but then we have some individuals who continue to be on social assistance and they are in there for a long period of time.

Recent data does point to one area of concern. The recovery of the size of the labour force post-pandemic appears to now have stalled. Our labour force has dropped from 23,800 in April 2021 to 23,100 in September 2021. We know that we saw a significant amount of construction — and some projects being in a situation where they are coming to finale and other projects starting up — but we have to really be in a scenario to really dig into labour force and understand elements of it.

I've worked on the edges of that conversation previously, and I think what we're seeing is that every province and territory is now starting to look at this in a different way. We saw Ontario last week, I believe — announcements by their minister that focus on labour — Monte McNaughton — and that was really focused on respecting foreign credentials and having individuals come in.

That doesn't have so much to do with the conversation on social assistance, but there seems to be movement in Alberta as well around really recognizing the domestic labour force, making sure that people have that opportunity to go out and work, looking at their domestic credentials, and understanding that we have to reduce these barriers. We don't want people on social assistance; we want people to have opportunities and jobs. Because of regulatory impacts based on how we look at their credentials — we are not meeting the goals, I believe, of that regulation and program.

The Yukon labour market again appears to be in a state of flux. There is a significantly higher job vacancy rate than

normal, signs of upward pressures on wages, and an unexpected significant decline in the number of those eligible for employment insurance and related additional COVID-19 support for workers over the next several months.

Over the two years prior to the pandemic, the labour force survey has generally found the Yukon to have the highest labour force participation rate. When we look at that, it is those aged 15 years and over either working or actively seeking work in Canada. We have the highest labour force participation and the highest employment rate — again, the highest in the country — the percentage of population of those aged 15 and over who are employed in Canada. We had the lowest unemployment rate in the country. If you look at the average for the last half of the decade, we have. We hit the lowest in the country in December 2016. I commend my colleagues, certainly — the government. There was a lot of work done, I think, to put us in that trajectory, and the important thing is to keep that going.

At this point, I am going to go back to sort of what we heard in *Putting People First* that was touched on in the opening statement. The report notes that there is a lack of data around social assistance programs. The collection, management, quality, analysis, and reporting are weak. I appreciate the comments from the member opposite on that. I think that it is important to figure out, within that review, not just these items with the *Putting People First* report, but we have to think about how we have been doing a lot of this work and what the available tools are. We have countries globally that are tackling this problem, whether it is big companies like Boeing that are bringing in the best expertise that there is in the world — we have universities like Ryerson, which is building these hubs that are talking about this, and then you can look at really strong economies like the UAE in the Middle East, and they are trying to get the best possible expertise in programming.

Like I mentioned earlier, you now have artificial intelligence being used to try to figure this out. That's not how people worked with the labour force previously.

Adding to this issue is that, across the different social assistance providers, there is no common agreement about what social assistance support should be, what it is intended to achieve, the number of cases we have, or why people need assistance.

That goes back to that conversation that I touched on earlier. You have to have a holistic approach. Why are people on assistance? I think that any Member of the Legislative Assembly could write down three things that they believe — you would probably think about this generally, and we hopefully wouldn't stereotype when we do that, but we would think about what has caused that. There could be other things that people have experienced that have led to that particular base, but we need to know that. If we don't understand that, we are not going to be able to transition those folks.

This results in difficulties in supporting decision-making around service provision if you don't know what problem you are trying to solve, or how you are trying to support, in determining whether outcomes are improving.

Recommendation 5.4 in *Putting People First* states that the Yukon government should: "Create a framework and provide support for data management and analysis for social supports programs. This work should be completed with associated reporting timelines attached, to ensure relevant data is reviewed and reported upon regularly."

I wanted to state that on behalf of our government. I know that it was reflected upon by the opposition, but we clearly understand that this is the work that needs to be done.

Further to that, it notes: "In 2018-19, the Yukon government spent almost \$20 million on social assistance. Spending on social services more broadly is also increasing. To address this, Yukon needs a framework that identifies and tracks critical performance measures for quality improvement." This would include the development of indicators to assist with more thorough evaluation.

It recommends improvements to data quality through consistent data entry, improved structures of data outputs, and regular reporting that contextualizes program-level data within the larger system, including population level employment, income, and housing data. The most progressive or future proofing that is happening is that we are seeing organizations looking at all of their sectors. They are then looking at the projected need of the labour force. In turn, they are going back and getting all of that data — not just individuals who are within the social assistance programs but the entire workforce.

I think that First Nation governments do this extremely well. They tend to have a really good sense within their citizenry of what individuals' skills are, what the opportunities are, and what the needs are. I think that it is key, as the member opposite touched on, not only on the social assistance piece, but learning from them on how they go out and gather that data. Most First Nations are always looking at having that data at the ready so that when there is a significant industrial investment in their traditional territory — during the negotiation around the impacts and potential benefits agreements — just understanding where they can help their own citizens.

We can learn something there — having all that data at the ready, not just from the 11 self-governing First Nations, not just from our other three First Nations in the southeast and northwest, but also how we do it as Yukon government for the rest of our individuals — because having all of that information is absolutely going to be key in understanding this. Maybe this is not part of the social services review under *Putting People First*, but this really does feed into the conversation because, when you are thinking about transition, we are going to need that. This will provide, again, a more complete picture of what our social service system is addressing and where we can improve.

I highlight this recommendation at this time because it is critical to evidence-based decision-making. If we know that there is a gap in the labour market and we know that there are individuals who are seeking employment due to their situation, we can focus on efforts appropriately to ensure that individuals are supported in skilling up and gaining employment.

Again, the other key partner on this is going to be Yukon University. When you talk about the review, you need to meet

people, but you also have to understand that, to my recollection, there are 13 remote campuses that exist. Your best reach into more rural communities that have a platform and have the capacity to deliver — over the last couple of years, we have come to this position where we have all spent a significant amount of time on Zoom. The precursor to Yukon University — Yukon College — has been doing their version of Zoom for a long, long time. Zoom has been into Carcross, Pelly, and you name it. That's how people were learning. That is another key partner — those academic institutions. Certainly, we have one that is going to be key to this. How do they play a role in this review?

We know that there is a gap in our labour market, and we know that there are individuals seeking employment due to the situation. Again, the population level employment is such an important piece of data.

The recommendations from *Putting People First* — and I want to touch on that. It was a very — watching somebody go through this, at the personal level, battling to get fair disability services — I think that the Leader of the NDP touches on this and has been an advocate. I can't specifically touch on when she has spoken, but my recollection is that it has always been key — just for those folks who are underserved. That is touched on within that same chapter, and it has to be, I think, part of that discussion. I think that it's important that it's part of the discussion. It's not just a review of social assistance, but it's our disability services for adults. Resources, again, for families supporting Yukoners with disabilities at home — that's part of it. That can be a significant expenditure. We want to improve the health outcomes for individuals, housing, and food security. I have to say that it was such a profound example by the member opposite — that somebody goes out and undertakes their traditional way of life and then there is an impact to that. I missed that, and I think that it is something that just should not be happening to individuals who are already in a difficult situation.

At a high level, that report talks about the current policies that are not guided by high-quality evidence, which we touched on, but we need to be person-centred. We need to have integrated services. I think that we're going to have to figure out, in that analysis, if there are gaps in those services so that we make sure that, if we're integrating them, we have all of them to integrate. We have to pay attention to the impacts on the population as a whole and, as well, on vulnerable communities and set out clear deliverables and objectives, which I think are going to be extremely important. I think this is extremely important.

I also think that it's a fascinating conversation because the labour market and housing are the things that are on my mind all the time — and it's any policy conversation around it.

As mentioned earlier, we have our three types of social assistance and we talked about that. We talked about the Government of Yukon, First Nation governments, and the Government of Canada. They all operate with a bit of a different approach. The Yukon government, as touched on by the member opposite, should develop a framework with the other providers and key stakeholders. It's not just about how —

we're not going to get this right unless everybody is at the table in order to make sure that we have that equity.

Yukoners should receive appropriate supports and services regardless of who provides the service. It's important to repeat that Yukon is uniquely poised to be a leader in Canada in delivery of social assistance. Yukon is a small jurisdiction with comparatively low caseload numbers.

Reactivating the income support reciprocal agreement working group is probably an appropriate forum for that work. If you go back and you take a look at — and that really speaks to 5.1 of *Putting People First*.

If you go back and look at the next part of it — which is the development of a referral process and procedure to employment and training services for all individuals on social assistance to determine their work readiness and/or their vocational planning — it also talks about how you need to ensure that the current employment and training services are meeting the needs of clients. Retooling these services should also lead to improved outcomes in social assistance duration, workforce attachment, and reducing the overall impacts of poverty.

Being financially disadvantaged for a long time makes it difficult, of course, to stabilize your life and return to work. People may need the support to improve their situation. The department's employment and training services unit provides employment and training supports to people with persistent barriers to employment. It appears that the referral rates to employment and training services are low for non-disability social assistance clients. Yukon government will need to determine if this is a result of poor policies and procedures for referring clients, current services not meeting the needs of income support clients, or both. That's going to be part of what we have to figure out.

When you think about 5.3 in that report, it's to develop a referral policy and procedure for community health services for individuals with medical barriers to work if they are not currently receiving medical treatment.

It is not clear, again, how service providers are working together to help social assistance clients with their medical needs. So, lots of things take people out of the workforce, including medical, personal reasons, or maternity or paternity leave. Again, reintegrating into the workforce after time away can be challenging. Setting goals and developing a supportive case plan and providing supports early are critical to a successful return to work.

I think that we all learned, when people have these challenges — the Yukon — when we say that we can be a leader, we have done that in other policy development. The sick leave program that was rolled out during the first COVID response — policy analysts and advisors worked extremely quickly. For anybody who is in the Assembly, I know that the Leader of the Official Opposition, in his technical work, would commend his former colleagues for putting programs together in two weeks.

There is a risk when you are working at that level of speed and you are looking at that type of innovation, but as the Leader of the Third Party said before, when you have that political will

and you can move those things, you can really do something that is pretty special. They did that, and there is no better validation than when a big western province in Canada calls the Department of Economic Development in the Yukon, where there are 53 or 54 people working, and says, “Hey, can we see the template, or can you help us out in getting our new program launched?” — or understanding what the policies are around that a year later — a year after it was already launched in the Yukon. We know how important it was to make sure that we had that in place, and of course, now the conversation that has continued on about having sick leave has really been very live in the country and here in the territory.

The other piece of this, when you are thinking about not having more individuals move toward social assistance, was supporting our essential workers. The Leader of the Third Party did a very great job of being an advocate for individuals who were working in that field when we were doing the top-up program. Some employers were not embracing it. We just did not want to see people lose their employment and move toward social assistance. Again, we don’t want folks to get into that scenario. It seems for many that there is a bit of rut. We wanted to make sure that individuals were in a position where they could continue to do their work.

Again, it was a lesson learned for us about how to provide the right supports. Of course, that was funded through the federal government, but even those actions are pertinent to this conversation, because we would be in a much more difficult position when it comes to social assistance if we didn’t look at that.

In 2018-19, the Yukon government spent almost \$20 million. For all of us, how do we reallocate those funds if we’re not putting them into social assistance to properly reallocate them into maybe skilling up or retooling for folks? That can be part of the key scope of the review.

While preliminary data and policy analysis has begun to provide a clearer picture of cost-drivers, processes, and outcomes to social services, much more information is needed. During our public engagement, some organizations expressed concern about the creation of a welfare culture. This is when there are few incentives to leave social assistance due to the extensive discretionary aid provided. We also know that rapid or significant clawbacks, which were touched on, act as a deterrent to re-entering the workforce. Due to challenges with data collection at different program levels, little is known about the drivers of social assistance uptake in the Yukon, why people leave social assistance, what services or supports best help people leave social assistance in the Yukon, and how different programs are working together.

Yukon’s social assistance legislation is very broad. This leaves implementation decisions at the discretion of staff. These decisions can vary over time as staff change — and we’ve seen where clients have very similar situations, but for some particular reason, have different treatment. Of course, we don’t want to see that lack of equity.

It is common for health and social systems to have a culture that prioritizes front-line interaction with clients. The problem with this is data collection that can then be seen as secondary,

or not so important, or even as getting in the way. I’m just going to pull a note up here as we talk about those services.

We did talk about the fact that the majority of the funding through the social services program is going toward housing. I want to just share with the Assembly that it has been talked about a bit before, and that is the Canada housing benefit. I think it’s important to add this to this discussion, because it has been a very important tool for us.

We are in a position where we allocate, through the Yukon Housing Corporation, either \$200, \$400, \$600, or \$800 to individuals. It has been a very important program.

So, the Yukon Housing Corporation launched it in November 2020. The Canada housing benefit was a rental subsidy program in partnership with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation — with CMHC. Since the launch, we’ve helped over 200 households. As of August 2021, we have approved direct housing rental subsidy support to over 140 Yukoners in market rental housing — just in standard rentals. It gives them that little extra support to ensure that they can have that suitable housing. This is an important piece.

We know that we have funding in place. The initiative was \$9.1 million over eight years, but it is probably prudent to look out to understand what potentially happens after that program comes to a conclusion, because again, does that factor into this work? This is something very, very key — a bilateral agreement that a previous Minister of Yukon Housing Corporation helped put together.

The rental subsidy program is helping Yukoners recover from the economic effects of COVID-19 and moving a significant number of Yukoners out of housing need. This program is supported with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation funding of \$865,000 this fiscal year. This amount, again, is cost-matched by the Yukon.

We are pleased that additional funding for this program was announced in the 2021 budget. Currently, under this program, pad rent — something I know is very important to the Leader of the Third Party — is not covered, but pad rental represents a combination of costs, including land rental and services, as well as things such as garbage and snow removal; at least that was my experience when I had to pay pad rent. Mobile homes that are rented out as private market rentals are eligible for that.

Again, this fall, after the first year, we are completing a review just to make sure that this works. I am hoping that the results from that review can feed into the work of *Putting People First*.

Mr. Speaker, like I said, I find this a fascinating topic. I could probably keep going here, but I think my colleagues in the Assembly are looking for me to conclude. I do have what I consider a friendly amendment. I think this is in line with the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin. I think that the focus of this motion is just a bit too narrow. We went through all this: housing, employment supports, labour market — all these things. They are part of it, so I have the following amendment that I will present for the House’s consideration.

Amendment proposed

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I move:

THAT Motion No. 168 be amended by adding the following after the word rates “as part of implementing Chapter 5 of the Putting People First report.”

Speaker: The amendment is in order, with slight changes by the Clerks.

It has been moved by the Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation:

THAT Motion No. 168 be amended by inserting after the word “rates” the phrase “as part of implementing Chapter 5 of *Putting People First — the final report of the comprehensive review of Yukon’s health and social programs and services.*”

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I will be brief. I just wanted to thank the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin.

We think that the motion as tabled, although we have looked to increase the scope, is a very important conversation, and it is not — as I hope I have had an opportunity to illustrate — it is not just about the importance around ensuring that we have an equitable social assistance program and system within the Yukon that is being delivered by multiple agencies, but also, it is a very important part of ensuring that we have opportunities in our labour force that can support our businesses. We see businesses right now that are not being able to provide their full course of services because they do not have enough individuals to be there.

I hope that we have had an opportunity as well to illustrate that this should be deeply tied into chapter 5 of *Putting People First*, understanding that a holistic approach to this conversation is very key — not to take away from the fact that it was just a review, but it is a broader conversation than just that. Again, I am sort of hoping that the member opposite sees the commitment and the work — at least for the Department of Economic Development, which I have responsibility for — and that we continue to figure out how to support Health and Social Services and other departments as they look to implement this.

I want to thank the Clerks for helping out with getting the proper language on this motion. Thank you very much.

I want to thank Hansard — or to apologize to Hansard — for the to and fro this afternoon on some of my comments, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I would like to thank the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin for the motion today. I am prepared to speak for a little while on the amendment, as presented by my colleague. I don’t think that there would be any argument to the sentiment that any society is only as strong as its most vulnerable people. We have heard that many, many times. It is a way of signalling that we have to do better — providing for those in our society who are struggling. There is not a single person in this Chamber — I know that there is nobody on our side who would object to that statement. I would argue that this is why we are all here. I can guarantee that there is not a single person in our government who has not been working toward that goal every day.

In fact, most of us have dedicated our lives to that cause — to improving the lot of those least fortunate in our society and making our communities healthier and more vibrant. This is why the former Minister of Health and Social Services championed *Putting People First*, a review of health and social programs and services in the Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, the independent committee was appointed in November 2018 by the Premier and then-Minister of Health and Social Services, Pauline Frost. Like most of her work, it was comprehensive and groundbreaking. The final report was delivered on April 20, 2020, and we are committed to implementing this report in full.

It is perhaps important to reference the document’s preface as it succinctly lays out the approach and goals: “Throughout this report, we have tried to provide recommendations that will improve patient-client responsiveness, experience, and outcomes, as well as health provider experiences and ensure fiscal sustainability for future generations of Yukoners.”

This was said by Bruce McLennan, George Green, Greg Marchildon, Diane Strand, and Jennifer Zelmer in their 206-page report.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, there is a lot to this report and we are committed to making it happen.

“As we explain in our report, this Quadruple Aim assumes that providing higher quality care and managing costs go together...” — said the committee. “Poor quality care will actually cost us more over the long term.” This is absolutely true.

In society, too often, we pinch pennies up front to make something seem affordable and wind up wasting thousands once the news cycle passes by. We have to end that process, which is why the committee “... decided that it was far better to get to the root of what is causing gaps in care and provide recommendations that would fix these problems.” Many of the committee recommendations “...require some front-end investment. In the long run, we believe these changes will improve care and reduce the growth curve of system costs.”

Let’s talk specifics. Let’s talk about universal childcare and early childhood learning. This is our initiative. It cost us a lot of money, but the benefits to families and to society are enormous. As a young family 25 years ago, we struggled. In fact, with two sons, it was more economical for my wife to stay home with the kids than to work.

It improved our bottom line. This has been a typical story in the territory. When speaking to constituents, I’ve heard it time and again. Today, because of this program, families have a choice. Parents can work if they choose to. They have more disposable income. For society and our record-breaking economy, as my colleague was talking about earlier, there is slightly less pressure on our housing market.

The winds are great. The *Putting People First* committee wrote that report, but it was Yukoners who provided the ideas. Improving social assistance was part of that report. The committee spoke with Yukoners to understand the challenges people face when interacting with various —

Speaker: Order, please.

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

Debate on Motion No. 168, and the amendment, accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

The following sessional paper was tabled October 27, 2021:

35-1-24

Yukon Hospitals Year in Review 2020-21 (McPhee)