



Yukon Legislative Assembly

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HANSARD

Monday, March 10, 2025 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2025 Spring Sitting

SPEAKER — Hon. Jeremy Harper, MLA, Mayo-Tatchun
DEPUTY SPEAKER and CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Annie Blake, MLA, Vuntut Gwitchin
DEPUTY CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Lane Tredger, MLA, Whitehorse Centre

CABINET MINISTERS

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

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

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

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Monday, March 10, 2025 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

INTRODUCTION OF TABLE OFFICERS

Speaker: The Chair is pleased to be able to introduce the new Clerk of Committees, Logan Ockenden, who has joined us from Ontario. Logan grew up in northern Ontario in a small town called Hanmer, which is north of Sudbury, so he is no stranger to the Canadian winter. Logan will be finishing up his studies at Carleton University and will join us full time at the end of April.

Please join me in welcoming Logan to the start of his duties today.

Applause

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to draw to the attention of the House the reason why a motion was not placed on today's Notice Paper.

On Thursday, March 6, 2025, the Member for Riverdale North rose during the rubric "Notice of Motions" in the Daily Routine to provide the House with notice of a motion that he should intend to debate in the House this session. The member spoke for one minute and 35 seconds, but Motion No. 1160 was not in the form of a motion and was instead in the form of a member's statement. This is out of order.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: The Chair will remind all MLAs once again that the time for notices of motions should not be used to make statements or engage in debate. As I have stated previously, with close to 1,200 motions read in the House, it is long overdue for the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges to deal with this issue and, at least on a trial basis or in the form of a pilot project, move to establish members' statements.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Under Introduction of Visitors, the Chair would like to introduce visitors.

Visitors introduced

Speaker: Are there any further introductions of visitors?
Visitors introduced

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of International Women's Day

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to International Women's Day.

This year, perhaps more than any other, there is a pressing need to reflect on the progress made on gender equity but also preparing ourselves to defend human rights more broadly.

Internationally, we are watching decades of progress being rolled back right before our eyes, restricting access to reproductive health care, attempts to erase transgender people's existence under the law, a tax on diversity, equality, and inclusion initiatives. We should not take status quo for granted.

In the Yukon, we have so much to be proud of when it comes to gender equality, and that will serve us well going forward. Our territory has a proud legacy of trailblazing women, leaders who have shaped our history and paved the way for future generations.

In 2000, the Yukon was led by an extraordinary group of women. Their leadership, alongside the efforts of many other women and equality advocates, has strengthened our communities and advanced the principles of equality and inclusion.

The Government of Canada's theme for International Women's Day 2025 is "Strength in every story". This year's theme highlights the importance of amplifying the voices of all women, particularly those who continue to face barriers to success. Creating opportunities for women and girls unlocks their potential and drives innovation, supports Canada's economy, and helps ensure a sustainable future for all.

Mr. Speaker, as I prepared for this tribute, I could not get Morgan Harris out of my mind. Her remains were found in a landfill in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This was confirmed on the eve of International Women's Day. She was killed, along with three other Indigenous women, by a serial killer. Morgan was loved and cherished. Her remains will now be cared for by her loving family. Other remains were found in this landfill, believed to be the remains of another Indigenous woman. My heart goes out to these families.

I am thankful for the families, advocates, and allies who did not give up when demanding that we look for them. I am also so thankful for the matriarchs and leaders who participated in developing Yukon's MMIWG2S+ strategy and implementation plan and who are helping us move that important work forward. Today and every day, I acknowledge the women-led and equity-seeking organizations across the Yukon who stand for gender equality every day by working tirelessly to create healthier and safer communities. Progress is upheld by action, not complacency.

Today, I ask my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly to reflect on how we can continue to move our territory forward in the quest for gender equality. Every woman's story is a testament to resilience, determination, and power of opportunity. Celebrate the women and girls in your life and share their stories. I know that we are going to hear an exceptional story in a few moments in our next tribute.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize International Women's Day, which took place on March 8.

Women have played a pivotal role in the growth and shaping of our territory. They fought for their rights and for their way into every corner of the workforce. This is true for so many women throughout our history — the grit and determination that they had to forge the way for future generations of women to help the stigma of women in male-dominated fields to subside. To them, we say thank you. We thank them for leading the charge so that we can be standing here in the Legislature today, so that the female officers here in the gallery for the next tribute can proudly wear the RCMP uniform and dedicate themselves to the communities that they serve, so that all the women in trades and tech sectors, in medicine and in law and all other sectors can thrive and continue to change those sectors for the better.

We continue to make leaps in our territory to help women and girls gain experience and confidence in areas that were once more male-dominated and continue to make the stigma that I mentioned earlier disappear. Those leaps continue, but there are still barriers being faced by women and girls.

According to data from the World Economic Forum, it will take until 2158, approximately five generations from now, to achieve gender parity. As such, this year's theme for International Women's Day is "Accelerate Action", which focuses on speeding up the actions being taken to address systemic barriers and biases faced by women.

We must continue to help ensure that our children have equal opportunities to one another and that all women and girls are given the resources and respect they need to do big things in our communities.

Salamat po.

Applause

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the NDP to honour International Women's Day. This day is a powerful reminder of the strength, resilience, courage, and wisdom that women bring to our families, communities, our territory, and the world. Our ancestors have walked this land for generations, nurturing it with their hands and hearts. They have passed down stories, traditions, and knowledge that continue to guide us today. We carry forward this legacy with a deep sense of responsibility and love for our people, for those who have come before us, those here today, and those yet to come.

We honour the women who came before us who fought tirelessly for our rights, our culture, and our future. Their courage and determination paved the way for us to stand tall and speak our truths. We honour the women of today who continue to break barriers, challenge injustice, and lead with compassion and strength. I honour the many women who have helped raise me and shaped who I am today and the many women who continue to walk beside me in my journey through life.

On this day, let us remember that our voices matter, our stories matter, we are the keepers of our culture, the protectors

of our land, and the nurturers of future generations. With everything that is happening around the world where we see women's rights being attacked, we must speak these stories louder than ever before.

International Women's Day is an important reminder to everyone here that our work will always impact generations of Yukon women and girls, that the work we do in this House is meant to help and serve Yukoners. This day reminds us that women's rights are human rights and we have the important work of upholding them.

To all the women out there: We see you, we honour you, and we stand with you. Let us continue to rise, to lead, and to inspire.

Happy International Women's Day.

Mahsi' cho.

Applause

In recognition of Royal Canadian Mounted Police women

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government. It is my honour to pay tribute to the women of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and, in particular, to the inspired leaders whom we have here at M Division.

The recent selection and appointment of Lindsay Ellis to be the chief superintendent and commanding officer of the Yukon RCMP is just the latest example of exemplary leadership by women in the Yukon RCMP. She is the 41st commanding officer for M Division and the first woman to ascend to this post. This appointment recognizes her exceptional work ethic, forward-thinking approach, and commitment to modernizing police services for front-line and specialized units and increased police accountability.

Chief Superintendent Ellis has a rich history of policing in the Yukon, holding leadership roles throughout her 12-year career in the territory. She has been: district commander; the first female detachment commander of Whitehorse detachment; a primary investigator and the team commander on major cases; an undercover operator, cover person, and covert reviewer; a plainclothes unit commander; and supervisor and then unit commander of the federal investigations unit.

Chief Superintendent Ellis has fostered genuine relationships with Yukon First Nations and diverse groups while promoting collaboration, inclusion, and communication both inside and outside of the RCMP.

The Yukon has a rich history of exceptional women in M Division — really too many to mention here, but I want to highlight just a few.

Constable Shirley Telep was the first Yukon First Nation woman to become an RCMP member. Brenda Butterworth-Carr, the first female Indigenous commanding officer of both F and E Divisions and the first to reach the senior rank of deputy commissioner.

Corporal Karen Olito, an Indigenous woman, was the first woman Detachment Commander in the Yukon, having spent 34 years in the RCMP, working in almost every Yukon community. Constable Jess Edwards is the first female full-

time emergency response team member in any contract division across the country. These groundbreaking achievements are only the tip of the iceberg marking the impact that women in the RCMP have had and continue to have in the Yukon.

The women who work in RCMP support and administration roles are exceptional in their own right, including the telecommunications centre, which is at the core of the public safety and on the front lines. All of your work exemplifies the vital role that women have in the operations of the RCMP. It is my honour to pay tribute and to celebrate this trailblazing work, especially as we have just recognized International Women's Day.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to all Royal Canadian Mounted Police women. In 1974, 32 women, known as "Troop 17", became the symbols of policing in Canada when they graduated from Depot. Today, I want to recognize and honour some amazing Yukon First Nation members whose stories should be shared.

Shirley Telep, a Na-Cho Nyäk Dun citizen, was a probation officer in Mayo and decided to join the RCMP. She had a 30-year career, all spent in M Division or Yukon. She was a well-loved member. She handled many situations with confidence and dignity but lost a battle with cancer in July 2018. Her twinkling eyes and beautiful smile are missed.

Gina Nagano, a Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in citizen, had a long career and dedicated her life to helping families and communities. Since 1985, whether it was in Whitehorse, Ottawa, Vancouver, or Dawson City, she was there keeping the peace. In 2006, she retired in Ottawa as sergeant. To this day, Gina is still involved in community policing and sharing her knowledge throughout Yukon.

Karen Olito from Watson Lake told me that it was a great career and she would highly recommend it to anyone. She was in the force for 34 years and worked in eight communities — a brief stint in Ottawa and the rest in Yukon. She is one of the handcraftiest women I know and is still involved in community events and sports.

Brenda Butterworth-Carr, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, worked through the ranks and, through hard work and dedication, she became the chief superintendent and commanding officer of Division E, BC's top RCMP position.

Early on, she had worked in Yukon, then BC; then she was a criminal operations officer in BC and commanding officer in Saskatchewan before returning to British Columbia. She retired from the force but continues to contribute to her community, Dawson City.

Ebonie Rae Lutz, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in — and my niece — 20 years in the force and all spent in Division K, or Alberta, in Grande Prairie, Saddle Lake First Nation, and Beaver Lodge, among many. She also said that it was a great career and said — quote: "Be the change you want to see in the force. Be a role model and be the voice for those who cannot speak or haven't found their voice yet." Remember, most of these women had children and juggled school schedules and sports while having

to transfer to different communities and be the front line for our safety and comfort.

I want to commend all women in the RCMP and know that this career will continue to appeal to many. The duty, the discipline, and the resounding success of our Yukon First Nation women have proven to all that we are a force not to be taken lightly.

Congratulations to the women who have retired, to the women who continue to work today, and to our newly appointed RCMP Chief Superintendent and Commanding Officer Lindsay Ellis. Thank you for all you have done and all you will do.

Applause

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to women who are serving or who have served in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

I take this time to acknowledge the sacrifices that women and gender-diverse officers and staff made and continue to make in their service to Canadians.

In writing this tribute, I look back at the history of gender inclusion in the RCMP. Long before women were officially allowed to serve in the RCMP, they served in unpaid positions to support their RCMP-officer husbands. These women were referred to as the "unpaid Mountie" or the "second man".

The first female RCMP officers were hired in 1974, and they were given a purse to hold their guns and were required to wear a sensible heel and a skirt. Although history shows us how far we have come in terms of gender inclusion, we know that this work isn't finished. We need to continue to work to ensure that women and gender-diverse people are recruited, hired, and retained and that policies and programs support gender diversity and inclusion in the RCMP.

We thank all of those women and gender-diverse RCMP members for continuing to show up each and every day to serve and protect their communities.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling a post from Yukon Party candidate Adam Gerle.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling a letter addressed to the Premier and Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources from the Klondike Placer Miners' Association and the accompanying press release.

I also have for tabling a letter addressed to several public officials, including me, from the City of Dawson, dated March 4, 2025.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, today, I have a letter for tabling from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Whitehorse addressed to parents and caregivers of students in Yukon Catholic schools.

I have a letter that I wrote to the Minister of Education regarding the Catholic school board and the SOGI policy and a response from the minister entitled “Catholic Schools and SOGI policy” written to me.

I have a document written to the Holy Family Elementary School Council from the departing principal, and I have the 1972 agreement between the Commissioner of Yukon and the Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Whitehorse.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?
Are there any petitions to be presented?
Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 47: Act to amend the Income Tax Act (2025)

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 47, entitled *Act to amend the Income Tax Act (2025)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 47, entitled *Act to amend the Income Tax Act (2025)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 47 agreed to

Bill No. 50: Inclusive Yukon Families Act

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I move that Bill No. 50, entitled *Inclusive Yukon Families Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Health and Social Services that Bill No. 50, entitled *Inclusive Yukon Families Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 50 agreed to

Speaker: Are there any further bills for introduction?
Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House congratulates Chief Superintendent Lindsay Ellis on her appointment as commanding officer of M Division, Yukon RCMP, and on becoming the first female commanding officer of the Yukon RCMP.

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

THAT this House congratulates Naa Shaáde Háni Elizabeth Bosely on becoming the first female Naa Shaáde Háni of the Teslin Tlingit Council.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House congratulates Mark Carney on his impressive election as the leader of the federal Liberal Party as prime minister-designate.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House denounces threats, personal attacks, vandalism, and acts of violence toward elected officials.

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

THAT the Yukon Legislative Assembly, pursuant to section 4 of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, recommends that the Commissioner in Executive Council reappoint Annette King as the Child and Youth Advocate for a term of five years, commencing May 1, 2025.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT the Yukon Legislative Assembly, pursuant to section 18 of the *Conflict of Interest (Members and Ministers) Act*, reappoint David Phillip Jones, KC, as a member of the Conflict of Interest Commission for a three-year period, effective November 2, 2025.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House congratulates Rob Yeomans on his appointment as chair of Yukon University’s Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining Governing Council.

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

THAT this House supports the Government of Yukon’s commitment to Sport Yukon to ensure that the current location of the Polarettes Gymnastics Club be designated for use as a sports facility.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House welcomes Dylan Cozens back to Canada with his recent trade from the Buffalo Sabres to the Ottawa Senators.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Leader of the Official Opposition to offer the same support for the Yukon as a natural choice for meetings and investment as their Yukon Party candidate, Adam Gerle.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to:

(1) immediately draft legislative amendments that clarify the independence of Elections Yukon, the Ombudsman, and the Child and Youth Advocate and the process of establishing their budgets;

(2) consult with the independent officers and the Members’ Services Board on the draft legislative amendments; and

(3) move quickly to introduce those legislative amendments following that consultation process.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to produce the report for the Connective emergency shelter review that was voted unanimously by Members of the Legislative Assembly in the 2024 Spring Sitting.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to enhance safety and security measures for seniors residing at 600 College Drive.

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

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Government of Yukon borrowing

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, according to the Public Accounts, which are audited by the Auditor General of Canada, as of March 31, 2017, the Government of Yukon had a total debt of \$193.5 million. The current budget the Liberals have tabled will see the government's total debt rise to \$774 million.

This means that, during his tenure as Finance minister, this minister will have caused the total debt to quadruple. Last week, the minister talked about how he would be viewed in the history books. Mr. Speaker, quadrupling the government's debt is one way to get into the history books; that's for sure.

Can the minister explain why he is quadrupling the government's debt?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the Yukon continues to grow, that it continues to evolve as a dynamic territory, and that it has an expanding population, thriving communities, and increased demands for essential services and infrastructure. To support this development, the Yukon government is committed to maintaining the fiscal flexibility required to respond to both immediate and long-term needs effectively.

While the territory has historically operated under a robust financial plan to minimize borrowing, recent challenges — such as urgent environmental responses, growing pressures to health care, and underscoring the importance of adapting in financial planning — have changed, so strategic borrowing has become a key part in addressing these challenges. It not only provides us the flexibility to manage cash flow and fluctuations in cash flow but also unlocks opportunities for future growth and reliance.

In the fall, the Yukon government provided Yukoners with an update on the needs to reassess the territory's borrowing limit and to engage with federal partners.

Through close collaboration with the federal government, the borrowing limit was increased to \$1.2 billion, and this increase provides the necessary capacity to manage cash-flow fluctuations more effectively. We have done an awful lot of spending for infrastructure and O&M, and we will continue to make sure that we meet the needs of Yukoners.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, just a few months ago, the Minister of Finance told the Legislature that he was — quote: "... very conscientiously avoiding the need for significant long-term borrowing to date, as we have held that Yukoners should not be burdened by long-term costs..."

Yukoners can be forgiven for their surprise, then, Mr. Speaker, when they saw the budget the same minister tabled last week.

Can the Minister of Finance explain why he said he was avoiding long-term borrowing because he felt Yukoners shouldn't be burdened with long-term costs and then tabled a budget just four months later that includes a record-setting amount of long-term debt?

Hon. Mr. Silver: As the member opposite knows, we have been dealing with an awful lot of issues in the Yukon, from the pandemic, supporting our businesses, making sure that we didn't increase our tax to businesses — we got rid of the Yukon Party's small business tax, for example, and we reduced the corporate tax as well. We want to make sure that we're not passing burdens on to the people of Yukon but, at the same time, responding to crises in climate change, environmental catastrophes in the mining industry, growing health care costs — which the opposition asks for increased spending on. So, we are able to do that while also identifying the infrastructure deficit that we found ourselves in after the members opposite's administration.

So, with all of these things in consideration, as part of budget 2025-26, the government has included provisions to enable long-term borrowing of up to \$400 million. This authorization, included in the *First Appropriation Act 2025-26*, represents a prudent and forward-looking measure designed to enhance and to ensure that the Yukon is equipped to address emerging pressures while continuing to invest in essential infrastructure and services that benefit the entire territory.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, the revenue from the federal government is up substantially, but the government is blowing through it and more.

Mr. Speaker, there is no getting around that this Minister of Finance's record from his time in government is that he's quadrupling the debt; that's his record. And it's certainly a bad look for a Finance minister to tell Yukoners that they had no plans to take on long-term debt and then turn around and take on historic levels of long-term debt just four months later.

But what's more worrying about the debt that the Liberals are taking on in this budget is that they can't or won't tell us what it's for. There may be times when borrowing makes sense, but the Liberals have not made the case for what they plan to do with this money.

This budget bill includes new long-term borrowing of \$400 million. Can the minister — or perhaps the Premier — tell us what the \$400 million will be spent on?

Hon. Mr. Silver: With all due respect to the member opposite, we have been saying that. We know that, during the briefing, the members opposite had asked: Is there a specific project this is going toward? It's not a specific project; it's all of these things that we've been talking about.

Now, we probably would be in a better cash position if the Yukon Party had gotten the Nisutlin Bay bridge done on time. We probably would be in a better financial position if they actually did more than just the aprons at the airport and also the fibre optic links. We did have to catch up with all the infrastructure deficits that the Office of the Auditor General warned us about. We also had to go through a pandemic. Now we are dealing with increasing costs to health care right across the nation. We are dealing with a mining disaster with Eagle Gold. We are dealing with a lot of issues in health care. We are dealing with that catch-up/keep-up.

We are also seeing, if the members opposite would take a look at the financial update — the fiscal update — that we will have a return to taking in more money than we're putting out in the short- to medium-term, and we will be in a great position to pay back these loans in a very timely fashion, unlike the Yukon Party, who borrowed \$100 million, and when that bond matures in 2030, the government will have paid \$150 million in interest on that one loan, with no payment to the principal at all. We will not borrow the way the Yukon Party borrowed, and we will be making sure that we pay back loans in a timely short-term manner as we move forward.

Question re: Government of Yukon borrowing

Mr. Dixon: As bad as the Minister of Finance's record is for quadrupling the debt during his time, there was a real change in the trajectory of the government's finances that occurred in early 2023. Of course, that was due to the change in leadership of the Liberal Party here in Yukon. According to the fully audited Public Accounts, when the current Premier was acclaimed without an election, the Government of Yukon had a total debt of \$233 million. That means that, in just over two years, this Premier's erratic spending and chaotic decision-making has led to more than half a billion dollars of new debt.

My question is for the Premier: What mandate does he have to take on over half a billion dollars of new debt during his very short time as Premier?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: First, I guess what I would like to know from the Yukon Party, which we haven't been able to hear — there was some discussion in the scrum on Thursday about cutting some positions inside the Department of Finance. What I have heard over the last number of years from many members is: to ensure that we are investing in rural Yukon, which we have; to make sure that we are hiring more nurses and investing in health care, which we have; and to ensure that we're making housing available to Yukoners, which we have.

I guess I would ask the member opposite — it's a real opportunity to understand what he is thinking — what his plan is. He hasn't told Yukoners anything other than that he would cut some jobs, I believe, in Finance.

Tell us: Which spending in this budget do you believe is inappropriate? And tell us where we could do better in this budget. I think it's good for Yukoners to understand what the trajectory is that this individual would take the Yukon government in.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, if the Premier wants to see our platform, all he has to do is call an election.

Mr. Speaker, the half a billion dollars of new debt that this Premier has added to Yukoners' credit cards is just the symptom of the problem. The real problem is that this Premier is addicted to spending Yukoners' money. The year-over-year spending increases since he became Premier have been breathtaking. Let's take this year alone: They are spending \$275 million more than last year. That's a 16-percent increase in spending. Despite that increase, the Premier has said that he thinks this budget is disciplined.

So, Mr. Speaker, what part of this massive increase in spending and massive increase in debt does the Premier think is actually disciplined?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I would ask the member opposite: Which part of this budget and over that \$200 million is not disciplined? You have an opportunity in the third question to specifically say what you wouldn't spend this money on. Tell us now, and then we can debate over the next number of questions.

Mr. Dixon: You can tell, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier is not very proud of his budget when he wants to run it down so quickly, but the simple fact is that if he wants to know what our platform is, all he has to do is call an election and get his own mandate, which he doesn't have.

The fact is that this Premier's chaotic administration and erratic decision-making have led to massive new debt for Yukoners. In his short time as Premier, he has added over half a billion dollars in new debt to Yukoners. Spending has increased dramatically, and critically, Mr. Speaker, the increases in money haven't been coming close to keeping up with revenue. Increasing spending way faster than increasing revenues creates a predictable result; that is the massive amount of debt that this Premier is saddling Yukoners with.

The ironic part is that the Premier has the audacity to say that he has presented a disciplined budget. So, can the Premier tell us what part of the hundreds of millions of dollars of new spending and the record-setting new debt that he is saddling future Yukoners with does he consider to be disciplined?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: When I refer to "discipline", I look at the fact that we're walking into a spring budget before an election. I think that making sure that we spend in areas of health care, housing, education, and infrastructure — and not like past Yukon Party budgets where, when they were moving into an election, there were bells and whistles for political favour — that's what I mean. I think it's important to invest in the things that we need to have as a foundation for Yukoners.

There was a great opportunity for the member opposite, after criticizing the budget, to just name a portion of the spending that the member opposite wouldn't invest in. I would ask again — maybe during the scrum, maybe at some point there will be a chance for the member opposite — while critiquing and criticizing the budget — to tell Yukoners where the Yukon Party wouldn't spend and why there is overspending here, because I think what we have done is invest in Yukoners, invest in Yukon families and in the values that Yukoners hold close to them.

Question re: Department of Education sexual orientation and gender identity policy

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government says that they support the 2SLGBTQ+ community and that our schools are safe for everyone, but their words don't match their actions.

Last month, the principal of Holy Family Elementary School resigned, citing interference from the Catholic bishop, who she described as — quote: "... outright harassing and discriminatory." She was referring to discriminatory and hateful comments about First Nation people and about 2SLGBTQ+ people as well the harassment and bullying of staff. The principal's criticism didn't stop at the bishop. The department and the Minister of Education have not addressed the problems. She referred to hundreds of pages of documentation. The lack of support from the department left her between a rock and a hard place. It took a severe toll on her well-being and ultimately led to her resignation.

How can the minister say she is supporting reconciliation and the 2SLGBTQ+ community when racism, homophobia, and transphobia within the school system is forcing educators to resign?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, neither I nor the Department of Education can speak on personnel matters or HR issues publicly or for sure not in the Legislative Assembly; however, what I can say is that every student and every staff member and every family has a right to feel safe in all Yukon schools. I am committed and the Department of Education is committed to ensuring that every school environment is one where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

We recognize that on issues like the SOGI policy there will be differences of opinion, but we also need to be realistic and acknowledge and accept that there are students and families and staff members who are queer and trans.

As the Minister of Education and also for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate, of course, I am absolutely committed to our SOGI policy. We made adjustments to that policy in 2023. I am happy to have the Child and Youth Advocate in the House today. We have also referred the policy to the Child and Youth Advocate for review, and I am looking forward to the results of that.

You know, there is a lot of misinformation in the public domain about the policy. It exists to protect children and to be inclusive.

Ms. White: It would be bad enough if the Department of Education and the minister were just standing by and doing nothing, but they are actively helping the bishop spread obvious homophobic and transphobic messaging.

In January 2025, an e-mail was sent to the families of all of the students attending Catholic schools. The e-mail was sent through the Department of Education's official communications channels, but the letter was not from the department; it was from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Whitehorse. It was a jumble of misinformation and told parents that the school curriculum on human sexuality and relationships was not approved by the church.

I heard from many people who were shocked that the department would help to communicate a message that was a direct attack on their very own SOGI policies. I wrote to the minister and was even more shocked when she wrote back defending the decision to send the e-mail through official school channels.

So, why has the minister shared messages from the bishop that attack SOGI policies and perpetuate misinformation?

Hon. Ms. McLean: All schools are expected to teach all learning standards outlined in the curriculum, including those relating to sexual health. This includes all of our Catholic schools. Curriculum resources approved for use in public schools are evaluated based on several factors, including alignment with public school policies and the *Education Act*, curricular fit, and the appropriateness of content for age and grade level.

I think that I just want to correct the record today. There was a letter definitely sent through our messenger. The department provides schools with a catalogue of curriculum resources, all of which are approved for use in Yukon schools. The bishop's letter mistakenly referenced the "Better to Know" website, which is the Health and Social Services public health resource, because it is very similar, Mr. Speaker, to the "Better to Know: Comprehensive Sexual Health Education" website. The site outlines age-appropriate lessons taught in each grade level. This is an unfortunate mistake that happened. We have certainly corrected that.

Again, Yukon schools are expected to deliver the curriculum under our laws and policies. I know that the member opposite knows very well that we have spent a lot of time ensuring that our schools are inclusive.

Ms. White: I wonder where the minister stands on the part of the letter that said that the Catholic Diocese and the Department of Education were working on a new sexual health policy.

We get a lot of questions asking why there is public funding for religious schools in the Yukon. So, the answer dates back to an agreement from 1962 between the Yukon government and the Catholic Diocese. This agreement outlines specific responsibilities, which appear to have been ignored in recent years, resulting in an unsafe environment for students, staff, and families. This is totally unacceptable.

It is very clear that children cannot thrive in an environment that does not value reconciliation and respect all sexual orientations, gender identities, and family makeups. Yet the department continues to turn a blind eye to a bishop acting in direct opposition to agreed-upon values and responsibilities in the 1962 agreement. It is unacceptable in publicly funded Yukon schools that interference from the bishop continues to impact the education experience of staff and students.

So, why is the minister choosing to ignore the 1962 agreement and allow the bishop to spread racism, homophobia

Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, of course, I am very well aware of the 1962 agreement that is in place, and I also note that we had a new *Education Act* come into place in 1990.

That was brought in by the New Democrat Party at the time, and I certainly am aware of all of the conflict and issues that have been raised by the member opposite. The member opposite knows that our SOGI policy exists to create a welcoming learning environment where all students, staff, and families feel safe and are safe.

The member opposite knows that our government supports the Yukon 2SLGBTQ2S+ community. We issued a joint statement supporting gender diversity and 2SLGBTQIA equity as recently as January. The member opposite knows that we banned conversion therapy in 2020 and that our territory offers the most progressive access to gender-affirming health care in Canada.

While I want to thank the member opposite for their advocacy on behalf of Yukon students and parents and I know that their heart is in the right place, they also know that there are a lot of aspects of this that we are not able to talk about publicly — like HR matters — absolutely committed, in both of my roles in this government, to ensure that our schools are inclusive —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Department of Education sexual orientation and gender identity policy

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the impact that the hatred from the bishop is having on educators and students in the Catholic school system. In 2023, educators from all Catholic schools gathered for professional development day. Part of that day included an address from the bishop. This was not optional; all the educators were required to be there. The bishop used his platform to spout pure and explicit hatred toward the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

The Department of Education was not unaware of what happened. There were superintendents there at the time, but as far as anyone knows, nothing was ever done. Teachers and educators were left to sit through the homophobia and transphobia from the bishop on their own. There was never an apology. There was never even an acknowledgement that it shouldn't have happened.

Why has the minister failed to protect educators from homophobia and transphobia in their workplace?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, thanks for the opportunities to speak about inclusion in our schools. As I have just pointed out in the previous question, we have worked very hard as a government to ensure inclusivity within our schools. The Department of Education continues to work on governance challenges with Yukon Catholic schools. The Department of Education continues to review policies and structures to clarify roles and improve communication between the department and the Catholic corporation.

Current initiatives include: discussions addressing the communication protocols between the Department of Education and the Catholic community of Whitehorse to ensure that all parties have the comprehensive and common understanding of the agreement; monthly meetings between department officials, the deputy minister, and the bishop; a YG learn course on Catholic education in the Yukon providing

guidance for educators; and ongoing engagement on SOGI implementation in Catholic schools. There's a lot more information, Mr. Speaker, that I can add to this.

Again, we are wide awake to the issues that we are faced with and are continuing to work with all of our partners in a good and respectful way.

MLA Tredger: Last summer, a teacher went public about the homophobia she experienced at a school council meeting. The minister repeatedly wrote that school councils have to follow sexual orientation and gender identity policies but, then and now, has been silent on what she was doing to enforce that.

Before that, there was the school councillor who publicly resigned from a Catholic school council. She was exhausted from spending hours of meetings arguing against homophobic and transphobic statements from other council members. Before that, there was the transphobic textbook that was only pulled from the classroom when a group of parents went to the media. Before that, there was the principal who refused to allow pride flags in the hallways, and before that was the principal who shared documents calling homosexuality an intrinsic moral evil.

This is just the beginning of what educators and students have been dealing with in the Catholic schools over the last decade. How can the minister say that Yukon schools are safe for everyone when there are repeated homophobic and transphobic attacks within the Catholic schools?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, again, all students, staff, and parents have the right to feel safe and be safe in our public schools. People of all sexual orientations, gender identities, ancestries, ethnicities, and places or origin, citizenship, religion, ages, and abilities must be treated with respect and dignity.

In terms of the Department of Education and how they are working with the Holy Family school council to ensure a smooth transition as we work toward a short-term principal position, I note that our deputy minister had a meeting with the Holy Family school council just late last week — met with them — and it was a very positive meeting. They focused on staffing supports in the near term. They updated on work underway and processes in place being developed with the bishop's office, on how those can be used to support clarity for school-based teams and school councils and all of the representatives.

So, we continue to support the school community as they work to unite and to work toward addressing the issues at hand.

MLA Tredger: I want to bring this conversation back to the people who are most affected: the students.

Last week after the resignation of Holy Family's principal, a crowd gathered outside the school council meeting. There were current and former teachers, parents, grandparents, community members, and, most importantly, children. One little girl held up a sign saying, "We want Ms. Gray back".

We are losing incredible educators because of the lack of support from this minister. I say "we", but it's really the students who are losing out; our children are losing incredible educators because of the lack of support from this minister, not

to mention the profound emotional impact on 2SLGTBQ+ students and First Nation students.

We have asked so many questions over the years. There have been letters to the ministers and news stories and protests — nothing has changed. What will it take for this minister to start protecting educators and students from racism, homophobia, and transphobia in Catholic schools?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, I can't overstate the level of commitment. I've work for — this is my ninth year in the role of Women and Gender Equity Directorate and my fourth year as the Minister of Education — and absolutely fully committed to ensuring that our schools are inclusive and welcoming and made the necessary changes to the policy, continuing to work with our partners to review the policies to make them stronger and, as I've stated today, working closely with the Catholic community to find those paths forward.

The Department of Education is working with the Holy Family school council to ensure a smooth transition while they are recruiting short term. The department cannot provide comments on personnel matters. We take concerns raised by the school staff seriously.

All students, staff, and families have the right to be safe and feel safe in their school community. That includes respecting and upholding policies like the sexual orientation and gender identity policy. We recognize that there are always differences in perspectives within the Catholic community, and we will continue to work toward bridging gaps and working with the school council and the Catholic community to foster a positive and collaborative relationship.

Question re: Shakwak project funding

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, the budget tabled last week includes \$8 million for a project to rehabilitate a section of the north Alaska Highway. The Yukon government is counting on this funding for this Shakwak project to come from the US federal highways administration. This means that the plan is for the Yukon government to tender and pay for the work and then recoup the \$8 million from the US federal government. Naturally, many Yukoners question how likely this is to happen.

What confidence does the minister of highways have that the Trump administration will actually pick up the bill for this work?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: For the first time since 2015, funding was announced in 2024 to rehabilitate sections of the Alaska Highway between Destruction Bay and Beaver Creek that had been damaged by thawing permafrost. There is shared recognition by Alaska and Yukon of the positive influence that the north Alaska Highway has on the quality of life and well-being of northerners. As the member opposite indicated, the recent changes in the United States' administration and its approach to trade with Canada has raised uncertainty about the finalization of funding agreements between Alaska and the United States. At this time, we do not know how the changes in administration will affect the timing and scope of the project.

Mr. Speaker, despite multiple attempts to engage with our United States federal counterparts, we have not received clarity

yet in terms of a path forward. However, the Government of Yukon continues to engage with the State of Alaska's Department of Transportation and Public Facilities as well as the Federal Highway Administration. The Government of Yukon remains committed to securing the funding that was previously announced as we work collaboratively to complete funding agreements. Planning and preconstruction work for the project is underway.

Mr. Istchenko: Before announcing US federal funding for the Shakwak last year, the Yukon government and the State of Alaska signed a memorandum of understanding on February 9, 2024. The MOU referred to the original 1977 agreement between Canada and the US which set out each government's roles and responsibilities regarding the highway.

The 1977 treaty explicitly states that Canada will — quote: "... not impose any highway toll, or permit any such toll to be charged for the use of such highways..."

Last week, the Premier of BC said that he would be imposing tolls on commercial trucks travelling to the US along the Alaska Highway. Is the minister concerned that this action would violate the 1977 treaty and put this funding at risk?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We've reviewed the language of the treaty. It also speaks to the fact that, if there is no funding, I think within a 25-year period, some of the terms would be relinquished. I will leave it to the Justice department, to which we have handed that over. We've also reached out to the Government of British Columbia to make sure that they are reviewing that. They are in the midst of drafting legislation or have drafted legislation and are now tabling legislation.

There has been a conversation that has happened over the last three or four weeks. I understand they were going to do that. I think it's a good point to bring to the House today. We are in a position where there has been funding committed, but now there could be a risk around that funding. I have reached out to the Governor of Alaska, and he is still very supportive of that funding coming through to the Yukon, but we want to ensure, as we make any decision on retaliatory measures, that we are understanding what the risk could be.

I think it's important that those funds go into the Yukon; I think it's important that communities like Burwash and White River have an opportunity to take part in the benefits of that economic development beyond the fact that it's an incredibly important trade route and important to Arctic sovereignty and security. At this point, we are taking all of this information into consideration as we make our decisions.

Mr. Istchenko: Last week, the Premier of BC announced that his government would be introducing legislation in the coming days to levy fees on commercial trucks moving through the province to and from Alaska along the Alaska Highway. Last year, the Yukon and Alaska governments jointly announced over \$42 million CAD in funding for upgrades to the Shakwak section of the Alaska Highway.

In the budget, like I said earlier, that the government tabled last week, they are counting on \$8 million from the US government. My constituents from Destruction Bay to Burwash and those who live in-between — toward White River — of

that highway and many contractors are hoping to get some of the work and are worried that this funding might be in jeopardy.

What assurances can the government give that this work will indeed go ahead this year as the budget commits to?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, we know that we're going to get blamed for a lot of things that are probably out of our control through the next 60 days in the House, but I will ask the member opposite, over the next two months that we are here, to give us a little flexibility and not blame us for what President Trump is going to do.

What we can do is make sure that we bring timely information to the House. We are going to continue to work on ensuring that we have positive relationships where appropriate and where we can. We want to see this investment. I think the member opposite reflected many of the same comments that I made. We have talked to individuals in the Kluane riding who are excited about maybe acquiring pieces of gear because of all the things we are doing in the member opposite's riding. It's not just that. Of course, we are building a brand new school that has been 100 years in the waiting. We are supporting the RCMP. It's the first time they have seen a detachment since 1947. We are doing some housing. We will talk about that in the budget.

Many of the things that the members opposite were asked to fulfill that didn't get fulfilled — we are doing that work. We want to make sure that the economy in that region can grow and that people can make strategic decisions. We will bring that information to the House.

Speaker: The time for the Question Period has now elapsed.

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, just for colleagues to understand, the motion for the Child and Youth Officer is Motion No. 1170.

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3 and notwithstanding Standing Order 27(1), I request the unanimous consent of the House to move Motion No. 1170 without one clear day's notice.

Unanimous consent to move without one clear day's notice Motion No. 1170

Speaker: The Government House Leader has requested the unanimous consent of the House, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3 and notwithstanding Standing Order 27(1), to move Motion No. 1170 without one clear day's notice.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Unanimous consent has been granted.

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 1170

Clerk: Motion No. 1170, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT the Yukon Legislative Assembly, pursuant to section 4 of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, recommends that the Commissioner in Executive Council reappoint Annette King as the Child and Youth Advocate for a term of five years, commencing May 1, 2025.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. I just want to say thank you to the Child and Youth Advocate officer, office, and the team. The Members' Services Board considered this and has presented it to us. In my role as House Leader of the government, I am bringing it forward for our consideration here in the Assembly and looking forward to support in this reappointment.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, as the Government House Leader has indicated, this comes as a recommendation from the Members' Services Board. I serve on the Members' Services Board and can attest that MSB thoughtfully considered the matter before us and came up with this recommendation that came forward in the tail-end of last year.

We look forward to seeing this motion passed today. On behalf of myself and my colleagues, we congratulate Ms. King on her work and look forward to her future in the next appointment.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, today, in speaking of support in favour of this motion, I will just note that the Members' Services Board last year made this recommendation at the same time as we made the recommendation for reappointing the Ombudsman. For whatever reason, this motion didn't come forward on the floor, which — to be perfectly frank — left the Child and Youth Advocate Office in a state of flux there for a while, so I'm relieved to know that we have this certainty now going forward.

Of course, I thank the Child and Youth Advocate for her service to date and look forward to the next five years. Of course, we are in support of this action.

Motion No. 1170 agreed to

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Again, Mr. Speaker, for colleagues, the motion for — the conflicts commissioner's motion is 1171.

Pursuant to Standing Order 14(3) and notwithstanding Standing Order 27(1), I request the unanimous consent of the House to move Motion No. 1171 without one clear day's notice.

Unanimous consent to move without one clear day's notice Motion No. 1171

Speaker: The Government House Leader has requested the unanimous consent of the House, pursuant to Standing Order 14(3) and notwithstanding Standing Order 27(1), to move Motion No. 1171 without one clear day's notice.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Unanimous consent has been granted.

Motion No. 1171

Clerk: Motion No. 1171, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT the Yukon Legislative Assembly, pursuant to section 18 of the *Conflict of Interest (Members and Ministers) Act*, reappoint David Phillip Jones, KC, as a member of the Conflict of Interest Commission for a three-year period, effective November 2, 2025.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thanks to the Members' Services Board for bringing this forward. I would like to thank Mr. Jones for his service to all of us. I think that, since the time we have been in this role, since 2016 — maybe before — but all of us have worked with him and appreciate the recommendation from the Members' Services Board. We support the reappointment of Mr. Jones in the role of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner.

Mr. Dixon: This recommendation comes from the Members' Services Board, and we very much agree with it.

Ms. White: I have had the privilege of having Mr. Jones as the conflicts commissioner since the day I was elected. We have been at this a long time, he and I, so I am happy to see him reappointed and grateful that he stepped back into the role.

Speaker: Before putting the question, the Chair must draw members' attention to section 18(4) of the *Conflict of Interest (Members and Ministers) Act*, which says: "In order to take effect, a resolution of the Legislative Assembly for the appointment or removal of a Member of the commission must be supported in a recorded vote by at least two-thirds of the Members present for the vote."

In order to ensure that the requirements of section 18 of the *Conflict of Interest (Members and Ministers) Act* are met, the Chair will call for a recorded division.

Division

Speaker: The bells will ring.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

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.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 18 yeas, nil nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried by the required support of two-thirds of the Members of the Legislative Assembly present for the vote and that David Phillip Jones, KC, has now been reappointed as Conflict of Interest Commissioner for a three-year period, effective November 2, 2025.

Motion No. 1171 agreed to

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 217: *First Appropriation Act 2025-26* — Second Reading — adjourned debate

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 217, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver; adjourned debate, Mr. Cathers.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise here today as the Yukon Party Official Opposition Finance critic to speak to the Liberal government's 2025-26 budget.

Mr. Speaker, we are in an election year, and while the Premier has tried to characterize this budget as disciplined, we disagree. If the Premier considers ballooning net operation and maintenance spending by a whopping 19.3 percent in a single year disciplined, can he please tell us what he would consider reckless spending?

The Liberals are clearly desperate to revive their slumping poll numbers, and this budget is an election year budget if there ever was one.

The government is planning to borrow \$400 million in long-term debt, and worse, unlike previous governments, which borrowed to buy hydro assets, expand hydro capacity, and build hospitals and health facilities, this government has admitted that the \$400 million of long-term debt will be used to cover the ballooning O&M budget and maybe some capital projects too, but they won't tell us which ones. This is just four months after the Minister of Finance made strong statements in this House claiming he was opposed to taking on long-term debt — \$400 million in debt, Mr. Speaker, and that is on top of borrowing that the Liberals have already entered into in the past eight years.

According to their own numbers, total debt is now projected to reach \$744 million this year. That is literally four times higher than the total debt was at the end of March 2017 according to the audited Public Accounts, which, of course, are audited by the Auditor General of Canada. March 31, 2017 — \$193.5 million in total debt was the status at that date, and I believe that number is on page 51 of the Public Accounts for that year. The Liberals plan to increase that to \$744 million from that starting point of \$193.5 million.

Mr. Speaker, do the Liberals really feel they have a mandate to quadruple the debt without telling about it first and seeking a clear mandate in an election?

To put this in context, using the most recent population numbers from the Yukon Bureau of Statistics, your personal share of that debt will be about \$16,000. Each person's share of the \$400 million that the government intends to borrow this year equates to over \$8,500.

Mr. Speaker, as Yukoners and Canadians well know, we are also in a situation with the unjustified imposition of tariffs by the US administration and the trade war that we appear to be in — or are on the verge of, depending on the day — where this is a time in this period of uncertainty and potential economic downturn that a government really should be preserving fiscal capacity to respond to potential problems later, not blowing through their reserves and going into debt at the outset of that. We are dealing with an unjustified violation of the trade agreement between Canada, the United States, and Mexico — the USMCA — which was signed by President Trump. Again, Mr. Speaker, we should be preserving our capacity to respond to it and not seeing the current government go into overdrive in an election year, ballooning net O&M spending by 19.3 percent, according to their own numbers.

There are a number of actions that should have been taken sooner by Canada and the United States to strengthen the Yukon economy and the Canadian economy, including removing unnecessary barriers that impede the private sector, blocked internal trade, and so on.

I also want to note, Mr. Speaker, on the relationship overall between Canada and the United States, that it is very important for us all to remember that Canada and the United States have been long-time friends, allies, and close trading partners for generations. Our American friends have been there for us during good times and bad, and we have been there for them. We all recognize their role in building the Alaska Highway, which we use as an important part of our transportation network in the territory. I would note that many of my Alaskan friends refer to it as the Alcan.

Canadians and Americans fought side by side in wars, including two world wars. On September 11, as anyone who was in the Yukon at the time likely remembers, planes were rerouted to Whitehorse and to Newfoundland. It is a moment in Yukon history that all of us here remember where we were when we heard the news. For any of us who saw the planes on their approach to Whitehorse, it is a moment in time we will never forget.

Following that, when the United States invoked Article 5, Canadian men and women in our military answered the call to fight in Afghanistan, and over 150 paid the ultimate sacrifice in support of our American friends, and many others, of course, came home wounded.

Let us not allow any administration or any politician on either side of the border to cause Canadians and Americans to cease being good friends. I was personally disturbed by the anti-American tone in the new Liberal leader Mark Carney's speech yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, this is the time that Canadians — and indeed here in the Yukon — need to focus on strengthening their economy. Canada needs to take the actions which are long overdue to rebuild our military, to protect our land and territory, and to assert and defend our Arctic sovereignty in an increasingly less predictable world. We must strengthen our economy and our resilience in both Canada and the Yukon.

Moving back to the budget specifically and to borrowing, the Minister of Finance likes to criticize the Yukon Party for borrowing \$100 million for Mayo B in connecting to the electrical grid. That investment increased renewable energy supply and helped to keep power rates low. It also resulted in the government meeting and exceeding the commitment in the 2009 energy strategy ahead of schedule to increase the production of renewable energy here in the territory.

The Liberals, on the other hand, have spent well over \$30 million and climbing on their fleet of rented diesel generators. Now they plan to borrow \$400 million this year, which is four times the cost of the bond for the Mayo B hydro, to cover operational spending in an election year spending spree. How long are they borrowing that money for? They won't tell us. The length of time that they plan to borrow it for and the terms of that are very important, because the total amount of interest paid on that could be astronomical. Again, how long are they borrowing it for? They won't tell us. But at CIBC's posted interest rate of 5.2 percent, that would be over \$20 million in interest on \$400 million in a single year just on that new \$400 million, not counting the interest paid on existing debts. How long will the loan term be?

If it's for 30 years, at \$20 million of interest a year — again, I recognize that the terms, the rate of the payment on the principal or lack thereof, and other variables will all have a material cost — impact on the borrowing costs. But using that number of \$400 million and the posted interest rate of 5.2 percent, if the government's borrowing costs for a single year are \$20 million and you expand that over 30 years, the borrowing costs for that \$400 million could be over \$600 million. Are they? Again, we don't know how the loan will be structured. But if it were structured in that manner, we could see the cost of that \$400 million to Yukoners actually being in excess of \$1 billion, Mr. Speaker. So, it would be irresponsible for anyone to give the government a blank cheque. Future governments and future taxpayers will pay for it, and it is important that they know how much they are going to pay.

Mr. Speaker, when the NDP signed the confidence and supply agreement with the Liberals, I doubt that they imagined that there might be a billion dollars in combined borrowing and borrowing costs, and it will be interesting to see whether they consider this a violation of the no surprises provision of their agreement to support the Liberals.

Mr. Speaker, last fall, the Minister of Finance tabled a fiscal and economic update. According to the government's own fiscal and economic update, over a 10-year period ending March 2023 — quote: "... gross expenditures grew by an average of 6.2 percent annually, which is higher than revenues, at 4.9 percent annually."

Now, most households, most people, and most businesses, if their revenues grew by 4.9 percent per year, would find a way to live within their means, but this Liberal government and its NDP partners have increased spending at an unsustainable rate. The average over the past decade of 6.2 percent annual growth of expenditures was already undisciplined spending, but in the budget tabled by this Liberal government last week — by their own numbers — net operation and maintenance spending is increasing by a whopping 19.3 percent over last year — a 19.3-percent increase in a single year.

Like the federal Liberals, this territorial Liberal government has also responded in desperation to low poll numbers by abandoning some of their policies and adopting policies and positions championed by their opponents for years — policies that they previously had no interest in or actively opposed.

We are pleased that this has resulted in the territorial Liberals giving in and that they are now trying to sound like the Yukon Party on the issue of funding for Yukon hospitals and support for the RCMP.

We all remember a few short years ago when the commanding officer of the Yukon RCMP took the unprecedented step of calling the government out publicly for not having funded even a single new RCMP member in the Yukon since the Liberal government took office. Through pressure from us and from the public, we are pleased that this has changed.

Drug overdoses and toxic illegal drugs are claiming the lives of far too many Yukoners, and while enforcement alone will not solve the substance abuse crisis, going after organized crime and arresting drug dealers and disrupting the supply chain is an important part of the solution. Property crime is up and residents and businesses in many neighbourhoods and in many communities — but especially in the downtown area of Whitehorse — are less safe and feel less safe than they did when the Liberals took office.

On the issue of hospitals, Mr. Speaker, we know that this Liberal government has chronically neglected our Yukon hospitals, with even the independent report by Ernst & Young commissioned by the Premier himself confirming that during the four years they covered in their review, Yukon hospitals suffered from a chronic cash-flow and operating shortfall. They also confirmed that the hospital had to divert \$7.3 million in capital funding to cover an O&M shortfall and, if they had not done so, they were at risk of not being able to meet payroll.

The government has tried to blame it on the Hospital Corporation, but Ernst & Young is quite clear in multiple statements that the deficit was clearly communicated to government by the Yukon Hospital Corporation, and we all know what happened. The government did not listen even to our hospitals and failed to fund them adequately, leaving Yukon patients and Yukon health care professionals paying the price.

The hospital's own annual reports, which are available online, show multiple years under this Liberal government when expenses were millions of dollars higher than revenue. That put our hospitals under immense strain, contributes to

burnout of health professionals, and results in patients paying the price. So, this year, we were pleased to see that they finally provided an increase to core funding for Yukon hospitals of 4.8 percent. That's in contrast to last year — and many others indeed, Mr. Speaker — when, at the start of the fiscal year, the government is budgeting less money for the hospital than their actual needs were the previous fiscal year.

So, while that small increase of 4.8 percent to the core is welcome, government press releases and talking points about hospital funding were quite misleading. The Liberal government has tried to claim that this is a major focus of the budget and put it in the spotlight and put it in press releases trying to give people the impression that hospital funding is one of the main reasons for overall increased expenses. But in fact, according to the government's own press release, core funding for Yukon hospitals increased by just 4.8 percent — a mere 4.8 percent. That is in stark contrast to O&M spending across government, which is increasing by a whopping 19.3 percent. Total spending across government is growing at four times the rate hospital spending is this year. General government spending is growing at quadruple the rate of the small funding increase for Yukon hospitals.

We remember that, in the 2023-24 fiscal years, at the start of the year, Yukon hospitals were short almost \$30 million in needed O&M funding, and we remember the impact that had of cancelled surgeries and capped procedures around Christmas for a longer period than ever before in Yukon history and caps and cuts imposed that had never been imposed before, Mr. Speaker.

So, for the fiscal year ending last March, according to the government's own books, actual O&M spending for Yukon hospitals — \$123.6 million; this year in the budget — \$135.3 million. Again, while that is a small increase, it is an increase of just \$11.7 million from the actual spending for 2023-24. Let me compare that to other spending in the budget and things that are clearly more important to the Liberals than our hospitals.

Compared to that \$11.7 million increase in hospital O&M, they're spending more money on a Watson Lake solar project, which is set to receive \$12.7 million. The budget has \$12.5 million for building energy retrofits and updating building codes. There's another \$900,000, for a total of \$12.9 million, for the former High Country Inn renovations, which doesn't include the much larger federal contributions to this vastly overbudget project, which is over \$42 million and climbing.

There is \$75.5 million for airport improvements and \$118 million for the response to the Eagle Gold mine berm collapse. Whatever people may think of any one of those items, any one of those expenditure examples I listed, my point is that all those numbers add up to this: Funding for Yukon hospitals is not a top priority or even a high priority for this Liberal government.

We are pleased to see that they have finally allocated some funding to advance the surgical services renewal project — which, of course, as members will recall, is a proposal made by the Yukon Hospital Corporation in collaboration with health

professionals that would see the surgical services area roughly doubled and see it increased to four operating rooms as well as adding more patient beds — but this is too little too late. That project still seems to be on a very slow road forward, and there are still no timelines announced for it.

I would remind everyone that, by the Premier's own admission, this government has had the surgical services renewal project proposal from the Yukon Hospital since at least January of 2019, if not before. That is at least six years that this project proposal has collected dust despite the Yukon Medical Association, during the last election campaign, calling that project an "urgent need" — and that, of course, was almost four years ago in April of 2021.

Doctors are leaving and closing practices. According to the Yukon Medical Association, four doctors have closed family practices in the last 18 months. We have lost a surgeon who specifically cited in a letter to colleagues the lack of funding as a reason for leaving the territory. While the Yukon Medical Association has done an excellent job recruiting locums to provide coverage for doctors who are in need of coverage during time away — maternity leave and so on — that program has also had to heavily support the gap in the hospital resulting from the structure of the hospitalist program not working as well as promised.

That has resulted in 75 of those doctors being used to cover those gaps in hospital services, but on the overall numbers, the Yukon Medical Association, according to their publicly provided numbers, in 2024, were successful in recruiting 153 doctors to come to the territory to provide locum coverage. Of those 153 doctors who visited the Yukon, the number who stayed — zero. Zero. And what has the government been doing to encourage them to stay? Well, that remains unclear.

Mr. Speaker, another critical service area that has been neglected is funding for our volunteer fire halls through the Fire Marshal's Office. It is disappointing to see some funding actually being cut despite fire chiefs ringing the alarm bell last year on multiple occasions.

Time and time again, this Liberal government spends heavily on its priorities and, in doing so, demonstrates how out of touch they are with what is important to ordinary Yukoners. That volunteer firefighters are using expired personal protective equipment while the government finds tens of millions of dollars for solar projects and finds money for heat pumps shows how out of touch the Liberals are with what is important to most Yukoners.

I could go on at length today, but in the interest of allowing other members to speak and being relatively brief at this stage, I will note that I look forward to raising other issues and asking questions of importance to my constituents and other Yukoners during departmental debate as well as during Question Period. It will come as no surprise to the government to hear that projects that I look forward to hearing updates on are the Takhini River bridge, the Mayo Road project, as well as Takhini River Road.

Mr. Speaker, in wrapping up my comments, my colleagues and I will be voting against this budget, to the surprise of no one. It is a confidence vote, and over 70 percent of Yukoners,

including many Liberal supporters, want an election. It is long past time for this Premier, who was not elected to that role by anyone, to seek a mandate of his own and especially before this government burdens future generations with a whopping and unprecedented \$744 million in debt, as they plan to do in this budget.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Last Thursday, our Liberal government shared a vision, a vision centred on uplifting the lives of every Yukoner, wherever they may call home in our beautiful territory.

In this budget, our government demonstrates its commitment to easing the pressures of the rising living costs, pouring our energy and resources into making life brighter and more affordable for all Yukoners. Our government is investing strategically and significantly in the heartbeat of our communities — our health care system — ensuring that it thrives while also nurturing the future of our children through a stronger, more supportive education system. We are putting in the work to improve our infrastructure — strengthening the roads, bridges, airports — in order to keep our communities connected and growing. Mr. Speaker, this is unlike the Yukon Party, who left multiple critical infrastructure projects languishing for years, leaving Yukoners waiting and the territory in an infrastructure deficit.

We are privileged to call the Yukon home. Our economy stands strong with some of the highest wages in Canada and an employment rate that is consistently among the lowest nationwide, sitting at 4.5 percent in January 2025 according to Statistics Canada. Our government remains focused on addressing the unique challenges and opportunities of our territory. We recognize the invaluable contributions of all Yukoners, from those whose ancestors have been here for thousands of years to our newest arrivals.

This budget is designed with a clear purpose: to ensure that the opportunities and prosperity that we see across the Yukon are shared by all. We recognize that the Yukon holds a special allure, drawing people from near and far with its unique blend of opportunity and natural beauty, and we are grateful that so many choose to call it home. Mr. Speaker, from 2016 to 2024, Yukon's population has grown from approximately 36,520 to 46,704 — an extraordinary increase of nearly 28 percent. These numbers speak powerfully to our territory's vibrant economy, welcoming communities, and the boundless opportunities that continue to draw people here to build their futures and achieve their dreams.

Mr. Speaker, this budget allocates \$477.3 million in planned capital spending for the 2025-26 fiscal year, alongside approximately \$1.88 billion for operation and maintenance spending, ensuring that the Yukon's infrastructure and services remain robust and reliable.

Mr. Speaker, as the Yukon's Minister of Highways and Public Works and the Minister of Environment, I will highlight in this speech the dedicated, innovative, and responsive work carried out by these departments to serve the needs of Yukoners effectively.

I will start with the Department of Environment. The 2025-2026 main estimates total for the Department of Environment capital and operation and maintenance budgets is \$58.9 million. The operation and maintenance budget for 2025-26 is approximately \$55.08 million, which represents a decrease of \$527,000 over the 2024-25 estimate.

I would like to highlight a couple of the programs for which we receive 100 percent recoveries from Canada. The *Inuvialuit Final Agreement*, through this work — which includes support for projects, joint planning, and management that enables the land in the eastern Yukon North Slope to count toward Canada's target of conserving 25 percent of land and fresh water by 2025 — also fulfils a deliverable in the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*. Last year, the Aullaviat/Anguniarvik Traditional Conservation Area agreement was signed, along with the Inuvialuit parties and the Government of Canada. Signing this agreement contributed to enhanced partnerships and relationships with the Government of Canada and Inuvialuit co-management partners and exemplified collaborative management of wildlife and habitat on the Yukon North Slope.

I would also like to highlight and thank the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope) for coordinating the Yukon North Slope Conference 2025 and all representatives of Indigenous governments and organizations that were able to attend. The conference provided a valuable opportunity to discuss this year's theme, "Indigenous Conservation Economies".

In the face of challenges like population growth, industrial development, international relations, climate change impacts, and biodiversity laws, it is more important than ever that we work together to protect the Yukon's environment. Under those recoverable funds, it is critical to highlight the Yukon bilateral nature agreement, which is a multi-year, 100-percent recoverable agreement aimed at achieving the federal mandate of 25 percent of Yukon's lands and waters protected by 2025 and 30 percent by 2030.

The 2025-26 main estimate for that item is \$6.5 million, and also, there is Parks Canada 100-percent recoverable funding of \$185,000 for protected area planning and establishment in the Yukon — in particular, Chasàn Chuà, also known as McIntyre Creek.

Our government is committed to working in partnership with Indigenous groups to share protection and conservation efforts to ensure that their histories, cultures, and traditions inform how we manage the Yukon's lands and waters now and into the future.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind Yukoners that they can be proud to be Canada's leading jurisdiction for conservation. Alongside Indigenous partners, our government has increased protection of lands and waters in the Yukon by an additional two percent, bringing the Yukon's total to 21.1 percent. This is currently the highest percentage of reported protected areas of any province or territory in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, while the United States under President Trump pursues policies that undermine and endanger its protected areas — such as terminating approximately 1,000

probationary National Park Service employees in February 2025 and issuing an executive order on March 3, 2025 to expand logging across 280 million acres of national forests while bypassing *Endangered Species Act* protections — the Yukon continues to be proud of our national leadership and commitment to conservation and nature.

Mr. Speaker, addressing the climate emergency remains one of the cornerstones of our Department of Environment's work, representing humanity's most urgent collective challenge. Our Liberal government takes the climate change crisis seriously and is active on multiple fronts. This is reflected strongly through our actions and investments.

Last summer, Yukoners again witnessed first-hand the escalating impacts of climate change. Recording record-breaking heatwaves pushed temperatures up to 6.5 degrees Celsius above historical averages, severely impacting communities and ecosystems. The crisis is now. We are not burying our heads in the sand as we continue to deal with climate records being shattered in all hemispheres — there are just two hemispheres.

The summer of 2024 brought intense wildfires across Yukon, with 22 active fires by late June alone. These fires forced evacuations, endangered critical infrastructure, and blanketed our territory in prolonged periods of hazardous smoke. These events reinforced exactly why our government continues to prioritize bold climate action and strategic investments in renewable energy and infrastructure adaptation.

Unlike those who advocate for outdated fossil fuel solutions, we are committed to meaningful investments such as renewable energy projects, community-led adaptation strategies, and resilient infrastructure in order to protect Yukoners now and into the future.

Mr. Speaker, the plan guiding our actions is *Our Clean Future*. Our government continues to make significant progress in implementing *Our Clean Future*. In November 2024, we proudly released the 2023 *Our Clean Future* progress report, highlighting our meaningful achievements in adapting to climate change impacts and reducing greenhouse gas emissions across the Yukon. By the end of 2024, we had reached several exciting milestones. There are now 597 zero-emission vehicles registered in the Yukon and all road-connected communities have access to fast chargers, making transportation convenient and accessible for all Yukoners.

Our Liberal government has provided over 1,500 rebates for electric bikes, empowering Yukoners to choose active transportation options that benefit both their health and our environment. The e-bike market in Canada is booming, with a projected growth rate of 21.63 percent from 2025 to 2029. Yukon is at the forefront of this revolution, leading by example. This program showcases our commitment to both the environment and fiscal responsibility, proving that small changes can lead to monumental impacts. I can say, Mr. Speaker, that in my daily walks to and from Riverdale, it is truly heartening to see moms and dads from Riverdale — families — on their cargo bikes, transporting one and sometimes two children on the back of those bikes. Kudos and a shout-out to Riverdale residents for embracing the e-bike

revolution. I look forward to seeing more of those examples as we get into the warmer and brighter spring and summer of 2025. Well done.

We have also completed more than 300 high-performance residential retrofits along with over 50 high-performance commercial and industrial building retrofits, significantly improving energy efficiency, reducing emissions, and enhancing comfort for families and businesses. This government has also installed 219 smart heating devices in homes and buildings across the territory, helping Yukoners reduce their energy use, lower costs, and actively participate in climate solutions.

Additionally, we have recently introduced — and I know that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources will speak to this as well — a new income-tested heat pump rebate program that proved incredibly popular and was fully subscribed to within just one month. Through this initiative, we are directly supporting 84 Yukon households this year and next, making sustainable heating solutions affordable and accessible for everyone.

As of December 2023, our government has completed 68 actions outlined in *Our Clean Future*. Another 105 actions are actively underway or ongoing, with just five remaining to start. These achievements clearly demonstrate our unwavering commitment to climate leadership.

Our government remains committed to transparency and accountability in delivering *Our Clean Future*. This would not be possible without the exceptional work of the Climate Change Secretariat and our dedicated climate change scientists whose expertise and tireless efforts ensure that our actions are guided by accurate data, sound science, and a deep understanding of Yukon's unique environment. Their contributions are instrumental in helping us build a cleaner, more resilient future for all Yukoners.

Together with Yukoners, we are building a healthier environment, resilient communities, and a sustainable future that inspires pride together today and hope for generations to come.

Our government is also advancing this critical work within the Department of Highways and Public Works, focusing on retrofits, innovative heating solutions, solar upgrades, and other forward-thinking initiatives to reduce emissions and to enhance energy efficiency. These efforts reflect our commitment to integrating sustainability into every aspect of Yukon's infrastructure.

As minister of both Highways and Public Works and Environment, I see first-hand the dedication of these departments in ensuring that our buildings and infrastructure are resilient to the growing challenges of the climate crisis. While the upfront investments many seem significant, it is abundantly clear that every dollar spent on strengthening infrastructure resilience today will save significant funds and protect Yukoners in the future. This is not just an investment in infrastructure; it is an investment in our collective future.

The extended producer responsibility regulation is a result of years of extensive consultation and collaboration. From the establishment of the EPR advisory committee in January 2022

to public engagement sessions and the recycling summit in late 2022, we have worked closely with businesses, municipalities, First Nations, and the general public to design a program tailored to our territory's unique needs.

During the public engagement phase, we heard from 121 organizations and 278 individuals over 15 group engagement sessions, multiple one-on-one meetings, and a survey. Following the public engagement, we continued to engage stakeholders through 22 more meetings and presentations before the regulation passed in January of 2024. Since then, the department has had more than 25 additional meetings with stakeholders to ensure clarity, transparency, and collaboration every step of the way. As we move through the implementation phase, we continue to engage stakeholders through producer responsibility organizations in order to ensure that the EPR framework remains responsive to the needs and concerns of all concerned parties.

We understand the concerns raised by some businesses about compliance costs, which is why our government has committed to conducting a full review of the program after one year of operation. This review will allow us to assess its impacts and identify opportunities for improvement based on real-world data. In the meantime, producers are already working with PROs to develop stewardship plans that define how recycling services will be delivered across Yukon, ensuring costs are transparent and fairly distributed among producers while advancing our shared goal of a cleaner, more sustainable future.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment to commend the dedicated team at the Environmental Protection and Assessment branch for their exceptional work in developing and implementing the extended producer responsibility regulation. Their commitment to collaboration, transparency, and sustainability has been instrumental in driving this transformative initiative for the benefit of all Yukoners.

Our government is unwavering in its commitment to the responsible management of Yukon's wildlife. We are dedicated to maintaining healthy, sustainable populations of the iconic species we share this land with while ensuring that future generations can continue to benefit from ample harvest opportunities. In order to achieve this, we rely on the expertise of a strong team of biologists and harvest specialists who collect and analyze critical data. Their work ensures that every decision we make is grounded in science and informed by the best available knowledge, balancing conservation with the needs of Yukoners. Collaboration is at the heart of our approach. We are in regular and meaningful discussions with our co-management partners, Yukon First Nations, and all stakeholders who share our vision for responsible and sensible wildlife management. Together, we are working to protect these vital resources while respecting diverse perspectives.

Wildlife conservation is not just about protecting species; it's about preserving the natural balance that supports all life. By managing populations responsibly today, we ensure that future generations inherit a Yukon where wildlife continues to thrive both as an ecological treasure and as a vital resource for communities.

We are steadfast in our commitment to upholding First Nation rights, jurisdiction, and the provisions of Yukon's modern treaties. By honouring these commitments, we ensure that our actions reflect not only sound policy but also respect for the deep cultural and historical connections that First Nations have with this land and its wildlife.

Mr. Speaker, moving on to camping, the Government of Yukon continues to modernize and improve access to our campgrounds through the introduction of a new online reservation system piloted in 2024 at four popular campgrounds: Pine Lake, Marsh Lake, Wolf Creek, and Tombstone Mountain. This system balances the needs of planners and spontaneous campers, ensuring fair access for all Yukoners and visitors while reducing congestion at high-demand sites. The early data coming back from last year is quite positive, and I can certainly provide that information over the course of the Spring Sitting.

The Department of Environment is also actively updating campground regulations in order to enhance safety, protect ecological values, and to improve visitor experiences. These updates reflect our commitment to responsible land stewardship while ensuring that Yukoners can continue to enjoy our natural spaces responsibly.

Mr. Speaker, the Pine Lake campground redevelopment is a shining example of collaboration between the Government of Yukon and the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. We are creating 22 new campsites, a new group gathering space, and an upgraded trail network. This project reflects our commitment to enhancing recreational opportunities while respecting cultural values and ecological integrity. We are deeply grateful for Chief Joe's leadership and Champagne and Aishihik First Nations' partnership and contributions in ensuring that this project not only meets the needs of campers but also celebrates the rich cultural heritage of the area. Since 2017, the Government of Yukon has invested in the development of 126 new campsites across the territory. The 22 sites at Pine Lake will be in addition to that number.

I will now turn my attention to Highways and Public Works, the department that I often refer to in the orientation sessions for new Highways and Public Works employees as "the department of getting a lot of stuff done" or, in other words, "the department of exceptional execution". It is not me doing this "exceptional execution", but I just wanted to advise — send a shout-out to Highways and Public Works.

As we examine the portfolio of this department under the strong leadership of my deputy minister and her leadership team, from citizen services to capital infrastructure, you will see why this characterization is so fitting. Their consistent ability to transform complex challenges into tangible outcomes for Yukoners warrants our deepest appreciation. I would like to highlight some of the capital investments that make up part of this spring's Highways and Public Works budget.

In this year's budget, we have \$75 million allocated for the Whitehorse airport runway improvements. This project is a long-overdue project that underscores decades of infrastructure deficit. For years, critical infrastructure at the airport — originally built in 1943 — was left as is, with some drainage

systems dating back to the 1950s still in use. Beneath the asphalt surface of the main runway lay aging concrete panels from World War II, which caused recurring cracks and posed potential risks for aircraft operations.

Our Liberal government has awarded a \$160-million contract for the full reconstruction of the main runway at Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport. This investment is not merely a repair but a commitment to ensuring long-term safety, reliability, and resilience for this critical transportation hub. The project will finally address decades of neglect by replacing outdated infrastructure and implementing modern solutions to meet the needs of Yukoners today and into the future. This work is part of a \$258-million program to improve Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport, with the federal government's contribution at \$186 million through the national trade corridors fund and with the Yukon government funding remaining at approximately \$72 million.

I will move briefly to the Nisutlin Bay bridge. In 2019, our Liberal government partnered with the Teslin Tlingit Council to advance the Nisutlin Bay bridge replacement, which was the largest bridge project in Yukon history. This modern infrastructure prioritizes safety, wider lanes, pedestrian/cyclist access, and incorporates cultural collaboration through the inclusion of Tlingit artwork on the bridge. Certainly, there will be more to say about that project during the course of this Spring Sitting as well.

There has also been ongoing investment in the north Klondike Highway corridor, budgeted at \$31 million this year. The highway is undergoing, in total, an approximately \$267.6-million modernization, with 209 kilometres of planned reconstruction between Carmacks and Dawson City. This project will improve safety, driving conditions, and climate resilience while better connecting Yukon's resources to markets.

In my travels in the territory over the last three or four years, I have certainly been very impressed by the significant reprofiling of the roads and the size of the replacement culverts that have been put in, in contrast to those that were put in before, indicative of climate change adaptation and sometimes greater flood events and runoff.

With respect to school and education infrastructure, our Liberal government delivered the Whistle Bend Elementary School. This state-of-the-art facility reflected the Yukon government's unwavering commitment to delivering high-quality education for our youngest Yukoners. Featuring modern amenities, culturally enriched spaces, and innovative learning environments, this school was designed to become a cornerstone of inspiration and growth for students. Its completion represents more than an investment in infrastructure; it is a commitment to the future of Yukoners.

A similar investment is occurring in the Kluane riding, where construction has begun on Kêts'ádań Kù, meaning "House of Learning" in Southern Tutchone, on the traditional territory of the Kluane First Nation. This long-awaited K to 12 school will provide a modern learning and community space for Burwash Landing and surrounding areas, with substantial completion expected in the fall of 2026. This \$32.45-million

project reflects a strong government-to-government partnership, with \$5.7 million allocated to Yukon First Nation businesses. Kêts'ádañ Kù represents a shared commitment to education, cultural respect, and the future of Yukoners.

I know that I and some of my colleagues — and perhaps members opposite as well — were starting to hear about persons — Kluane First Nation citizens and others — expressing an interest in returning to live, work, and thrive in Burwash Landing. So, that's very exciting and I know that this is among some of the objectives that Chief Dickson and the Kluane First Nation had with respect to providing this incredibly important and modern piece of community infrastructure.

I would be remiss to not mention the work on the *Traffic Safety Act*. After nearly five decades — our Liberal government replaced five decades of it being in operation — our Liberal government replaced the outdated *Motor Vehicles Act* of 1977 with the *Traffic Safety Act* passed in the fall of 2024. This long-overdue modern legislation addresses critical safety gaps and administrative inefficiencies to better protect Yukoners on the road. Key provisions, such as tougher penalties for dangerous driving and expanded municipal traffic management powers, will be implemented by the fall of 2025. This phased approach prioritizes public safety now.

The *Traffic Safety Act* was shaped by extensive consultation with stakeholders and was grounded in research. Unfortunately, as we know, last fall, the Yukon Party chose not to support this legislation and that is indeed unfortunate, but in any event, that was their determination ultimately.

Before moving along, I would like to talk about our government's efforts to improve active transportation and commuter safety projects. This certainly is a priority of mine. Our Liberal government is making strides in creating safer, more accessible options for walking and cycling — projects like the continuous multi-use trail along the Alaska Highway and other upgrades prioritizing safety, connectivity, and year-round usability for active commuters.

In the riding of Watson Lake, our government invested in pedestrian safety such as new crosswalks with flashing beacons over the last few years and streetlights on the Robert Campbell Highway to Two Mile Village, demonstrating a strong commitment to protecting residents and visitors. These projects, supported by federal funding, addressed critical safety needs in key areas.

In this regard, a sincere thank you goes out to the Whitehorse Urban Cycling Coalition and the Cycling Association of Yukon for their invaluable guidance in shaping active transportation projects. Their advocacy underscores the importance of designing infrastructure that truly meets the needs of those who use it every day.

Mr. Speaker, every public servant, of course, plays a vital role in keeping our community strong, safe, and connected and they deserve our deepest gratitude. However, I must admit that there is a special place in my heart — and likely the hearts of many Yukoners — for the grader operators and road crews who face some of the toughest challenges imaginable to keep Yukoners' roads safe and open year-round. Grader operators

and road maintenance crews are the unsung heroes of Yukon highways, braving extreme conditions to keep lifelines like the Dempster Highway, the Haines Pass, and the White Pass open. Through hurricane-force winds, cement-like snowdrifts, and relentless blizzards, they carve paths of safety and connection for remote communities, ensuring that vital supplies and access are never out of reach.

While grader operators work tirelessly to keep Yukon's roads open and safe, the Department of Highways and Public Works is advancing renewable energy initiatives under *Our Clean Future* to reduce reliance on diesel-generated electricity and lower emissions. Solar energy systems with battery storage are being installed at off-grid highway maintenance camps, optimizing energy use and cutting fossil-fuel consumption. The Klondike and Ogilvie sites reached substantial completion in November 2024, with system optimization expected this month. These projects will offset approximately 103,000 litres of diesel annually and reduce emissions by 270 tonnes.

Additional solar projects at Tuchtua and Blanchard camps are underway, set to offset another 98,000 litres of fuel and cut emissions by 260 tonnes per year by the fall of 2025. These initiatives represent a significant step toward sustainable infrastructure and a cleaner future for Yukon's remote networks. Mr. Speaker, our government is continuing to prioritize investments that will positively impact Yukoners today and many years into the future while upholding values that are important to them.

Just to confirm what I think that we all know, Canada and Yukon are thriving and not broken. While we are not perfect and there is always more work to do, the rhetoric pushed by the Yukon conservative party and their Conservative federal allies like Mr. Poilievre is both false and harmful. He dismisses the hard work that Yukoners and Canadians put in every day to build stronger communities and a better future. On a national level, it fuels unsettling rhetoric about Canada's sovereignty, like President Trump's suggestion that Canada should become the 51st state.

This is not just insulting; it's a reminder of how critical it is to work together to protect our independence and to ensure that Canada remains strong and united. Yukoners rise to challenges with resilience and determination, just as Canadians across the country do. Canada and Yukon are not broken. We are thriving because of the dedication and hard work of people who believe in progress. We will keep working together to build a brighter future for generations to come.

While I have the opportunity to highlight many of the incredible initiatives and accomplishments of the Department of Environment and the Department of Highways and Public Works in my remarks today, I know, of course, that I have not covered it all. There is so much good work being done — work that is making a real difference in the lives of Yukoners. That's why I look forward to appearing in the Committee of the Whole where I can answer questions, provide details, and share more about the important projects and initiatives that these departments are leading. I am proud of what we have accomplished and remain committed to transparency and collaboration as we continue building a stronger Yukon

together. These are real solutions that make a difference in people's lives. Our Liberal government is committed to building a Yukon that is safe, inclusive, and sustainable for everyone who calls it home. These are real solutions that matter; these are real solutions that change lives and they are the solutions that Yukoners deserve.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: It's great to be standing here in this house of democracy addressing colleagues on our ninth budget. Now, I don't live in a bubble. I know there is stuff going on in the world; it's a little bananas these days. To say that a lot of it is troubling is an understatement. In the face of this topsy-turvy world, it's helpful to focus on our strengths and all of the stuff that we're doing really well, and there's a lot of it.

It's also important to recognize that Canada is not broken. That is going to be something that we will hear a lot of, I'm sure, over the coming hours and perhaps days. It's important to state, though, because there are those in this House who I am personally sure believe that it is broken, and they're saying that it's broken. There are some who, despite everything, insist that our nation is on the slide. Frankly, nothing could be further from the truth. We know that the federal leader of the opposition wants to follow in the footsteps of the team in Washington and cut our civil service to the bone. He has for years been attacking our public institutions, much as we have seen in Washington, and he has not been shy about saying that he would begin with the elimination of the CBC. This at a time when our media is fractured and curated, dependable news is hard to come by. This attacking of our institutions has long roots in Canada. It has long roots here in the territory, I'm sad to say. Now begins a very brief but important history lesson.

In the late 1980s, Preston Manning and Stephen Harper embraced western alienation and flirted with western separation. Manning's Reform Party supplanted Kim Campbell's Progressive Conservatives in the wake of Jean Chrétien's massive victory in 1993. In those days of Reform's genesis and success, I was a reporter for the *Yukon News*. That was a long time ago. Manning came to the Yukon, and I covered his fevered dream at the Gold Rush Inn on Main Street. He talked about declaring a state of emergency in Canada to take control of it — quote: "Liberal institutions" — get rid of them, get the bums out, get rid of the CBC, slash the civil service, and try to balance the budget.

We are hearing echoes of that today here in the Legislature — even this afternoon — and also in Washington, as these are some of the approaches that it is embracing in 2025. While Manning's visit was a long time ago, it's crucial to note, because one of the folks there organizing the Reform team and listening raptly to Manning at the time was a much younger career politician, the Member for Lake Laberge.

Today, that same debt-obsessed, civil service-cutting conservatism sits at the heart of the Yukon Party. Our local right-wing politicians are parroting the federal Conservative Party, in this case maintaining that the Yukon is broke. Indeed, the current Leader of the Official Opposition has suggested the same, misrepresenting the territory's debt, exaggerating the

growth of the territory's civil service, and hinting that it is bloated and needs to be cut.

In fact, it is important to remember that the Yukon Party is the only entity in this House that has embarked and embraced wide-scale freezing of all hiring in the civil service, provoking a deep recession in the early 1990s. Once again, we are hearing those echoes coming into the House even this afternoon. Those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it. I know that is becoming an old chestnut, but it bears repeating.

Today, Canadians have a new Prime Minister. I offer congratulations to Mark Carney, and I look forward to working with him and his new Cabinet. I wish him every success in that role, especially during these challenging times. It's frankly comforting to have someone positive who believes in Canada and Canadians, who knows our strengths and refutes continued assertions that we are a broken nation. It's good to have someone like that at the helm. Having someone with tremendous international respect and financial experience leading the country is also critically important during Washington's deep hostility to its long-time allies, especially Canada, in these past months.

Mr. Speaker, the White House's decision to allow American oligarchs to pillage the treasury while that nation's government abandons the rules-based international order that it has promoted since before the Second World War is frankly terrifying. Make no mistake; the duly elected US president's direct moves against Canada, Mexico, Denmark, Ukraine, Gaza, Panama, and NATO, while cozying up to Russia in opposition to its allies in Europe and Asia, has begun the most dangerous era in recent memory. Thankfully, we Canadians are a resilient lot. Polite, sure, but we're tough, eh?

I am now going to pivot. It's time to shift gears a little bit this afternoon, Mr. Speaker. There is another side that's brighter and longer, and that's where I'm going right now. I want to spend most of my time this afternoon talking about how extraordinary our territory is and how we got here. I want to thank my constituents for their continued support, and I want them to know what an honour it is to serve in Whitehorse West, a riding with a rich political history, and to represent them here in this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, I have been tied to this House — this very House — for most of my professional life: as a reporter, an editor, a civil servant, and now as a politician — Cabinet minister in this government. I have done a lot, and I can say that the time that I have spent with the folks on these benches in this Cabinet and caucus are some of the most rewarding days that I have ever had in a very rewarding career. I want to thank the folks in Whitehorse West for their support of me. For context, the time that I focused on this very Chamber — as I said, for most of my professional life — is a very, very long time. I'm a very, very old man now, not like I was when I first came to the territory in 1989. It's actual 35 years and a few months and counting.

Mr. Speaker, I watched Tony Penikett, the Yukon's first Premier, and a talented order lean into these microphones and growl at the opposition. Then I watched him growl at the government as an opposition leader. He had a very distinctive

style of leaning on the podium and addressing the mic directly. Penikett is another exceptional Yukoner — a ferocious advocate for Yukon First Nations. He was certainly instrumental in getting our final agreements in place and for the territory's presence at a national level. As a territorial premier, Penikett was not allowed to fully participate in national discussions when he first came to office. He was on the sidelines — seen but not heard. He argued hard for a seat at the table, certainly during the Meech Lake Accord time, and today, because of his vision, we are now full partners at those tables. Indeed, in many ways, we are currently leading the country in discussions at those tables across all of our ministries, and we should acknowledge and celebrate that success and where it began, Mr. Speaker, because it is extraordinary.

I had also spoken to Piers McDonald in the halls just outside these doors shortly after the passage of the Yukon *Education Act* way back in the 1990s — I think it was 1992 — again, I'm old — and at that time, that legislation was considered among Canada's most progressive education legislation. It was a brutal fight, getting through that. When I talked to Mr. McDonald outside there, he was relieved to have finally gotten it through the House, because the debate was ferocious, because he was pushing the envelope. That's what Yukon continues to do — is push the envelope in so many ways — not broken but exceptional.

I was sitting in the gallery covering a sitting in 1995 when McDonald congratulated me on the birth of my first son, Thomas. That's how long I've been around. I was sitting right up there. I was there when the Yukon Party was formed. From the Yukon Progressive Conservative Party, it elected the youngest political leader in the country, Chris Young — another exceptional nation-leading move that the Yukon did.

I was there days later when Bea Firth and Alan Nordling — two other exceptional legislators — split from the Yukon Party to form the Independent Alliance, another unique Yukon addition to the commons — to the Westminster style of government where we had two independent people coming together to form a party and try to maintain their independence.

I watched John Ostashek stride into the Westmark Whitehorse to challenge Willard Phelps for the conservative Yukon Party leadership and then watched Phelps and Ostashek work together in the Yukon Party after the 1992 election.

This has an impact on our health care debate today — this very budget — because one of his first moves as the then-health minister that Phelps made — one of the first moves he made as health minister — was to reject millions of federal infrastructure investment to make the Whitehorse General Hospital half the size it was to have been. Our hospital is half the size it should have been, because the Yukon Party health minister carved it down.

I remember in 2000 when the Yukon Party was subsequently reduced to one member — Peter Jenkins — and I sat across from Yukon NDP Dennis Fentie in the Westmark Hotel restaurant — now the Sternwheeler — when he was contemplating a run at the NDP leadership — or perhaps, he asked, "Should I walk the floor to the Yukon Party to join Peter Jenkins?"

As a reporter, in that hotel restaurant, I told him, "Dennis, you are further right than Attila the Hun, and the NDP are never going to make you their leader." In June of 2002, the Yukon Party elected Fentie their leader. It subsequently won three majority governments. As part of those governments, Fentie made raw political decisions, with no planning and little if any consultation, to build hospitals in Watson Lake and Dawson, amplifying Phelps' mistake to unnecessarily shrink the Whitehorse hospital, which, I would argue, long delayed the development of necessary hospital expansions where they're most needed, here in Whitehorse. We are dealing with that legacy today here in the territory and in this Legislative Assembly.

It mirrored the Yukon Party's decision to build the shelter at 4th Avenue, again, with no plan, and also the Yukon Party's short-sighted shrinking of F.H. Collins Secondary School, which, in the end, saved little if any money and left us with a facility too small to serve the community properly. Mr. Speaker, I am going to say that those decisions contributed greatly to my stepping up in Whitehorse West. Again, I thank my constituents for their support.

Enough said. I have chronicled a lot of history here. We can contextualize some of it. The point is that I have listened to opposition politicians thunder about the territory's perceived problems for 35 years — politicians from all parties. I can tell you that the Yukon is not broken. It wasn't broken then, and it's not broken today. As a matter of fact, the trajectory of the territory is one of exceptionalism — one of being exceptional, of leading the country in so many ways — from our First Nation final agreements to so many other things.

The opposition's role, of course, is to challenge and test and hopefully improve things. I know that the Premier today asked the opposition to come forward with helpful suggestions on how they might work and improve things for Yukoners if they were there, but we're just hearing the constant complaints, and that is typical of the opposition. In the 35 years that I have been sitting right there in that front bench listening to things going on here, there's nothing really unusual in that, but I would hope that they would do better.

This cavernous Chamber amplifies and distorts criticisms beyond reality. This Chamber — my experience, I can say it — amplifies and distorts criticisms beyond reality, and the media was once a decent fact-checker when the industry in the territory was robust, but the reporting pool has been hollowed out. We have fewer media outlets and fewer people doing more stuff, and frankly, the public is no longer as well served, in my humble opinion. There are distortions in the public discourse, distortions amplified by unchecked social media feeds that pump incorrect information into the public domain. Some of those feeds, some of that information, is being planted there by people willingly trying to manipulate the public discourse, and that certainly happens even more so during elections. It is all something that we have to keep in mind as we work in this brave new world that we inhabit.

The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is: Are there problems in the territory? Sure, sure there are. There are always going to be, and the media and the opposition are going to focus on the negative.

I am hoping to bring some light to some of the positive things that we have done and are doing. Not “we” — when I say “we”, I mean Yukoners — that Yukoners are doing.

Are there problems in our health care system, Mr. Speaker? Sure, sure — however, no more than anywhere else. If we are at national tables, we are hearing the same thing across the country. The nation needs 23,000 or more doctors. We are all competing in that shortfall — every one of us, from Halifax to Whitehorse to Vancouver to Prince George to Brandon and all points in between.

Here, though, anyone who has been involved in the health care system in Ontario or BC or in most provinces, as I recently have, will know that our system is remarkable — remarkable.

It is arguably the best in the country — fast, responsive, collaborative, generous, and indeed often intimate, supporting, and comforting. Is it perfect? No. God, no. Do people have to wait sometimes? Yes. Is it painful? I can attest that sometimes it is, but is it fast? Yes, because when I need scans, I can get to the hospital, out, and back at this office in 20 minutes — amazing. That would never happen in Nanaimo. It doesn't happen in Toronto. It doesn't happen in Kingston. I can tell you that, Mr. Speaker. It does not happen. It is remarkable.

Blood work — 20 minutes — remarkable. And we are on the frontier. This isn't downtown Vancouver. This is on the frontier of civilization in some ways. It's amazing. Is it perfect? No. But in Canada — a place, as I have noted, where we have a shortage of 23,000 doctors — it's as close as it comes.

Do we have housing issues here? Yes, sure we do — absolutely. Are they unusual, unlike other places in Canada? No, not at all. In my experience at federal political tables, which Penikett set us up to attend, our situation is remarkably similar to most other places. Yukon municipalities, Yukon civil servants, contractors, and tradespeople have built more lots, houses, and affordable living options in the last nine years than I have seen in the 35 years that I have been following events in this Chamber — maybe the most in the territory's history. It's remarkable that the municipalities, the tradespeople, the contractors, and the planners have all managed to get this done. We should celebrate it. And it happened through a global pandemic — amazing — a testament to our toughness.

Are there still housing pressures? Sure. Why is that, Mr. Speaker? Well, let's look at that for a minute. Contrary to the broken message that we keep hearing in this House from the opposition, our economy is strong. Almost everyone who wants a job has one. Wages are up, and our Yukon is growing faster than most places in the country, so, yes, it is hard to keep up. That's a problem, but it's a good problem to have — better than the alternative where people are voting with their feet and fleeing. That's not happening. We are growing faster than we have ever grown before — amazing.

By working together in every community and corner of the territory, we have accomplished something extraordinary on the housing front. We have created many, many lots and, no matter how you count them, we will reach our 1,000-lot target in five years following the 2021 election.

I mentioned the pandemic, Mr. Speaker. We are still living with the fallout from those years of stress and isolation, of fear

and uncertainty. Society is still working out the kinks. *The New York Times* recently chronicled the impact that the pandemic had on American society in 30 graphs. You can look them up. I have no doubt that the results mirror the situation in Canada. The impacts have been far-reaching. In many cases, we are still sorting them out today. The pandemic serves as a demarcation of our government's two mandates — a seam that splits our time in office into “before” and “after”. However, as hard and as terrible as that time was, the Yukon was resilient, and its response to the world-altering pandemic was decisive, coordinated, thoughtful, united, and delivered some of the strongest and most positive outcomes in the world. We led the world — here.

Our health professionals and our professional civil service were simply fantastic. As Yukoners, we should not forget that. It is important that we continue to recognize and reflect on the Yukon's time during the pandemic. We navigated those years better than any other place in Canada, and that means that we were the best of the best in the world. We kept each other safe, and because of that, we lost fewer people per capita than any other place in the country. The vaccines were developed globally, miraculously, in record time, and it was a moon shot for health science — again, something that we should celebrate as a species. It was unbelievable what we accomplished, working together as a globe — around the world. The Yukon deployed those vaccines faster than most other jurisdictions despite our tiny population, our challenging, empty geography and weather. We supported our businesses better than any other jurisdiction in the country here in the Yukon. We led the country again — exceptional and incredible.

We emerged from the pandemic economically stronger than most if not all Canadian provinces and territories. Again, that's not often spoken about in this Chamber by this opposition, but it's something to celebrate — not broken. In fact, Yukoners were exceptional during the pandemic and Yukoners continue to be exceptional. Today, my colleague gave a tribute to the women in the RCMP. We saw the first Indigenous commanding officer of F and E Divisions in Brenda Butterworth-Carr and we saw Constable Jess Edwards become the first full-time emergency response team member of any division across the country. Again, leading the country — exceptional, not broken.

The other day, I was in the grocery store and a constituent tapped me on the shoulder. We spoke for about 45 minutes about nothing and everything. What I remember is how thoughtful and kind and well-informed this person was — and considerate. This is common in my travels in town and in Whitehorse West. Whether I'm at the grocery store, the coffee shop, the library, or walking Albus on the trails behind Logan on the Trans Canada Trail or down the neighbourhood streets, I am inspired by the kindness and thoughtfulness of the people I meet — a sense of community. We all know each other and we take the time to ask each other how we're doing — or grab a shovel and help shovel the driveway of one of my elderly neighbours down the road. It's important to recognize this intimacy and sense of community that we have in this territory and celebrate it. Whether it be through music, art, drama,

writing, dance, food, agriculture, tourism, volunteerism, or sports, Yukoners are excelling on the local, national, and international stage. As a society, we have to recognize this, remember it, savour it, and celebrate it.

For example, Joe Hanson has just become the first Yukoner to play professional soccer abroad. As a former soccer coach here, I am overjoyed to see one of our players find success, first playing for the Vancouver White Caps FC 2 before getting a contract with the Winnipeg Valour FC in the top-tier Canadian Premier League. Now Joe is with Treaty United Football Club playing in the League of Ireland — simply incredible.

It is a testament to Hanson's incredible skill, of course, but also to the support of his family, friends, and to the growing depth of Yukon soccer, which helped to hone his skills here in our chilly spring evenings and short summers. Oh, how I remember those chilly spring evenings out there on the soccer pitch.

Of course, we are also excelling in hockey. We all know about forward Dylan Cozens, whose family lives in my riding. Cozens has just been traded to the Ottawa Senators, where he will play at the Canadian Tire Centre built atop the very agricultural land near Carp River where I used to play as a kid in Kanata — the very same.

There is also Emery Twardochleb, who recently won a bronze medal in hockey with the U-18 women's national championship tournament, and the talented Gavin McKenna, who represented Canada so well at the U-18 championships — exceptional.

But that success doesn't end with hockey or soccer, Mr. Speaker; it extends to so many other sports and so many other people. Recently, at the Yukon sports award ceremony at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre, I watched as more than 170 Yukoners were recognized for their extraordinary achievement over the past year in all manner of sports and also in coaching and volunteering — incredible. My constituents Lia Hinchey and sister Jaymi won silver and bronze medals respectively in judo at the open nationals in May. These are Yukoners living in a place with fewer than 50,000 people who are not only competing but winning in the top tier in Canada, beating folks who come from provinces with 100 times their population — incredible. The same for Nadia Moser, a biathlete who won a gold and two silvers at the nationals. Her teammate, Cole Germain, won gold and silver medals at the same event, again competing against provinces with far greater populations. We are not only thriving but winning, Mr. Speaker.

Snowboarder Stian Langbaak took a bronze medal at Canada's junior national championships. We have Shiori Monzo, who won gold in archery at the nationals and who represented Team Canada at the Pan Am Games. We also have Mya Wilson and Mikayla Therriault, two more archers who won gold at Canada's indoor championships. They are the best in the country from the smallest place in the country — incredible.

There is Mallory Pigage and Bobbi-Rae Patchett, who both won gold in bowling at the 2024 Special Olympics Canada Winter Games just a year ago. Many of their teammates also

excelled at those games — again, extraordinary Yukoners doing extraordinarily well at the national level. I could go on and on — 170 targets, but I'm not going to do that.

All of this is evidence of a place that is not broken. These athletes are top in the nation, and that is something that we must not gloss over. We must take time to recognize and celebrate these victories as our collective success as a society. In 2023, during a break in our incredible success at the Arctic Winter Games in Fort McMurray, I met with Sport Yukon's Tracey Bilsky. She made an impassioned case for more sport infrastructure in the territory. Bilsky suggested that we should build more usable gym spaces in our new schools. It would serve students and also the community at large. In doing so in schools, it should be more cost-effective to run than stand-alone facilities, she said. It was a good conversation, and it was a great idea — one I took seriously and have been working with my colleagues on ever since. It is why we are building a large competition-ready gym space in the new Whitehorse Elementary School in Takhini, because, yes, building usable sports spaces in schools is a cost-efficient way to expand competitive opportunities for Yukoners.

As the Council of Yukon First Nations Grand Chief notes frequently and with passion, sports are the answer to listlessness and boredom in youth, and it is often critical for success later in life. It leads to healthy outcomes. It is at the very foundation of a healthy society. We agree, so we are investing heavily in recreation across the Yukon in this budget. That's why I am so happy to say that, thanks to the advocacy of Sport Yukon and its many members, we are renovating the old gymnastics facility in Riverdale. It is why we built an awesome new gymnastics and climbing space in Whistle Bend. I have toured that facility, which is close to finished. I was struck dumb by its grandeur. It will be an amazing facility for Yukoners of all ages. It will be another Canada Games facility-like asset for the people of the Yukon, for citizens of Whitehorse, and really for the people living in Whistle Bend.

I was also pleased to participate at Climb Yukon's open house recently. There was also a fundraiser at MacBride two weeks ago. I was blown away by the scale and scope of the crowd. The place was packed with young and old, all looking for details and signing up for memberships in the new facility, which we plan to open this summer. People were literally hanging from apparatuses that they brought in there — little kids. It was amazing.

Creating more opportunity for athletes, creating a healthier place for people to live, creating another reason for professionals of all stripes to come to the territory is one of the reasons why we're investing in Biathlon Yukon's facility in Grey Mountain, which we hope will serve the Arctic Winter Games in 2026 but also well into the future. It's also why we built a great new arena in Carmacks and why we're actually going to build a new arena in Dawson City after many false promises and false starts and misleading announcements by others in this Chamber. It's why we invested in a pool in Pelly Crossing, which was completed in 2023.

That's not all we're doing; that's not all at all. We are also doing an inventory of our sport and recreation infrastructure in the territory.

The Sport and Recreation branch ensures Yukoners have access to the sport facilities as an opportunity they need, and we've compiled a comprehensive list of community sport and recreation infrastructure for the territory, and we're engaging with communities to validate the findings of this report.

Engagement involves identifying previously unrecorded infrastructure and gathering new data on features such as trails and parks. We're going to analyze that data to identify how we can develop new infrastructure across the territory and establish principles for evaluating future sport and recreation initiatives.

So, we're going to have a framework — a way of identifying the gaps in our infrastructure. We're going to use that information to inform our approach going forward — very important — and the communities will be involved.

Now, for some time, the Association of Yukon Communities has been asking for an increase in the comprehensive municipal grant. I've been speaking to municipalities since I came into Community Services in 2021, but I've actually been involved with communities, again, for 35 years. I have spoken to and engaged with municipalities for, again, most of my professional life. I heard from mayors across the territory how the pandemic and post-pandemic situation is affecting them — sort of taking the stuffing out of them, to be honest — and that they need more resources.

So, we struck a task force to look at the comprehensive municipal grant, which is, again, the way that this territory funds our municipalities, and we looked at their request for more money through this comprehensive municipal grant. As a result of that work, we are increasing the grant by 20 percent, the largest increase the grant has seen since it was begun in 1991 — the largest increase in the grant since it began in 1991. Thanks to the work of my predecessor in the role, the member for the beautiful Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes, that will also be indexed to inflation going forward, providing some certainty to municipalities — a record increase in funding. And that comes, Mr. Speaker, during one of the most trying times in the Yukon's history, with the Victoria Gold disaster happening, the federal government tightening its belt, and a trade war brewing with our neighbour and former friend. This will go a long way to helping Yukoners through their local governments. What they do with the extra money is up to them, of course — that is their responsibility — but I have no doubt that it will be put to good use.

I'm also very pleased to be making an investment in municipal training. \$88,000 will be made available annually to the Association of Yukon Communities to support professional development opportunities and training for municipal and First Nation employees and local advisory councils. We are also investing heavily in Whitehorse's blue bin recycling program to keep the cost down to the residents of Whitehorse. It is, again, because of Raven's decision — Raven ReCentre's decision — to move out of processing. We have actually stepped in and helped Whitehorse deal with that issue, and we actually now have blue bins. As I have said — I say often to

anybody whom I'm talking to about this that I'm really happy to be able to put those bins out at the end of my driveway, to drive around the town on Tuesdays and see all of those bins in my neighbourhood as people put their recycling out. I certainly appreciate that myself.

We are also making investments in rural fire and rescue teams. Now, Mr. Speaker, I met with the firefighters for two hours on Saturday — had a long talk. It was supposed to be a 10-minute presentation; we spoke for two hours. I heard their concerns and hopes for the future. I took that time to thank them for their service —

Speaker: Five seconds. You are just about done.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Just about done? All right —

Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this afternoon in response to the 2025-26 budget tabled by the Minister of Finance on March 6.

Through this budget, we are taking decisive action to address the substance use health emergency, respond to the climate crisis, advance reconciliation, and change the story for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. These are critical priorities and I am proud to be part of a government that is committed to meaningful change. My roles in both the community and the government are deeply important to me. I was first elected as MLA for Mountainview in 2016 and I remain incredibly proud to represent my constituents. It is an honour to serve as Deputy Premier, Minister of Education, and the Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate.

Beyond my work in government, I value my family role and I am a very dedicated auntie to many nieces and nephews, many of whom are part of the public school system, early learning programs, or they are pursuing post-secondary education. I am also incredibly grateful for the unwavering support of my husband, Rick McLean, who not only stands by me but also believes in the work of this government. Most of all, I am very proud to be mother and parent to Colin and Jedrek Dendys and, most recently, in the last few years, very proud to also embrace my stepdaughter, Bria Rose, my stepson, Ty McLean, and our wonderful little grandson, Malcolm. So, the family is growing. I'm so proud of all of them. I could not be prouder of their accomplishments and the truly meaningful ways in which they continue to contribute to this territory.

To my friends who continue to support me and not give up on me and continue to invite me to do things with them even though we're very busy a lot of the time, thank you to them.

I believe deeply in the work of this government and remain fully committed to my role as an MLA. To the constituents of Mountainview, thank you for your trust and support. It has been the greatest honour to serve as your representative over the past eight-plus years. Your trust, your support, and your unwavering commitment to our community have been the driving forces behind everything that we have accomplished together. Because of you, we've made real meaningful progress transforming our neighbourhood into a safer, stronger, and more connected place to call home.

We fought so much for the much-needed upgrades to the Alaska Highway, the new stoplights, the safer turning lanes, and road widening, and we didn't stop there. Together, we pushed for a full redesign and rebuild, advancing the timeline, completing that project ahead of schedule. Every time I drive into the neighbourhood or go to the airport, I am reminded of that change — what it used to be like and the improvements that we've made.

We made our community stronger by championing the new Kwanlin Dün First Nation community hub — a gathering place that will serve generations to come. We created safe welcoming spaces for children, from new playgrounds in the Kwanlin Dün community to improvements throughout Mountainview.

But what means the most to me is the relationship that we've built. I've walked the trails with you, sat at your kitchen tables, and listened to your concerns, whether about the tank farm or neighbourhood safety or the everyday challenges that matter to you and your families. These conversations absolutely led to action.

I worked to establish the Mountainview safety and wellness committee. In the coming months, I'm going to be focused based on discussions that I've had with some of the leadership in Mountainview to work again to re-establish this committee.

It was happening and then it wasn't happening, and there are folks now in leadership roles who would like to reinitiate that, so I will be advocating for that work to happen again.

I have also had the privilege of helping countless individuals by opening case files, ensuring that your voices are heard and your issues are addressed. Through it all, I have worked to keep the lines of communication open through hosting barbecues, community meetings, dinners and breakfasts, and connecting through Facebook livestreams during that incredible time of COVID-19 and, of course, personally delivering updates to your doors. I note that we will be working toward some community events over the next couple of months. I am really looking forward to that happening.

Mountainview is more than just a place on the map; it's a community built on trust, care, and the belief that we are stronger together. Thank you for allowing me to be part of this journey with you. I look forward to continuing this work side by side with all of you to make our community even better.

I want to take a moment to speak about the responsibilities that I hold within the government, starting with one of the most fundamental priorities — education. A strong, well-funded education system is not just an investment in our students. It is absolutely an investment in the future of our territory. Education drives individual success, strengthens communities, and fuels economic growth. That is why our government is committed to ensuring that every learner — whether in early learning education, K to 12, or adult learning — has access to resources and opportunities that they need to succeed.

Adequate funding is critical to achieving this. It allows us to recruit and retain qualified educators, modernize learning resources, and maintain safe, up-to-date school facilities. These

are not luxuries; they are necessities. Inclusivity and accessibility are at the heart of our approach. As it reflects in the budget, we are taking real action to close the gaps and reduce disparities in education. From expanding early learning subsidies and grants to strengthening K to 12 supports and increasing financial assistance for adult learners, we are breaking down barriers so that every student, regardless of their background ability or circumstances, has the opportunity to succeed. This budget represents a significant step forward in our government's commitment to building a more equitable, inclusive, and more prosperous society, one where every individual, regardless of gender or background, has the opportunity to succeed.

That is why our government is investing \$315,389,000 in education in the 2025-26 budget. Not only is education the foundation of opportunity, but it is also a key to ensuring a thriving future for all Yukoners. These documents contain a wealth of information. I encourage Yukoners to see how this budget reflects and supports their needs and priorities. It also represents our commitments that we made nine years ago in building prosperity through reconciliation, affordability for all, territory-wide growth, safe and healthy families and communities, and protecting our environment. Our government firmly believes that education is the foundation to this success, and this budget reaffirms our commitment to making it accessible and equitable for all. Again, our budget represents an 11.74-percent increase — that's huge.

Across the country and around the world, we see a troubling trend — the rise of right-wing ideologies pushing ruthless austerity measures that undermine the very foundation of our public systems, disguised as fiscal responsibility. These cuts are not about efficiencies or good governance; they are deliberate and ideological attacks on the right to accessible, high-quality services for all — attacks that always hit our most vulnerable the hardest.

Let's be clear. When governments slash education funding, it's not bureaucrats who suffer; it's students, families, and educators. It's the child who loses access to specialized support because their school can no longer afford an educational assistant. It's the teachers struggling to manage classrooms that may be overcrowded and under-resourced. It is the working family forced to pay out of pocket for services that should be publicly funded, all while the wealthiest enjoy tax breaks at their expense. This is why our government has always seen education as a foundation of economic growth, from the earliest learners to those who seek out higher education at any age.

The pursuit and accessibility of quality, publicly funded education is at the heart of any nation. Our incredible public education system and every single public servant who works to make it great are ones we should uphold and cherish not only as Yukoners but also as Canadians.

Our government has proven time and time again that we will always prioritize children, students, families, and every Yukoner above the politics of scarcity, and this budget proves it. By closing the generational gaps created by poverty and trauma, we are ensuring that every student and family has the support that they need to thrive. We are investing in education,

mental health, and community supports because we know that learning doesn't happen in isolation. Kids need food. They need safety. They need stability. We are advancing reconciliation and gender equity, breaking down systemic barriers so that everyone has a fair shot at success.

Throughout this Sitting, my colleagues and I will highlight real actions that our government is taking to fill these gaps. This budget is an investment in people and I hope all members of the House will support it. As I reflect on my mandate as Minister of Education, I am incredibly proud of the progress that we've made in strengthening Yukon's education system. While some would choose austerity measures, cutting resources and opportunities in the name of cost-saving or other reasons, our government has taken a different path. We reject the short-sighted approach of those who see education as an expense rather than the foundation of our future. Instead, we have worked in collaboration with Yukon First Nations, education partners, and the school communities to invest in students, improve learning outcomes, and create better opportunities for all Yukon learners.

Education is not a privilege; it's a right and a cornerstone to a just and prosperous society. I will always stand for an inclusive, well-funded, and student-centred education system, one that lifts up every Yukon student, no matter where they live or what challenges they face. Our children deserve a government that believes in them and their potential, and I will never waver in my commitment to building a brighter, stronger future for all Yukoners.

The availability, Mr. Speaker, of affordable, accessible childcare is life-changing for families, and our government is committed to making sure that every child has the best possible start in life. Since the introduction of universal childcare in April 2021, we have remained committed to making early learning and childcare in Yukon accessible, affordable, and inclusive. As of November 2024, we have 1,930 children and their families who are benefiting from universal childcare, saving up to \$8,400 per year per child enrolled in licensed programs. This represents a savings of over \$16 million for Yukon families, money that stays in their pockets, helps with the cost of living, and gives parents greater flexibility to pursue careers, education, and other opportunities. In total, we are dedicating over \$46 million to strengthen this essential program, supporting families, easing financial pressures, and ensuring that every child gets the best possible start in life.

To sustain the progress made through our existing early learning childcare agreements, including infrastructure funding, supports for early childhood educators, and access to affordable childcare, we have reached an agreement with the Government of Canada to extend the early learning and childcare funding, providing \$74 million to further strengthen programs in the Yukon starting at the end of this current agreement in 2026-27. This includes a three-percent funding increase every year for four years beginning in 2027-28. This funding directly supports wage enhancement for well over 500 early learning childhood educators, recognizing the crucial role that they play in early learning, and 79 licensed childcare operators, including nine First Nation government-owned and

-operated centres, representing a total of 2,343 licensed spaces across the Yukon and overall lower costs for Yukon families. This is what investing in the future looks like.

These initiatives are about more than just childcare; they're about building a stronger Yukon where every child has access to early learning opportunities and every family, regardless of income, has the support that they need to thrive. Our government will continue to make early learning childcare a priority because, when families succeed, Yukon succeeds.

We know that good nutrition is fundamental to school success. When children have access to healthy meals, they are better able to focus, learn, and thrive in school. Proper nutrition supports both mental and physical health, and ensuring that students have access to nutritious food is one of the most effective ways to set them up for success. That is why we welcome Canada's \$1-billion investment over five years to create a national school food program. The program is guided by the national school food policy, which sets out principles to ensure that every child has access to nutritious food at school. The joint announcement released this morning confirmed that Canada and the Government of Yukon have finalized a bilateral agreement for school food program funding for 2024-25 to 2026-2027. Under this agreement, Yukon will receive \$2,260,000 in 2024 and \$2,550,000 annually for 2025 to 2027.

Additionally, Canada has agreed to allow 100-percent rollover for the 2024-25 funds into 2025-26, ensuring that we can maximize the impact of these investments and adapt to the needs of schools and students. This funding will support essential components of school food programming, ensuring that students have access to nutritious meals. It will cover the costs of food purchases, helping to provide healthy options for students. It will also support staffing to assist with food preparation and meal distribution, ensuring that meals are served efficiently and effectively.

Additionally, investments in infrastructure will enhance food preparation and storage facilities while funding for transportation and logistics will help ensure that meals reach students across the Yukon, no matter where they live. Investing in a school food program is an investment in a student's well-being, learning, and long-term success. A hungry child cannot focus in the classroom and no student should have to worry about where their next meal will come from. By making these investments, we are not only ensuring that every Yukon student has access to the healthy meals that they need to grow, learn, and thrive; we are also reinforcing our commitment to creating inclusive, culturally safe, and supportive learning environments for all.

I note that one of the new criteria for the Every Student, Every Day program where we committed \$100,000 annually — they are matching at \$100,000. There is a new project that is related to food in schools, so that is another funding source that is being made available.

In terms of other initiatives, we continue to advance reimagining inclusive and special education, commonly known as RISE. This is a long-term initiative aimed at breaking down barriers for learners and providing student outcomes for all regardless of ability. Since its approval in 2021, the RISE work

plan has guided our efforts to address the recommendations from the 2019 Auditor General's report on K to 12 education, the review of inclusive and special education, and the Child and Youth Advocate's review on attendance.

With the completion of the 2021 to 2024 RISE work plan, we are now working with education partners to develop the next phase of this critical initiative. We are anticipating a final report from the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate on the systemic review on racism. We will work toward advancing that work and ensuring that it is actioned. These insights will help shape the 2025 to 2035 RISE work plan, ensuring that our approach continues to evolve in meaningful and responsive ways. These efforts reflect our government's unwavering commitment to building an education system that is inclusive, equitable, and rooted in reconciliation.

As the Minister of Finance highlighted in his speech, our government is committed to building safe, modern, and inclusive learning environments for students across the Yukon. This budget allocates \$25,640,000 in capital spending. This includes modernizing our learning spaces, building new experiential spaces, site improvements, and school initiative renovations.

We are also making significant investments in upgrading school infrastructure to meet the needs of our growing communities. We are currently in the planning phases of the new École Whitehorse Elementary School on the Takhini Educational Land Reserve.

This space will feature a state-of-the-art gym to support Yukon's growing sport community and, of course, new softball fields for Yukoners. We are also in the initial phases of meeting with Yukon First Nations and stakeholders on building a new downtown school. This preliminary work with stakeholders will ensure that we have a purpose-built facility that meets the needs of all Yukoners.

As part of our government's commitment to reconciliation and long-term capital planning, we are also proud to be working in partnership with Kluane First Nation to build Kêts'ádañ Kù, the replacement and reallocation of a new community school in Burwash Landing. This budget invests \$16 million in this project and reflects our shared vision for education, as outlined in the memorandum of understanding between the Government of Yukon and the Kluane First Nation, a commitment to plan and construct a school that truly meets the needs of the community. Kêts'ádañ Kù, meaning "House of Learning", will provide Kluane First Nation citizens with the opportunity to learn and thrive within their community. It will be a place where students can connect with their language, culture, and traditions while receiving a high-quality education that supports their success.

By working together with the First Nation governments, communities, and educators, we are ensuring that every Yukon student has the resources, opportunities, and learning spaces that they need to reach their full potential. Beyond these projects, we have made major strides in strengthening our education system by: building the new CSFY school, providing a dedicated space for francophone students; expanding the Robert Service School, ensuring Dawson students have the

space they need to learn and grow; completing a major retrofit of the Elijah Smith Elementary School, improving learning conditions for students and staff; and constructing a new Whistle Bend Elementary School, meeting the needs of one of Yukon's fastest growing neighbourhoods.

These investments are not just about buildings; they are about creating learning environments that support the success of all students. More than 50 years ago, Yukon First Nation leaders laid out a vision for self-determination and a better future for their children in *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow*. Education was central in that vision. This was a call to action, a vision that recognized education as a key to a stronger future for our children and our communities. That vision continues today as we work toward decolonizing and Indigenizing our education system, ensuring that Yukon First Nation languages, cultures, and ways of knowing are not just included but valued and upheld.

As I have said, education is the foundation of opportunity and must reflect the voices, values, and visions of the communities that it serves. That is why the Government of Yukon and the Chiefs Committee on Education and the First Nation School Board share a common goal: to provide high-quality, culturally appropriate education rooted in an Indigenous world view for all Yukon students.

The establishment of the Yukon First Nation School Board, now governing 11 schools across the territory, represents a historic step forward. It is a demonstration of Yukon First Nations reclaiming greater responsibility over the administration and management of education in their communities, empowering them to shape a system that reflects their traditions, knowledge, and aspirations.

The work being done today — the partnerships that we are building, the funding that we are securing, and the changes that we are making — are a direct response to that call to action. In December 2024, the Department of Education finalized a two-year transfer payment agreement for the First Nation School Board for \$33.4 million per year to create stable operational funding for the First Nation School Board, but this is just the beginning. We are committed to working with the school board to develop a long-term equitable funding formula, one that ensures fairness across the school authorities and consistent, high-quality education for every K to 12 student in the Yukon. This is about more than funding; it's about fulfilling the promise made generations ago. It is about ensuring that every Yukon student, no matter where they live or who they are, has access to an education system that reflects their identity and strengthens their future. This is *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* in action.

Reconciliation is not just a commitment; it is a responsibility, and responsibility requires action. This budget reflects our government's unwavering commitment to reconciliation by investing in First Nation government-led wellness support roles in Yukon schools. These roles will provide culturally grounded, community-led support, ensuring that students have the guidance that they need to succeed.

We are also taking a landmark step toward culture and language programs. Indigenous knowledge deserves formal

recognition within our education system. That is why we are expanding locally developed courses, such as food sovereignty, fish first, and climate change studies, so that students can learn in a way that reflect their communities and their history.

Beyond the classroom, we are working with Yukon First Nations and Canada to renew the joint education action plan for 2025 to 2035, ensuring that our education system continues to reflect Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being. With \$1.83 million in funding for the upcoming year, we are advancing community-led education initiatives, including expanding the First Nation School Board, which now oversees 11 schools.

Student success depends on more than academics. It requires strong mental health and well-being. That is why we are investing \$1.65 million to strengthen school-based supports, adding new wellness counsellors, educational assistants, and learning assistance teachers across the territory. When students graduate, we want them to have every opportunity to build a brighter future. Our government is investing \$1.18 million in post-secondary grants, breaking down financial barriers and ensuring that every Yukon student has the support they need to pursue higher education. These investments reflect our government's vision for a stronger, more inclusive education system and are designed to support every student in reaching their full potential. I look forward to discussions on these important initiatives during the budget debate.

At the heart of every thriving school and successful student is the dedicated educator. Yukon teachers, educational assistants, teachers on call, and all support staff shape the future of our children. They inspire, guide, and nurture the next generation of leaders, thinkers, and change-makers. Their passion and commitment extend beyond the classroom, helping students grow into confident, capable individuals ready to take on the world. That is why our government is proud to have our new collective agreement that's now in place with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals. This agreement is a testament to our deep respect for Yukon educators and our recognition of the essential role they play in strengthening our communities. This three-year agreement ensures that Yukon educators remain among the highest paid in Canada while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

This collective agreement includes a 14.15-percent wage increase over three years, with annual increases of up to 8.15 percent and three percent and three percent the following years; a 10-percent increase for teachers on call, recognizing their invaluable contribution to maintaining continuity in student learning; a seven-percent increase for educational assistants, acknowledging their critical role in supporting students with diverse learning needs; a \$5,000 allowance for First Nation language teachers, reinforcing our commitment to Indigenous language revitalization; a rural retention allowance, ensuring that educators in rural communities are supported and incentivized to continue their vital work. This agreement is more than just numbers; it is a reflection of our belief that investing in educators is investing in the future of our children. When we support and uplift our teachers, we strengthen our

schools and ensure they are respected and valued and fairly compensated. We are deeply grateful for the hard work, resilience, and dedication of Yukon educators and, of course, for their unwavering commitment to our students and our school communities.

I am just going to speak a little bit more and reflect on women and gender equity. Our government has embedded gender-based action across government decision-making to ensure that investments are not just equitable in theory but in practice — whether that means funding for education, economic development, or public safety. This means recognizing that women, gender-diverse people, Indigenous communities, and other under-represented groups often face unique barriers and designing policies that address these challenges head-on.

We see the impact of gender-based action in this year's budget. By ensuring funding for early learning education and childcare, we are directly supporting women who are often primary caregivers, and we are making it easier for them to fully participate in the workforce or to pursue other goals within their lives.

Through targeting investments in workforce development, we are breaking down barriers in fields like trades and STEM, creating new opportunities for women and gender-diverse individuals to enter high-paying careers.

Across many western nations, we are seeing an alarming rise in discrimination and attack on the rights of women and LGBTQIA+ people. At a time when inclusion and respect should be the foundation of our communities, too many are facing hostility simply for being who they are. Here in the Yukon, our government stands firmly against hate in all of its forms. We believe that everyone deserves to live with dignity, free of discrimination, and without fear. We have no interest in interfering in the personal lives of individuals; our role is to ensure that Yukoners have the freedom to be themselves and live safely and openly in their communities.

We will continue to support inclusivity, respect, and the right for every person to live their life without prejudice, because a Yukon that values and uplifts all of its people is stronger. It is healthier; it is more vibrant. It is a more vibrant place for everyone. That is why we are investing \$375,000 in operational funding to support the continuation of the programs and services at Queer Yukon. This funding will help to sustain vital community spaces in Whitehorse, Dawson City, and Watson Lake, spaces that provide connection, resources, and a sense of belonging for 2SLGBTQIA+ Yukoners and their allies.

By supporting organizations like Queer Yukon, we are strengthening our communities and ensuring that all Yukoners have access to safe, inclusive, and affirming spaces. This investment builds on our important work that we have done to advance equity, safety, and inclusion of all Yukoners.

From the launch of the Yukon's MMIWG2S+ strategy in 2020, a commitment to addressing and preventing violence against Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit+ people, to the creation of the sexual assault response team, ensuring that survivors have access to compassionate, trauma-informed

supports, to the development of Yukon's LGBTQ2S+ action plan, which outlines concrete steps toward a more inclusive and equitable Yukon — each of these initiatives reflects our unwavering dedication to building a Yukon where every person feels safe, valued, and supported.

Coming into the positions that I've held for the last several years, coming into government where we did not have well-thought-out plans — that is a big part of this government's legacy in terms of ensuring that we have the plans in place, we have the roadmaps, we have the thoughtful planning that is needed.

I continue to remain committed to all of the work that we've done with women and gender equity and the legislation that we've changed and all of these advancements. As the Minister of Finance highlighted, this budget is an investment in our children, our families, and our communities. It is a step forward in building a Yukon where every person, regardless of gender, background, and identity, can reach their full potential.

But make no mistake; progress is a choice. We can choose to invest in a stronger, more equitable Yukon, or we can turn away from that responsibility. I urge my colleagues in the House to choose progress, to vote for a budget that supports our students, our educators, our families, and our future.

This is not just about numbers on a page; it's about people, real opportunities, and real change. It is about ensuring that no student is left behind, that every Yukoner has the resources that they need to succeed, and that our territory remains a leader in education, inclusion, and equity.

I look forward to working with my colleagues in the House. I look forward to the further debates. Let's move forward together. Together, we can build a Yukon where each and every individual can live, grow, and thrive.

MLA Tredger: It's good to be back here in the Legislature. Thank you to everyone who has shared well wishes with me and my family. We really appreciate them all.

As you all know, I was virtual for most of the last Sitting while my wife and I waited for our twin babies to be born in Vancouver. I'm delighted to share that they're here; they're almost four months old. Everybody is happy and healthy and thriving.

Somehow, we managed to get two babies who are both the cutest baby ever. I supposed that might be my parental bias talking, but I can say with confidence that we feel very lucky.

A really special piece of the last few months for us has been the way our community has showed up for us, from bringing us meals, to walking our dog, to helping out with whatever we needed whenever we needed it.

I also want to give a huge thank you to my colleagues, the MLA for Takhini-Kopper King and the MLA for Vuntut Gwitchin, for helping to cover my workload while I was away on parental leave. I was able to step away knowing that everything was in excellent hands and I am excited to be back and diving into the work.

It has been a real pleasure to be back in my home in Whitehorse Centre and downtown Whitehorse chatting with my constituents on dog walks and with my neighbours as they

put out our garbage bins on the days that we forget. 8th Avenue is its usual thoroughfare of dog walkers and people enjoying the daylight, families strolling with their children, and people walking to and from work. I suspect that the rest of the city doesn't always realize what a thriving, bustling neighbourhood there is when you step off the main arteries of downtown. I am lucky and grateful to be able to live in such a vibrant place.

I always enjoy my conversations with constituents and I had the opportunity to have many while door-knocking last summer. On the doorstep in the long summer evening light, they told me about how much they love downtown and how much they appreciate their neighbours. They also talked about hard things. They talked about how hard it was to find housing and how much harder the proliferation of Airbnbs downtown has made that. They talked about the challenges of accessing health care and of living in pain while waiting long years for surgeries. They talked about their concern for the people our society is leaving behind.

These are challenges that I imagine I share with many people across Whitehorse and the Yukon, but they also, at many doors, talked about a downtown-specific issue, and that is a downtown elementary school. This issue, as you all know, kicked off when the Liberals announced that they were moving École Whitehorse Elementary out of downtown to Takhini. It's currently downtown's only elementary school. This was a shock announcement for most of downtown, for me, and for my constituents, and the response was immediate and strong. People talked about how important it was to have an elementary school downtown. They talked about their kids being able to walk to school. They talked about the independence encouraged when their kids can bike and walk themselves to school. They talked about the challenges of downtown and how those challenges are balanced by having a healthy, thriving elementary school and how the sounds of kids laughing and playing brings the whole neighbourhood into balance. They talked about how downtown being a place where people want to live has to work for everyone, which includes families and children, and that means an elementary school.

We talked a lot about safety downtown, about crime, and about the challenges we face downtown. I want to tie that back to an elementary school. It might not be an obvious connection, but we know from research that the things that prevent crime are vibrant, healthy neighbourhoods. You can't have a vibrant, healthy neighbourhood that doesn't have children in it. I know families — I am not going to share their names, but I can picture their faces right now — who already left downtown. They moved away from downtown because they wanted to live where their kids could walk to school and they are scared that this won't happen downtown anymore.

I am happy to see the recent announcement that conversations about a downtown school are moving forward. I want to acknowledge that this is due to an incredible amount of advocacy and work by my constituents. They have shown up here in the Legislature; they have written letters to the minister; they have signed and written petitions; they have door-knocked around at their neighbours — they have done so much work to

make sure that the downtown elementary school is not forgotten.

But I can't help but notice in the five-year capital plan that there is a budget for community engagement on a downtown school replacement. That budget is for \$50,000 to \$100,000. I believe it's in this year, but there is nothing in subsequent years for actually building a downtown school. Is this just another plan to make a plan that will then be ignored? I hope not.

A press release from the government, dated February 28 of this year, suggests that the government is meeting with commercial property owners about locations for a new school. That's promising, but I wonder: Is the government planning to use any of its own existing properties downtown? What properties are being considered? These are questions that my constituents are asking me all the time. So, I hope the opportunity for public engagement will include the opportunity to engage on potential new locations, but I can tell you this: My constituents and I will not stop fighting for a downtown elementary school until there are shovels in the ground and until the doors open.

I would also like to talk about how this budget relates to some of my portfolio areas. We had some spirited debate in the last Sitting about the Liberals' commitment to meeting greenhouse gas reduction targets that are required for a livable planet, as laid out by the UN. They put that commitment into question when they chose mining greenhouse gas reduction targets that miss the UN's calls to action by five years. This budget puts it further into question.

The Climate Change Secretariat — an instrumental piece of the government in reducing our territory's emissions — is seeing a 25-percent cut in its budget this year. Let me remind this House that the Liberals have not yet shown us a plan that will actually meet the targets, so why would they cut the budget of the very organization that is supposed to help us meet those targets, when they don't even have a plan to get there yet? On top of that, the green infrastructure budget has been absolutely gutted — over two-thirds from where it was last year.

The Department of Environment has seen cuts across the board to environmental protection. Water Resources, Conservation Officer Services, Parks, Fish and Wildlife, and the Animal Health Unit are all receiving less money this year than they did two years ago. In a time of inflation, it is hard to understand how that can add up.

We continue to see this government underfund the Mae Bachur animal shelter. They will again receive less funding in this budget than they did in the year 2021-22. With the rate of inflation, that is unacceptable for a non-profit that is providing a valuable and critical service to Yukoners.

We see those same cuts continue in another of my departments — housing. We see cuts to the capital program for the housing initiatives fund and the rapid housing initiative, which have been really instrumental in helping to build housing over the last few years.

I was meeting recently with someone who works in the housing sector and works to help people to find homes. I asked: Has it gotten any better? Is it any easier for people to find homes

that they can afford than it was four years ago? This person said, "Not really, from what I can see on the ground."

It is not the time to let up on our efforts to solve the housing crisis. Yukoners still are searching for affordable, safe places to live. There are still not enough affordable, safe places to live. So, why are we seeing cuts to the programs for building new housing?

On the topic of affordability, I want to talk about electricity prices. The Liberals have proposed spending \$3.85 million to give rebates to Yukoners on their electricity bills. I can't help but wonder: How much of that money will go directly to profits for ATCO — a private Alberta-based company? I have to wonder: Why would the Liberals rather hand taxpayer money over to ATCO rather than reign in their unjustified profits?

Before I wrap up, I really feel I need to speak to the difficult and worrying times that we're living in. We are watching things that many of us took as "givens" crumble around us. I know that there are many of us who are scared — and rightfully so. In this time of fear, my hope and my vision for the Yukon is that we can be a haven in the storm, that we can be a place where diversity and inclusion are valued and prioritized, a place where people can count on public services like health care and education, a place where the care that we feel for each other as friends and neighbours is reflected in the decisions of our government.

I hope that, through this Sitting, as we debate legislation and budgets and make decisions that will have enormous impacts on the lives of Yukoners, we can all hold hope in our minds and stand firm in our commitment to the Yukon and choose paths forward that build a welcoming, kind, compassionate territory.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Madam Deputy Speaker, I often wonder at the statements or the questions or the positions taken by the Official Opposition, because I truly can't fathom how they are serving Yukoners. But once again, their apparent refusal to take this opportunity to respond to this budget, to really talk to Yukoners about what they think and about what the budget means is beyond me.

They just don't do the work that is needed to take this opportunity. It is very disappointing, I think, for Yukoners. I believe that we have an obligation to take every opportunity that we have to tell Yukoners how we are working for them and how we are serving their interests.

I am going to turn to the Justice estimates that are outlined in the 2025-26 budget. They consist of capital investments of \$6.5 million and O&M expenditures of \$104.2 million. Specifically, I want to take the opportunity to note expenditures that are here in this main budget for this fiscal year. They include — not entirely — some of the notable items in the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*, investments in addressing safety in downtown Whitehorse, the Yukon Legal Services Society or legal aid, and RCMP increases. There is a notable audio-visual enhancement capital funding for a new morgue for the Coroner's Service, capital investments for a few upgrades to the Whitehorse Correctional Centre, and upgrades to the Old Crow detachment.

Before I present that information or a bit more about that in this year's budget, I want to take the time to recognize that so much of the work that we do is in partnership with Yukon First Nation governments, with the RCMP, in collaboration with independent agencies and with Yukon communities. We are committed to that work. This work across governments and organizations helps us to make Yukon a safer and a healthier place to live. I look forward to carrying on this work and to creating a justice system that is easier to navigate and more accessible to all people of the Yukon.

The Government of Yukon strategically invests in ways that enable us to build relationships with our partners and to foster safer communities, to support culturally relevant services, and to encourage innovation and good governance. That is evident here in this budget.

The Department of Justice will receive over \$6 million over the term of an agreement with the federal government for initiatives related to gender-based violence, the ending of that scourge in our society, and the attempts to provide support.

Over the term between 2023 and 2024, that \$6 million was invested in multiple initiatives, including prevention, breaking the cycle of violence in families, intervention, specialized care, court support, trauma healing for justice-involved Yukoners, and First Nation models of justice. I am proud of the work that my colleagues and I have done for this to happen.

Some might say — some in this Chamber might say — that is funding that they would not support. It is incredibly important for our communities and our society that we work to support the elimination of gender-based violence. To this end, I am also pleased to announce funding of \$1.858 million in the 2025-26 budget for work at the Department of Justice to address gender-based violence in the Yukon.

The Government of Yukon is committed to working across government and with our partners, as I have noted, to advance the downtown Whitehorse safety response action plan. This action plan is a road map aimed at enhancing the safety, health, and well-being of downtown Whitehorse. This 2025-26 fiscal year, the Department of Justice will continue to implement actions identified in the plan, including supporting officers in downtown Whitehorse and enhancing security measures for business owners and non-governmental organizations.

The Department of Justice is contributing \$100,000 to the implementation of SafeBiz, a crime prevention funding program administered by the Department of Economic Development and the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce. This program's intention is to support businesses and non-governmental organizations to improve their security measures and respond to crime downtown.

This 2025-26 fiscal year, the department has allocated \$3.474 million to the Yukon Legal Services Society. This allocation reflects our government's dedication to the continued stability and predictability of legal aid services as a cornerstone of our justice system. The Yukon Legal Services Society, also known as legal aid, has three Whitehorse-based clinics and a new justice support centre that operates in partnership with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation. Mr. Speaker, I

encourage any individual in need of their services to visit one of these locations for more information.

Mr. Speaker, public safety is, of course, a top priority for our government and for Yukoners. We recognize that the RCMP provides much of the front-line responses that support public safety. I want to take the opportunity to highlight the Government of Yukon's continued commitment to support the RCMP and investing in public safety across our territory.

Here in the Yukon, we have one of the highest police-per-capita ratios in Canada, with 325 officers per 100,000 people, ranking third in the country. We also understand that M Division here in the Yukon has one of the lowest vacancy rates in the country. The national Commissioner of the RCMP and I spoke recently, and he confirmed for me that there is nothing but requests coming their way to come to work here in the territory as an RCMP officer. This is really great news, because of the important role that the RCMP plays in protecting the safety and well-being of Yukoners.

In budget 2025-26 and subject to legislative approval, of course, we are increasing funding to the RCMP by \$5.2 million, bringing the total to \$47 million this fiscal year. This is part of a broader trend where our government has increased support for the RCMP in our verbal commitment, in our public commitment, and frankly in our actions. Over the past several years, we have steadily increased the amount of money invested in the RCMP. This year's increase is more than three times the increase from 2024-25.

A key focus of this year's investment is staffing. We are creating nine new positions across the Yukon, including eight RCMP officers and one public service worker. The Whitehorse detachment has received two additional officers as part of the downtown Whitehorse safety response action plan. These positions have been successfully hired and are now being made permanent. When combined with the two additional officers funded this spring, this represents a net increase of four RCMP officers in Whitehorse since last summer.

Additionally, we are continuing to support successful initiatives like the Car 867 program, which integrates police officers with mental health professionals and has been wildly successful in reducing the calls to RCMP and, more importantly, in providing real services to individuals when they are in crisis. Due to its success, we are making two of these positions permanent within the Whitehorse detachment. This initiative is vital in addressing mental health and substance use challenges in the downtown core.

It is also crucial that the RCMP has the right tools to do their job. The budget 2025-26 includes \$1.39 million for equipment such as body-worn cameras, body armour, and other resources to ensure the safety of both officers and the public. We are investing \$3.15 million to support repairs and upgrades to RCMP facilities across the territory. This ensures that RCMP officers have modern facilities to serve the public effectively. These investments reflect our ongoing commitment to modern policing that meets the diverse needs of Yukoners. We will continue to provide the support and the resources necessary to keep our communities safe.

Since 2018, the total funding for the RCMP has increased by over \$15 million. This year's increase, as I've noted, is more than three times the increase that we were able to make in 2024-25. We hear much criticism from the members opposite about the RCMP not being properly resourced. We work with them on a weekly basis to determine their needs, to work carefully with them in crafting budgets and allocations going forward, and we are committed to the work that the RCMP does here in the territory and to supporting them, as I've said, publicly through our work and through our actions.

In total, there are 156 regular members who serve the Yukon through the *Territorial Police Service Agreement* and the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program.

We are also investing in the First Nation communities through the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program. New RCMP positions have been added in communities such as Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, Kluane First Nation, and the Ross River Dene Council to ensure that policing is culturally appropriate and accessible to all Yukoners. Last Friday and the week before that, I met with Chief Robert Dickson of the Kluane First Nation. My colleagues and I, last week at the Yukon Forum, had the opportunity to hear directly from him about the significance of having two new officers assigned to Burwash — a long-awaited and important development for the community.

In addition to staffing, we are investing \$1.39 million for essential equipment like body cameras and body armour, which protect police and members of the public. These investments ensure that the RCMP has the tools and the modern facilities that they need to serve effectively.

The Government of Yukon remains fully committed to supporting the RCMP with the resources that they need to protect and serve our communities. I just want to note that, year after year, through our increases in investments in policing, we have continued to ensure that the RCMP has the staff, the equipment, and the infrastructure that they need. I was so pleased to be able, earlier, to do a tribute to the incredible impact of women in the RCMP and to have the new chief superintendent here with us.

I just want to note a couple of things from the capital budget for the Department of Justice, because we are seeing the first investment beyond planning here in the five-year capital plan. The capital budget for Justice for this year includes a \$1-million increase for the construction of a new morgue and coroner's facility. The target completion date for the project is the winter of 2027, with a total target cost of \$14.8 million. This is one of the benefits of the five-year capital plan, which we have been proud, as a government, to present because individuals can clearly see how this investment will continue over a period of time and feel secure in the work that will be done. This capital investment will provide a much-needed — I can't really stress enough — safe work space for the Yukon chief coroner and her staff and provide a respectful and culturally appropriate space to serve Yukon families in one of the worst times of grief in their lives.

The other large capital expenditure is for the RCMP. In the 2025-26 fiscal year, \$3,149,000 is allocated to support

renovations. This year's target will be Old Crow's detachment building for some renovations, with concurrent exploratory work being done on potential renovations to the Haines Junction detachment.

When we arrived here in late 2016 and then had these discussions in 2017, the plan at that time was to invest in a new detachment or, I would even say, a renovated detachment — any improvement every five years. That agreement was signed in 2012. When we got here in 2017, nothing had been done on any of the detachments to meet this commitment. We then renegotiated with the RCMP to invest this amount every year to make sure that those projects would go ahead. I'm proud of the work that has been done and the detachments that have been supported to date. This year, there will be renovations to Old Crow and work on Haines Junction.

It is also projected that a portion of this funding will be shared across Yukon RCMP infrastructure for maintenance purposes. The Department of Justice will continue to work with the RCMP to make sure that policing facilities meet the needs of the RCMP and the communities that they serve, because that is what this is really all about.

I would like to turn to the Department of Health and Social Services. First, I am going to take the opportunity to say that our dedicated staff go above and beyond to support the health and well-being of Yukoners. That means front-line people. We know that is the case, but I have a unique opportunity to see the dedication, the focus, and the commitment with which the staff at the Department of Health and Social Services work every day for the benefit of Yukoners. There is no question about whom they serve. There is no question in their work about who is the ultimate beneficiary of that caring.

We owe a debt of gratitude to all our front-line health and social care providers and service-oriented staff, but I really want to focus as well on making sure that all Yukoners understand that, every day, there is no lack of focus, there is no lack of caring, and there is no lack of dedication by the staff at Yukon Health and Social Services for Yukoners.

From community nursing and vaccination teams to home care, mental wellness and substance use services, to our nurses, our care providers, our support services staff, our custodial teams, and the administrative staff — just to name a few — I have the opportunity today to say thank you.

As we rise to meet the challenges and the opportunities of this very unusual time, I would also like to express thanks to all of our health and social care system partners for all that they do to support Yukoners.

In 2025-26, the operation and maintenance budget for the Department of Health and Social Services is \$682.9 million. It's an extraordinary figure. This represents a 14.9-percent increase over the 2024-25 main estimates. This budget reflects our commitment to responsible management while maintaining and expanding the core services that Yukoners deserve and expect.

Some of this work includes addressing health human resource challenges, improving access to health care services, investing in health infrastructure, and enhancing social services.

In 2025-26, there are 1,664 FTEs, or individual positions, in the department. This represents an overall increase of 47.6 positions compared to the 1,616.4 positions that we had in 2024-25.

Now, I mention this because we've had much discussion already — today is only day 2 — about cutting people — much discussion, much questioning back and forth, to be frank, from the Official Opposition about how we should cut positions, we should not spend on certain positions. At the same time as they say that, they talk to us about making sure that we continue to provide services for Yukoners. I hope that they understand that services are provided by people. They are provided by individuals who work hard on behalf of their position, or on behalf of their departments or on behalf of their dedication and provide services to Yukoners.

This year's staffing increases reflect enhanced support for Yukoners in multiple areas, and this reflects our commitment to increasing the quality of care and the success of our health human resources strategy — just a few examples, Mr. Speaker, of whom the Official Opposition says: Maybe we don't need these people. I'll let Yukoners decide. We have decided that we do need these people.

There is increased staffing for 24-hour ground and air ambulances. We have increased the capacity and the quality of care at our long-term care homes and in our home care program. We have increased the capacity to care for children and youth who are in care at group homes, and we have increased staffing for the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer and the First Nation navigation project — all, in my estimation, worthy causes, worthy services, appropriate care for Yukoners.

The 2025-26 Health and Social Services budget is about investing in the future. We are spending on our long-term capacity to ensure that we can deliver high-quality health care to Yukoners for years to come. This means that we are investing in both our physical and our human resources. In the past few years, we have opened and staffed new clinics in Whitehorse and in Old Crow. We have expanded the Whitehorse emergency department and grown our long-term care capacity. This year, we are including funding to support planning for an expansion of the Whitehorse General Hospital and advancing plans to expand our capacity for continuing care.

I note that my colleague earlier spoke about the short-sightedness of our friends of the Yukon Party in relation to the Whitehorse General Hospital — that with the stroke of a pen, I think on the back of a napkin, it was literally cut in half with respect to what it could serve in the future. Our vision is long term, Mr. Speaker. I think the same activity occurred with respect to long-term care and how initially the plans were for some 300 or 300-plus beds and ultimately was reduced.

I should note that, with respect to the long-term care facility, the building was put up, but there was absolutely no O&M budgeting done by the former government. They didn't have any money in any budget for how the building would be run, for who would be paid, for how they would feed patients or residents. Similarly, we inherited the 405 Alexander building where it is now. Again, just the building. In the budgets, nothing existed for the operation and maintenance, for how you

pay people who are going to work there, for how you pay for programming that is going to happen there — short-sighted bad planning, and we are doing the opposite.

We are also investing in the people who deliver our health care. We all know that the Yukon is the best place in the world to live and work, and we are hiring and training new physicians, nurses, social workers, medical office assistants, nursing home attendants, and more. We are working to educate many of those individuals right here at home. I appreciate all the health care workers who are choosing to make Yukon their new home. By living and working here, you are also working with us to keep Yukoners healthy and well.

This year's increase of \$88.7 million in operation and maintenance funding enables the department to develop and deliver on key initiatives that meet the needs of Yukoners. I am really pleased to speak of some of those.

Insured Health Services has been provided an increase of \$47.1 million to continue to respond to the growth in the delivery of our legislated programming. I often shake my head when I am sitting here and hear some of the questions that come with absolutely no recognition whatsoever that we have lived through a world pandemic, that our population has increased exponentially over the last 10 years, and that we continue to serve more and more Yukoners. It is absolutely critical that Yukoners understand the context within which we are continuing to deliver these services. Our population is growing, our population is aging, there are more complex medical situations, and we continue to provide service. The increase of \$47.1 million at Insured Health Services allows us to do that.

I am also pleased to share that there is an increase of \$1.5 million to fund our ongoing and expanding vaccine program. This includes new costs for COVID vaccines, RSV immunizations, and other new and expanded preventive measures to keep Yukoners healthy. I urge Yukoners to note the outbreaks in this country and in the United States of measles and the impact that this can have on youngsters in particular but on all of us. It is completely preventable with a vaccine that is available here in the territory.

The Government of Yukon is committed to ending and preventing homelessness through community collaboration initiatives that help all Yukoners access safe, affordable, and appropriate housing. We are working collaboratively with other levels of government, partners, and stakeholders from across the sector to address these challenges in the short, medium, and long term. It's not good enough to just have a short-term solution or a long-term solution. We will deal with that later? No, we must focus on short-, medium-, and long-term solutions to all of these complex problems. There are many, many solutions. As I think I heard the Grand Chief say in a quote earlier today, "If there was a silver bullet, we would use it." There just isn't. These complex issues all require many solutions and many partners working together in collaboration.

This year, we have allocated \$1.5 million to operate 17 new supportive housing units at 408 Alexander Street. This initiative is a partnership with the Yukon Housing Corporation and the Safe at Home Society. I am very pleased to share that

there has been an allocation of \$1.3 million to operate a new supportive housing development in Watson Lake.

The 2025-26 main estimates include \$650,000 to support women's transition homes in the Yukon. This includes \$250,000 for the Yukon Women's Transition Home Society in Whitehorse, \$250,000 for the Help and Hope for Families in Watson Lake, and \$150,000 for the Dawson Shelter Society in Dawson City. All communities matter. The funding provided is recoverable under the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* funding — again, a focus for our government.

We provide operation and maintenance funding to support shelters in Whitehorse, including 405 Alexander, Kaushee's Place, and the emergency youth shelter in Whitehorse. We provide funding to support shelters in the Yukon communities, including, as I've noted, Help and Hope for Families in Watson Lake, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Jëjë Zho in Dawson City, and the Dawson Women's Shelter. We're also providing \$750,000 in new funding for the Whistle Bend women's Family Preservation Wellness Centre operated by the Council of Yukon First Nations.

I want to take a few moments to talk about the Hospital Corporation. Since 2018-19, the Yukon Hospital Services O&M budget has increased by roughly 98 percent. We're pleased to continue building our partnership with the hospital and working with them to meet core funding needs, growing infrastructure needs, and to introduce new programs and services. This fiscal year, we've provided an additional \$24.5 million for the Yukon Hospital Corporation services and operation and maintenance budget — a 22-percent increase over last year.

I know there were some figures mentioned by the member of the Yukon Party who spoke earlier. I don't know that they matched those figures, but I hope that we will have an opportunity, no doubt, to discuss this in the future.

I'm really pleased to announce that we're providing \$5.4 million in capital funding to the Yukon Hospital Corporation this year, which is an increase over last year. We're excited to know that the mental wellness unit will be completed in this year, and I look forward to opening that much-needed facility. This capital budget includes \$1.2 million to plan for the development of expanded infrastructure at the Whitehorse General Hospital. This represents the next phase of the strategic master plan following completion of the new emergency department, which occurred in 2018, and the mental wellness unit, which I've noted will happen this year.

We work with the Yukon Hospital Corporation on an ongoing basis to identify present and future funding needs and to ensure that we are providing the services that Yukoners need so they can access safe and excellent hospital care.

I have heard from so many Yukoners this year and certainly more recently as we approach the spring and this budget of how impressed they are with the services they receive at the Yukon hospital. My colleague the Minister of Community Services mentioned his experience. I have had many people say to me that they are so impressed with the opportunities that we have here, with the service that we have here, and, most importantly, with the care.

The Government of Yukon provides further indirect support to the Hospital Corporation, so in addition to the funding I have noted, the Government of Yukon pays for physician fees, for contracts with individual physicians who work at the hospital, for fee-for-service payments. We also provide support for health human resources recruitment and surge support and a partnership throughout the health care system. We recognize that the Yukon Hospital Corporation has been facing pressures related to staffing constraints and increased growth and demand for care such as medical imaging and higher demands for beds and surgical services. We will continue to work with the Hospital Corporation to identify funding needs and to ensure that we are providing the services and the supports that Yukoners need to access safe and excellent hospital care.

I want to reiterate my gratitude to all members of the department and to all of our health and social care system and to our Justice department for their ongoing commitment to serving Yukoners. While we continue to experience challenges, we are also meeting these challenges head-on and have a budget that enables us to not only expand on existing services but to set the groundwork for innovative, person-centred care.

Mr. Speaker, whether it is improving access to care, making life more affordable, or supporting the staff who make services possible, we are putting people first.

This is a special place. We all know it. As many of my colleagues have said, it is not broken. As said so eloquently by them, my colleagues, ministers of this government, it is exactly the opposite.

Mr. Speaker, we are living in extraordinary times. It seems trite to say that, because we are facing threats like never before. We must protect our political and our societal institutions. We must protect our community values. We must protect and support women. We must protect and support members of the LGBTQ2S+ community and we must protect and support diversity. We must continue to work for equity for all humans. We must protect our education systems, our right to free education, and our support for higher education. These are foundational pieces of our world. They are foundational pieces of our society and are foundational pieces that must be protected. We must protect our media. We must protect free speech.

If there are people among us who don't think that any of these foundational protections of our society, our democracy, and our very being are under threat, then they need to think again, because they are. It's not my personality to be alarmist. It's not my personality, but we must be real. We must really understand that every action that we take now matters — every small action. I fear for the rule of law. It is a fundamental legal and political principle of Canadian and, until recently, American democracy. The rule of law states that all people and institutions are subject to the same laws. It applies to everyone. It includes governments, officials, judges, and corporations. The rule of law requires that laws be applied fairly and equally and it requires that people know what the law is. It means that no one is above the law and, most importantly, the rule of law allows citizens to challenge the social order if they believe that

there is inequity. The rule of law protects citizens from being unable to stand up against powerful interests without fear of attack, and we are seeing that this is being eroded below the 49th parallel. The rule of law allows citizens to obtain legal advice from a lawyer who is independent of the state.

Our institutions are being deliberately and intentionally dismantled south of the 49th parallel, and we must take every opportunity to guard against any leadership or decisions that might lead us down the same path. We need to protect our sovereignty, our freedom, and our democracy and the Canadian way of life.

Thank you for the chance to speak about the important work that we are doing here at home and our current important challenges in the world.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, every year when I get up to talk about the budget, I try to think about someone — a Yukoner, often within my riding — so that I can try to focus to try to think about why we are here to represent people. This year, Marsh Lake had the New Year's baby in the Yukon, so the person I'm going to think about is young Oscar. And I think that is a good focus, because I think that this budget and what we're here talking about today is about our future.

Just this past weekend, I was struck twice by events. One was when one of our colleagues here — the Leader of the Third Party — had a brutally inappropriate attack — vandalism and threats level. It's just so disheartening to see. It just doesn't feel like the Yukon way, in my mind. I think that all of us, regardless of political stripe, should stand up and denounce that. It's just wrong.

At the same time, I got my own little pickup truck stuck in my own driveway. There was a skiff of snow and the truck started sliding sideways. I know I have winter tires. Then I tried to correct and get it back on, and I was wedged up against the bank. So, I started calling around the neighbours to get a hand. I was hopeful about getting it done before my wife got back from her weekend at the hot springs in my colleague's riding. A neighbour said yes, sure, he'd be over. He just needed to finish doing some work collecting some firewood and then he would be over in about an hour. But then another neighbour saw my truck and came by and stopped and asked if he could pull me out. It's just so Yukon.

As I rise to speak about this budget, the first thing that comes to my mind is how fiercely proud I am to be Canadian and a Yukoner. Right now, what I'm hearing from Yukoners and Canadians is that they're worried. They feel threatened, they feel disrespected, and frankly they feel pissed off. I'm not sure if that's parliamentary language, but that's what they feel. For all of my life, we have been amazingly good friends with our American neighbour.

I put this pin on today to remember that and to mark that — to say that we care about our neighbours and we respect them. I have lived in seven of the Canadian provinces and I have worked in every province and territory. By the way, I have probably worked in closer to a dozen states than a half dozen, so I have worked in the US often and certainly travelled there lots. After all that time and living in all these parts of Canada

— and I loved everywhere that I lived — I picked the Yukon. Very clearly, I picked this place because I think, as others have said, that this is an amazing place to live. I absolutely love it. I am just so proud of what we try to do as a territory. I think that this is where I want to start today.

When I talk about the issues that we have and the threats that we feel right now as Canadians, our disagreement is not with Americans and the folks who live in the communities alongside our borders, but it is definitely with the American choice to bring in tariffs — or the threat of tariffs — and to talk about us in a disrespectful way. As Canadians, I know that we are super polite about how we disagree. I agree with the Premier who said, I think, on the first day of the Assembly to please not boo other national anthems; I think that's wrong. But putting tariffs on your closest ally and neighbour will hurt our country and also hurt the US. Prices will rise, jobs will be lost, and investments will suffer. I somehow feel that uncertainty may be part of the point.

Mr. Speaker, bullying and being disrespectful, attacks on elected officials, telling us that we have no power or that we are broken — all of that just strengthens us. It strengthens us as Canadians and it strengthens us as Yukoners. When the US President stood and said that Canada was not doing its part with respect to international security, I decided to look back at our track record. On August 4, 1914, England declared war at the onset of World War I. Canada automatically joined that war on the same day. Three years later on April 6, 1917, right around the same time as the Battle of Vimy and after the Battle of Somme and Battle of Ypres, is when the USA joined World War I.

On September 3 —

Speaker: Order, please.

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

Debate on second reading of Bill No. 217 accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

The following documents were filed March 10, 2025:

35-1-297

Executive Action Required in Response Unreasonable Delays in Processing Regulatory Renewals for Placer Mining, letter re (dated February 28, 2025) from the Board of the Klondike Placer Miners' Association to Hon. Ranj Pillai, Premier, and Hon. John Streicker, Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Dixon)

35-1-298

Support for the Healthy Families Healthy Babies program in Dawson City, letter re (dated March 4, 2025) from Stephen Johnson, Mayor of Dawson City, to Brendan Hanley, Member of Parliament, Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee, Minister of Health and Social Services, Currie Dixon, Leader of the Official Opposition, and Hon. Mark Holland, Government of Canada Minister of Health (Dixon)

35-1-299

Catholic School Board and SOGI policy, letter re (dated February 12, 2025) from Kate White, Leader of the Third Party to Hon. Jeanie McLean, Minister of Education (White)

35-1-300

Catholic Schools and SOGI policy, letter re (dated March 6, 2025) from Hon. Jeanie McLean, Minister of Education to Kate White, Leader of the Third Party (White)