



Yukon Legislative Assembly

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HANSARD

Wednesday, March 12, 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

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**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, March 12, 2025 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of changes made to the Order Paper. The following motion has been removed from the Order Paper at the request of the member: Motion No. 771, standing in the name of the Minister of Health and Social Services.

In addition, two motions for which notice was given yesterday were not placed on today's Notice Paper, as they are not in order. They are: Motion No. 1183 from the Minister of Community Services and Motion No. 1184 from the Minister of Highways and Public Works.

Speaker's statement re artwork in the Chamber

Speaker: Finally, I am pleased to introduce the eight pieces of artwork displayed in the House for this Sitting. Each work comes from the Yukon permanent art collection, the territory's record of visual art. Beginning from the back south side of the Assembly and moving counter-clockwise, the works are: *Directions* by Brian Walker; *Frog/Beaver Mask* by Keith Wolfe Smarch; *Beaver Spear* by Ed Smarch; *So much for that* by Meg Walker; *In Honour of Old Horses* by Sheila Alexandrovich; *Ches Kea* by Fred Edzerza; and *Bracelet* and *Untitled* bracelet by Mark Preston.

We are proud to showcase these important works and encourage Yukoners to visit the Yukon Legislative Assembly website to learn more about the artists and their work.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Introduction of Visitors.
Visitors introduced

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of the Yukon Rendezvous Festival

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the Yukon Rendezvous Festival.

Last year, Rendezvous celebrated their 60th anniversary, so that means this year they are officially north of 60. Since 1964, this winter event has been bringing people together and showcasing the very best of the Yukon's unique and colourful charms.

This year's theme, "Rootin' Tootin' Rendezvous", certainly kept us grinning bigger than a coyote in a chicken coop.

Yessiree, your Honourable Highfalutin Straight-shootin' Speakerness, whatever you might be hankering for, this humdinger of a winter festival always delivers, and the two-naught-25 edition was no exception. Whether it was yeehawing our frostbitten toes off at one of the many hoedowns and hootenannies, saddling up for some feats of skill and strength like chainsaw chucking or flour packing, eyeballing the snow sculptures that were cooler than a cowpoke's stare at high noon, or moseying over to the performance stage for the pret-near two days of spur-jangling good times with them there cancan dancers, sassy Snowshoe Shufflers, music, and whatnot, Rendezvous always has something for everyone.

It gives Whitehorsians and Yukonites a chance to grab their best buckaroos and their sense of fun to boot, because this here shindig is all about bringing folks together and saying "au revoir" to them there winter blues.

On behalf of the Yukon government, our hats off to the organizers, sponsors, and volunteers. Congrats to the fetching Miss Porter Creek Super A, Danielle Lang, and her posse o' princesses, Barbie Sam and all those incorrigible cup contestants and, of course, this year's Mr. and Mrs. Rendezvous, spring chickens Ron and Amelia Swizardaryk.

Y'all put the grit in the gumption that keeps this festival kickin' year after year. And the community spirit you have rustled up helps keep this crazy ole barn dance as jumpin' and dee-lightful as ever.

Very much obliged for all you do. I reckon y'all have earned your braggin' rights.

Your Honourness, I ask my fellow wranglers and ne'er-dowells of this here Assembly to join me in a hearty hat tip to the jim-dandiest bunch of organizers, volunteers, performers, yahoos, and enthusiasts.

Merci, mahsi' cho, much obliged for making this year's event the rootin'est tootin'est Rendezvousin'est time imaginable.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the winter celebration, Yukon Rendezvous.

Since 1945 when we were a much smaller population, the need to cure the winter blues was to host a winter carnival. The carnival stalled for a few years and then was reinvigorated in 1964 as the Yukon Sourdough Rendezvous.

A walk back from 1945 to 2025 would take too long, so I will focus on a few memories and a bit of history. The winter event hosted dogsled races on the Yukon River, snowshoe races, snow sculptures, flour packing, Swede saw competitions, dances, fashion shows, and so much more. Many communities sponsored a local girl for the queen competition: Haines Junction, Mayo, Keno Hill, Faro, Watson Lake, Dawson City, and, of course, service clubs such as the Elks and the Kiwanis.

As a small child, I would be glued to the radio to hear who the winner was, and the year that Alice Martin won, Dawson

was so excited. To me, she was the most beautiful person I had ever seen.

Through the years, Lenora Hakonson, Judy Crayford, Kelly — my now sister-in-law — and I followed, representing Dawson City. The dog races were all local teams: Stephen Frost, Alex Van Bibber, Wilfred Charlie, and Stanley Njootli come to mind. Everyone had a favourite.

Dances at the Elks hall, the Takhini Curling Club, the air force rec centre, the Legion — and everybody wore costumes. Businesses decked out, window dressing, painted characters, bars filled to the rafters with dancing glee, and again, more characters.

As most of us queen candidates were underage, the bar or dance would stop liquor sales, and we would be allowed to come in and sell tickets and mingle with the crowds as well as show off our costumes. It was a different time.

The talent show at the F.H. Collins school featured us as candidates as well as local talent. I remember the year when I was involved, they brought Alanis Obomsawin in to participate, and I got to meet her years later at a Governor General event. We chatted and we chuckled about that experience and how young we were. Fast-forward to changing, subtracting and adding to the programs — with change, some don't care for it, others don't mind, and others will be involved to the hilt.

This event is put on by volunteers, board, and staff who dedicate so much of their time, energy, and talents to make it as fun and varied as possible — well done. A special shout-out to the amazing Snowshoe Shufflers, the lovely cancan girls, and the talented cancan junior line that works so hard and brings such joy wherever they appear. Congratulations to our current Rendezvous Queen, Danielle Lang, her court, and, of course, to Mr. and Mrs. Yukon, Ron and Amelia, and the YOOPs who sponsor her.

Thank you all for another successful year.

Applause

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to add our voices in celebration of another wildly successful Rendezvous Festival. All of Rendezvous week, as I encountered people around Whitehorse, they were buzzing about the events that they had been to: the drag show, the cancan dancers, the Quest for the Crown, and many, many more.

This was a particularly special Rendezvous for me because I had the joy of taking my babies to the festival for the first time. We bundled up and went to my personal favourite Rendezvous event: the snow sculptures. Shipyards Park was absolutely packed with activities galore and people of all ages with smiles on their faces. My friend's three-year-old was a little bit upset to learn that he couldn't join in the axe-throwing, but he was quickly distracted crawling through the snow-castle playhouses built especially for the children. The snow sculptures were, as always, magnificent. The creativity and skill in each sculpture is absolutely breathtaking.

Congratulations to the incredible team of staff and volunteers for pulling off this festival yet again. An event of that scale and excellence takes a huge amount of time and effort

to make it happen, and it is much appreciated. Thank you to you all and we wish you a belated happy Rendezvous.

Applause

In recognition of National Engineering Month

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to engineers as we celebrate National Engineering Month this March. The theme of this year's National Engineering Month, "Engineers Open Doors", reflects the impact that engineers have on opening up new possibilities. Engineers in the Yukon solve problems every day. From roads to bridges to digital infrastructure, their work keeps our territory connected, safe, and thriving.

Each field of engineering addresses the unique challenges that come with living and working in the north. A great example of this is the runway improvement project at Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport. This project demonstrates the unique engineering challenges that we face in the Yukon and brings together multiple disciplines in order to ensure its success.

Civil engineers handle design work, on-site field management, and inspections. Geotechnical engineers ensure that the new runway is built on a stable foundation, guaranteeing the durability and stability of the pavement. Materials engineers test the asphalt and minimize cracking caused by the Yukon's freeze-thaw cycles. Geomatics engineers provide essential surveying and mapping data in order to ensure that the project stays on track. Environmental engineers oversee proper sediment control, monitoring, and the careful design of drainage systems in order to protect the environment. The list can go on.

But engineering is more than just visible infrastructure; it is about building long-term solutions. Mechanical engineers in our Property Management division are improving building envelopes across the territory, working on everything from schools to grader stations. Software engineers build the digital infrastructure that helps Yukoners access services from anywhere with an Internet connection. Platforms like MyYukon make interacting with government services easier and engineers play a key role in building and securing this digital infrastructure. Of course, these services rely on a strong, reliable network.

Mr. Speaker, that's where engineers stepped in again, designing and building the Dempster fibre line, which was completed this year. This fibre line ensures that communities in the north of the territory have access to reliable and fast Internet, which is crucial for education, business, and emergency services.

Engineers ensure that what is built today will continue to serve the needs of Yukoners for decades. From highways, airports, and energy-efficient buildings to secure digital networks, engineering makes life better for all of us.

This is the essence of engineering and that is why I am proud to highlight National Engineering Month.

Mr. Speaker, before I conclude, I would like to recognize that, for over 75 years, Engineers Yukon has safeguarded lives and landscapes by holding every engineer and organization,

regardless of size or purpose, to the highest national standards. Through rigorous licensing, unwavering accountability, and innovative partnerships, they have ensured that Yukon's engineering excellence remains as resilient as its terrain.

Thank you so much for your contributions.

Applause

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize National Engineering Month.

The Yukon is home to a number of historical engineering marvels. We have paid tribute to the construction of the Alaska Highway here in the House during the recent 75th anniversary, but it is worth mentioning the incredible feat that was undertaken to construct the land route to Alaska. It was a cooperative effort and an incredible achievement.

Another remarkable project of the past was the construction of the White Pass & Yukon Route, which was designated as an international historic civil engineering landmark in 1994, an honour shared by only 36 world civil engineering marvels. It is recognized for the many hazardous obstacles throughout construction as well as the bravery of builders in adverse conditions. To live in a place that is home to a project among the ranks of the Eiffel Tower and the Panama Canal is quite amazing. The designation reflects the outstanding engineering work that took place creating this route into the Yukon interior.

On a different scale of engineering but one wholly entertaining to old-time Yukoners was the move of the *SS Klondike*. In 1958, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada determined that steamship transportation was of national significance and that the surviving steamers in Whitehorse should be preserved. The *SS Klondike*, which we all know and love, was moved from its location in the shipyard down 1st Avenue, up Hanson Street, and further along 2nd Avenue to a site along the Yukon River — another feat of engineering brilliance using steel I-beams pulled by tractors and lubricated by eight tonnes of Palmolive Princess Snowflake soap. This move was completed in five weeks.

It ended with the presentation of a certificate of merit from the citizens of Whitehorse, a gold miniature of the *SS Klondike*, and a blow of the whistle for foreman Chuck Morgan and his crew. The ship was later moved to where it sits today.

Now, during this National Engineering Month, I would like to thank all of those who have contributed their skills, work, and knowledge on projects throughout the history of our territory and to all those who are involved in the field today, especially Jamie Davignon and Mike Johnson.

Applause

Ms. White: Today, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate engineers. National Engineering Month is an annual campaign by Engineers Canada to spark interest in the next generation of engineering professionals, so I would like to speak directly to that next generation, because I would like to share the story of two young people I know.

As young children, these two learned about Leonardo da Vinci's famously failed attempt to build a glider. Long story short, da Vinci designed a bat-like contraption that was never flown — at least not successfully. Well, these two bold and creative adventurers were pretty confident that they could do better if they just launched from a high enough spot. But don't worry, this story turns out in the end.

They did test their contraption from the first-storey gable of the house. Luckily, they had a contingency trampoline underneath and a volunteer friend to break their fall. Egos were seriously bruised, but no bones were broken. The home-built glider idea was thankfully abandoned, but their love of engineering was born. Today, both of them continue that special mix of outrageous creativity while daring and rigorous science as professional engineers.

I think if you sit down and chat with the parents of an engineer, you will find that there is some similar story of adventure, construction, and dreaming big that characterized their youth. That's what we need engineers for — they are the inventors, the problem-solvers, and the critical thinkers who look for ways to solve the complex challenges that stump the rest of us.

So, if you're one of those people who are constantly tinkering, dreaming, and inventing, this month is for you. I hope you find your way to some of the events going on to see what it looks like to be a mechanical, electrical, computer, civil, or software engineer, and I hope you go on tinkering and dreaming big.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 46: *Residential Tenancies Act* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, move that Bill No. 46, entitled *Residential Tenancies Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Community Services that Bill No. 46, entitled *Residential Tenancies Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 46 agreed to

Speaker: Are there any further bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House supports the Government of Yukon's five-year extension to the *Canada-Yukon Early Learning and Child Care Agreement* which will provide approximately

\$74 million in funding to ensure that the early learning and childcare system in the territory is sustainable through to March 31, 2031.

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

THAT this House supports the resolution of Canadian provinces and territories' efforts to recover money for our health care system from tobacco companies whereby the Government of Yukon will receive \$101 million, with approximately \$24 million in the 2025-26 fiscal year.

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

THAT this House recognizes the significant loss of the Tagish Community Centre and commits to working with the community to plan for and rebuild a new facility.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with the residents of Tagish to restore their community centre and library.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to implement universal, upfront coverage for all abortion care, including procedures, medications, and transportation costs.

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

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Fire Marshal's Office funding

Mr. Cathers: Yesterday, I asked the Minister of Community Services questions about lack of funding for our volunteer firefighters and the serious problem of damaged and expired protective gear. According to the Association of Yukon Fire Chiefs, approximately 80 percent of volunteer firefighters wear expired protective gear. If the minister had met with fire chiefs when they first asked for a meeting instead of repeatedly brushing them off, this problem could have been fixed long ago.

Fire chiefs say that government is seeking an exemption to the OH&S regulations to allow firefighters to respond in expired gear. Yesterday, the minister said — quote: "The reality is that we are not seeking an exception until the new gear arrives."

Will the minister please clarify: Is the government seeking an OH&S exemption to allow firefighters to respond in expired gear? If not, what impact does that have on the number of firefighters who are able to respond to calls?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking the five departments that responded to Tagish this morning. I know that they responded early in the morning — I understand, around 4:00 o'clock in the morning — and I really do thank them for their service in working to protect Yukoners.

I also am very grateful for the opportunity to address this issue again to correct some of the misinformation that came out from the member opposite yesterday. The member opposite stated that I had met with fire chiefs once. That's not entirely true. As a matter of fact, I have met with fire chiefs and the fire departments twice this year already — the second time being on Saturday — and my department is actually meeting with them regularly. We have actually set up a committee to deal with their concerns in a formal and methodical process, as well as the fire marshal, who is also working very closely with the fire chiefs to address the issues that were brought up.

On Saturday, we had a really great conversation. I heard their concerns. They heard some of my thoughts on the matter. It was amicable; it was a decent conversation. A 10-minute presentation turned into a two-hour conversation that day. We learned a lot about each other, and I think we have a good way to go forward and I am happy to address this further in the moments to come.

Mr. Cathers: Despite the minister's attempt at spin, I remind him that I quoted fire chiefs.

These problems didn't develop overnight. Yesterday, the Minister of Community Services appeared to blame fire chiefs, saying: "I asked them how much funding they needed; they couldn't tell me exactly what they needed." But as the minister knows, his department is responsible for purchasing all fire equipment for the FMO, and it is the government who knows current costs from suppliers, not volunteer fire chiefs.

The FMO has already done the work. Over the last few years, multiple Management Board submissions have been prepared and submitted outlining exactly what is needed and the associated costs, but this Liberal government has rejected those requests behind closed doors, and now the minister has the audacity to claim that no one has provided the numbers.

Will the minister now apologize to fire chiefs and firefighters and explain why his government rejected multiple FMO funding requests?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, again, we had a good conversation on Saturday. We are going to continue to meet. We have been meeting regularly. As a matter of fact, last May, the Premier and the Deputy Minister of Community Services met with fire chiefs up in Dawson City.

We had a list — a written request from fire chiefs at that time — and as of October, we met every single one of the requests that came through that process in the last budget, including roughly \$300,000 for an on-call increase to volunteer firefighters.

Shortly thereafter, we learned of more requests that they had, and so we are now working through with the fire marshal to address those concerns. The department has been meeting with the fire chiefs and the fire association regularly, both at the ADM and deputy levels and with the fire marshal. I have already had two meetings with the association this year, and the department continues to meet with them on many matters. We have the PPE that they requested in October and brought to our attention. We have put out tenders for that. Two-thirds of the PPE requested is on its way. The other one will be tendered very, very shortly.

Mr. Cathers: Yukon volunteer firefighters respond at all hours of the day and night, dropping everything when they get a call and sometimes waking up in the middle of the night to respond. They put neighbours and community before personal safety. This morning I received this message: “Would you kindly bring it to the minister’s attention today that, while he was likely enjoying his sleep this morning, my son and many others were responding to a fire, risking everything, while our government fails to appropriately support them. I am not okay with that.” Mr. Speaker, the Yukon Party is not okay with that, either.

The minister said that — quote: “Two-thirds of the required PPE that the fire service has requested is actually on its way. It’s coming here right now. It has been ordered and procured and it’s on its way. The other one-third is being assessed and we’re almost done.” Will the minister commit to tabling a complete list of the PPE being ordered and the expected timelines for delivery of that equipment? Our firefighters and their families deserve a clear commitment and timelines for when they will have the protective gear that they need.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I totally understand that Yukoners expect that we are prepared to quickly respond to all emergencies. Managing emergency response across all of these areas requires a coordinated approach. We respect and value the perspective of our volunteers, and we will continue to engage with the Association of Yukon Fire Chiefs and work together with the challenges that we face. We have been meeting with them regularly. We have set up a new process to make sure that we meet with them regularly and hear their concerns.

The Fire Marshal’s Office is currently evaluating what we need so that we can actually get a Management Board submission together that will address the shortfalls that I have heard about — the desires of the fire service.

I look forward to continuing our efforts to ensure that all of our firefighters have proper tools, training, and safety measures to fulfill their duties. I have been very clear about personal protective equipment and how important it is — certainly from the point of view of workers’ compensation and the protection of our fire services. The Government of Yukon has also made additional investments in the Yukon fire service recently, including the honorarium for volunteer firefighters, which they asked for in no uncertain terms in May last year. We have now increased it to \$30.74, up from \$22 an hour. That was something that they asked for and we did that. We funded the annual Yukon fire service conference, which was last Saturday. We have new self-contained breathing apparatus units and they may even be here now.

Question re: Whistle Bend and Porter Creek traffic

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I continue to hear from residents of Whistle Bend and Porter Creek that they feel that too much of the growth pressure that the Yukon has been experiencing has been pushed onto them and their neighbourhoods. The result has been that the infrastructure in these neighbourhoods has become overburdened. The best

example of that is the gridlock traffic that so many of my constituents experience almost every day.

When I raised this last year, the minister dismissed the issue and said that he would not consider working on that unless he heard concerns from the new city council.

So, can the minister tell us what work has been done with Whitehorse City Council to alleviate the traffic affecting so many of my constituents?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I really thank the member opposite for the question today.

We, all of us, are hearing concerns about traffic. I hear it from my constituents up in Copper Ridge, she is hearing it from Whistle Bend, and we hear it from Riverdale as well. There are a lot more people living in the territory now and so there is a lot more traffic.

I have been meeting with Whitehorse City Council and the mayor regularly since the last election. We have heard concerns about traffic out of Whistle Bend, of course, and we are working with the City of Whitehorse to address those concerns. The issue of traffic in Whitehorse is certainly live. As I have said here before, our economy is strong, there are lots of jobs, wages are up, the place is thriving, and people are moving here. We are seeing pressures because of that. That is a problem, but it is a good problem to have.

Mr. Speaker, I will say as well that I have been working with the City of Whitehorse now for three councils, and I will continue this answer in the future.

Ms. Clarke: When I initially suggested the idea of working with the city to expand Mountainview Drive, the minister told me to write to the city, because it was their responsibility. He said that I should write to the city instead of asking him because — and I quote: “... the roads reside within a municipality and it’s actually a municipal responsibility — that they would have to come to us with plans.” However, in November, the City of Whitehorse passed a resolution that called on the city and the Yukon government to enter into an infrastructure and servicing agreement that would set out development responsibilities, timelines, and costs associated with improvements to the roads that feed into Whistle Bend.

Has the minister entered into this agreement? If so, how much money is in this budget for these projects?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to talk about all the new money for municipalities through our comprehensive municipal grant, which is actually being raised higher, getting a bigger boost than it has seen in the entire time it has been in existence — since 1991. We have increased the grant to municipalities more than 20 percent in this very budget. I certainly hope that the opposition finds it within itself to actually vote for that budget.

I know that yesterday they denied Yukoners money to keep the government running and providing all the services that they depend on. They voted against that yesterday. I certainly hope that the opposition, when it comes time to budget, will vote for firefighters and will vote for municipalities and make sure that this budget passes in a minority parliament.

Ms. Clarke: As concerned as I am with the impact of this gridlock on my constituents today, we all know that this

will get worse with time as Whistle Bend continues to grow. In response to this, the city has undertaken a transportation impact analysis to review solutions. They have come up with some concrete plans, but they need help from the Yukon government to fund them.

They include a number of projects such as a third lane on Mountainview Drive and a third entrance into Whistle Bend. When I review the five-year capital plan, I did not see any of these projects planned for the next several years.

Can the minister tell my constituents when action will be taken to alleviate the traffic that is such an issue for them?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I will say again that I work with all municipalities on a regular basis. I certainly meet regularly with the City of Whitehorse to hear their concerns and to discuss these issues. I will continue to do that.

We heard from municipalities across the territory how they needed more money. They asked that the comprehensive municipal grant — and despite all the financial pressures that the government is facing these days — and it was such an important issue — we managed to get a 20-percent increase to the comprehensive municipal grant to our municipalities, the largest increase in the territory that municipalities have ever seen.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue that collaborative relationship and I will continue to work with Whitehorse as they bring their issues forward to me. I will again assert that the traffic within the City of Whitehorse is the city's responsibility. I know that their candidate has asked and put posts out saying that it's a federal and a territorial responsibility. I will say this: It is also a municipal responsibility. The municipality and the council of Whitehorse have control over the official community plan. They chose the site for Whistle Bend to build there. They are now choosing the new destination — the new subdivision for Whitehorse — to go in the southern expansion and I have been working very closely to identify how and when those essential lots will be brought to market.

Question re: Abortion services

Ms. White: Yukoners seeking abortions need access to safe, timely care and aftercare options. The Opal Clinic, the Yukon's only dedicated abortion clinic, is set to lose its current space at the Whitehorse General Hospital at the end of March. This move will affect the range of services that they can offer.

The new space won't have access to an ultrasound machine or the support of hospital security. Doctors have expressed disappointment and stated outright that the solution that is being offered to them will severely limit the care that they can provide.

So, what immediate steps will the government take to ensure that the Opal Clinic has adequate facilities to meet the needs of people seeking abortion services in the Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, the question regarding the Opal Clinic and the fabulous service that it provides — excellent service for Yukoners who are seeking medical care — is, of course, the responsibility of the Hospital Corporation. The current space that is being used is within the Hospital Corporation. I understand that there are space challenges there.

I also understand that we support completely the operation of the Opal Clinic. The excellent staff at Health and Social Services is working with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to make sure that the available space will, in fact, meet the needs of Yukoners.

Ms. White: So, I would just like to remind the minister that Yukoners' access to health care is actually a Yukon government responsibility.

The minister claims that non-surgical abortions are available to Yukoners at all health centres across the territory, but based on the experience of Yukoners, that is not true. The reality on the ground is that a person seeking an abortion would find it nearly impossible to do so through a rural health centre.

CBC confirmed in a news story last week that, out of the 11 rural health centres they could reach, none of them carried abortion medication. For rural community members seeking an abortion, accessing abortion services means taking time off work and organizing travel to Whitehorse. This comes with costs and privacy concerns.

The Yukon Status of Women Council has publicly said that there is a clear mismatch between what people are able to actually access versus what is being stated on the government website.

So, what is the government going to do to make abortion services accessible in all rural Yukon communities?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, medical abortions using Mifegymiso are available in Whitehorse — it's an oral medication — in Dawson City, and in Watson Lake. Whitehorse services can be provided by both physicians and nurse practitioners.

At this time, that medication is not available in community health centres because it is not included in the community nursing formulary, and primarily, it is community nursing that provides excellent medical services in our community health centres.

Medications available in communities are reviewed and approved by the pharmacy and therapeutics committee, which focuses on ensuring a standardized, safe, effective, and economical supply of medications to all community nursing health facilities.

In addition, approval by the pharmacy and therapeutics committee — the review is being undertaken — and the clinical practice and quality improvement team — to assess the introduction of new medications that can be in the scope of practice of primary health care nurses. We recognize the importance of increasing access in communities, and these barriers absolutely must be addressed to ensure safe and appropriate care.

There was some misinformation with respect to what is available, and we are working to provide this service more broadly.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, watching abortion bans south of the border is absolutely terrifying and we want to imagine that this could never happen in Canada, but right now, here in the Yukon, there is not accessible or equitable abortion access for all Yukoners. People face unacceptable challenges when accessing abortion care in the territory.

We know that the government is not covering the cost of abortion medication in the way that they claim — a medication that costs between \$300 to \$500. The Liberals say that this medication is available for free, but people are being asked to pay up front unless they are seen at a hospital and only during regular business hours.

Will the minister commit to true universal upfront coverage for medical abortions and ensure that abortion medication is accessible in all Yukon communities?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, our government is absolutely committed to ensuring that Yukoners have access to safe, legal abortion services. Medical abortion using the Mifegymiso is available, as I have noted, in Whitehorse, Dawson City, and Watson Lake, and in Whitehorse, it can be provided by both physicians and nurse practitioners. At this time, as I have noted, it is not available in community health centres. Individuals can get information and referrals from community health centres in order to access services. Anyone in a community who needs abortion care can access initial pregnancy testing at their community health centre. If they choose to terminate the pregnancy, that is offered through the Opal Clinic. Medical travel is available for those who need to travel to Whitehorse for this care, with no prior application or approval required to travel related to these medical services.

The Department of Health has recently upgraded the “better to know” website to provide Yukoners with up-to-date information on abortion services, including where and how to access care. Yukoners looking for information about abortion care can visit bettertoknow-yukon.ca for resources and support. There are also various places throughout our medical care system where individuals can get this care. We are committed to providing care more broadly to Yukoners.

Question re: Residential lot development in Watson Lake

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, according to page 4 of the five-year capital plan, the project to extend Frances Avenue in Watson Lake to create 43 serviced lots was completed in the fall of 2024. However, anyone who has actually visited Frances Avenue would see that those lots are not yet completed and that the project is not done.

Can the Minister of Community Services explain why his budget document says that these lots were completed when, in fact, there is more work to do on them?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, the information from the MLA from the region is appreciated, and I will certainly look into that question. I do know that getting the new Frances Avenue extension in Watson Lake was something that Watson Lake had wanted for a very long time, and I was very pleased to have my departmental officials working with the municipality and the First Nation to bring those to fruition.

I will find out what is happening — more up-to-date information to bring to this House — but we are, through our rural land development program, creating well-planned, sustainable Yukon communities that will ensure that housing needs are met for today and for generations to come. This was a very big boon to Watson Lake, and I know that the member

opposite and the town certainly did appreciate it. I am looking forward to completing that job.

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, can the minister tell the residents of Watson Lake and the municipality when these lots will be released for sale and how much they will cost?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, we are getting into the budget debate. I am sure that we will have more information when our officials are on the floor of the House. My colleague from Energy, Mines and Resources has just passed me information that the Frances Avenue 43-lot extension and lift station construction are targeted for completion this spring. That work is going ahead.

Under the Yukon government-Liard First Nation agreement, 18 lots will be transferred to Liard First Nation, plus one lot is owned by the Town of Watson Lake, and the remaining 24 lots will be sold in the summer of 2025.

Question re: Residential lot development in Haines Junction

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, according to page 4 of the five-year capital plan, the Mountain Ridge subdivision, which will offer 44 serviced lots in Haines Junction, was completed in the fall of 2024. However, anyone who has visited this subdivision will see that is not the case. These lots are still being worked on actively here.

Can the Minister of Community Services explain why his budget document says that these lots were completed last year when, in fact, there is more work to be done on them?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate all the questions today. It is great to be on my feet again in the House answering questions on behalf of Yukoners.

What we are doing, what we are seeing here in land development, is record land development across the territory. We are hearing about it in Watson Lake and we are hearing about it now in Haines Junction. That is a tremendous thing, because we have a lot of people voting with their feet, coming to the territory, because we have a great economy, everybody who wants a job can get one, wages are high, and we have great social programs. This is a good place to be, and that is why we are seeing such growth in the territory and why we need so much land development.

In Haines Junction, the member opposite has asked a question about the new Dhäl Gähy — Mountain Ridge — subdivision. It is going to be completed in the spring of 2025. Again, that is 44 lots in Haines Junction. That is an incredible number. That is a little bit less than we are getting in Watson Lake.

That’s a huge expansion in both those communities that hasn’t been seen for a very, very long time, and I’m happy that this government has been able to work in tandem with those communities and the First Nations to get those lots out the door so that those communities can grow. That’s what I like to see in this territory; that’s what Yukoners like to see; that’s what we’re delivering.

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, can the minister tell the residents of Haines Junction and the municipality when those

lots will be released for sale? When will they be put on the market? How much will they cost?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I was just down in Teslin talking to the Teslin First Nation and the town of Teslin at a meeting recently about lots in their area as well. Again, more lots coming there, and again, they were talking about lot development. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and I had a great conversation down in Teslin about lot prices, and we're happy to bring that conversation to the people of Haines Junction as well.

We're trying to keep lots down, Mr. Speaker. We're trying to make sure that they reflect the markets in which they're being released.

Mr. Speaker, I will say that, again, I'm happy to report that the historic investment and the historic delivery of lots in Haines Junction, because of our fast-growing and wonderful economy and just wonderful community we have going, is slated to be finished this year in 2025 and that we're hoping to get those lots — and the master plan for the area 3, country residential, 63-lot subdivision is targeted for completion in 2025 as well.

Mr. Speaker, we're hoping to get those lots out as soon as possible, and I'm sure, during budget debate, he can ask the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, the department responsible for lot sales, those questions.

Question re: Yukon Child Care Board recommendations

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, in November, the Minister of Education tabled the Child Care Board's annual report for 2023-24. According to that report — quote: "Only one of the eleven recommendations from last year has seen progress of any kind. This is concerning to the Yukon Child Care Board." The report then lists their 11 recommendations and notes for each one of them, except one, that there has been no action on any of them.

Why isn't the minister taking the recommendations of the Child Care Board seriously?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to rise today to talk about early learning childcare in our territory. I am happy to be advancing the work on behalf of Yukoners. We certainly recognize the importance of early learning and childcare for Yukon families and need to continue to improve children's learning opportunities and outcomes.

The department values the ongoing dialogue and collaboration with the Yukon Child Care Board and the important input that members provide in the development of high-quality early learning and childcare services. In its annual report of 2023-24, the Yukon Child Care Board recognized the review of the *Child Care Act* and how they are honoured to be a part of that work. The review of the *Child Care Act* is focused on modernizing and strengthening legislation based on the principles of quality, affordability, inclusivity, and accessibility within the early learning and childcare sector.

The Yukon Child Care Board made four new recommendations that we are reviewing. They also noted actions that required additional work, including the

commissioning of an early learning framework, which is what you will find in the new act. Many of the actions that the Child Care Board drew to our attention will be discussed further this week.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the minister that the report that she tabled just in November pointed out that only one out of 11 recommendations from the board had been actioned in any way.

The Child Care Board's report goes to say this — quote: "Not only was no action forthcoming for the other ten recommendations, but there was also no communication to the Board regarding any of them. It would appear that more work is needed in order for the voice of the Yukon Child Care Board to have impact within the Department of Education."

Since receiving this feedback from the board in their report tabled in the Legislature in November, has the Minister of Education met with the Child Care Board to discuss why they feel ignored by her department?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, again, the work of the Yukon Child Care Board is very important, and you will see that in the new legislation that has been tabled this week in terms of their role and the enhancements that we will see. It is, again, a new act that was a long time coming. It's work that we are incredibly proud of. The Child Care Board has been a very significant contributor to that.

Again, many of the actions that the Child Care Board drew attention to are also noted in the "what we heard" report that was released in September, which we intend to address in the legislation. I am so proud of the work of the department and all of the hard work that folks have put into that. They have accomplished this together with partners and acknowledge that there is more work to be done in collaboration with the Yukon Child Care Board.

The department engaged with the Yukon Child Care Board on the review of the *Child Care Act* from November 2023 to February 2024, and we will continue to work closely with the board on this project as it moves ahead.

I certainly have met with the board and am happy to have added new appointments to that board recently. Again, Mr. Speaker, I am so proud of the work that we have done on this.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the minister that the report that you tabled just a few months ago pointed out — according to the Child Care Board — that no action was taken on 10 out of 11 recommendations that they made to her. Since making those 10 recommendations that have gone unactioned, the board has added in four new ones.

Now, the minister mentioned that the minister is reviewing those four recommendations that were made in the most recent report. Can the minister tell us what specific actions she has taken to act on those four new recommendations?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, again, I'm happy to rise today to talk about the incredible work that is being done in partnership with all of our partners. Again, I want to say how important the Yukon Child Care Board is. I am certainly looking forward to debating the newly tabled act. Again, the first new — this is an incredibly important milestone.

I'm pretty sure that the member opposite may be disappointed that we have accomplished that item in my mandate letter beyond — because we were actually — I was mandated to do a review of the *Child Care Act*, and we have actually rewritten the *Child Care Act*, and we're repealing the previous outdated act. Many of the areas that the Yukon Child Care Board points to are addressed in this act — happy to have a very thorough debate. We have worked very closely with the Yukon Child Care Board, among many other partners in education, to ensure that we get this right. Much of that is captured in the “what we heard” document.

Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to the debate on this new modern piece of legislation.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 218: *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2025-26* — Third Reading

Clerk: Third reading, Bill No. 218, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 218, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2025-26*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 218, entitled *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2025-26*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, not to run the risk of repeating myself from yesterday's information in second reading and also Committee of the Whole, I will cede the floor and hope to see this very important money pass the Legislative Assembly and be moved on to the appropriate departments and agencies.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I will not speak for long, as I did outline earlier, in speaking to this, that as with all confidence votes, the Yukon Party Official Opposition will be voting against the Liberal government, since it is a confidence matter.

I would, though, ask if the Minister of Finance, in closing, or perhaps the Minister of Community Services, considering the urgent issue of the personal protective equipment for firefighters that has come up — and we know that 80 percent of volunteers, roughly, have expired equipment — can the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Community Services tell us how much money, if any, is included in interim supply for replacement of firefighter protective equipment?

Ms. White: The NDP will be voting in favour of the interim budget in support of the work of government continuing on in the next two months, and we look forward to debate on the rest of the budget.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, thanks to my colleagues for their comments. I would just say to the Member for Lake Laberge that the breakdown will be a great question for the minister during Committee of the Whole when he returns with his department.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question? Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

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: Disagree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Ms. Clarke: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Ms. White: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 10 yea, eight nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

Motion for third reading of Bill No. 218 agreed to

Speaker: I declare the motion carried and that Bill No. 218 has passed this House.

Bill No. 216: *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25* — Second Reading — *adjourned debate*

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 216, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver; adjourned debate, the Hon. Ms. McLean.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise again to complete my comments on second reading of the *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* for 2024-25 on behalf of the Department of Education.

When I ended yesterday, I was highlighting some increases that include: \$750,000 to address the rising utility costs in

Yukon schools; \$120,000 under the French bilateral agreement with Canadian Heritage to enhance French language and cultural programming — this is fully recoverable with no net impact to government spending; \$308,000 in internal budget transfers that include additional funding for biomass heating systems at the Teslin school and Elijah Smith Elementary School; and expanding school wellness specialists services within the First Nation School Board.

A student who feels safe, supported, and valued is a student who is ready to learn. Our investment in student well-being is an investment in their success, ensuring that every learner has access to the resources and supports that they need to thrive both in and outside of the classroom. Education is about more than just academics; it's about nurturing the whole student. By prioritizing well-being, inclusion, and mental health supports, we are helping to create learning environments where every Yukon student can feel seen, heard, and supported.

The budget includes \$165,000 under the confidence and supply agreement to support First Nation wellness workers through agreements with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Teslin Tlingit Council, Carcross/Tagish First Nation, and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. These workers play a vital role in fostering student mental health and cultural connection.

We are increasing funding by \$98,000, also under our agreement around CASA, for school wellness specialists, ensuring that trained professionals are available to support student wellness across our schools. Another \$20,000 is being invested in a new training program for educational assistants and teachers on call developed in collaboration with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals, Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon, and Autism Yukon.

Our corporate services and programs division is responsible for overseeing early learning and childcare, French language programs, and post-secondary and future skills.

Education continues to work with Yukon First Nations and community partners in Yukon, working toward a future where all families have access to high-quality early learning and childcare that is affordable, accessible, and inclusive. This supplementary budget also reflects a \$1,716,000 overall decrease in corporate services and early learning investments.

The \$2,330,000 decrease is due to the early learning and child care infrastructure program, where fewer projects were shovel-ready than initially anticipated. I am pleased to confirm that the Early Learning and Child Care branch has received two minor applications meant to improve physical accessibility in licensed early learning and childcare centres and three major infrastructure applications which will increase childcare spaces. The department looks forward to announcing the successful recipients early this spring.

Despite this adjustment, I am pleased to bring forward that, across the supplementary budget allocation is federal funding for French language programs of \$756,000 and French monitors at \$20,000, increasing our recoveries for a total of \$776,000, which are fully recoverable, with no net impact on government spending.

The Department of Education continues to work with Yukon First Nations to ensure that all schools meet the needs

of Indigenous students and offer all students opportunities to learn about First Nation ways of knowing, doing, and being. Supporting student learning remains at the heart of our work. This budget provides \$174,000 to address increased personnel costs for Yukon First Nation language teachers under the Yukon Association of Education Professionals collective agreement and \$195,000 to support Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in language, culture, and programming at the Robert Service School. This funding is a component of the historic letter of agreement on education and co-governance with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in government. This agreement strengthens the partnership between the two governments and aims to create an education system that reflects the unique values, culture, and language of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in people. There is \$45,000 to fund the Yukon First Nation language teacher at Whistle Bend Elementary School, ensuring that students continue to learn and engage with Yukon First Nation language and culture.

As we continue to improve Yukon school infrastructure, this supplementary budget reflects adjustments based on project timelines. \$4,620,000 is being deferred for the Burwash Këts'ádañ Kù project, ensuring responsible spending aligned with project forecasts.

The total project cost remains \$32.5 million. A \$2,080,000 deferral for the École Whitehorse Elementary School replacement project is due to project timelines shifting. A \$1,193,000 decrease for Whistle Bend Elementary School, which opened in August 2024 — this adjustment accounts for the final construction costs and warranty-related expenses.

Finally, this budget reflects a decrease of \$1,554,000 in recoveries primarily due to the adjustments in federal funding timelines. As previously noted, although we have a \$2,330,000 reduction in recoveries from Canada's early learning and child care infrastructure, this is offset by a \$776,000 increase. This breakdown is \$756,000 under the Canadian Heritage agreement for the French language program and an additional \$20,000 in third-party recoveries that will support increased salaries for French monitors under the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada agreement.

The total request for the *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* is \$11,959,000. This represents our continued commitment to delivering a high-quality, inclusive, and responsive education system for Yukon learners.

While some infrastructure projects are moving forward more gradually than expected, our long-term planning remains strong, ensuring that funding is available when projects are ready. At the same time, we are investing strategically in teacher supports, student wellness, language programming, and educational equity, aligning our priorities with the needs of Yukon communities. Through these measures, we are strengthening the future of education in the Yukon, ensuring that every learner has the resources, opportunities, and support that they need to thrive.

I appreciate the support of all members as we continue this important work together. I look forward to moving soon into Committee of the Whole to have a more thorough discussion around all of the areas that have been identified in our

Supplementary Estimates No. 2 budget, and I will now turn it back over.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues who have provided comments and questions during our time here at second reading. I am looking forward to Committee of the Whole.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. 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: Disagree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Ms. Clarke: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Ms. White: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 10 yeas, eight nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for second reading of Bill No. 216 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 216: *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Madam Chair, I am pleased to rise today to begin Committee of the Whole debate on Bill No. 216. This is the *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*, also known as *Supplementary Estimates No. 2*.

Before we begin, I would like to welcome Jessica Gemma Schultz, Deputy Minister of the Department of Finance, to the Legislative Assembly. Jessica and her team play a very vital role in producing the budget materials that we debate here in this House. I would like to thank the entire team for their tireless effort — and I mean tireless — during not only this busy time of year but all year-round.

So, the *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* for the 2024-25 fiscal year proposes an overall increase of \$130.1 million, including \$114.3 million for operation and maintenance and \$15.8 million for capital projects.

As well, there are changes in recoveries and revenue, including \$7.9 million in additional O&M recoveries and \$3.8 million in additional capital recoveries.

Meanwhile, the revenues are projected to increase by \$7.8 million compared to the *Supplementary Estimates No. 1*. With these adjustments, we will see a revised surplus of \$57.6 million and a net debt of \$608.1 million.

Madam Chair, I would like to now outline the proposed spending in these estimates, beginning with changes to O&M, most notably with the departments of Energy, Mines and Resources, Health and Social Services, and Education as well as other departments.

The largest proposed O&M increase is in the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, with up to an additional \$55 million included as a loan to the receiver for Victoria Gold to fund remediation at the Eagle Gold mine. This will be offset by a proposed \$3.1 million reduction across various program areas in the department. This includes \$1.2 million for type 2 mine sites, \$1 million for the low-carbon economy fund, and \$500,000 for Minto mine.

There were also lower than expected expenditures related to preliminary work for studying the feasibility of connecting the BC grid, a project which is now being led by the Yukon Development Corporation.

Next, the Department of Health and Social Services will receive a total of \$28.1 million. This includes \$13 million for

Insured Health to provide hospital and medical services to Yukoners. Social assistance will increase by \$3.5 million to keep pace with demand, which typically rises during the winter months. To meet the rising demand for Emergency Medical Services, we are allocating \$1.3 million to continue to staff a 24-hour ground ambulance and \$675,000 for a 12-hour air ambulance.

As well, \$832,000 will support the auxiliary on-call float program, which supports local community responders and further reduces air ambulance demands. We are also proposing \$1.5 million to the Yukon Hospital Corporation to ensure that it has the necessary funding to provide services to Yukoners. An additional \$1.4 million will also fund additional agency nurse hires to backfill positions when staff are on leave. Lastly, in Health and Social Services, in the area of nursing requirements, \$713,000 will support the community nursing program.

In the supplementary estimates, we are allocating \$1.3 million to expand Naloxone availability as part of the substance use health emergency strategy. The child welfare program will receive \$733,000 to contribute to the retention and recruitment of extended family and community caregivers. Finally in the Department of Health and Social Services, there is also \$708,000 to support operation of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter.

The Department of Education will also see a notable increase in funding as part of the *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* with a total of \$17.5 million in new allocations. Of this amount, \$9 million will cover increases associated with the collective agreement signed with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals in January; \$4.7 million will support the operations of the First Nation School Board; \$2.4 million is allocated to respond to personnel funding pressures that are related to recent successes in reducing vacancies for staffing teachers and other essential educational positions; and \$756,000 has been set aside to support French language programs, an amount that is fully recoverable from the Government of Canada. An additional \$750,000 has been allocated to account for increased costs in utilities, heating fuel, and electricity, which directly impact costs for operating schools. A total of \$1.3 million will support First Nation wellness workers and other FTEs — full-time equivalents — including additional educational assistants, school wellness specialists, and learning assistance teachers. Conversely, the Department of Education will see a reduction of \$2.3 million in funding for the early learning and child care infrastructure fund due to lapse in 2024-25.

Now, shifting the focus from Education, the Department of Highways and Public Works will see a proposed budget increase of \$8.4 million. Of this amount, \$4.4 million is directed to the Transportation division, including: \$2.2 million for road repairs necessitated by emergencies like floods and fires; \$787,000 for Faro mine road resurfacing; \$754,000 for winter materials, electrical, and driving fuel; \$520,000 for the Dawson City ice bridge; and \$128,000 for airport flood and fire response in Mayo, Old Crow, and Dawson City. The Property Management division will also see an increase of \$4.1 million

for items including: \$1.4 million for snow removal and winter outdoor maintenance; \$1.1 million for utilities; \$989,000 for essential inspection work that, if not done, could lead to fire and life safety infractions; and \$279,000 for lease costs, including lease renewals, maintenance, electricity, and insurance.

Turning now to the Department of Justice, we are seeing a total proposed increase of \$3.8 million through this appropriation. This includes \$1.1 million carried forward for the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*. A further \$613,000 from this funding pot will be transferred to Health and Social Services. Community Justice and Public Safety will receive a total increase of \$904,000, which covers \$452,000 in utility costs and health contracts for the Whitehorse Correctional Centre, \$285,000 for psychological assessments, and \$167,000 for safety equipment.

Legal support and materials will be supported by an investment of \$1.1 million to cover outside legal counsel contracts, law library materials, the community impact statement project, expenses related to judges' retirement coverage and a growing caseload, and the Yukon Public Legal Education Association.

Lastly, \$425,000 has been allocated to the Coroner's Office to address forced growth as required by the *Coroners Act* and increased operational expenses due to increased population and the ongoing substance use health emergency.

I will now move to the Department of Community Services. This department will see a modest increase of \$2.7 million through *Supplementary Estimates No. 2*. This will fund a range of initiatives, including \$1.5 million to help cover the costs of non-municipal residents accessing municipal solid waste facilities, \$375,000 to support curbside recycling in the City of Whitehorse, \$330,000 for a free transit initiative, and \$294,000 for the grant-in-lieu of property tax.

Before I conclude my summary of the O&M changes, I would like to highlight a few notable reductions. The Executive Council Office will see an overall reduction of \$832,000, which includes decreases for the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, boards and committees, and the Western Premiers' Conference.

Madam Chair, I would like to detail some of the capital spending that is contained in this bill. There are some modest changes to the capital spending outlined in this appropriation, with an overall proposed increase of \$15.7 million. \$3.8 million is recoverable.

The Department of Highways and Public Works will see the largest capital increase of \$12.5 million, and this includes \$11.7 million for the Nisutlin Bay bridge project. Another \$2.8 million will cover the cost of work completed on the north Klondike Highway over the summer. An additional \$551,000 is required for the property management division to complete various building development and maintenance projects, including essential building safety improvements. These increases are partially offset by a \$1.9 million deduction for the Dempster fibre project, which was completed last fall, and modest reductions elsewhere in the department.

The Department of Community Services will also see an increase of \$10 million to advance critical land development work in the territory.

The Department of Health and Social Services will see a handful of capital increases, including a proposed \$2.9 million to cover budget increases for the construction of the mental wellness unit. As far as capital reductions, there is a \$904,000 reduction for operational equipment as well as \$440,000 deferred from the Whistle Bend Place courtyard project, which is instead planned to advance in 2025-26.

The Department of Education will be reflecting a \$5.5 million decrease in capital due to updating cash-flow forecasts and revised timelines for major school replacement projects.

Due to updated forecasts based on new timelines for the Watson Lake solar project, there is also a proposed reduction of \$2.2 million to the Yukon Development Corporation budget, reflecting updated forecasts for project expenditures in 2024-25.

Justice has revisited the timelines and forecasts for the corrections centre building security communications system upgrades, which will result in a \$1.3 million downward revision in the capital forecast for this fiscal.

There are also several adjustments within Yukon Housing Corporation, which result in no net change. Lower than anticipated expenditures for replacement of aged-out units offset higher expenditures in other areas, including \$1.6 million to the housing initiatives fund, \$800,000 to the developer-build loan, \$600,000 for renovations and rehabilitation of existing units, and \$500,000 for community housing development.

Before I wrap up my remarks, I will briefly speak about the 23.4 full-time equivalents included in the *Supplementary Estimates No. 2*. Of these, 18.5 are for the Department of Health and Social Services, including 13.5 to support an additional 24-hour ground ambulance and 12-hour air ambulance mentioned previously. An additional four FTEs will support the auxiliary-on-call float program for community responders, and one FTE will provide navigation of cancer services for First Nation patients and families. The Department of Education will receive 4.9 new FTEs in the supplementary estimates, including 3.9 FTEs for the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon and a new First Nation language teacher for the Whistle Bend Elementary School.

Finally, this brings me to changes in revenues. As part of the supplementary estimates, we will see a \$7.8 million increase to total revenues. This includes an \$803,000 increase to the Canada health transfer and a \$261,000 increase to the Canada social transfer. Yukon will receive an additional \$231,000 through the cannabis transfer, and we will see a slight reduction of \$20,000 on the vaping transfer.

There is a \$4.3 million increase in personal income tax revenue, \$2.2 million in revenue from the fuel tax, and \$589,000 from taxes on tobacco. This is tempered by some reductions, including a downward adjustment of \$2.95 million in banking and investment revenue and \$1.2 million in the insurance premium tax.

I will now conclude my remarks for the *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* for 2024-25. I trust that, through my detailed overview as well as my second reading remarks, members have gained a clearer understanding of the key changes outlined in the bill and the rationale behind them. These adjustments are essential to supporting the continued growth and well-being of our territory and enhancing the quality of life for all Yukoners.

I do look forward to answering questions about the changes that I have outlined and encourage members to direct specific questions on programs and projects to ministers during departmental debates. I welcome the thoughtful discussions ahead in the coming weeks.

Mr. Dixon: Madam Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to the 2024-25 supplementary estimates here in Committee, and I appreciate the opening remarks from the minister about them. As he has suggested and indicated, we will be saving our specific questions for departmental debate, but I do have a few high-level questions that I think are appropriate for general debate, so I will put them to the minister now.

Page 3 of the *Fiscal and Economic Outlook of the 2025-26* budget document package includes a table that shows the 2024-25 *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* as it fits in the framework between last year's estimates and, of course, the main estimates of 2025-26. In that table 1, the fiscal summary, it shows that this *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* adds \$400 million of new short-term borrowing. I was hoping that the minister could tell us what that is an increase from. What was the short-term borrowing in the 2024-25 main estimates that the 2024-25 supplementary estimates is increasing that \$400 million to?

Hon. Mr. Silver: The member opposite is pointing to page 3, the short-term borrowing of \$400 million. This number is where we expect to be on the short-term borrowing at the year-end, therefore necessitating a transition past the 365-day short-term borrowing over to more of a long-term investment, which will allow us to capitalize on better interest rates as we move forward with the growing needs and responsibilities of the government.

Mr. Dixon: What I was looking for was: What was the short-term borrowing at the beginning of the 2024-25 main estimates?

So, the supplementary estimates is adding \$400 million in short-term borrowing, according to table 1. What I'm looking for is: What was that short-term borrowing at the beginning at the main estimates?

Hon. Mr. Silver: As we transition to long-term borrowing, this number represents the necessity based upon our need for short-term borrowing and our use of our line of credit. So, this is the number we estimate where we would be — would have been — for this moment in time. Numbers in the past for borrowing, lines of credit, and interest will always show up annually in our Public Accounts.

As the member opposite would have noticed, we have now added a whole new section to our mains and to our budgeting that shows the forecast moving forward and how we are moving out of that short-term debt into a more medium-term borrowing in order for us to capitalize on better interest rates. Also, with

the FAA, it's necessary that, if you think that your short-term borrowing is going to go past 365 days, you must translate that over into a longer term borrowing. So, this is just a reflection of where we are in time and that transition.

For annual reporting, when it comes to interest rates, borrowing — short-term borrowing, long-term borrowing — the members can reflect on the Public Accounts.

Mr. Dixon: So, the minister has correctly pointed out that this is a new section both for the 2024-25 supplementary estimates and the 2025-26 main estimates that is included in the fiscal summary. I think he has referenced as well — and I'll reference it again — it's table 1 on page 3 of the *Fiscal and Economic Outlook*.

On that table, there are several boxes on the table that are blanked out. I assume that is because this wasn't a metric that they measured or reported on, at least in the main estimates before the 2024-25 supplementary estimates. What I would like to get is a sense of what those numbers would have been for those greyed-out squares.

For instance, total borrowing, according to the table for this supplementary estimates, represents \$633.5 million. The total debt in the Public Accounts as of March 31, 2024 was \$375 million, so that's a significant increase. I am just trying to understand what those figures would have been in those greyed-out boxes that you see on table 1 on page 3 of the *Fiscal and Economic Outlook*.

Hon. Mr. Silver: It would be hard to report on what those were, because they weren't recorded. They weren't recorded in the Yukon Party's time nor mine. Moving forward, we now have numbers to fill in those spaces. Again, any other questions on line items and final reporting would be a Public Accounts exercise. We are now expanding our ability to show fiscal summaries to include tables that have not been shown before, but that would explain the absence of data for that time, because this is new.

Mr. Dixon: Can the Minister of Finance tell me what the total borrowing was at the beginning of the 2024-25 budget year?

Hon. Mr. Silver: The closing balance of 2023 will be the opening balance of 2024 — again, items and line items that are set out in the Public Accounts.

Mr. Dixon: Well, that is excellent. I have the Public Accounts here, and they show a total debt, as of March 31, 2024, being \$375 million. Can the Minister of Finance just confirm that this would be the total borrowing when the 2024-25 main estimates were tabled?

Hon. Mr. Silver: As the member opposite knows, at the end of every fiscal year, we do an update, because a few months have gone by since the Public Accounts, so that is the discrepancy between the numbers that he is referencing.

Mr. Dixon: I am not sure that I understand what the minister is referring to. I gave him the total debt as of March 31, 2024, but I am not sure what he is indicating there is a discrepancy with. What is the other figure that he is saying there is a discrepancy with?

Hon. Mr. Silver: To reiterate, I believe that the member opposite is asking for an updated number past what is provided

in the Public Accounts. We will update that number in the Public Accounts each year. The number would be different now, because time has gone by and there would be more calculations. We don't have a number that the member opposite is looking for. If he is looking for a number today, while we don't necessarily account for that now, it would probably be a different number than the ends of the Public Accounts. But I don't have a number for him today to tell him what an update is, but those numbers will all be updated in the Public Accounts in a timely fashion.

Mr. Dixon: I will try one more time just because I am not sure that we are understanding each other on this. When the minister tabled the 2024-25 main estimates, he must have known what the total borrowing was, because there is a debt cap that we have to report to Canada, and at the time he tabled it, the debt cap was \$800 million. He would have had to have known what the debt cap was — what the total borrowing was when he tabled the budget last year. According to the supplementary estimates that we see today that we are debating now, the total borrowing has moved to \$633.5 million.

I am just trying to understand where that number grew from, because they must have known that when they tabled the last budget — the 2024-25 main estimates. They must have known what percentage of the debt cap they had available to them when they tabled the budget last year.

Hon. Mr. Silver: We analyze an awful lot of moving parts as we talk with Ottawa, including responses to environmental situations — responses to what we know will be coming at us when it comes to the growth of the Yukon. We know that, when we have our starting balance on March 31, we will have numbers for the members opposite in the Public Accounts, but I think the member opposite is trying to get a number out of me that we don't necessarily report, and I just ask, maybe — we will reverse engineer from here. What is the member opposite getting at?

When we talk about the numbers that we do report, we would have the borrowing numbers as of March 31 — the starting balance. The new schedule is in the supplementary and the 2025-26 main report — the anticipated closing balances — and these will not be comparable, but also, for him to say that there is a particular number that we must have seen to then therefore go to Ottawa and say that we now need to up our borrowing room in the fall — I think it is more nuanced than that. It would be more knowing what programs and services are demanded upon us, what responses we have to do to climate change, to floods, fires, to issues in the mining industry. So, it's forecasting a need — a necessity — to make sure that we are continuing to provide the services and programs that Yukoners need.

I don't have a specific number for the member opposite. I will reflect back on this. I am not trying to be difficult here. I don't have a specific number for him other than the numbers that we openly and transparently report upon here in the fiscal summary, which is an increase in the data that is normally provided by the Yukon government and also the traditional data that the member opposite knows that we do on a quarterly,

yearly basis — either with the Public Accounts or with the supplementary estimates or with the mains.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate that the minister isn't trying to be difficult. I am not either; I am just trying to get the numbers that are needed to analyze this.

When we look at the fiscal summary on page 3 of the *Fiscal and Economic Outlook*, it shows the 2025-26 main estimates, which includes total borrowing of \$774 million against the territorial borrowing limit of \$1.2 billion. In the 2024-25 supplementary estimates, it shows a total borrowing of \$633.5 million against a territorial borrowing limit of \$1.2 billion.

What I am trying to understand is: If they were able to do it for the 2025-26 main estimates, what I would like to know is that same number for 2024-25 so that we can see where we have come from as a result — where we started at the tabling of the 2024-25 main estimates and where the supplementary estimates that we have before us today has taken us.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I guess the number for short-term borrowing in the *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* for 2024-25 of \$400 million is not precise enough for the member opposite? I wonder — is that the —

Mr. Dixon: No, the \$400 million is clear. What I'm asking is what it started at, at the beginning of the budget year in the 2024-25 main estimates. Where did it start? And then the supplementary estimates provide us an update here at the end of the — toward the end of the year for the past year. Then, of course, that shifts next year into the 2025-26 budget year when we shift some of that debt into long term.

The number that I'm looking for right now — and maybe I'm out to lunch here or maybe I need to follow up by letter, but I'm just simply looking for the total borrowing that would have been reported in 2024-25 had this column existed at that time. So, if you look at the 2024-25 — sorry — the 2025-26 main estimates, it shows that the total borrowing for this upcoming year is \$774 million. In the supplementary estimates, it's \$633.5 million. I'm trying to understand what it would have been for the 2024-25 main estimates.

Hon. Mr. Silver: What I can say is that the closing balance at March 31, 2024 is the opening balance at April 1, 2024. We have enhanced our reporting moving forward, which, of course, you will find in the *Fiscal and Economic Outlook* and in the mains, and the supplementary is the forecasted ending balance of March 31, 2025.

Moving forward, we will have more specific data for the members opposite. I will work with my team in Finance to see if there is an appropriate answer to the member opposite. I would hope that the member opposite would be happy that we are now moving forward including more information that has not been included in the updates and in the mains in previous governments — plural — and moving forward, we will have that accurate data.

What we are showcasing here is the necessity for us to commit and to continue our sustainable fiscal management, making sure that we are moving past a short-term debt into a medium term. We're going to maximize our ability to get better interest rates, and we will continue to be open and transparent

moving forward on how that is going to come to fruition. But that will not happen — the borrowing — to transition that over to a medium-term debt until we have the blessing of the Legislative Assembly and the mains pass.

Mr. Dixon: I think we did finally get it there. So, the minister had indicated that the number should be the closing balance of the 2024 year. I'm just looking for him to tell me what that number was. He had identified the right figure that I'm looking for; I'm just looking for an explanation of what that number is.

Hon. Mr. Silver: So, what we have here is forecasts — \$400 million — a very rounded number, clearly. The member opposite is trying to get more information that his government never provided before in a timely fashion. So, the numbers he's looking for, as far as year-ends, comes with the Public Accounts.

He seems frustrated, because he's asking for a number that has never been reported at this time with his government or previously with our governments, but those numbers come out in the Public Accounts. The numbers at year-end will be the final — not estimates anymore — so we're not comparing oranges to apples, which he wants us to do now — to say: Well, where is this \$400 million? This \$400 million is an estimate.

The previous numbers were not reported on previously, as they were not included in the Public Accounts, because this is a new report. So, the reason, again, why we're having trouble understanding what he is looking for is that they are looking for numbers that don't get reported at this time. It is frustrating for him, but it's frustrating for us as well, because this is the same line of questioning that we get from the Member for Lake Laberge as well, trying to get more and more numbers, even though we have, moving forward into our estimates and our mains, more reporting. Now they are saying: Well, what about in the past?

We have changed this to be more open and accountable moving forward. We don't — and he didn't — report on those numbers at this time, so I don't have that information for him outside of that estimate that we provided for him. Again, as he knows, being the chair of the Public Accounts Committee, we will have all of the numbers for 2024 fiscal year-end at the appropriate time, just like his government did.

Mr. Dixon: I will move on. I didn't think it would be difficult for the Minister of Finance to tell me what the total debt was as of March 31, 2024, but apparently it is. I will move on.

The *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* includes, as the minister has noted over and over again, \$400 million in short-term borrowing. Can the minister tell us what the interest rate is on that, and is it encompassed entirely within the single line of credit, or are there multiple lines of credit?

Hon. Mr. Silver: With the member opposite's indulgence, I have a number, but I am not sure if it is the final accurate number. We are just looking to confirm with the department to make sure that we have the number confirmed.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Madam Chair, as my department is working to get that number for the member opposite, because I do want that number to be reflected today, I will just speak a bit to this new table that we are talking about on page 3 reflecting the expenditures and the operation and maintenance and capital and net recoveries. This is new information. It is important for us to reflect that we are moving in a pattern toward reflecting a very, very long list of years where we have had extraordinary costs.

We have had the ability to take our recoveries and have a new strategy to making sure that we have our recoveries returned from Ottawa quicker, which is one of the exacerbating factors to using cash on a yearly basis.

I just wanted to give a shout out to the Department of Highways and Public Works and their work with the Department of Finance in that strategy. A lot of times, it's difficult to explain surpluses and deficits. One of the things in there is the ability to pay for things up front and then wait for Ottawa to give you those recovery dollars. We worked very hard with Ottawa to make sure that the returns happen on a timely basis, which is another way of us saving on the amount of money that we did have to borrow on the line of credit.

Now, the government's interest rate on that line of credit does follow the CIBC's prime rate. The member opposite was asking about the interest rates. As of January 29 — which wasn't my most updated number, but now it is, so I appreciate that from the department — the bank's prime rate was 5.2 percent. There is also an additional discount factor applied, as the line of credit was secured through a competitive public tender. As a result of that, the competitive process — the discount factor — is not disclosed.

Again, this is information that, the last time we got up to debate, we talked about as well in our last Committee of the Whole on Finance.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Chair: The Member for Copperbelt South, on a point of order.

Mr. Kent: I didn't want to interrupt the minister while he was speaking, but I'm just looking for clarification with respect to rules. You may have to come back to the House with this, but the member answered a question from my colleague and sat down. You asked if there was any further debate; it was cleared, and then the member got back up without anyone from this side getting up. So, I just was wondering if that is allowed within the rules — if he can continue to get up and then the clock resets.

Again, I'm not looking for a ruling here today. I'm just looking for some clarity going forward, so if you do have to return to the House with that, it would be fine.

Chair: Member for Klondike, on the point of order.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Madam Chair, I sat in the opposition many times when we got to the exact same time where members of the Yukon Party would jump up and continue to debate. The only difference is, in this case, that I got up to answer the question that was just asked. I could have waited and returned

that information later on, but I thought, to be open and transparent, we would get that information to the member opposite as soon as possible.

Chair's statement

Chair: We will review the Blues and return to the House.

Is there any further general debate on Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*?

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

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is Vote 51, Department of Community Services, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Department of Community Services

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am pleased to present the Department of Community Services' *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* for 2024-25 totalling a \$2.7 million increase in operation and maintenance expenditures and \$10 million in capital costs.

There are a couple of items in here. Under Wildland Fire Management, we have about \$212,000 for coming out of our partnership with the federal government on the 2 Billion Trees program, which helps to lower threats of wildfire for communities. To date, the Government of Yukon's Wildland Fire Management branch planted 178,000 aspen seedlings in areas of Whitehorse that have been treated for wildfire risk. By replacing the flammable conifers with fire-resistant deciduous trees near communities, we are reducing risks while protecting forest health. It also helps in our fight against climate change with their ability to capture carbon and decrease emissions in the atmosphere, both of which are key steps in meeting *Our Clean Future* commitments. That is a cutting-edge climate change action plan that our government, with the civil service, has drafted. We are requesting \$212,000 in this supplementary estimate for increased participation in this program, and 100 percent of this money is recoverable from Ottawa.

In Community Development, we have \$1.9 million for sustainable local services outside of the capital. This money is to address the increased costs that we are seeing associated with solid waste services across the territory. The money will cover these unexpected overages. As well, we are also requesting funding to cover our financial contributions to the City of Whitehorse curbside recycling program.

We are pleased to support this first curbside recycling program, as it helps people, for sure, and takes us toward the implementation of the extended producer responsibility program, which we're hoping to launch in the near future. Those two items make up \$1.9 million in the supplementary estimate.

In Community Affairs, we have \$294,000 for our grants-in-lieu of property taxes due to higher land values in Whitehorse and Dawson. There is another \$330,000 to support the free transit initiative, the aim of which is to reduce barriers to transportation and increase access to essential services for those who need it most.

In Land Development, we are asking for \$10 million. These land development projects are complex and are usually multi-year affairs, so construction schedules can shift as projects proceed. That occurred this year as we intensified efforts to design and deliver more subdivisions across the Yukon, requiring us to move up investments in finishing new lot development. A strong construction season and a high level of productivity is a good situation to be facing in rural Yukon. We are requesting \$7 million in additional funds for addressing higher than expected productivity, primarily in Haines Junction and Watson Lake, where we have produced two 40-plus lot serviced subdivisions that will be online this year, as I said earlier today.

In Whitehorse, \$3 million in additional funds are required for a lift station, force main, and utility work in Whistle Bend — all necessary work for getting lots in that neighbourhood ready for sale.

With that brief opening remark — a little bit longer than it was going to be — I will now cede the floor and let my colleagues ask me some questions.

Ms. McLeod: I thank the minister for his brief comments, and I want to welcome, of course, the officials to the Chamber today to help us out with our discussions.

This supplementary budget contains \$12.7 million, which is to cover off expenditures from the past fiscal year. Well, I guess we're still in the current fiscal year — 2024-25. The minister spoke a bit about the 2 Billion Trees program. It's a relatively minor amount of \$212,000.

I am not sure if the minister said this, because it is difficult to hear from that corner of the room, but what was the total budget for the tree program in the Yukon for this fiscal year 2024-25?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: It seems like my good colleague across the aisle wants spoilers. Of course, we are not in the mains for this year yet, but I am happy, on this issue, to tease a little bit — give you a little bit of a spoiler — and I look forward to a much more robust conversation coming up in the mains when we have that discussion.

For this fiscal year — for the complete year, it's \$434,000 in 2024-25. My mistake; I misunderstood the question. I figured it out in my head as I was going. Please bear with me. Picture trouble is temporary. Yes, my apologies to the member opposite. It is \$434,000 in 2024-25.

Ms. McLeod: I thank the minister for that.

\$434,000 for fiscal year 2024-25 — is that money a contribution from Canada, or is it to be recovered?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: That money is fully recoverable from Ottawa.

Ms. McLeod: Madam Chair, I appreciate that. The minister — I believe that he said there were 178,000 trees planted in this past year. I am wondering who did the planting, and is that number of trees the goal for this year?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Wildland Fire Management tenders the contracts for that. It is done by private contractors, and there were several, I am led to believe. We had several private contractors doing the planting. We are trying to get a number of trees that we anticipated to do this year, but we didn't. So, the total we planted so far is 170,000 trees in the area and that was done by private contractors. Just this year, we had the EU come over and look at the project that we were doing. They were very interested in this whole approach. In the south of Whitehorse, we have done the firebreak — that is really where a lot of this work has happened. The EU officials were very interested in the work that we did there and took particular note of the aspen trees that we were planting, which are less flammable than the deciduous growth, and they spoke to our officials there on that. It is also being studied by universities. I believe that there are universities, certainly in Alaska, that are looking at this approach and seeing how it works and studying it scientifically.

There is a lot of interest in this work that is going on with this really cutting-edge — in many ways, our territory is leading the country in this work with these firebreaks and the way we are approaching this, creating this natural — I call it "living infrastructure" — south of town. It has taken, as I said, international interest on this, and it is something that Yukoners should really celebrate. It is quite an amazing accomplishment that we've done here.

Ms. McLeod: So, there were a number of tenders that took care of this planting. Were these publicly tendered? Was this tendered through Highways and Public Works?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I will endeavour to raise my voice just so the member opposite can hear me. I apologize; I realize I was mumbling. I came across that myself, so here we go. I'll try to be clear. I know how hard it is with my own hearing impairment — it's difficult in this Chamber, so my apologies to my good colleagues across the way.

So, yeah, all the contracts were publicly tendered. It was done through Bids and Tenders. So, Wildland Fire Management handled the contracts, but they were tendered through the highways Bids and Tenders system.

The Whitehorse south fuel break is a 780-hectare piece of strategic wildfire-resistant infrastructure. So, it's very large. It is partially funded by the Investing in Canada infrastructure plan. The Copper Haul Road and Mary Lake components of the fuel break are expected to be completed in 2026 and include manual treatments, mechanical treatments, prescribed burns, and planting of aspen trees.

I haven't spoken to my departmental officials — I will probably do it after your next question — but on driving home, I've seen smoke rising from that vicinity, and I don't think it's

— I think that's actually prescribed burns that they are doing, but I will find that out for my own personal interest.

So, the planting was tendered, and there is separate tender for supply of seedlings. There is a planting contract and a seedling contract for procuring — getting — seedlings.

Wildland Fire Management is leading the Yukon government's participation in Canada's 2 Billion Trees program, which will provide \$8.9 million in federal funding between 2023-24 and 2030-31.

As I said, 170,000 aspen seedlings have been planted in fuel treatment areas around Whitehorse and Haines Junction to further improve the resilience of our forests and communities. A further 230,000 seedlings will be planted in the spring of 2025 to complete *Our Clean Future* Action C21. Planning is currently underway to plant up to 1.9 million aspen seedlings in strategic fuel breaks around Whitehorse and Haines Junction by 2031. Those people who like aspen are going to be very happy with all the aspen they find in these cut blocks.

Ms. McLeod: I thank the minister for answering part of my next question, which would have been whether or not this was an ongoing program or had a finite period of time, so thank you for that.

Where are the seedlings grown? I presume that Yukon is not producing them.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I appreciate that question. It was one of the points I was hoping to come across in the paragraph I just read. When I was out with the EU officials last fall — and I will look to the department to fact-check me today — I believe that most of the saplings are coming out of a nursery in BC; however, I think we are starting to grow our own here with native species. I don't know what the portion is, but I think we are starting to produce our own aspen saplings here in the territory in a nursery.

It is largely coming from BC, but we are actually starting our own. There are opportunities starting — the green shoots of a sapling industry here in the territory.

Ms. McLeod: That is good news, indeed.

I have a couple of questions about wildland fire. It looks to me like \$1.7 million was spent by the Yukon government to assist with fires in Alberta and British Columbia. My question is whether or not these amounts — and I do understand that they are recoverable — are recoverable from the provinces, or is Canada cutting that cheque?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am told that they are largely recoverable from the provinces. It's not a dollar-for-dollar thing, because overtime comes into it and the rates of pay are sometimes somewhat different. Generally, the entire recovery comes from the province, not the federal government. They are the ones buying the service.

Before I take my seat, I was especially rude. I don't know what's come into me this afternoon, but I do have Phil MacDonald and Marie-Alexis this afternoon here with me. I'm so pleased that they are the ones assisting me this afternoon.

Ms. McLeod: Of course, the minister will recall that we have had some discussion around gear for the Fire Marshal's Office, and I'm not going to go there, because that's an ongoing discussion. But I am curious, given those issues, whether or not

the wildland fire and the Yukon First Nation wildfire crews are fully equipped with up-to-date gear.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I know that there will be more questions coming in the coming days and whatnot on the Association of Yukon Fire Chiefs and the volunteer fire services.

The wildland fire teams operate under a different regulatory environment. It's not structural fires; it's wildland fire. It's a totally different thing.

I've been up there talking to wildland fire officials. I've heard no concerns about PPE or equipment there. They are very well equipped here in the territory. We're actually looking at ways to make it even safer for Wildland Fire Management to do their work in the bush. So, I've not been made aware of anything, but, of course, the ADM is going to be making sure that this is the case because, as I've said many times over the last couple of weeks, personal protective equipment is very important to me and I want to make sure the teams have all the gear that they need.

We'll be looking at that, but I have heard no complaints about that to date.

Ms. McLeod: I thank the minister for that and will follow that up when we get to the mains.

I'll move on then to Community Operations. There's an amount in there — \$1.9 million — for increased costs to solid-waste management and water delivery services with, of course, an increase to assist with curbside recycling in Whitehorse. I'm going to ask the minister for a bit of a breakdown on how much of that money is for solid-waste and water delivery and how much is for curbside delivery.

I'll have some further questions about the solid-waste and water delivery portions of that.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The increased cost of solid-waste and water delivery services came out to \$1.53 million and the cost to the department of the curbside recycling program for 2024-25 — this is from December to March — is \$375,000.

Ms. McLeod: Madam Chair, if we are talking about solid-waste services and water delivery, what communities are the beneficiaries of this additional investment, and does that include communities with transfer stations?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: As the member opposite knows, the Government of Yukon is working toward a sustainable model for solid-waste management in the Yukon. That model was proposed and advocated for by the Association of Yukon Communities. It was Yukon mayors who wanted and who asked my predecessor for a plan and an approach to solid-waste management in the territory to modernize it. We continue to invest in waste management services that reflect modern, sustainable practices that benefit the environment and the economy.

Community Operations manages 12 solid-waste facilities across the Yukon and provides base operating funds to 13 recycling depots. We also transport recyclables from these facilities into Whitehorse.

Regional agreements have been signed with six municipalities outside of Whitehorse — including Carmacks, Dawson, Haines Junction, Mayo, Teslin, and Watson Lake —

to operate as regional waste facilities. These agreements help to ensure that all facilities in the Yukon operate under the same high standard of service and care for the environment. The agreements ensure that all public waste management facilities in the Yukon have gates, operating hours, similar tipping fees, and on-site staff to monitor and manage waste streams. This will reduce the environmental risk and help to extend the life of landfills and costs associated with liabilities.

The Yukon government solid-waste facilities in the Yukon periphery started charging tipping fees on August 1, 2020. This was phase 1 of a move toward regional landfills operating under similar processes and standards. Phase 2 will see tipping fees implemented at Government of Yukon sites, including Champagne, Destruction Bay, and Pelly Crossing, this spring. The timing aligns with fees being put in place at regional municipal facilities. We thank the Association of Yukon Communities for the assistance and leadership in developing the regional agreements and for their support as we continue to implement the recommendations from the 2018 report *Recommendations for Action towards a Sustainable Solid Waste Management System for Yukon*. We remain committed to working with affected communities on solutions for managing solid waste.

Those are a lot of words. I hope that helps to answer the member opposite's question.

Ms. McLeod: I do understand the different phases of this implementation. We are looking at almost \$2 million. According to the briefing note, higher costs for solid-waste management include collection and transportation across the territory, so perhaps the minister can give us a little more information on where this waste is being transferred from. I assume that it is all coming to Whitehorse; can he just confirm that?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Well, it depends on what kind of waste you are talking about.

What we are doing is setting up regional landfills that the municipalities that I named earlier — six municipalities — will be responsible for; the garbage will be going into their landfills, which are managed. They will have a lifespan and will be managed to maximize the lifespan for those facilities, and that is very important, because they are expensive to commission and they are expensive to decommission, of course. They will be properly managed to minimize the impact on the environment. The garbage going into those landfills will be managed by those municipalities — the same thing for some of those smaller places I mentioned — Champagne and the rest. That is how that works.

Refundable recycling is put into trucks and sent into Whitehorse, where it is sorted by the processor. In this case, it is now P&M Recycling. They have the contract. When Raven decided to move out of the processing of non-refundables, P&M spooled up their operation and took on that role. Currently, the trucks are filled at all of these regional facilities. The recyclables are put into a truck unsorted, as they always have. They come into Whitehorse, and the processor in Whitehorse then sorts it into the for-money recycling and the non-refundable recycling.

I also want to add for the member opposite that Old Crow, Ross River, and Carcross are the three communities with water delivery that are also captured by those costs.

Ms. McLeod: Of course, I understand that municipalities are responsible for their solid waste and I think are doing so. I guess my question is whether or not the amount of money that is talked about in this supplementary budget — whether or not that goes to help manage the solid-waste facilities in those municipalities, or is this amount of money to address the perhaps higher transportation costs for the phase 2 sites that are contemplated, I think, in this supplementary budget?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The breakdown of that money for Community Operations solid waste and water is \$1.4 million roughly — it's \$1.3 million-something, rounded up to \$1.4 million — for Community Services/Government of Yukon sites, and there is \$162,000 going to municipal sites for this stuff, so that's how the breakdown goes.

Ms. McLeod: How does this affect the Village of Teslin?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: That's a fairly broad question. I can say that Teslin has signed on to the regional agreements we've struck with the other municipalities. They're one of the signatories to these agreements. The agreements allow the municipality — in this case, Teslin — to upgrade their waste facilities with gates and all of the appropriate processes to make sure it's a contained and managed facility within this community. That's the same for all other municipalities.

I don't have any detail on how the \$162,000 affects Teslin. If the member opposite has some more context for me, I'm happy to consider it.

Ms. McLeod: I ask because I didn't — I mean, perhaps the minister said, but I didn't hear Teslin when he was listing off the municipalities. Now, it's my understanding that the Village of Teslin is a transfer station and not a regional landfill. So, perhaps the minister could just clarify that.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: No, the Village of Teslin is now a regional facility like the others.

Ms. McLeod: Thank you for clearing that up for me.

So, I'm going to move on to the curbside recycling program. Now, while it is not the biggest line item in the budget, it is certainly an area of interest. The amount that is in the supplementary, as I understand it, is for December to March of this year. December was the start of the Yukon government's contribution. I'm wondering how long this contribution program will continue and what the anticipated annual expense will be.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Yes, this is a really exciting development. It has been a long time coming for a lot of people in Whitehorse to actually have this curbside program in place. The Yukon government stepped in to support the City of Whitehorse with — the total value was up to \$2.4 million over two years, through fiscal 2024-25, for our curbside collection program. The city's program is now in place. The Yukon government's contribution was structured such that, when the City of Whitehorse made the decision to bring in curbside and launched it — they contracted it; they got it running in

December. At that point, the Yukon government would subsidize 50 percent of the cost of that program. So, that cost is what is reflected in this — the \$300,000-odd from December to March — and then half of the cost will be subsidized from April through to March 2026. So, we are subsidizing 50 percent of the cost through that year.

I believe it was estimated at \$2.4 million, so we are estimating \$1.2 million in each of the two years, but it took the City of Whitehorse a period of time to get the program running. So, we are paying \$324,000 for 2025, and then the full \$1.2 million will go into subsidizing the program for 50 percent through 2026.

Ms. McLeod: Is the Yukon government's support for the program set to end in March of 2026? Is this because of the EPR regulations coming into force?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Yes, that is entirely correct. As soon as the extended producer responsibility program comes into effect — and we are expecting that to happen in late 2025 — then it will take over the cost of the curbside program, and the Yukon government will then withdraw that funding. It will be taken over by the extended producer responsibility program. So, that's how that is going to go.

Ms. McLeod: I look forward to when we get to the mains and can have that EPR discussion.

Has the department been approached by any other community for financial assistance in setting up a curbside program?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I can say that I myself, in my travels to municipalities, have not heard from communities that they want such support. In Dawson, I think the Yukon government did invest in a recycling depot up there for the community.

Support for recycling outside of Whitehorse is provided by the Yukon government through the recycling depot operating allowances as well as a recycling collection program that shifts non-refundable recyclable materials to Whitehorse from all around the territory. Depot operating allowances provided in 2024-25 are projected at approximately \$300,000, with another \$100,000 invested by the Government of Yukon to support rural municipalities with collection of non-refundables. This support is in addition to nearly \$3.5 million in direct investment over three years to municipalities for the regional landfills to support improvements like weigh scales and other upgrades. Another \$1.6 million is budgeted in 2025-26 — I'm getting ahead of myself; this is one of those spoilers — to support diversion of non-refundable recycling for the benefit of all municipalities.

That is sort of a breakdown of what happens. Again, all those refundables are put in the back of a truck without sorting, shipped into Whitehorse, and then taken off the trucks by the processor and sorted here in Whitehorse into paid and unpaid recyclables.

Ms. McLeod: That is all very weird to me, because I have to do a lot of sorting at home. I would be curious to know if they all just throw it in the truck. Okay, thank you for that. I am going to leave that there for now.

Today, there was an announcement by the Yukon government that the space that is currently occupied by the

Polarettes Gymnastics Club in Riverdale will be renovated for the purpose of hosting a variety of sport competitions and other events. Is there any money in this supplementary budget to start moving that forward, and is there a budget amount for this renovation? When is this work expected to start?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I encourage the member opposite to talk to me more thoroughly in the mains. I will say that this is a project that has been worked on in concert originally with Education and Highways and Public Works, with CS providing liaison and information to the project as it was developing through Education and Highways and Public Works. Education has now decided that they are not going to use the space at the Riverdale school, so Highways and Public Works is now moving ahead with the planning of that project. This decision was made relatively recently, and we're still working out the cost of this. There has been some preliminary work done by Highways and Public Works, and perhaps those questions can be answered by my colleague.

Ms. McLeod: I thank the minister for that.

We are going to move on to the \$10 million for land development that is contained within this supplementary budget. There is \$3 million for Whitehorse and \$7 million for rural residential. How much of the \$7 million is for Watson Lake, and how much is for Haines Junction?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I don't have that information at our fingertips right now. I'm going to give the department some time to come up with it. If not, I will report back to the Chamber when I have that information.

Ms. McLeod: I appreciate that, and I was initially going to ask if this was the last of the payments for those two projects, but because I believe we know that these jobs are not finished, I presume that there are additional monies to be expended in the next fiscal year. To date, does the minister have a total for the cost of the Watson Lake development that includes the lift station?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I was just consulting with my colleagues, so the short answer is that we are working on that number for Watson Lake — the total cost of development of those lots. I will report back when I have that number, be it in a few minutes or, if we don't get it this afternoon, I will get it to the member opposite.

Ms. McLeod: I appreciate that from the minister.

If we talk about the \$3 million that is for Whitehorse residential to be spent in Whistle Bend, what phase of Whistle Bend is that \$3 million funding, and when is that phase expected to be complete?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: This summer, we are hoping to complete Whistle Bend phases 12 and 13 and the associated Evelyn lift station. It's phases 12 and 13. In partnership with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, we are starting construction of the Range Point subdivision, but that's not the Whistle Bend part; the Whistle Bend portion is phases 12 and 13.

So, it is supporting multiple phases. Part of that \$3 million is also landscaping projects that create liveable neighbourhoods. These projects included the Midnight Sun lift station as well as the force main boulevard, the green street landscaping, and utility work in Whistle Bend. That's a

complete list, and it will also be for phases 12 and 13 and the associated Evelyn lift station.

Ms. McLeod: I thank the minister for that. I just have one other item that I want to talk about this afternoon, and that has to do with the grant-in-lieu of property taxes. It says here in the handout that we got at the briefing that the increase in this grant to municipalities is due to higher land values in Whitehorse and Dawson.

I am curious. How is it determined that the land values in those two communities have gone up and not anywhere else?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: So, land values in the territory are reviewed every two years. We look at sales data to determine if land increases are warranted. Land increases tend to happen in Whitehorse and Dawson due to high volume of sales.

Now, Watson and Haines Junction are both going to have a lot of lots in the coming days, so that will probably shift. That may provide more data points for us, but that has basically been the process and why we use Whitehorse and Dawson currently: because there are more sales in those areas and it's based on land sales data that we compile.

Ms. McLeod: Now, I understand that every two years there is a reassessment of property values, as we call them, based on the improvements that are upon that land. So, if I go to the Yukon government and I want to, let's say, borrow money in one of the programs for, say, well drilling and it's a bare piece of land, the government will tell me that land has no value, because you don't get to access that program on a bare piece of land.

I'm curious then: If we're talking about land that the government holds in various communities and that they are paying grants-in-lieu of taxes — you know, I'm wondering if this is all bare land we're talking about or if we're talking about properties where grants-in-lieu are paid on developments on land as a combined item. So, I'm a wee bit — not quite getting what the minister is saying then about how sales in Whitehorse and Dawson are affecting land values, because that's what we're talking about here, as opposed to why land values in the rest of the territory wouldn't rise by a commensurate amount.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: There is a lot to that question. I think what I just said was that Dawson and Whitehorse are used in broadly determining these assessments because of the number of properties being sold in those areas. I think that, when it comes to actual — the value of land itself, as in new lot development and what the value of that land is — like, Community Services builds and services the lots and then hands it over to Energy, Mines and Resources, which then does the assessments on the actual value of the land and puts them up for sale. So, I think if you're looking at a deeper dive into how we actually assess the cost of land in some of these communities, it might be — I think it would be more productive to ask my good colleague in Energy, Mines and Resources, who handles those calculations from within his shop. I can say just very broadly, from the meeting that I recently had in Teslin, that they will use either land assessors or — and also look at the sale of lots within the community itself to determine what the market is like in that community.

So, they do that, but I don't want to butcher this. Certainly, my colleague has officials who do this for a living. They are experts in this field, and they would be more than happy to answer such questions when they are into their budget debate.

Ms. McLeod: I thank the minister for that.

I am going to review the minister's response, because I guess I'm not quite satisfied, but I will review it and come back. If I need to go to a different department, then we will do that.

Thank you to the minister today, and thank you to the officials. I will turn this over to the Third Party.

Ms. White: I appreciate getting up today. It's not going to be for very long, because, let's be honest, I have way more interest in the mains budget than I do in the supplementary.

I have just one question that will help me respond to casework: Will EPR cover soft plastics going forward?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I want to thank the Member for Watson Lake for the discussion this afternoon. If I can help with that last question, I will certainly review the material too and try to get something. I am not happy with my answer either, so we will figure that out. It is confusing, and I will try to suss through it, so thank you for that.

I thank the Member for Takhini-Kopper King for her question today. That is a very good question. I believe that Environment is the lead department dealing with EPR. I don't have granular information on whether soft plastics will be captured by EPR. I would ask my good colleague to please ask Environment, which is really handling a lot of the negotiations to do with the implementation of EPR.

Ms. White: I had always hoped that when we talked — well, we were told anyway — about removing silos between departments, knowing that Community Services is paying for curbside collection, maybe there would be some insight as to what the EPR program would cover, but I guess that's not the case.

I do have lots of questions about programs going forward. I have lots of questions about the mains, and I am going to hold them for then. I thank the minister for his time today.

Just a heads-up to the Minister of Environment: I want to know if EPR will cover soft plastics going forward. I hope I get an answer in the Chamber and it doesn't take six to eight weeks to get a response to a letter.

With that, I will leave it for today.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank both members for their questions this afternoon. I really want to thank Marie-Alexis and Phil MacDonald for their assistance this afternoon. Thanks very much. I appreciate the discussion.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services?

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

Ms. White: Madam Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 51, Department of Community Services, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 51, Department of Community Services, cleared or carried

Chair: The Member for Takhini-Kopper King has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 51, Department of Community Services, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$2,743,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$10,000,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$12,743,000 agreed to

Community Services agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Department of Highways and Public Works

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the opportunity to be part of Committee of the Whole debate for Highways and Public Works *Supplementary Estimates No. 2*.

To my immediate right, I have Deputy Minister Tracy Allen and, to her right, Assistant Deputy Minister Richard Gorczyca assisting me today.

We will get started today. I certainly look forward to additional time in Committee of the Whole to answer questions with respect to the great work that the Department of Highways and Public Works is doing, but we will get started today.

I rise today to speak about the supplementary budget for the Department of Highways and Public Works. This funding reaffirms our commitment to maintaining and improving the infrastructure that Yukoners rely on every day. From roads and bridges to airports and buildings, our work is essential in keeping our communities connected and supported.

Whether it is snow and ice removal, brushing and clearing, or ongoing maintenance and repairs, our team works year-

round to ensure safe and reliable transportation and public spaces.

Each year, we carefully plan and allocate resources to meet the evolving needs of our communities. This budget adjustment will allow us to continue that important work, ensuring that Yukon's infrastructure remains safe, dependable, and built for the future.

Over the past year, the Department of Highways and Public Works has taken swift and necessary action to ensure that Yukoners continue to have safe and reliable infrastructure. This work has required an \$8.4 million increase to our operation and maintenance budget — an investment that reflects our commitment to delivering essential services no matter what the challenges.

Extreme weather events, rising utility costs, and emergency response measures have made this year particularly demanding, but through careful planning, we ensured that Yukoners remain safe, that roads were maintained, and that essential public services continued uninterrupted.

One of our key priorities has been the health and safety of our communities, including access to safe drinking water in government buildings. To support this, we have proactively conducted water sampling in select government facilities and we will continue regular testing. We have also recently installed filtration kits in drinking fountains across all Yukon schools, ensuring that students have access to clean water.

This year, higher utility and contractor costs, along with an early and intense winter, have increased our expenses. Utility costs alone rose over by \$1 million.

We also invested an additional \$1.4 million in snow removal and outdoor winter maintenance at government properties to keep public spaces safe and accessible.

Unseasonal winter temperature fluctuations have increased maintenance costs for our parking lots and sidewalks, while early heavy snowfall has made property upkeep across the territory even more demanding.

Our Transportation division also responded to several major natural events. Landslide, flood, and fire mitigation efforts required more than a \$2-million investment to protect infrastructure and communities.

One of the most significant emergencies was a landslide on the south Klondike Highway where HPW removed roughly 4,500 truckloads of material in order to restore safe access. I know that I was certainly incredibly impressed, but Yukoners were impressed. The aerial shot of that alluvial fan of the debris field from the air was absolutely extraordinary, and the contrast with the dump trucks was absolutely stunning. They looked very tiny in comparison to the massive debris that had come down on the south Klondike Highway. I certainly thought that it would take a long time to make that road passable, but through the dedicated work of Highways and Public Works crews, it was open within perhaps three days or four days, which I thought was just absolutely extraordinary — kudos to them.

In Old Crow, an unpredictable snowpack created a heightened risk for flooding. In response, we expanded staffing

and heavy equipment to maintain 24/7 flood monitoring and response operations.

Meanwhile, wildfires across the north Klondike Highway required additional safety measures, including pilot vehicles and additional flagging personnel to keep traffic moving safely through affected areas.

Through every challenge, our team has worked to protect Yukoners and maintain the infrastructure that supports daily lives. This funding ensures that we continue to deliver essential services and respond effectively to emergencies.

Madam Chair, alongside these maintenance and emergency response efforts, we also made great strides in advancing major capital infrastructure projects that will provide long-term benefit for Yukoners. This past year, we proudly opened a brand new school in Whistle Bend as well as a housing complex and health and wellness facility in Old Crow, strengthening services in the community. We also reached a key milestone with the commissioning of the Dempster fibre line, improving connectivity across the territory. Significant progress was also made on the main runway at the Whitehorse airport, the Nisutlin Bay bridge, and the north Klondike Highway construction project — critical components of our transportation infrastructure.

We opened the Big Creek bridge near Watson Lake and broke ground on the new Kêts'ádañ Kù School in Burwash Landing. I know that the Kluane First Nation and the community in general are absolutely excited about the prospect of significant work being completed this year, with likely completion in the fall of 2026.

We improved crosswalk lighting in Porter Creek and began developing a multi-use trail along the Alaska Highway through Whitehorse, enhancing safety for all ages and abilities. We also completed the final touches on the battery and solar power sites at our Klondike and Ogilvie maintenance camps located along the Dempster Highway, replacing the need for 103,000 litres of diesel fuel per year and cutting carbon emissions by 270 tonnes.

I certainly look forward to being able to report on — I believe that it will be something like a dashboard that will indicate the efficiency or solar gain at both Klondike and Ogilvie from now into the summer. That will certainly be interesting and hopefully inspiring to see. We are also moving forward with similar projects at Blanchard and Tuchtua. Blanchard is on the Haines Road at the Yukon-British Columbia border and Tuchtua is on the upper Campbell Highway. We hope to see similar diesel fuel savings in the very near future.

As a result of these efforts, Highways and Public Works is projecting an increase of \$12.5 million to our capital budget. The majority of this request is related to two main projects: the Nisutlin Bay bridge and the north Klondike Highway reconstruction. The Nisutlin Bay bridge is a major transportation link along the Alaska Highway for all of us. Not only that, it is a significant landmark, one that is recognized by Yukoners and travellers from away alike. As the longest bridge along the Alaska Highway within the Yukon, spanning 584 metres — or 1,916 feet — we are working to create a brand new

structure that is designed to accommodate modern traffic, including larger commercial vehicles.

This project will also improve safety with better sightlines, wider lanes, and improved pedestrian and cyclist access. Now in its final year of construction, I am proud to say that the project is moving toward completion. With all piers and girders now installed, crews will focus on completing the deck, lighting, guardrails, and a snowmobile bench this construction season. Beyond improving transportation, this project has brought significant benefit to Yukon businesses. Local contractors and suppliers have played a key role in construction, consultation, materials supply, subtrades, quarry development, and environmental monitoring.

This year, additional resources were required to address issues related to soil conditions at the project site. Crews adapted to these challenges with additional subtrade costs and expanded efforts during the winter months to keep the project on schedule. This investment will ensure that the bridge opens to traffic as scheduled this fall.

Moving to the north Klondike Highway, since 2020, approximately \$110 million has been invested to reconstruct 68.5 kilometres of the north Klondike Highway. Around \$81 million of that \$110 million is recoverable from Canada — part of the national trade corridors fund. These upgrades are key to increasing safety, improving driving conditions, and better connecting the Yukon's resources to markets. This project also strengthens the resiliency of the highway against the impacts of climate change, such as thawing permafrost.

Furthermore, this project provides economic opportunities for Yukon First Nations through the Yukon First Nation procurement policy.

Thanks to favourable summer construction conditions, work on the 16.3-kilometre section of highway from kilometre 542.3 to kilometre 558.6 progressed ahead of schedule, leading to additional expenditure in this fiscal year. Beyond these key initiatives, we have also invested in other critical infrastructure projects. This includes ongoing work on the Teslin River bridge, the Yukon Resource Gateway program, and the Big Creek replacement, each contributing to a more resilient transportation network. The new Big Creek bridge located near Watson Lake successfully opened to traffic on October 5 of last year, ensuring safe passage for the public.

Although tender prices were admittedly higher than expected, this investment allowed us to replace the aging bridge with a wider, stronger structure with improved road alignment. Completing the new bridge on schedule has provided Yukoners with a safe and reliable asset, eliminating the need for emergency repairs on the old bridge.

Under the Yukon Resource Gateway project, a contract was awarded to replace a culvert along the Silver Trail. This project was awarded to a First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun business under a regional economic development exception — an example of how our procurement policies directly support Yukon First Nation businesses.

While this resulted in additional spending this year, it also reflects our commitment to strengthening economic opportunities for Yukon First Nations and local businesses.

The department is also working to recover costs related to design adjustments on the Carmacks bypass project, ensuring responsible management of public funds.

Additionally, we are moving forward with essential repairs and geotechnical monitoring on the Teslin River bridge to maintain its integrity and safety.

Madam Chair, as you can see, we have done a lot of great things this past fiscal year. Overall, the *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* requests for Highways and Public Works amounts to a \$20.94 million increase, a necessary investment to maintain critical infrastructure and consistent services.

Keeping our capital projects on track remains a top priority, as they provide long-term benefit for Yukoners. Despite the challenges that we continue to face, we are committed to delivering these projects with efficiency and fiscal responsibility in mind.

Madam Chair, these investments not only enhance infrastructure; they strengthen communities, create jobs, drive economic growth, and help build a safer and more connected Yukon.

Thank you to all the work of the Highways and Public Works team. Thank you for your time today to provide opening comments on the supplementary budget. I look forward to questions from the members opposite.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

Chair: It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

We are now prepared to receive the Commissioner of Yukon, in her capacity as Lieutenant Governor, to grant assent to bills which have passed this House.

Commissioner Webber enters the Chamber accompanied by her Aide-de-Camp

ASSENT TO BILLS

Commissioner: Please be seated.

Speaker: Madam Commissioner, the Assembly has, at its present session, passed a certain bill to which, in the name and on behalf of the Assembly, I respectfully request your assent.

Clerk: *Interim Supply Appropriation Act 2025-26.*

Commissioner: I hereby assent to the bill as enumerated by the Clerk.

It is a beautiful day, and I hope you all are able to get out and enjoy the beautiful weather that we're having these days. Spring is here; it's muddy. Anyway, have a wonderful day.

Commissioner leaves the Chamber

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:19 p.m.