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HANSARD

Thursday, March 13, 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
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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 that the motion that the Minister of Tourism and Culture gave notice of yesterday, Motion No. 1189, was not placed on today's Notice Paper, as it is not in order.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

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

Visitors introduced

Speaker: Are there any further visitors to be introduced?
Visitors introduced

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Yukon Sustainability Awards

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the recipients of the second annual Yukon Sustainability Awards. On February 12 at the ECO IMPACT 2025 conference in Calgary, three Yukon businesses were presented with ECO Canada's Yukon Sustainability Awards.

Yukoners have a reputation for demonstrating strong environmental values, and this extends to our business community. The businesses honoured with these awards have taken a strong environmentally conscious approach, striving to ensure that their operations avoid negative impacts on the environment. I invite all Yukoners and members of the Assembly to join me in congratulating the recipients.

The winner of the Small Business award is Future Proof My Building Consulting Ltd. This company provides expertise to Yukoners to assess and improve their homes or commercial buildings through tailored methods. They help their clients save money while reducing impacts on the environment.

The Medium to Large Business Yukon Sustainability Award winner is Snowline Gold Corp. Snowline is a resource company built for the new age, with the values of environmental stewardship and local partnership at the forefront of their exploration efforts.

Lastly, the winner for the Regional Business Yukon Sustainability Award is Tincup Wilderness Lodges Ltd. Tincup is a beautiful tourist destination just outside of Kluane National Park. This business prioritizes minimizing the waste and relies almost entirely on solar power for their energy needs.

These three businesses have found their own unique ways to operate successfully while respecting nature and the beautiful territory that we all call home. The people behind these businesses recognize the importance of preserving our stunning territory for future generations and for the benefit of all living things in the north. This viewpoint is reflected in how they operate.

Mr. Speaker, these awards draw attention to leaders in environmental sustainability across all sectors of the territory's economy. As we come together to support buy and choose local in the ways we spend and do business and as we fight for the future of the Yukon and Canada, it's more important than ever that we recognize those who drive our economy forward in a responsible and sustainable way.

In closing, congratulations to these three award winners and to all the businesses that were nominated for their innovative practices. It is critical that we support entrepreneurs who operate responsibly, and this support includes celebrating their accomplishments and contributions to both our environment and economy.

Applause

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to join the House in recognizing these three recipients of the Yukon Sustainability Awards as presented by the Environmental Careers Organization at this year's ECO IMPACT 2025 conference.

Environmental stewardship is a key part of doing business here in the Yukon. We are fortunate to be home base for so many businesses that go the extra mile to ensure sustainable practices and environmental responsibility.

Future Proof My Building Consulting Ltd. was awarded the Small Business Yukon Sustainability Award for its work in relation to optimizing control systems and mechanical systems in buildings. I should note that Shane was also a Yukon Innovation Prize finalist in 2019 for developing innovation around solar and air heating, promoting energy efficiency and well-ventilated, healthy air.

The Medium to Large Business Yukon Sustainability Award went to the Snowline group. We paid tribute to Scott and the team here in the House for two years in a row as winners of the 2023 and 2024 Robert E. Leckie Award for Excellence in Environmental Stewardship. These honours are a testament to the incredible work of this company, with environmental initiatives being a cornerstone of everything that they do here in the Yukon.

Lastly, Tincup Wilderness Lodge has been awarded the Regional Business Yukon Sustainability Award for their commitment to sustainability through offering unique and authentic experiences to visitors in their fly-in, eco-conscious lodge on Tincup Lake in my riding in beautiful Kluane country. Meinrad and Katrin go the extra great lengths to immerse their guests in unspoiled nature in a minimalistic, sustainable setting.

Congratulations to all three recipients, and thank you for moving the Yukon forward in a positive direction.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon NDP to add our voices to the congratulations for this year's Yukon Sustainability Awards winners. A huge shout-out to Future Proof My Building Consulting Ltd., Snowline Gold Corporation, and Tincup Wilderness Lodge for being this year's winners.

They are doing some important work, from ensuring the quality of green buildings and industrial projects to progressive reclamation, partnerships with First Nation business owners, prioritizing eco-friendly operations, and incorporating the use of renewable energy options within their business models.

I would also like to thank the community leaders and advocates who help to organize these awards. They make these celebrations possible and keep us all motivated to do better for our environment.

Prioritizing and celebrating sustainability is a value that resonates deeply with Yukoners, and I'm confident that we will continue to do more great work as a community. I'm excited to see the impact from the winners this year, and I know that next year's nominees are already hard at work, so keep it up, everyone.

Applause

In recognition of Pi Day

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of all members of the Assembly and math nerds and numeral-phile allies everywhere.

Tomorrow is Pi Day. It seems like only a year since the last time we acknowledged Pi Day. Pi Day is a day to celebrate this irrational, transcendent number whose digits go on into infinity. Sometimes when I think about pi and its endless digits, I question whether Pi Day is just a fake holiday created by math companies to sell more math. Perhaps we just need to let the mystery be part of the magic.

For my 3.14 minutes today, I thought I would take us on a journey to the stars with pi, this fickle constant. Throughout human history, we have marked time by the motion of the sun, the moon, and the stars. A "day" is defined by one full rotation of the Earth. A day is divided into two times three times four hours; an hour is divided into three times four times five minutes.

If you were on the equator for one day, without moving, you would travel two times pi times the radius of the Earth or 40,000 km.

This is how the metre was first defined by mathematicians: 1/10,000,000 of the distance from the Earth's equator to the pole. If you stood on the border between the Yukon and BC for a day, you would travel two times the cosine of 60 degrees times pi times the radius of the Earth or exactly 20,000 kilometres.

A month was chosen to be two fortnights or the time it takes the moon to orbit the Earth, which to us looks like one lunar cycle. By the way, 28 days is also the length of one lunar day.

A year is one orbit of the Earth around the sun, which covers off pi times the astronomical unit squared in area.

The Earth's axis of rotation is not aligned with our plane of orbit. In astronomy, this is described as "the obliquity of the ecliptic" or 23.4 degrees. That inclination is what creates the Arctic circle and our seasons.

Astronomers from thousands of years ago could see all this and more. They saw that the obliquity of the ecliptic precessed so that our rotational axis slowly describes a cone — thank you, pi — with a period of 26,000 years. As we invented telescopes and began to look further back in time at our universe, we discovered the nutation of our orbit caused by the gravitational attraction of the planets and then a wobble with a period that indicated that the Earth's core must be fluid. And it keeps going, Mr. Speaker — Earth tides, leap seconds, orbiting the Milky Way, the expansion of the vast universe. This precise dance between the Earth, moon, sun, and our universe can all be described using pi and some basic math.

So, Mr. Speaker, thank you, pi. Thank you for providing us our star signs, our eclipses, our midnight suns, glimpses into the mysteries of our universe, and for helping to sell more math. Go pi.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Mr. Cathers: I have for tabling today a press release dated December 14, 2023, entitled "Immediate action needed in health human resources strategy".

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I have for tabling today statistics of the 35th Yukon Legislative Assembly to date.

Ms. White: Today, I have a statement from the board of directors of the Raven Recycling Society for tabling as well as a letter from the Ukrainian Canadian Association of Yukon.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

PETITIONS

Petition No. 28

Ms. White: I have for tabling a petition that reads as follows:

This petition of the undersigned shows:

THAT the Government of Yukon refused to grant Raven Recycling Society a transfer payment agreement that included community depot recycling materials in October of 2024;

THAT the Government of Yukon informed community depots that the depots could no longer use Raven Recycling Society's recycling facilities without notifying Raven Recycling Society;

THAT the Government of Yukon issued a change order on contract C00074407, removing Raven Recycling Society from the transportation contract without Raven Recycling Society's knowledge or consent;

THAT the Government of Yukon's actions have placed Raven Recycling Society at a competitive disadvantage in the recycling industry by restricting material on the transfer payment agreement; and

THAT the [...] Minister of Community Services, has been made aware of the situation through formal letters and a meeting but has taken no action to ensure Raven Recycling Society has fair and equal access to recycling materials from community depots and across Yukon,

THEREFORE, the undersigned ask the Yukon Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Yukon to publicly disclose the reasons behind these actions against the non-profit Raven Recycling Society and the directives given to the Department of Community Services, and to amend the transfer payment agreement to include community depot recycling materials, allowing Raven Recycling Society to continue serving all of Yukon as it has for decades.

Mr. Speaker, it has been signed by 622 Yukoners.

Speaker: Are there any further petitions to be presented? Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 49: *Technical Amendments (Estates, unclaimed bodies and related matters) Act (2025)*

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I move that Bill No. 49, entitled *Technical Amendments (Estates, unclaimed bodies and related matters) Act (2025)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 49, entitled *Technical Amendments (Estates, unclaimed bodies and related matters) Act (2025)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 49 agreed to

Speaker: Are there any further bills to be introduced? Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to take immediate steps to recruit doctors, nurses, and other health professionals from the United States, including:

(1) allowing US board-certified doctors, surgeons, and specialists to practise in the Yukon;

(2) working with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association to speed up the licensing of US-trained nurses;

(3) moving quickly to speed up licensing of other health professionals educated in the US, especially in areas where recruitment poses a challenge; and

(4) launching a marketing campaign to promote the opportunity of the Yukon to US-trained health professionals and to Canadian health professionals currently working in the US.

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

THAT this House congratulates Canada on signing the *Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women*, the Belém do Pará convention, on March 7, 2025.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to protect Yukon firefighters by replacing all expired turnout gear.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to ensure that all mine sites are compliant with all requirements of their water licences before mine sites are permitted for operation.

Finally, I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Auditor General of Canada to complete a performance audit to investigate the role of the Government of Yukon and Government of Canada in the failure of the heap leach facility at Victoria Gold Corporation's Eagle Gold mine.

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

THAT this House do issue an order for the return by March 31, 2025 of the final report of the review of all programs operated in Yukon by Connective Support Society, including the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, Housing First, and the supervised housing and reintegration program, conducted pursuant to the May 1, 2024 resolution of the Legislative Assembly.

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

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: **Infrastructure funding**

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, as the Yukon's population grows, there is increasing strain on infrastructure in our communities. Parts of Whitehorse, like Porter Creek and Whistle Bend, have experienced this strain and see it daily when they travel to and from work.

In the Yukon, we have long recognized that this type of infrastructure needs to be addressed by all levels of government, including the Yukon government. That is why I was disappointed when I asked about this yesterday and the minister's response was this — quote: "I will again assert that the traffic within the City of Whitehorse is the city's responsibility."

I would remind the minister that the Yukon government is the developer of Whistle Bend. So, I will ask again: Does the minister recognize that the only way the infrastructure problems we're seeing in Whitehorse, including traffic, will be

resolved is with significant support from the Yukon government?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I'm happy to rise today to address the question from the member opposite. I'm heartened to hear the opposition starting to acknowledge the fact that this is a great place to live and that the territory is actually growing, because the economy is booming, because we have great wages, because almost everybody who needs a job can get a job in this economy that we've built here in the territory over the last nine years, and we've also worked very hard to invest in our housing across the Yukon to make sure that people coming to the territory, who are coming to the territory in droves, have a place to live.

Now, of course, that is starting to put some strain on our resources, on the infrastructure that the member opposite has alluded to today. Of course, I'm always working with our municipalities on all manner of infrastructure requests to make sure that lives are easier for them and easier for their citizens.

I have just announced recently — in this budget, of course — that we are increasing the comprehensive municipal grant, which provides more money to municipalities, and we're increasing that grant by 20 percent. It's the largest increase the comprehensive municipal grant has ever seen.

I'm happy to continue this answer in related questions.

Ms. Clarke: For Whitehorse to continue growing, we must address these infrastructure challenges alongside municipalities. The minister's approach of ignoring or blaming municipalities is a failing strategy.

In November, the City of Whitehorse recognized this when they made a negotiation of an infrastructure and servicing agreement a condition of phases 10 and 11 of Whistle Bend. That agreement will include a number of specific projects, including a third lane on Mountain View Drive, the design and construction of a multi-use pathway connecting Whistle Bend to downtown, and a third vehicle entrance to Whistle Bend.

If these projects are conditions for developing the next phases of Whistle Bend, why don't we see any of them in the five-year capital plan?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, there are all sorts — a lot of components to that question, but I do want to highlight, first of all, that we have built an absolutely astounding economy in this territory by working together with our municipalities and our NGOs. There are all sorts of components that make this place one of the best places in the country to live, and we are seeing the success of those policies in the number of people coming to the territory. It is a problem — it's a problem for infrastructure and everything else, but it is a good problem to have.

I will also say that, over the last nine years, we have seen absolutely historic investment from the federal government in our territory, and I want to take — that historic investment has built communities from Old Crow to Beaver Creek to Watson Lake to Ross River and all points in between. It has been staggering, because this government — my Cabinet colleagues — have decided that every community matters, and so we have seen bridges and airports and pipes and water and roads. We have never seen an investment in infrastructure like this in

probably the history of the territory, and I really want to thank the federal government, of course, for that much-needed investment in the territory. I am sure that there will be more questions, and I am happy to answer them in the remaining questions.

Ms. Clarke: Salamat, Mr. Speaker. This isn't just about the issues that we see in communities today. The record population growth that we have seen is not being planned sustainably. The Liberals have simply not ensured that the territory's services have kept pace with that growth. This means that further strains on drinking water, waste-water systems, and roads will occur — but the same is true for non-municipal services. For example, while our population grows rapidly, more and more Yukoners can't find a family doctor or get the medical procedures that they need.

The Liberal government's inability to plan has reduced services and quality of life for Yukoners. Why have the Liberals failed so badly at planning how the territory will accommodate population growth?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I want to just identify for the House today and my colleagues: What I am hearing is a request from the opposition to ensure that we keep investing in infrastructure, as we did. We know that the week started with criticism about our commitment to investing infrastructure with our capital budget. I do appreciate, today, the member opposite getting up to make sure that we continue to do the work we are doing.

I would also like to flag — when you have population growth, you need to be able to put funds into health. As you see, we have record investment into health in this budget. When you have record growth, you need to build schools. We want to build schools. The opposition doesn't want us to build those schools.

Again, these are the types of things that I think will be a constant conversation through the spring. We want to have that record investment into housing. That is why it's in this budget. We are going to continue to invest in health and education, but we want good partners on both sides of the aisle here, because the folks have identified that, yes, there has been great success in what we have done with our economy. Many of the folks across the aisle have also asked on a number of occasions to make sure that we support our immigration programs and our labour market programs.

Again, I thank the member opposite for the support today in our capital budget and the continued investment.

Question re: Foreign-trained health care professionals

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, the Yukon Party caucus has repeatedly pushed for the Yukon government to speed up the recognition of credentials of foreign-trained health professionals from countries including the US, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. Right now, given what is going on south of the border, there seems to be a unique opportunity to recruit American doctors who wish to leave the US. One province — Nova Scotia — has already started

allowing US board-certified doctors and surgeons to practise without delay.

Will the Government of Yukon take steps to quickly allow US board-certified doctors, surgeons, and specialists to practise in the Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the question from the member opposite. I just want to take a little walk down history lane. Folks will remember that when I actually went to sign that agreement, I was criticized by the opposition. We signed an agreement, actually, with Premier Houston a number of years ago. I was criticized by the opposition for doing that and what value we would get from that.

Today, what we are hearing from the members opposite is: Please ensure that you are doing that same thing that the Atlantic registry is doing. That's why we signed the agreement — to be able to do that work. Our Department of Community Services is closely working with Health and Social Services so we can be the first jurisdiction outside of Atlantic Canada that can use that agile mechanism to actually see folks come into the territory. Thank you for the validation on that, but in the meantime, we are doing other good work.

We have signed an agreement — it's \$3.6 million — with the Government of Canada. It was signed quite a while ago. What that is doing is working with people from all backgrounds who are here in the Yukon. It's something that we can use for individuals who are maybe wanting to come from the US or from other jurisdictions, and it's a foreign credential recognition. We're actually sitting down with each individual, identifying the gaps in the licensing process for them, and making sure that we streamline in a very bespoke way, exactly case-managing each one of those individuals.

We have 45 individuals now we have been working with, and I think the number that I can give back to the House — 12 individuals who have completed that process and are now in our —

Speaker: Order, please.

Ms. Van Bibber: While we know that many doctors have publicly expressed interest in leaving the US, we think there is also a unique opportunity to recruit US-trained nurses or nurses working in the US to come north. Will the Yukon government work with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association to speed up the licensing of US-trained nurses to encourage them to come to Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, the internationally educated health professionals have historically played a very important role in the delivery of health care here in Canada and in the territory. We recognize that leveraging their expertise is a priority for all governments across Canada. I can note that we're working with regulators and our federal, provincial, and territorial partners to discuss pathways to licensing physicians, including internationally educated physicians. The navigator program that the Premier has mentioned involves helping internationally educated health professionals who are here in the territory to return to the health professions, if they choose to do so.

I can also note that we made changes in this very Legislature in the fall of 2024 for the purposes of allowing — just as the question asked — nurses to have licensing here in the territory in a far more streamlined process, in a far easier way. We work all the time with our partner representing the nurses here in the territory. We are happy to do so and are happy to take their advice as well as work together with them to make the legislative changes that make this all that much easier for nurses wanting to come here to the territory and work.

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, in addition to speeding up the credentialing and licensing processes, the Yukon government should also launch a new recruitment campaign targeting US health professionals.

With all the disruption happening south of the border, the time has never been better to encourage US-trained health professionals to make Yukon their home. Will the Yukon government launch a marketing campaign to promote the opportunity for US-trained doctors, nurses, and health professionals to come north and make Yukon their home?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think it's important to speak about internationally educated health professionals. I know that the motion introduced today and the question here is about American physicians or health care professionals. I think our scope is far broader than that. We welcome our American friends, should they wish to do so, but we have established a recruiting system that is broader than that.

We are working with our partners and our professionals and, of course, as the Premier noted, a letter of intent has been signed with Nova Scotia to work collaboratively. We are looking at innovative strategies and creating new opportunities for health care professionals to come here. Officials from both those two jurisdictions — ours and Nova Scotia's — have developed a comprehensive set of issues and have partnered and shared information on several of these topics.

We also look forward to the learnings that are being applied and developed through a framework known as "transitions to practice" for internationally educated nurses and new Canadian nursing graduates. It will be adapted in other professions, no doubt, in the future. We look forward to continuing the work collectively with partners across Canada and with health care professionals everywhere who will want to come and live here in the territory.

Question re: Eagle Gold mine heap leach failure

Ms. White: It has been eight months since the disaster at the Eagle Gold mine. The good jobs provided by the mining sector aren't worth much if they can't be counted on. The economic benefits of mining aren't worth it if they are going to continue to poison our environment and cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. When it comes to mining, this government needs to do better at protecting our environment.

They recently announced that the water treatment plant required at the Eagle mine is finally up and operational. The real issue is that a water treatment plant was part of Eagle mine's water licence and was required before the mine began operations, but somehow, it wasn't constructed until after the heap leach disaster. This is the fault of the Yukon government.

Every water management issue at the site is the fault of the government for allowing them to move ahead without water treatment.

Why was the Eagle Gold mine allowed to begin production without having a functioning water treatment plant?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The treatment plant that had been proposed or that was part of the plan for the Eagle mine has nothing to do with the treatment that is happening right now. I have asked the department professionals to explain it to me. The way they have sort of described it is that it would have been handling, you know, volumes of water many, many, many times less and types of water that are very different from what is being addressed right now. So, if there had been a water treatment plant in place, it wouldn't have helped in this instance.

I think that the question that the Leader of the Third Party asked is about why that is. I will go back through compliance monitoring inspection, but I think that there was an alternate strategy that was put in place and found acceptable, so I would have to dig out the details. Of course, I know that we provided briefings for opposition members as recently as a couple of weeks ago, so I will flag those questions to the folks who do the briefings for the members opposite, as well.

Ms. White: The government has assembled an independent review board to investigate a very narrow facet of the problem with the Eagle mine, and that is to answer why the heap leach failed. That is a technical question, and the government will get a technical answer. Maybe it was stacked too high, maybe the angle was too steep, or maybe they were running too much solution through the heap — maybe all three.

But that won't answer how or why those things were allowed to happen. There are so many more questions to be answered, like: Why didn't an inspection catch those violations sooner? Why were they allowed to act outside of their water licence? Why is the Yukon's mining regime so permissive that these problems were not addressed before a failure happened?

The First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun first called for a public inquiry and is now calling for the Auditor General of Canada to investigate the root causes of the failure. When will this government finally launch a public inquiry into its own role in the failure of the mine?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, the independent review board — which is a set of top professionals, with some other advice from top professionals around mining and heaps and failures — does have a specific focus. That specific focus is to find out what caused this, and that is a super important thing to do. What we have said all along is that, when we understand what the causes are, we will understand whether there were misses that were made on the part of government, and then that is what will lead to the next questions, but let's find out what those causes are. This is pretty important.

Also, when that independent review board was set up, we set it up to be distant from government. It's the receiver who is managing their work, and that is so that they can look at where government had a role and understand if there was cause there, too.

So, that is an important step; it is a very important step, and we remain open, once we understand what caused the slide.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, so this is about the systemic failure of government to properly regulate the many failed mines that it continues to claim are the backbone of our economy. There is more than \$100 million in this budget for the remediation, care, maintenance, and monitoring of environmental problems at a number of mine sites. This isn't just about Eagle Gold; it is about this government's and previous governments' inability to ensure the long-term sustainability of the industry and of our environment. The millions of dollars in this budget that are going into cleaning up failed mine sites could have been spent on things that Yukoners desperately need, like improving access to health care, education, and housing.

It is critical that the Yukon understands why mines continue to fail in the territory in order to ensure a thriving industry and a healthy environment for future generations. So, how can this government expect to prevent future disasters if they won't investigate why Wolverine, Minto, and now Eagle Gold mines have all failed?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: But we are investigating. That is the whole point. Even the member opposite just pointed out that we are investigating. The independent review board is doing this work to try to understand. If we are talking about Minto, people walked away, and thankfully, the security that we had has been what has paid for the remediation. I want to give a shout-out for all of that work that has been happening there. That mine site is being looked at by the Selkirk First Nation to take it back over and to see about restarting that or working that mine site. So, that is not one of the examples.

There are some really bad examples; I agree, and I think that it is the responsibility of governments to make sure that we get it right. We need to make sure that mining is protecting our environment, is upholding the treaty rights and obligations, is supporting our communities, and is safe. Yes, we need to do all those things, and the first step in understanding the cause of the slide is the independent review board.

Question re: Placer mining

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, the placer mining industry is crucial to the economic success of the Yukon and in particular rural Yukon. When we asked last week about the backlog in issuing permits and licences for placer mines, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources pointed the finger at the YESA board and the Yukon Water Board as the problem. However, in their February 28 letter to the Premier and minister, the KPMA states — and I quote: “The delays currently exist at all three levels, being: the YESAA assessment; the Yukon government's adjudicating of a Decision Document; and Yukon Water Board's subsequent regulatory process...”

So, is the minister now willing to accept responsibility for his role in the backlog and tell us what he is doing about it?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: My recollection of last week — was it? — when this question came up was to say that the placer industry had a record year last year. That's what I started off saying and then I talked about the challenges that were there. I

don't think — I didn't say that there were challenges with the permitting side on Energy, Mines and Resources — there are — and I said that there are also challenges around YESAA and the Water Board, so there are challenges everywhere and all of the timelines have been increasing for a whole suite of reasons.

Then I think I was asked: Why were we discovering this now? What I said was: No, actually, the department has been working on this for some time. They were the ones to flag this to me last year or the year before about the pressures that were coming. I remember spending an afternoon talking with KPMA just about the challenges that were in front of us.

So, we identified a lead within the government who was going to take the role to help folks to navigate. We gave a strategy to the Klondike Placer Miners' Association and talked about how they would assist. We will work to respond to the letter that was sent to me and the Premier recently, and we will continue to do that work as we go through the backlog that we see coming.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, the minister points to last year's success, but we want the placer miners to have success in this coming year and future years, but they won't be able to do so if they don't have the licences to operate.

According to the Klondike Placer Miners' Association — and I'll quote: "This situation is expected to worsen in 2026 and 2027, unless executive action is taken. The current, and worsening, regulatory backlog exists despite the placer industry's attempts to proactively apply for licences and work with assessors and regulators to find workable solutions to this issue, which is not the fault of the placer industry."

They have asked to Premier and minister to — and I'll quote again: "... take action to ensure placer water licence and Class 4..." — mining land use plan — "... renewal applications that are already in the regulatory queue are not allowed to simply expire while awaiting either a Decision Document or YWB decision..."

What is the minister's response to this request from the KPMA? Will he grant the one-year extensions that they have asked for?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Within that question, the member opposite said that this is not the responsibility of those placer miners who have been doing their work and submitting their applications, and I completely agree, and we are working to consider all of the pathways forward. We started, as I said in my previous answer when I got up — that there is a straightforward strategy that does not take executive actions at this moment. We will continue to use those, but that doesn't mean that we aren't looking at all the possibilities. So, we will continue to do that work.

I want to say again that I appreciate how Klondike Placer Miners' Association has been proactively working on this issue and working with us around trying to address it. I appreciate all the work that they have been doing toward it.

Mr. Kent: So, last night, I attended a meeting at the Marsh Lake Community Centre regarding water levels in the Southern Lakes. That meeting was also attended by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. At the meeting, Yukon Energy told residents that they have applied to the

Yukon Water Board for a two-month licence extension of the Whitehorse Rapids generating station, because they, too, like the placer miners, are facing delays with Transport Canada, in this case, issuing a decision document.

We know how important that facility is to Yukoners, but placer mines are also important to many Yukon individuals, families, and businesses, as their livelihood depends on them. My question for the minister is: If it's okay for Yukon Energy to have an extension, then why won't he do the same for Yukon placer miners?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think, yes, what you would have heard is that the board of Yukon Energy is applying for one. They will have to go through the process with the Water Board, I believe, for that two-month extension.

For the House today, I will say — I said it last week — that this is incredibly important that we see our placer miners operating this year, especially at a time when we have the economic pressure. They were a backbone of the economy in 2020 and 2021. It's important for our communities that these businesses — many family-owned businesses — are operating.

What we are doing is making sure we meet with Water Board officials as we see the challenges. We're working internally with — we're meeting with the KPMA, I believe, on Monday; I have a conversation with their team as well as the minister. But also, we're going to go back, because I think this problem also occurred under the previous government. So, we're going back to see what happened 10 years ago, as well, with the Yukon Party, and we're taking a look to see some of the challenges and maybe some of the tools, and we're also looking at the tools that we have available, because we think that this is incredibly important.

So, this will be an open dialogue, and we'll be able to report back on what we've seen and the tools that were used before and tools that we may use moving forward.

Question re: Carbon tax

Mr. Hassard: For years, the Yukon Party has said that the carbon tax was the wrong policy for Canada and especially the wrong policy for the Yukon. We've always said that we need to take action to address climate change but that the carbon tax was not the best way to do that.

After more than a decade of advocating for that position, we were happy to see that it is finally the consensus position across the country and is now the policy of the Liberal government in Ottawa. The only remaining stalwart carbon tax supporters are the Yukon Liberals.

So, is the Yukon Liberal government finally willing to accept that it is possible to take action on climate change without imposing a costly carbon tax, which has punished Yukoners for living in the north and driven up costs for all Canadians?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I will completely agree that there are many different ways to address the issues that are facing us when it comes to climate change. That's why, when I was the chair of the Council of the Federation, I made sure that we had a five-year review of the federal government's carbon-pricing mechanism to make sure that whatever model was

being used was the most effective and efficient way of dealing with man-made climate change.

What I will push back on is the member opposite — and every Conservative government in Canada — keeps on trying to convince Canadians that carbon pricing is the reason why there has been a 20-percent increase in consumer prices since 2019. It is just simply not the case.

If you don't want to take my opinion on it, take every single economist's opinion on that — including the IRPP, which says that, if that 20 percent did happen over that time frame, 0.1 percent of that would be attributable to every single type of Canadian municipal, provincial, and territorial effort to affect climate through taxes.

Again, the member opposite — I will agree with him and say, yes, there are many different ways in which we need to have policies to counter the effects of climate change. My question to him is: What is their policy?

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, we were especially surprised to see that the Yukon Liberal government issued a statement calling on the federal government to cancel the planned increase to the carbon tax on April 1.

Yukoners haven't forgotten that, just about a year ago, the Liberal government voted against a Yukon Party motion to cancel last year's annual increase. The Premier even said he felt so strongly about it that he hoped that it would become an election issue.

I would like to ask the Premier about this flip-flop. Have his views about the carbon tax changed, or did he simply get new orders from the federal Liberals?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: About a year ago, I was actually on my way back from attending the funeral of our former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. During that time, I did an actual interview where, clearly, I stated in that interaction that I felt that the five-year review should have happened, that the process and structure of the agreement that we had could be better; we needed something that would work for the Yukon.

I made those comments clear when answering questions here in the House — I have always said that. I will say it again: Whether it's a Liberal, Conservative, or NDP federal government, I hope whoever it is will do something to tackle climate change. What tools they use — they hopefully will work closely with us. It's important that this always happens.

We know here that we are getting ready. We have a contingency fund that's set up for the floods and fires that we will see this year. I think it's incredibly important that we do take action, but I have been very clear: Make sure that we have a system and a structure that works for us. And at that point, a year ago, what I was doing was calling on the federal government to sit down with us. I actually said that we should have a First Ministers' meeting to ensure that we have a system that works.

Mr. Hassard: So, when the Minister of Finance and past Premier was asked about his letter calling for the federal government to wind down the carbon tax, he expressed his disappointment. He said that he was sad to see the abandonment of a very successful carbon tax system. Many Yukoners thought that this was odd, because that same week, the now Premier told

the media that he had always had issues with the carbon tax and wanted to see it reshaped.

Mr. Speaker, which Premier was accurate? Was it the former Premier, who thought the carbon tax was great and well-designed, or the current Premier, who thought that it was flawed and needed to be reshaped?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I guess this is too complicated for the member opposite to see that we could be supportive of the pan-Canadian framework and we can be supportive of the Vancouver Declaration that the Yukon Party signed for us to have a carbon-pricing mechanism. The Yukon Party signed so that we could have a carbon-pricing mechanism, and we can also be critical of a federal government who does not adhere to its own rules and policies when it comes to that carbon-pricing mandate and requirements.

Yes, we can chew bubble gum and we can also walk. We can make sure that the reduction of emissions make sense. The systems that happen in California, the systems that are happening in Québec and British Columbia, and the federal system need to be criticized at every single turn to make sure that we are accomplishing the goal.

Again, I will pose the question to the members opposite: What are they going to do to help with the fact that, right now, floods and fires and all the money that we have to pay for the degradation of our environment is taxpayer money? What will the opposition do when it comes to climate policy?

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. 50: *Inclusive Yukon Families Act* — Second Reading

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 50, standing in the name of the Hon. Ms. McPhee.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 50, entitled *Inclusive Yukon Families Act*, be now read a second time.

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

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to rise today on this important Bill No. 50 before the Legislative Assembly. I am very pleased to present these amendments which respond directly to the mandate commitment to modernize the *Vital Statistics Act* and to reflect Yukon families and ensure that Yukon legislation is inclusive.

The amendments in this bill are a major step toward the vision of inclusive Yukon legislation that meets the rules and social standards for inclusivity and non-discrimination. They will ensure that Yukon laws establishing parentage and addressing naming are more inclusive of diverse family arrangements and naming conventions, should this bill pass.

This work also aligns with our commitment to reconciliation and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action 17 to enable Indigenous people to reclaim their traditional names. I think that all members of this Legislative Assembly would agree with me that having Yukon laws reflect Yukon families and responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action is something to be celebrated and supported.

Since 2017, our government has been working toward more inclusive legislation, policies, and practices through diverse initiatives. This commitment contributed significantly to increasing the Yukon government's awareness of diverse family arrangements and formations. Diverse family formations and arrangements include parents who are members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, trans, non-binary and gender nonconforming, multi-parent families, and Yukoners who use assisted reproduction, surrogacy, and donation of reproductive material to grow their family.

Over the past four years, we have been working toward amending legislation to make it more equal and reflective of Yukon families and the wide variety of ways that children are conceived and that our families are formed. The departments of Health and Social Services and Justice have conducted extensive research and analysis over this complex topic of family law. This work included the review of legal opinions written over the past three decades discussing legal parentage issues, the *Vital Statistics Act* and the *Children's Law Act*, along with the study of parentage legislation recently modernized or in the process of being modernized in several Canadian jurisdictions.

Another key component of this work is the public engagement conducted in early 2024. Health and Social Services engaged with Yukoners to identify barriers in parentage and naming legislation through in-person discussions with people with lived experiences and an online survey open to all residents. As part of this process, the department sought input from a number of stakeholders and received responses from Queer Yukon, the Child and Youth Advocate Office, the Human Rights Commission, and Yukon First Nations through the Health and Social Development Commission.

We are profoundly grateful for the time and the commitment that experts and individual Yukoners have given to share their expertise, knowledge, and experience to help ensure that Yukon legislation reflects families living in and enriching our territory. This amending bill is the fruit of all those learnings gained over the past few years, which has broadened our understanding of diverse family formations and increased our awareness of existing legislative burdens and barriers that potentially discriminate against marginalized cohorts and family contexts.

We are proud to bring forward this legislative work to ensure the modernization of the Yukon's legislation, and it properly reflects the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* by removing burdens and barriers that potentially discriminate against marginalized cohorts and family contexts.

The amending *Children's Law Act* and *Vital Statistics Act* have a clear purpose to make laws more equal and reflective of

Yukon families by introducing gender-neutral and inclusive language. Stepping away from gendered language based on binary assumptions about gender and sex makes Yukon laws more inclusive for many Yukoners, particularly those who are members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, trans, non-binary, or gender nonconforming.

Inclusive language also acknowledges the realities of families with different structures, including families with more than two parents. These families consist of individuals who share familial responsibilities and jointly participate as parents in the upbringing of a child.

The intent of this act is also to expand the rights to support the full spectrum of Yukon families, supporting the wide variety of ways that children are conceived and that families are formed, including the realities of Yukoners who use assisted reproduction, surrogacy, and donation of reproductive material to grow their family.

This is the reality of many Canadians experiencing infertility or single parents or same-sex couples who are increasingly turning to assisted human reproduction procedures to help build their families, and we are committed to supporting Yukoners walking this path.

These amendments provide clarity to outlining parentage in both cases when assisted reproduction not involving surrogacy or surrogacy is used to conceive a child, carving a path for intended parentage to be recognized and established.

They also include provisions that clarify the status of all the individuals involved, such as the intended parents, the person who gestates the child, whether they intend to be a parent or a surrogate, their partners, and the gamete donors. This is because it is critical to ensure that Yukon families can establish their intended parentage beyond the birth of their child in contexts where they do not gestate the child or where they are not genetically connected to the child while protecting the rights of the child and other individuals involved.

It's incredibly important that this legislation strikes a balance. It protects family and autonomy and supports the child's best interests by building on existing practices in diverse family formations and by providing a clear and certain system to establish parentage and guaranteeing care and security for a child upon birth.

Further, recognizing the rich makeup of our Yukon citizens, amendments to the *Change of Name Act* and the *Vital Statistics Act* that are included here in this bill address current legislative limitations and barriers that restrict naming options that are available to Yukoners. This, Mr. Speaker, will enable the Yukon government to work toward including letters, symbols, and diacritics that are not included in current laws. It will also enable Yukoners to adopt a single name, as is practised in some cultures. This is to be more inclusive of naming conventions, recognizing that language and naming practices are fundamental elements of a person's cultural, communal, and personal identity.

Mr. Speaker, Yukoners — particularly Yukon First Nations and Indigenous people of Canada — should be able to choose, reclaim, or be given a name that reflects their cultural background and language. The Yukon government recognizes

that reclaiming names is integral to the resurgence of Indigenous cultures and languages and that these amendments here in this bill demonstrate our commitment to reconciliation by enabling this activity and naming practices.

This is also why the Yukon government joins the many Canadian jurisdictions in responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action 17 by eliminating fees incurred by Yukoners wanting to reclaim their Indigenous name. Across Canada, many jurisdictions are working collaboratively to support the reclamation of Indigenous names. While we will be ready to waive the fees to individuals wanting to reclaim their Indigenous names this upcoming spring — should this bill pass — there will be additional work required across Canada and within our government to operationalize inclusive naming changes and make diverse naming conventions and spelling a reality in the upcoming years.

I look forward to discussing this bill as it is considered for approval and debated here in this House. I would expect and hope that, like me, my colleagues in this House will be eager to ensure that we are supporting the realities of Yukon families and we are continuously working on making our territory a place where people are recognized, valued, and respected.

Mr. Dixon: I am pleased to rise today to speak at second reading of Bill No. 50, entitled *Inclusive Yukon Families Act*. We certainly recognize and appreciate that the way in which many Yukoners choose to start and grow their families has changed over time. In many cases, this has been driven by our ever-evolving and improving technology and medical procedures, which increasingly give opportunities to families that otherwise may not have been able to grow their families and have children. Surrogacy, assisted reproduction, and many other fertility supports and options have made the structure of Yukon families a bit different from what we have seen in the past. It makes sense that our laws would continue to recognize those changes.

We are also aware that these changes in family structure across the territory have created significant legal developments. Who is and can be a parent to a child has become a matter of debate in courts. Adoption, surrogacy, reproductive material donation, and many other modern realities have created legal issues that currently find their way into an already overburdened court system. We believe that the intention of this bill is in part to address some of those challenges and ensure that there is greater clarity so that disputes of this nature or issues that arise don't need to end up in court.

As the minister indicated, this also comes as a recommendation from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which we very much support, so we are very pleased to see that acted on as well. Of course, we look forward to hearing more from the minister in Committee of the Whole about the upcoming changes that will be required to operationalize that.

As always, we will have questions and concerns that we will raise in debate in Committee of the Whole and we look forward to bringing those forward in Committee of the Whole

whenever that comes back. At this point, my colleagues and I will be voting in favour of this bill to allow it to proceed to Committee of the Whole.

MLA Tredger: I am pleased to rise to speak to second reading of this bill. This is a really important piece of legislation, which I think is quite overdue in the Yukon. I know of families who have really struggled in the absence of having this legislation as they have grown their family with uncertainty and a lack of clarity about how they can make sure that they are recognized as the parents of their children.

The call to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is so important to be acted on, and I'm very happy to see it here in this bill.

There is lots to dig into in this bill. For the most part, I will leave it for Committee of the Whole. I am generally very supportive of this bill. There are lots of provisions around the deeming of parentage and the provisions for surrogacy that I think are really great. However, I do have one major concern that I'm going to flag now before we get to Committee of the Whole, and that is about the registration of the birth. I'm just flipping to the right page in my document.

I'm looking at section 51, which says that at the time of the registration of the birth — so when the parents or whoever is completing the statement — they have to indicate that they are the parents and also whether they are biologically related to the child or whether the reproductive material of that parent was involved in the conception of the child. Then there are some other provisions that — I'm not clear and I will be asking in Committee of the Whole — are going to potentially be used to require to disclose who might have provided reproductive material for that conception — so, for example, whether donors might be included in that information.

Now, I understand that won't appear on the birth certificate, but I have deep reservations about asking parents to indicate whether they are biologically related to their children at the time of registration. I can imagine that would be alarming, invasive, upsetting. I would be wondering — if I was filling out that form — why that was being collected and how it was going to be used. We live in a time where, across the world, we are seeing a lot of danger and a lot of rights being rolled back for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and I think that there are many, many people who — well, I don't believe that this government would have any intentions of using that information in a way that might be harmful to that family; I don't know that I would trust that all future governments would have that same safety.

I'm guessing that the motivation for this part of the act comes from — when I read the “what we heard” report, there is a section that talks about the best interests of the child, and it talks about how many of the survey participants were concerned about making sure that children had access to information about their genetic, gestational, and birth connections as well as who was raising them.

I don't disagree that it might be good for children to have access to information about their genetic history. I don't think that the government register of birth is the place to do it.

I have to wonder — the survey was available to all Yukoners. When I contrast what is in the survey responses with appendix 3 of the “what we heard” report, which talks about the targeted consultations — which is with people who are directly affected by these pieces of legislation, people who might be parenting children who were conceived through assisted reproduction or who might be donors or surrogates — this concern does not come up with the people who have lived experience of this subject. This is solely something that comes up in the survey, and I do wonder why that has been chosen to be prioritized in this act.

So, I’ll be bringing these questions up in Committee of the Whole and I look forward to that debate. For the most part, I think that this is a really great act, it’s a really important act, and I’m excited to see it being brought forward.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I’m happy to rise in the House today to speak to Bill No. 50, the *Inclusive Yukon Families Act*, tabled by my colleague the Minister of Justice.

This legislation furthers the government’s action to make legislation, programs, and services more inclusive and removes inequities. In my 2023 mandate letter, I was directed, as the Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate, to continue championing the work needed across government to properly implement *Changing the Story to Upholding Dignity and Justice: Yukon’s Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit+ People Strategy*.

I was also directed to lead the implementation of the gender-inclusive diversity analysis, also known as GIDA, on key initiatives across government and to continue to support the implementation of the LGBTQ2S+ *Inclusion Action Plan* to ensure programs and services are inclusive and responsive.

I’m pleased to see the *Inclusive Yukon Families Act* tabled in the Legislative Assembly and the debate today in second reading. It aligns with the work that I have been directed to do as Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate and the work that we are committed to do across government to support equity, inclusion, and non-discrimination.

I reflect on all of the work that we’ve been able to accomplish since 2016 in terms of changing legislation, adding new legislation, and today is yet another example of that work coming to reality.

I was going back to look at the record, and we made changes to the *Vital Statistics Act* to be more in alignment with our work and then moving toward an LGBTQ2S+ action plan.

We made changes to the *Human Rights Act*. We had a *Gender Diversity and Related Amendments Act*, which changed a lot of terminology in many pieces of legislation for our government. The *Equality of Spouses Statute Law Amendment Act (2018)* was another important act that we brought forward. The *Public Service Labour Relations Act* also related to the work that we are doing. The *Married Women’s Property Act* was repealed. We introduced the *Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Protection Act*, which was also referred to, of course, as the act that bans conversion therapy. We worked with the New Democratic Party to create safer spaces in schools.

We have definitely turned the dial. With the introduction of this act, we know that there is a lot more work to be done, but this is an important change in our laws to advance and add more rights for Yukoners.

The current laws governing parentage in the Yukon include biological connections, binary and heteronormative assumptions about sex, gender, and family formations and do not adequately reflect our modern society. Examples of these outdated laws include that a mother be registered upon the birth of a child, with “mother” defined as a woman who has delivered the child. It is easy to recognize how this leaves out mothers and birthing parents who have used a surrogate or are gender non-binary or transgender. As a mother, I can empathize with the pain and frustration that this would cause a parent who does not fit within these binary definitions and who just wants to be recognized and connected to their new child.

Further, I am pleased to note that now parents can use their traditional languages and stay connected to their culture through updated name practices. The public engagement on inclusive families allowed us to hear how the current laws are affecting Yukoners, including the barriers, burdens, and inequities that they face.

I am happy to see these changes today that reflect what we heard and help ensure that our laws better reflect and represent the diversity of our communities.

All families are unique. Some use surrogates and human reproductive technology; some have multi-parentage. We respect these families — 2SLGBTQIA+ families — and parents, including transgender and gender nonconforming people, common-law parents, and many other family formations. There is no one definition of what a family should look like, so the update to parentage laws do not remove or change access or inclusion for parents who already felt represented by our laws; they make the laws equitable.

Our parentage laws need to align with the Yukon *Human Rights Act* and the Canadian *Human Rights Act*. Gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation are protected grounds. This act upholds basic rights and freedoms for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals and respects the rights and inclusion of people of all cultures.

I feel particularly moved that this act is being tabled today, as we see so many of these basic rights stripped away from our neighbours to the south and across the world. I am proud to be a Yukoner and to continue to uphold the rights of all citizens. Inclusion enriches the lives of families and children from diverse backgrounds and allows families to participate in their upbringing in an equitable way.

These changes ensure that all families are represented in our laws and represent the realities of our society. These changes reflect the reality of diversity of families and align with the LGBTQ2S+ *Inclusion Action Plan* and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s calls to action to support Indigenous name reclamation and align with the Yukon’s MMIWG2S+ implementation plan and strategy to strengthen First Nation identity and connections, support First Nation children in accordance with their culture, and that these

actions be informed by traditional knowledge and Indigenous languages.

The changes further support cultural inclusion by providing options to use all world languages, which could include characters and symbols not included in the Roman alphabet, initials, as well as single names.

When I look at the changes that we are seeing where folks really do want to reclaim their Indigenous names, I have many friends who are doing that in social media platforms and other places, but now they will be able to have the choice to make that an official change, and that's incredibly important. It is something that we certainly heard in the many stories in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as people talked about not being able to even use their name that they were given at birth from their parent or their loved ones or their clans.

I hope to see this type of transformative change across our country and around the world, really, but the reality is that we are seeing changes happen right now that are actually stripping away the rights of folks, and today we are adding.

I have mentioned, of course, that it is related to the MMIWG2S+ strategy. It again connects back to truth and reconciliation, because the MMIWG2S+ strategy and the inquiry was really a deeper dive into some of these areas. What we know is that identity and connection and support for First Nation children and their culture is so vital to how we change that story for Indigenous people in this country. This helps celebrate the diversity of our territory, which also includes immigrants and supports the revitalization of Indigenous language.

We set out to modernize our legislation to be inclusive of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities several years ago now. This is our ninth year of really working intensely in this area. I am proud of the work, as I have noted already, in some of the legislative changes that we have made, but there are so many others.

We said that it would not be a quick or easy task, and nine years in, here we are still chipping away at this work, making sure that Yukoners can see themselves in their laws.

These changes take time and a lot of good policy work by hard-working civil servants and engagement with the community. This act is another step in the right direction and ensures that we are meeting our constitutional obligations with respect to equal treatment of parents and families. In Canada and around the world, the LGBTQ2S+ community continues to face barriers and inequity in accessing services because of their gender or sexual orientation. Today, this is one more small step toward breaking down those barriers and reflecting the true diversity of our territory while denouncing direct or indirect homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia.

Similarly, people of different cultures continue to face barriers in staying connected to their language and culture and deal with the stresses that this may cause.

In closing, I thank the Minister of Justice and also Health and Social Services and her entire team and each and every public servant who has made this act and its updated parentage laws a reality. I also place enormous value on the diverse voices that we heard through the public engagement on these issues. It is a proud day to see the act going through this stage of our

debate. Today, as we do this work, we reflect on the inclusion, faith, and, of course, the welcoming — the hope, I guess — that it brings Yukoners who do not feel represented in our current laws. A family is not a binary or inflexible construct. A family is a group of people supporting each other and working together in a unit for their shared well-being and participation in society.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you to my colleagues for their comments. I, too, am very fearful of the changes that we are seeing in the world — a stripping away of rights — and that is why I am so pleased to present these amendments that respond directly, as my colleague has said, to the mandate, to our commitment over the years that we have the honour to be in government.

We have committed on many, many occasions and brought many pieces of legislation to this House that showed that we are committed to modernize Yukon laws to reflect Yukon families and Yukon individuals and to ensure that Yukon has legislation that is inclusive. I have also had the honour to speak many times about why legislation must lead on occasions and not follow. That's not necessarily the case here in this situation, but we are happy to finally bring this matter before the Legislative Assembly.

I look forward to Committee of the Whole and answering questions, some which have been noted by the member opposite, but I should note just briefly, in response to one of the things I have heard about a particular section that many survey participants — reading from the “what we heard” document that was released in February of this year — were concerned about ensuring that the best interests of the child, especially when it comes to their cultural and racial connections, would be protected. Individuals noted that they wanted children to have access to information about their genetic, gestational, and birth connections as well as who would be raising them. This information, it is noted by other individual survey participants, should be recorded for medical history, ancestry, and other legal purposes. It must be weighed and balanced.

I note that I am looking forward to speaking more about those sections, but I note that some 65 percent of respondents were in favour of a question that spoke about recording information for information purposes regardless of whether an individual has legal status as a parent or not. I appreciate that this is getting into specifics, but the other thing that I might comment on is, as I think the member opposite indicated, that registration of birth was not the place for this information to be recorded. I have to challenge that, Mr. Speaker; this is exactly the place where this information should be recorded. It is not public. It is for the purposes of registering the birth and providing information for the future should that individual — who will someday be an adult, despite the fact that they are infants at the time — that information should be recorded so that information is there for the protection of that information

— and that is the place to protect it — and that it will be available for the protection of the child’s right.

So, I will say very little other than to say that I look forward to the debate. I appreciate the support that I am hearing to date for the *Inclusive Yukon Families Act* and I appreciate all the work that has gone into getting us here. It has been an extraordinary journey. These are only some of the changes that could be brought here. I would also just like to take this opportunity to thank the individuals and the Yukon families who spoke to us about this not only in this survey through that more formal process but to the Yukon families who have reached out to me, in particular — I know to the Minister of Education and I know to the former Minister of Health and Social Services — and the opportunity that we’ve had to speak to them and to be supportive of them and to tell them that we were continuing to work on this. I know that we’ll reach back to some of them and let them know that this has been introduced today and let them know how it proceeds through the Legislative Assembly.

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: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

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

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for second reading of Bill No. 50 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.

Chair’s ruling

Chair: Before proceeding with regular business, the Chair will make a statement arising out of a point of order from yesterday, March 12, 2025.

Yesterday, the Official Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order during Committee of the Whole regarding whether a member can speak multiple times in a row during Committee of the Whole. The short answer is yes. After initial 20-minute speeches, MLAs may speak for up to eight minutes at a time. Unlike when the Speaker is in the Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 42, in Committee of the Whole, members may speak an unlimited number of times provided that the speeches are “strictly relevant to the item or clause under consideration.”

Yesterday, after the Member for Klondike finished his speech and sat down, the Chair asked if there was any further debate. The Member for Klondike was the only member to rise, so he was recognized to speak again.

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, 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.

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

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Department of Education

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Madam Chair, I am happy to be here today to work with my colleagues in Committee of the Whole regarding the Education *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* for 2024-25. I would like to welcome Mary Cameron, Deputy Minister of Education, and Ash Kayseas, the department’s Assistant Deputy Minister of Corporate Services and Programs. Thank you so much for being here today to assist us in the debate on this important bill.

Madam Chair, I’m not going to go through all of the detail of the supplementary budget, but I will just give a few opening

comments. I did do a thorough review of what is contained in the second supplementary budget for the Department of Education during the second reading.

This *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* is for \$11,959,000. This budget reflects our government's ongoing commitment to providing a high-quality, inclusive, and adaptable education system, one that truly meets the needs of Yukon learners. Education is the foundation, and by investing in schools, educators, and students, we are investing in the future of this territory. This budget reflects a reality that some infrastructure projects are advancing at a more gradual pace than originally anticipated. Despite this, the department's long-term planning remains strong. We are committed to ensuring that when projects are ready to move forward, the necessary funding and resources will be in place to support them.

Our focus is not just on short-term gains but on building a sustainable, well-planned education system that will serve generations to come. At the same time, we are making targeted investments where they matter most, enhancing supports for teachers, prioritizing student wellness, and strengthening educational equity across the territory.

We know that a strong education system is about the people who bring learning to life — the educators — and the support staff, families, and, most importantly, the students. We are addressing immediate needs and laying the groundwork for a future where every student — regardless of their background, their ability, or where they live — has the tools, opportunities, and supports to succeed. Education is a collective effort and I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all of those who contribute to the success of our students: teachers, administrators, families, First Nation partners, and everyone who plays a role in shaping the next generation of learners, thinkers, and change-makers.

As we move forward together, I appreciate the collaboration and support of all members of this Legislature. Your commitment to education ensures that we continue to build a system that is responsive, inclusive, and designed to meet the evolving needs of Yukon learners. Together, we are strengthening the future of education in the Yukon, one that empowers every student to learn, grow, and thrive.

On that note, Madam Chair, I will move to questions in Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate the opening remarks by the minister. I would like to welcome her officials here today and also thank them for the briefing that they provided us on the supplementary estimates and the main estimates yesterday. It was very helpful. Some of the questions that I will ask here today will be similar if not exactly the same as the ones that I asked during the briefing, just to get them on the record. I will dive right into the supplementary budget.

In the document provided by the officials at the briefing yesterday, the first highlight, of course, is personnel increases mainly driven by the collective agreement with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals. But just jumping down a couple of lines, it says in there that there is an increase of \$1.013 million for personnel costs for educational assistants and learning assistance teachers as part of the CASA.

When I looked at the Education annual report that the minister tabled in November toward the end of the Fall Sitting — this is the 2023-24 annual report — on page 6, it says that there were 40 full-time-equivalent positions, EAs, LATs, and school wellness specialists added in the 2023-24 school year, and then there are additional ones added in the supplementary budget.

I'm just wondering if the minister can give us a numbers breakdown of the additional ones added in the supplementary estimates for what it says are EAs and learning assistance teachers.

Then, how far are we to meeting the goal that was announced in August 2023? I believe that it was 80 additional FTEs as part of the commitment. Again, I think that announcement was in early August 2023 prior to the school year going back in.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thanks for the questions. The 2023 confidence and supply agreement supports several specific actions for the Department of Education and has prioritized funding commitments over three fiscal years. One of these actions is to increase the number of positions of educational assistants and learning assistance teachers. Yukon government committed to 81 new positions over three fiscal years, starting in the 2023-24 school year, including educational assistants, learning assistants, and school wellness specialists.

For the 2024-25 school year, the department has expanded on the 2023-24 school year allocations by adding one additional learning assistant to the 15 added previously and 14 new additional assistant positions to the 13 added previously.

For the 2025-26 school year, the department is proposing the following allocation: one additional learning assistance teacher and 18 new educational assistant positions. I note that we will talk about that particularly in the mains, but I think it's helpful to just be able to paint the picture.

The department looks forward to continued engagement with education partners to ensure that all students receive the support they need to succeed in their learning journey and to participate fully in school life.

Again, for the 2025-26 school year, the department allocated 18 educational assistants and one learning assistance teacher. For the 2024-25 school year, the department allocated 14 educational assistants and one learning assistance teacher. For the 2023-24 school year, the department allocated 13 educational assistants and 15 learning assistance teachers. Superintendents and school board executive directors are prioritizing the implementation of these important positions in schools.

With the three fiscal years, there are 44 educational assistants and 20 learning assistance teachers.

In terms of the wellness specialists — I can add more detail if needed — during the 2023-24 fiscal year, there were seven allocated and five were hired for Yukon Education. For the First Nation School Board, there were four allocated and zero hired that year.

The Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon had one allocated and one hired. In 2024-25 for Yukon Education, there were two additional wellness specialists allocated and two

hired. The First Nation School Board had one allocated and zero hired. The Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon only had the one throughout the three fiscal years, and that position remains in place unhired.

For 2025-26, we have one allocated and obviously zero hired.

In Yukon Education schools, we have allocated 10; there are seven hired. The First Nation School Board has six, and they are working on their hiring. The Francophone School Board has one allocated and one hired.

There was one position allocated for a supervisory position for the wellness specialist, and there is still one position that is to be determined, so that has not been allocated.

Mr. Kent: For the school wellness specialists, under the CASA with the New Democratic Party, the commitment was to create dedicated wellness counsellors or similar positions in all schools specifically dedicated to addressing the need for comprehensive mental health and wellness.

So, I am just looking for an update on where we are at as it stands right now prior to what we are looking at in the mains for 2025-26. Where are we at in fulfilling that commitment? How many wellness counsellors in total are on staff, and is it still intended that all schools will have a specifically dedicated “wellness specialist”, as I guess they are called now?

Hon. Ms. McLean: This is really important and it remains important and critical to the work that we are doing on the mental wellness comprehensive approach, working with Health and Social Services and all of our education partners. Addressing student and mental health needs requires flexible and adaptable approaches to effectively meet the range of needs. Of course, we worked with all of our partners around how we would approach this particular commitment that would work best for all of the partners, all of the schools, and all of the authorities that are involved. The goal is for each school to have access to a wellness specialist. This position is part of the team that supports students, teachers, families, and school communities.

Additionally, I just want to point out — because this is part of the wellness specialist — the work that we’re doing with Yukon First Nations. The department has had conversations, of course, for the development of First Nation government-led wellness support roles. The department officials are moving forward with First Nation governments as they are ready. These positions will provide culturally appropriate support that meets the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and academic needs of students. These roles are not replacing existing roles that are key to supporting students, such as education liaison coordinators or education support workers. The role will take time to continue to develop with Yukon First Nations, but we have, I believe, four of those positions now in place. The most recent one is with the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation.

In terms of the department-led schools, currently, the department’s student well-being and inclusion division is responsible for this area. Currently, it has eight school wellness specialists. Seven are working in 18 Yukon-authority schools, and one is working in the three Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon schools. They are École Émilie-

Tremblay, Jack Hulland, Porter Creek Secondary, École Selkirk Elementary, Aurora Virtual School, Elijah Smith Elementary, Hidden Valley Elementary, Christ the King Elementary, St. Francis of Assisi, and Holy Family Elementary.

On the francophone schools, it is all three — the two plus the Dawson French program. They are all covered by wellness specialists.

The First Nation School Board has been allocated six positions and are responsible for hiring those positions for their schools, which they are currently working on.

Mr. Kent: I wanted to jump over to the EA and staffing allocation issue, because last year during the spring, there were some concerns from a number of education stakeholders about a new EA allocation process that was put in place. At that time, the minister pulled it back — pulled the new process back — and I think went back to the previous process. I am just looking for an update on where we are at now. I know that EA allocations went in, I believe, a couple of weeks ago, so I am just trying to get a sense from the minister on where we are at now with the allocation process.

Which one are we working from? Is it one that was previously in place, or has there been a new one put in place with input from those education stakeholders who had the concerns about the new one that was in place at this time last year?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The allocation of educational assistants in schools across the territory is a collaborative process involving Student Support Services, superintendents, and school board executive directors, principals, and learning assistance teachers.

Specifically, to the direct question, we’re following the previous process that was in place as we continue to work with our partners around what the next steps are. With collective bargaining complete, the department is continuing with formal consultation with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals as well. The changes to the educational assistants allocation process were on hold during that collective bargaining period, and now we’re moving forward on all of that.

In terms of next steps and working with partners, the Department of Education, as the member knows, began reviewing how the Yukon education authority allocated educational assistants in the fall of 2023 and heard from many partners on how educational assistants were allocated. The Yukon education authority met with every school in area 1 and 2 during the 2023-24 school year to review each educational assistant request.

The First Nation School Board and CFSY work separately and follow their own allocation process. During this time, Student Support Services officials gathered feedback from schools on process. Schools continue to provide feedback on the processes and educational assistant support.

Again, formal consultation with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals’ process began, and for the 2025-26 school year, as the department continues to discuss with partners, staff will for now use the 2022-23 rubric form and base allocation.

Formal consultation with YAEP is ongoing, and allocation in the future may be affected by their redefinition of the role of the educational assistants being undertaken by the Joint Management Committee. This Joint Management Committee is a time-limited collaborative committee formed with education partners to revise the training plan programs, educational assistants, and teachers on call, and so, this may be impacted by the work of that committee.

Mr. Kent: I'm just wondering if, once those allocations are set, there is somewhere public where people can access them. I know that, being at a number of different school council meetings, there are often questions about staffing and EA allocations at other schools. So, once those are set — like the EA allocation piece and the final staffing allocation — is that available on yukon.ca — the education portion of that website — for individuals to access, or would they have to request or go through the access to information to get that information from the department?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Currently, we do not post those allocations publicly. The superintendent works directly with each school principal and their administration. Once the initial allocations are done — I'm sure that the member opposite knows well that those numbers do become fluid as the enrolment changes by school. So, those numbers sometimes fluctuate based on needs of children and change in enrolment.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate that and, of course, when you go on the website, you can get the monthly enrolment numbers for students, and as the minister mentioned, those fluctuate, but there is nowhere to access — on a monthly basis, even if there are fluctuations — the staffing allocation and EA allocation for each school. You can get them if you go to each school council meeting, but you know, even if you went to every one over the course of the school year, it would take months to go to each one. Again, I guess I'm asking for school councils who have asked about it whether or not the minister would consider posting those numbers publicly, as the enrolment numbers are also posted publicly.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am happy to look into that request, consider it, and bring back more information once we have done that.

Mr. Kent: I thank the minister for that. I appreciate that. I think that it would be helpful, and it's something that I've heard at a number of the different school council meetings that I have attended. They are curious about those numbers.

I do want to jump down in the supplementary estimates to other increases of \$5.896 million. There is an increase of \$4.718 million related to the First Nation School Board. I understand that it was required to cover the costs associated with the agreement from July 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025, but I'm wondering if the minister can give us the full amount that was funded to the First Nation School Board for the fiscal year. I know that it's a challenge, because there is the school year and then there is the fiscal, but I'm just trying to get a handle from a Yukon government budgetary position on how much is advanced to the First Nation School Board in the fiscal year. I guess I could wait until the mains to ask what 2025-26 looks

like, but I'm assuming that the two-year funding agreement will cover it, so it will be similar.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I probably will have to bring back more detailed information, and we can get those exact numbers based on fiscal year when we move into the main estimates debate, but I will just give what I have now: \$35.5 million is included in the 2025-26 mains. That includes \$25.9 million in salaries and heating fuel paid on behalf of the First Nation School Board and \$9.549 million being flowed to the First Nation School Board.

The difficulty is that the TPA for the year of July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025 — that is the school year — and I note the member is looking for the fiscal year, which is a different calendar than how we work with schools because of the calendar that we work within. So, in that period, July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025, there is a total of \$33.4 million, with \$24.2 million being held for salaries and heating fuel that we pay on behalf of the First Nation School Board and \$9.221 million being flowed to the First Nation School Board. Again, this is for the operation of 11 schools, most of them in the rural communities, and represents 830 students.

Mr. Kent: I thank the minister for that. What I am looking for is to split out from that broader funding envelope for the First Nation School Board and actually the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon, or the Francophone School Board, how much is sent to the board for their costs and their management and then how much is sent to the schools. I think that the minister broke it down a little bit, but we can circle back when we get to the mains and get to Education. I am just trying to get a sense for what the overall operating costs are for them and then the breakdown within that funding envelope for what it costs to manage the board versus what it costs to operate the schools and that type of thing. That is for both the First Nation School Board and the CSFY.

I do have to just quickly jump back to the school wellness specialist issue. It's a procedural question, I guess. Do those individuals, once they are hired, become members of the YAEP, or are they members of the YEU? I am just curious about that.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am happy to bring back that more detailed information on the breakdowns within our school authorities by school as well. We will work to bring back information when we are debating the mains — not just the portion that we allocate in our TPA to the school authorities but also the portion that we withhold to pay on behalf.

The union that the wellness specialists are part of is the YEU.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate that.

Jumping down now, I am on page 305 of the briefing document supplied by officials yesterday.

It says that there is an increase of \$20,000 for a training plan program, which was, of course, part of CASA. That agreement was that the department is to provide a training plan program for EAs and teachers on call in collaboration and consultation with YAEP, the Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon, and Autism Yukon. That's what it says in the briefing document, but in the agreement, it says that this was to

be done by 2024. Obviously, that wasn't the case, so I am just wondering if the minister can tell us what the reasons were for the delay in getting this training plan program up and running.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I think the short answer is that we just really needed more time to work with all of our partners. We certainly worked closely with the Leader of the New Democratic Party around that adjustment in time frame. The longer answer, of course, is that this is a key action in creating this training plan. What was really important to both of us was that we get it right and that it really is something that withstands the test of time. That will become part of how we support educational assistants and teachers on call.

As you heard me talk about moments ago, we have a joint management committee that consists of membership from the Department of Education, the Yukon Association of Education Professionals, including the association of Yukon administrators subcommittees and the special education teachers association subcommittee. We have Autism Yukon, LDAY Centre for Learning, and the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate as well.

So, the joint management committee deliverables are a revised educational assistant training plan program and updated role of the educational assistants, as I talked about, which will, of course, tie into the work of the EA allocations as well. All deliverables from the joint management committee will be subject to — once this is complete — a formal consultation process with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals following the conclusion of the committee's work. Although the Yukon Association of Education Professionals is a member of this committee, we still have that formal consultation to do with them upon completion. The updated EA training plan program and role of EAs will be implemented following the formal consultation process with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals. As anticipated, it will be fully implemented in the 2025-26 school year.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate that. Under 2(g) of CASA, under the education chapter, it says that there will be a commitment to an additional annual investment of \$1 million for mental health outcomes for youth. But then, reading through the Education annual report, on page 5 under "Investments in youth mental health", it says: "We committed an additional \$500,000 towards initiatives aimed at improving the mental health of Yukon youth." It then goes on to list four different areas that were funded.

I'm just wondering where that \$500,000 gap is between what was reported here and what was promised in the confidence and supply agreement.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Under the confidence and supply agreement, the Yukon government has committed \$500,000 annually over three fiscal years, ending in the fiscal year of 2025-26. The other \$500,000 is administered through the Youth Directorate. You will have opportunity certainly during the mains to talk to the Premier about that part of the fund, but we work very closely together in terms of the allocation of those funds. They go to very, very worthy causes. I heard the Leader of the New Democratic Party reference that in the reply to the mains budget just a few days ago in terms of feedback that has

been received from those organizations that received those funds directly.

Mr. Kent: I think the ECO briefing is tomorrow, so I will follow up or my colleague will follow up with them about the other \$500,000 and where that has been spent.

I might as well just cover off a couple of other CASA questions while we're on this topic.

Section 2(a) was to allocate an additional \$1 million in each of the next three budgets to enhance recruitment and retention of new rural education professionals across the Yukon. It goes on to say that this may include a program aimed at supporting Yukon students pursuing studies in educational fields who commit to working in the Yukon after graduation.

I'm just wondering if the minister can confirm that this \$1 million for, I believe, the first two budgets — we can talk about the next one when we get to the mains. But I just want to make sure that the \$1 million was expended and if there's a breakdown on how those expenses were targeted toward rural education professionals in particular.

Hon. Ms. McLean: This commitment includes support for recruitment and retention of rural education professionals. Education has \$1 million dedicated in the confidence and supply agreement initiative. This is a three-year commitment from 2023 to 2026. We are certainly dedicated to doing this in the right way for both Yukon learners and Yukon educators, with an approach that is developmentally and culturally responsive.

The Department of Education has implemented a number of initiatives to improve recruitment and retention efforts since 2023: enhanced marketing for recruitment, posting jobs earlier in the year, participating more widely in job fairs, enhanced onboarding and training of staff, exploring bursary incentives for Yukon students to pursue post-secondary programs in professional educational fields. On November 13, 2024, the Department of Education launched a recruitment video promoting French language education programming across the Yukon. The video highlighted opportunities for educators in French immersion, pre- and post-intensive French, and other items within.

There has been a tremendous amount of work done by the department officials attending several more — in addition to what we normally do — job fairs across the country. In February 2025, the department officials also — of course, there are also virtual opportunities, and we have been working within that. I guess that there is a blend over the last while, and now that we have the new collective agreement, there are provisions within the collective agreement that deal with part of that allocation.

Again, this is an area where we really needed to ensure that the collective bargaining was complete. There are provisions within the collective agreement — happy to bring a bit more information about the details of that, because this will certainly be a matter within the mains discussion.

Mr. Kent: I am going to move on to Corporate Services and Programs and the decrease of \$1.7 million. So, the largest line item in that program is a decrease of \$2.33 million for the Early Learning and Child Care program. I think that it was

originally budgeted at \$2.6 million for last fiscal year, and then it went down to \$300,000. My understanding on what was provided is that there was a decrease in funding from Canada based on estimated projects to be funded in 2024-25. According to the annual report, that agreement with the Government of Canada for infrastructure in early learning and childcare centres was signed on March 31, 2024.

At the briefing yesterday, I think that we were told that it wasn't implemented until later on in the fall. I am just curious why there was that six- or seven-month delay in getting the project implemented. I just wanted to confirm that the \$2.33 million that is being lapsed can carry forward into later years in the agreement.

Hon. Ms. McLean: The Department of Education has a three-year agreement covering 2023-24, and then we recently announced that an additional year has been added. I have signed off on that, so what we are actually talking about now is \$10.5 million from 2023 to 2026-27.

The amount that we were able to carry forward is 100 percent to ensure that we have the maximum benefit for Yukon communities. Of course, this is a partnership with the Government of Canada, and it will support our mutual vision of high-quality early learning childcare.

We worked to establish a fair program. The Government of Yukon announced the early learning and childcare infrastructure fund on November 20, with a deadline to apply on January 15 for both major and minor submissions. As of March 12, 2025, there have been no major projects approved, as no project is ready to start. Major projects are expected to be shovel-ready in 2025-26. There are two minor projects that have been approved.

Mr. Kent: Is the minister in a position to tell us which projects those are? I think she said there were two major and two minor — or is that not publicly available at this time?

Hon. Ms. McLean: We are working with the recipients and within our communication protocol to announce — happy to bring the information forward once we are able to — excited about the launch of this new funding and happy to bring forward that information as soon as we can.

Mr. Kent: I look forward to receiving that information when it is available.

I am going to jump down to the capital expenditures in the supplementary estimates here. There has been \$4.62 million deferred to 2025-26 for the school in Burwash Landing — the Kêts'ádañ Kù school. It says in the documents we have that the targeted cost of this project is \$32,500,000. Anticipated delay and expenditures are based on projected work to be done in the 2024-25 fiscal year.

Can the minister tell us if the deferral has meant a change in the project's schedule? Will the school now be open later on than first anticipated? With the delays, does that mean an increase in the overall cost of the project from what it was initially set at?

Hon. Ms. McLean: This is a really important project for us. We are working very closely with the Kluane First Nation. We have a memorandum of understanding that outlines a shared commitment to plan and construct the new school in

Burwash Landing. We have officially named it Kêts'ádañ Kù — house of learning. This is a major priority for the Kluane First Nation. Again, we are working closely with them on the construction of this school.

Even with the deferral, again, we are adjusting the budget to be reflective of the scope of work that will happen in the fiscal year. We are still anticipating that this will be complete by the fall of 2026, and we will adjust if there are any delays or anything that may change that date. We will work with the Kluane First Nation, the contractor, and others, of course, who are involved with this important project to adjust the time frame, if that is necessary.

Mr. Kent: We'll certainly be — my colleague the MLA for Kluane, who represents the community of Burwash Landing, and I — keeping an eye on the project and hope that it stays on time and stays to this targeted cost that's identified here.

The other capital project that I wanted to ask about was the replacement school that is, I believe, École Whitehorse Elementary School. There is a \$2.08 million reduction in the budget for the school for this fiscal year.

Can the minister tell us how much was spent in the 2024-25 budget with respect to École Whitehorse Elementary School?

Then, from a project cost and project schedule — when it was first announced, I believe, by the minister and her colleague the Minister of Highways and Public Works, when it was anticipated to be completed then and what the budget was then compared to where we are today with project schedule and budget.

Hon. Ms. McLean: We're still working with the numbers that are published in the five-year capital plan for this project. As you work through projects like this, as you move through various phases and determine more detail about the project, sometimes those numbers can change. The total project actual cost to date is \$692,027. That's the total actual cost to date. That's my answer.

Mr. Kent: We will just flag this for the minister for when we get to the mains in Education and possibly Community Services. I know that there were some changes worked through with Sport Yukon and Softball Yukon with respect to that project. I think it's going to be a larger gym inside that envelope. I will ask in the mains if that will have an impact on the overall cost and whether it's under Education or Community Services — the commitments made to Softball Yukon around different fields and new surfaces and those types of things. We can certainly circle back to that during the mains. If it's Education's responsibility for all of that or if CS has some responsibility — just so that the right critic can ask the questions. If the minister could let me know, I would appreciate that.

That is going to conclude the supplementary estimates questions, but I just have a few quick policy questions with respect to the 2023-24 annual report and some of the statistics around it, and I will ask my usual Golden Horn field question at the end to conclude my time.

On page 6 of the annual report, under the Reimagining Inclusive and Special Education portion of the report, it talks

about the communities of inquiry. This is back to the last school. At the time, it said: “Six out of the seven Communities of Inquiry have been completed and recommendations submitted. The department will review recommendations and will provide next steps during the 2024/25 school year.” I’m just looking for an update from the minister. Have all seven of those now been completed, and is the recommendation review complete yet? If so, are these recommendations available publicly? If not, when will they be?

Hon. Ms. McLean: What I would like to say around this work is that there are a lot of foundational pieces that are reforming education in the Yukon. This is certainly one of them. This is work that I have dug into since 2021 and coming into the role. One of the goals that I have as the Minister of Education is to help to bring our plans together to ensure that they are speaking to one another all the time. There were initially eight communities of inquiry connected with RISE. Two of the communities combined into one to better address the questions. So, the 2021-24 RISE work plan and recommendations from the communities of inquiry will inform the next steps in the new 10-year work plan that will feed in directly to the integrated outcome strategy, which is a 10-year strategy, and it will feed into the joint education action plan.

So, again, it is really important to me to be able to have a very clear road map for education in terms of how we really make the systemic changes that are needed in our education system. This has been incredibly important, and the voices and work of Yukoners are reflected indirectly in these recommendations. This is work that involves all of our partners in education and we will be bringing that information forward. I do note, of course, that it was also reported on in the 2025 progress report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

This report provides an update on the department’s ongoing work to address the recommendations contained in the kindergarten through grade 12 education in Yukon report — the June 2019 report of the Auditor General of Canada that was reported to this Legislative Assembly in 2019.

Again, all of this work ties directly into that work in addressing those issues that were pointed out clearly by the Auditor General of Canada.

Mr. Kent: I did want to ask a quick question that was sent to me by one of my colleagues with respect to his riding. I wanted to get it on the record here. If the minister has an update, that would great, but if not, we certainly hope that she can come back during the mains.

We are looking for any update on the situation at the Del Van Gorder School in Faro with regard to the lack of a principal at that school.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am happy to bring back the update and timeline of that situation for Del Van Gorder School in Faro when we are back in debate in Committee of the Whole. I can bring information directly back to the member through a letter or e-mail as well.

Mr. Kent: I would appreciate some sort of correspondence — either a letter or an e-mail. Perhaps the minister could send it to the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin as well. It is something that is important to his constituents.

I know I asked at the briefing yesterday about the soccer field at Golden Horn School. I know that the minister and her deputy visited it a couple of years ago now, and it hasn’t gotten any better. It’s covered in rocks; there’s no real grass of any kind out there. I note that officials said that there was no money in the 2025-26 mains for it, and I don’t think that there was anything expended in the 2024-25 fiscal year either, so I’m just looking for an update from the minister. I try to make it to as many school council meetings out there as I can, as it is in my riding of Copperbelt South. For the minister, it is the number one capital issue for the current school council and the previous council, so I am just looking for some sort of an update that I can send to them with respect to that project.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yukon government continues to invest in school infrastructure to ensure that our schools meet the demands in the unique school communities that they serve. In terms of Golden Horn, in the mid term and long term, we will continue to work with the school community to identify their requirements around maintenance upgrades and address them through the capital and maintenance planning process.

The MLA for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes and I attended and met with school officials sometime in the past. We definitely got a sense of the school field. So, in December of 2024, the Department of Highways and Public Works completed a study to explore options — including capital costs, operation and maintenance costs, and lifecycle costs estimated — to upgrade the school’s playground. The report includes options, preliminary budget, and operational costs. This report will be going to the school council, so I would prefer to do that and then have a more thorough discussion — happy to, of course, meet with the member opposite, if that is something they would like to do, once we have that report submitted to the school council. At that time, we will have a better idea of the time frame and other issues that have been identified by the Golden Horn Elementary School Council.

Mr. Kent: I just wanted to clarify and I wanted to make sure that I heard the minister correctly. She said the study was completed by Highways and Public Works in December 2024 on the playground. Does that include the field, or is it just the playground? I just wanted to clarify that.

Hon. Ms. McLean: It is the field.

Mr. Kent: I will send that along to the school council, and I’m sure they will be anxiously awaiting the report once the minister and her colleagues are ready to send it along.

I’m just going to conclude today. I have a number of questions with respect to some of the Yukon-wide student data report that I can get to in the mains, but just one thing, when I was reviewing these numbers, that jumped off the page at me was on page 55, for officials who are here in the House or providing support to the minister from remote locations. It’s with respect to attendance.

Looking at the rural attendance numbers, going back to 2018-19, 61 percent of students missed more than 20 days of school in the school year. Then we had the COVID year, which is greyed out for good reason just because school ended at the March break, but then, jumping ahead to 2023-24, that number jumps up to 76 percent. Again, this is for the rural schools.

The urban schools are also not trending in the right direction, but again, the rural ones seem to be having the most challenges with attendance.

I'm just curious if the minister or her officials have undertaken a more comprehensive attendance review and tried to dig into some of the systemic challenges that we're seeing in rural Yukon and in Whitehorse and in just the Yukon as a whole with respect to attendance numbers, because as we know, missing 20 days is essentially a month of school.

Jumping up to 80 or more days missed for rural Yukon — back in 2018-19, it was seven percent, and then in the 2023-24 school year, it was 17 percent. So, we're seeing trends in the wrong directions. So, we are obviously not wanting to — I know that the minister — through the Victoria Gold Every Student, Every Day project, there is work being done, but I am just wondering if there are thoughts of a deeper dive into some of the challenges that we are seeing with respect to student attendance in our schools.

Hon. Ms. McLean: We are working on this issue in a number of different ways, for sure. I note, as well, that we did have a very thorough report done by the Child and Youth Advocate which was specifically about attendance. We received that report on attendance from the Child and Youth Advocate in May 2021. That is exactly when I started this position.

We also received the Dr. Nikki Yee report at the same time, and we released them together in Carcross. We knew, of course, that there were no quick fixes to the issues — and again, arising out of the Auditor General's report, we did the review on inclusive and special education, and then we had also, of course, the report from the Child and Youth Advocate. We accepted the report's recommendations in principle and provided a detailed formal response directly to the Child and Youth Advocate.

Many recommendations in the attendance report overlap with those from the review of inclusive and special education. We work in partnership with the First Nations Education Commission and the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education to develop and finalize a work plan to guide our joint response to the review of school attendance and a review of inclusive and special education. Those regular online reports to partners and public — we do that regularly to share progress.

As I indicated, we also report to the Public Accounts, and — but more importantly, we are working toward the next version of the reimagining inclusive and special education work plan, the integrated outcome strategy, and the joint education action plan. Those are where I would really be directing the work to happen in those particular strategies, because I think that having those strategies that really speak to one another is where we're going to get into deeper systemic change in our education system.

I also note that we are awaiting the report on systemic racism in our education system — and we know that there are connections to the actions that they will bring forward. That is a joint review that is being done by the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate and the Child and Youth Advocate. Again, there are no quick fixes to this, and COVID did not help

our situation in terms of ensuring that children are showing up every day.

I note that the member mentioned the Every Student, Every Day initiative that supports schools and communities in creating innovative projects that encourage student attendance and engagement while improving results for Yukon students. For the 2024-25 school year, the initiative funded 31 projects in 24 schools across the Yukon, with a total of \$400,000 in funding. The Government of Yukon provided \$100,000 of that \$400,000. Going forward, of course, we know that there have been some changes. We will be — what is now open for applications, there will be \$200,000 in funding. The Government of Yukon Department of Education is providing \$100,000, and Every Student, Every Day will provide the other \$100,000.

These projects range from enhancing curriculum through experiential learning tools, such as kick-sleds and science, technology, trades, engineering, arts, and mathematics resources, to supporting popular school clubs and activities that keep students engaged in their school communities. This has been a really important initiative that I have increased year after year in terms of our contribution to this fund.

As well, I have asked that — have our set criteria of projects that are considered for the fund, but we have also asked that school food be considered as well — not the purchase of food but the preparedness for food in schools, because we do have the new national program — and really wanting to ensure that schools have the tools that they need to be able to feed children in the school settings. Sometimes, that can be a barrier, and it certainly was one that was indicated in all of those reports that I have already mentioned today.

Chair: Shall we take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

Deputy Chair (MLA Tredger): Order. Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Is there any further general debate?

Ms. White: I am happy to wade into today's conversation and, of course, echo the welcome that happened a couple of hours ago to the officials who are here in the Chamber.

I just wanted to start off with the École Whitehorse Elementary School relocation. Back in November, the minister said that there would be a public meeting held with the results of the traffic study. My neighbourhood association was told that there was going to be a meeting date before the end of February. Then they were contacted to say that this wasn't the case, but there have been no further updates on the meeting. Can the minister start off by telling me when the Takhini neighbourhood can expect to have a public meeting on the

traffic study around Range Road and the École Whitehorse Elementary relocation?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Happy to have the discussion in Committee of the Whole with the Leader of the New Democratic Party around our *Supplementary Estimates No. 2*. The Department of Education, as the member knows, is currently in a pre-design phase, phase 2, during which key studies and reports have been completed to inform the design of the school. A traffic study analysis and impact on major intersections around Takhini that will provide recommendations for parking, access, pedestrian safety, and effective traffic flow along Range Road is part of that.

Highways and Public Works has received the final traffic study, and an executive summary has been developed. We are working toward finalizing an engagement strategy, and part of that absolutely will include the Takhini Neighbourhood Association, as I have committed to, working toward an open house-type concept for that meeting. Of course, we're working with all of our stakeholders on this.

More to come, and happy to share directly with the leaders of both parties when we're ready to launch that engagement.

Ms. White: Thank you for that. I guess my concern is that there had been indication to the Takhini Neighbourhood Association from their contact within the Department of Education who was talking about the traffic study when they proposed a meeting date in February. Here we are; it's practically the middle of March, and that hasn't been indicated.

I recognize that we're talking about the supplementary budget from last year and not this year's mains, but I will note that there is an engagement line item in this year's mains about engaging with downtown about the future of a downtown elementary school.

So, how much has been spent on engagement with Takhini around the proposed relocation of the École Whitehorse Elementary School?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I understand that we are in March; I know which month we are in today. I am looking forward to being able to communicate those meetings with our partners very soon. We are just finalizing that information and I will be happy to share that with the members in the two opposition parties as soon as I can.

To date, this project's actual costs are \$692,000 — the actuals to date for the Whitehorse Elementary replacement project. That is part of what we are talking about here today in the supplementary budget.

Ms. White: Out of the \$692,000 to date spent on the École Whitehorse Elementary School replacement project, how much has been spent on engagement with the Takhini neighbourhood?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I, of course, do not have that level of detail with me today. Obviously, part of the money there — because of the phases that we have been in — is directly attributed to engagement. As I have said, there will be more engagement as we have that discussion around the traffic study and, of course, all other aspects of the project as we go forward.

I will note that when the Takhini — I don't have the exact dates, but we were a ways into the project when the Takhini

Neighbourhood Association officially formed. We quickly moved to have them be part of the project advisory committee, which had been meeting for a bit of time before that. We are happy to have the Takhini Neighbourhood Association as part of this project and we will continue to ensure that they are able to meaningfully participate in the project.

Ms. White: Prior to the creation of the Takhini Neighbourhood Association, how many public engagements — how many public meetings — were hosted around the relocation of École Whitehorse Elementary School in Takhini for Takhini residents?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I, of course, had a number of meetings as we were considering this move to replace École Whitehorse Elementary. This included meetings with the school council and included meetings with the Yukon First Nations — of their traditional territory. When we moved toward hiring the contractor to work on this project, the Department of Education established a project advisory committee to facilitate collaboration and the exchange of ideas with partners, stakeholders, and, of course, community. A number of meetings have happened. The project advisory committee is made up of a number of key partners — those being the school council, the school administration, City of Whitehorse, Government of Yukon, Ta'an Kwäch'än, Kwanlin Dün, and the Takhini Neighbourhood Association. Representatives from all of the key stakeholders had a joint meeting that was a facilitated meeting — I want to say that it was last spring — to bring together all of the partners, which happened.

I have committed, through my meeting with the Takhini Neighbourhood Association, to have an open-house-type facilitated or open-house-style discussion with them. That is exactly what we are planning right now, so we will be able to go through the findings of the traffic study and talk about any other issues that folks want to discuss.

That will be broad. We are happy to have a meeting directly with the Takhini Neighbourhood Association, but part of our meeting — we discussed having a whole Takhini neighbourhood meeting. I am really looking forward to having that meeting.

As I stated, we are planning for that now and we will have more details to come very soon.

Ms. White: Although I appreciate the answer, there are a couple hundred people who live in that Takhini bench area — Takhini West, Takhini North, Takhini East. To this point, there has never been a public meeting about the school relocation. It was an announcement that was made. I reached out, I asked if there was going to be communication with my community, and nothing has happened.

I appreciate that we are talking about an open house-type thing. I do; I think that's important. I think it is maybe two and a half years too late for the first one to happen. I think it should have happened just shortly after the announcement was made so that people would feel like they were part of the process.

Knowing that this isn't set and that I don't know what we are going to talk about — so probably the traffic study will be

part of it — does the minister have an idea of where this meeting will be held?

Hon. Ms. McLean: We are currently working with the First Nation School Board to have the meeting happen at the Takhini Elementary School.

Ms. White: I appreciate that.

When the meeting is set, how will the Department of Education communicate with the neighbourhood? Not everyone is online with the neighbourhood association, so how will that communication go out?

Hon. Ms. McLean: We will be working with every means that we can to get the information out to Takhini neighbourhood folks — social media, radio, print, and definitely through the Takhini Neighbourhood Association itself. I don't have the communication plan in front of me, but if there is any more detailed information, I will be happy to share that with the member so that the member has the direct information available.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. I just urge that when they are ready to hold that meeting, it is communicated in all ways, possibly even including leaflets or signs up on Range Road so that more folks know about it than not.

Talking about communication and Yukon government communication policies, how does the Department of Education decide when or how to send letters through their communication tools?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The SchoolMessenger platform is our most effective and timely communication tool to reach families, students, and staff — certainly able to target and be more precise about when messages are needed to get out to a school community. SchoolMessenger is used in different forms of communication, including safety, reporting, absenteeism — that's another direct — very direct — communicating upcoming events, and providing families with general education-related information. Messages sent by SchoolMessenger often include staff so that they are aware of the communication. They are typically the first point of contact for parents, guardians, and Yukon schools.

Generally, it's the — depends on the situation in terms of when — because we do have a communication protocol in terms of when there is an emergency or when there is a situation that needs to be communicated quickly and directly. It is work that happened through the school safety plan. For the most part, schools will work with their superintendent to access the messenger system, so sometimes that includes our partners. We have protocols with the First Nation School Board around communication and the use of the messenger, and we have the francophone school authority as well that we work directly with in terms of, again, access to the messenger system, which is, again, the most effective, timely way to get information out to folks in our school community, depending on what the situation is.

Ms. White: So, how was the decision made on Friday, January 17, 2025 to send out the Roman Catholic Diocese of Whitehorse letter to all families and caregivers of children registered in the Catholic schools?

Hon. Ms. McLean: As I have stated, the school communities work directly with their superintendent, and in this case, it was the same scenario. The superintendent worked with the bishop directly around this letter, and it was decided to send the letter after the holidays, not before the holidays — that is why that particular date. I know that they had been working on communication and, of course, we know that there were some issues around the reference of the websites in there.

I will just wait for the other questions. I am sure that there are other direct questions around this that I am happy to answer in relation to some of the information that was shared in that letter — just to be clear — but I will wait for the question before I dive into it.

Ms. White: Just for clarification, was it someone within the department who worked with the bishop on the letter? When the minister just said “worked with the bishop”, who worked with the bishop? Then she said “they had been working on communication”. Can she just elaborate — I don't want to know who as in what position; I just want to know if someone within the department was working on this letter or if it just came. I guess I am looking for what oversight there was. Was there oversight from the Department of Education prior to the letter going out? Who was working on the letter?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I know that the member is well aware of the 1962 agreement and how we are working with the episcopal corporation. We have a number of protocols. One of them is a communication protocol, so when I say that the superintendent was working with the — not to write the letter; that's a letter that was written by the episcopal corporation, and then it was received by the Department of Education. In terms of — then our responsibility would have been to have a bit more scrutiny around what was in that letter, and I definitely have had that discussion with the deputy minister around that deeper look at what was happening and what was contained in the letter. I think that a lot of lessons were learned here.

It does go back, again, to our protocol that we do have in place. There were a lot of lessons learned not just from our department but from the episcopal corporation as well. There needs to be more scrutiny, and I have definitely had that conversation. You know, you can always do better, and there are definitely lessons learned around this particular incident that has happened.

Ms. White: If the minister is going to reference the 1962 agreement — which I appreciate — my understanding or interpretation of reading it is that there is an expectation of how both parties will behave.

The reason I am bringing up this letter is that I am struggling to understand how a letter that contains information that is not accurate was allowed to be sent out through the Department of Education's communication website.

As an example, in the bishop's letter, it says, “I would like to draw your attention to the “Better to Know” classroom resources and lesson plans...” That link is not actually what is taught in elementary school, which led to confusion.

There is another section of the letter that says: “We are currently working in collaboration with the Department of Education to supply a Catholic sexual health program and

curricula to support Administrators, Religious Education Coordinators, and teachers in supplementing the public resources with the Catholic perspective.”

I guess my first question is: If this was sent out through the Department of Education website through the communication tool, why was the wrong information included there? Why was the “Better to Know” classroom resources and lesson plans that was a link that you could go to and was clearly not what is taught in schools — why was that included in that communication, or why was that communication sent out?

Hon. Ms. McLean: As I just stated, I have had this direct conversation with the deputy minister that there should have been more scrutiny over this. I will just go through it, because I would just like to address the issues with the letter and some of the questions, because I have received letters, of course, not just from the member opposite but from others. I would just like to be clear about the bishop’s letter referencing the “Better to Know” website. The reference was a simple misunderstanding. The letter referenced the “Better to Know” website, which is a public sexual health resource available to people of all ages. It is not the Yukon curriculum resource used in schools.

Information about Yukon’s comprehensive sexual health education curriculum, which is designed for classroom use, is available at the “Better to Know” comprehensive sexual health education. This site outlines the age-appropriate lessons taught in each grade level.

The other aspect of this that I have received questions about is: Why did the bishop talk about opting out of the program? Well, yes, parents and guardians of children in all Yukon schools have the right to opt their children out of the sexual health instruction in classrooms. Parents and guardians are encouraged to talk to their child’s teacher if they have concerns with any aspects of a child’s curriculum, and it will be accommodated, so that is not just something that is communicated to students in Catholic schools.

That’s definitely not the case that every student in every school has the — their parents have the right to opt them out.

Also, the question around: Is the department working on the Catholic sexual health program? Although the department is aware of this letter, currently, the Department of Education and the Catholic Diocese have not formally entered into any conversations about alternate sexual health curriculum for the Catholic school. We have the curriculum that is set out for all schools.

Those were the main, I think, issues that I’m aware of with this letter. Again, lessons learned; there is certainly a lot more awareness and more scrutiny that will happen on all communication that goes out of the messenger system. I take responsibility, as does the deputy minister, and we take these matters very seriously.

Ms. White: I appreciate that answer from the minister.

In the letter, though, it clearly says: “We are currently working in collaboration with the Department of Education...” It says that. The minister has just said that’s not the case.

So, is there going to be a communication that goes out to all those same parents that actually corrects all of this misinformation?

I say this because it talks about the opt-out. I don’t disagree that a parent should have the ability, but it says — in this letter, it says: “...please be advised that you have the right to have your children opt out of the sexual health classroom instruction by filling out the appropriate form supplied by your school administration.”

That doesn’t exist, to the best of my understanding — that form — in this way that it’s expressed.

So, it says that the diocese is — quote: “... currently working in collaboration with the Department of Education to supply a Catholic sexual health program...” If that is not true and that is not happening — because the minister has just said that — is that going to be communicated publicly for clarification purposes for families within those school systems? I think they should know how to opt out of something if they don’t want to participate, but it’s certainly not by filling out the form supplied by the school administration. So, is a correction going to be sent out in response to the January 17 letter, with the right link and the right attachment, maybe explaining what the health curriculum is with the correct link to that health curriculum? Is there going to be, like, a response to this letter sent out to all of the same families and parents?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, we are working on a correction communication. Again, we would want to send it out after the spring break is complete so that — with the Christmas break, it makes sense to send things out when people are back in school and back into normal activities and parents are back from holidays and whatnot. That is being worked on, and we will be happy to share that communication directly with the Leader of the New Democratic Party as well to ensure that we’re communicating what is being sent out to families.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that response, and I’m looking forward to seeing that response. I guess the concern that I have if, like, we’re going to talk about the 1962 agreement — which I think we should, to be perfectly frank — I think a lot of things have changed since 1962. I don’t think it is — I don’t think what, you know — I mean, a lot has changed since 1962. My reading of it — and I’m happy to be corrected by the minister — lays out, in my understanding, quite clearly that there is an expectation from both parties to behave in a certain way, including the fact that all Catholic schools have to follow policies of the Department of Education, including the sexual orientation and gender-identity policy. I’m just going to ask the minister if I’m accurate in that interpretation.

Hon. Ms. McLean: This was an agreement that was signed in April 1962 between the Commissioner of the Yukon Territory and the Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Whitehorse and it outlines a number of expectations. The 1962 agreement is protected under the *Education Act* in section 57. Alongside the 1962 agreement, it remains in force. It is legally binding on both parties; however, the agreement cannot — this is part of the agreement — displace other laws of Canada or the Yukon, such as the *Education Act* and the Constitution, the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and the *Human Rights Act*. It

is very clearly anticipated that this agreement would follow laws and policies of the Department of Education.

Ms. White: I am just going to ask for affirmation. The minister is saying that the Catholic schools need to follow Yukon government Department of Education policies, including the sexual orientation and gender identity policy?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, that is correct.

Ms. White: When I look at clause 7 of that agreement, 7(1) says: “The Corporation...” — and this, of course, is the Catholic Church — “... shall be responsible for instructing and training the pupils attending separate schools established by the Government of the Yukon Territory pursuant to section 2 of this agreement in the Roman Catholic religion and morality and for this purpose will provide at no cost to the Government of the Yukon Territory all necessary instructors, religious books, whether hymn, prayer or otherwise, sacred objects and all other religious accessories appointments, furnishings and paraphernalia.”

When I read that, my understanding is that anything that is related with the Roman Catholic religion is not supplied by the Government of Yukon; is that correct?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, that is correct.

Ms. White: Does the Department of Education pay the salaries of the instructors or the teachers who teach religious studies within those three schools?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, we do. It’s part of the program-specific teaching positions within the Catholic schools, and we do cover those costs.

Ms. White: Can the minister help me to understand how paying for the cost of teachers teaching the Roman Catholic religion fits with section 7 of that 1962 agreement?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, this program is specific to the Catholic schools — that the corporation shall undertake programs for the recruitment of teachers, including principals and vice-principals for separate schools. Recruitment is currently coordinated through the Department of Education with a role for the corporation.

It relates back to the earlier question. Where the specific items are related to the Catholic Church, they cover those costs, but we cover the costs of the staffing. That is part of our responsibility — to undertake that cost of the program. I think it’s similar in other school settings where we have very program-specific materials that are being used and it’s part of the cost of the program, so we cover those costs that are costs of delivering that program, which include the personnel for it as well.

Ms. White: Can the minister help me to understand clause 7? So, I’m going to read it again. Clause 7(1) is: “The Corporation...” — so, that’s the diocese — “... shall be responsible for instructing and training the pupils attending separate schools established by the Government of the Yukon Territory pursuant to section 2 of this agreement in the Roman Catholic religion and morality and for this purpose will provide at no cost to the Government of the Yukon Territory all necessary instructors, religious books, whether hymn, prayer or otherwise...” So, that’s specific. I’m not talking about teachers who are teaching kindergarten; I’m not talking about teachers

who are teaching grade 5; I’m not talking about grade 7 math teachers; I’m not talking about social studies teachers; I’m talking about religious instruction teachers. I’m sure that there is a term; I don’t know it; I didn’t go to a Catholic school. But I want to know: Is the Department of Education paying for that? Are they paying someone to teach the Roman Catholic religion? Is the Department of Education paying people to teach the Roman Catholic religion — those very specific teachers?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, I think that you have to look at the structure of the schools as well and how those positions are allocated to the school. They are FTE positions that may have other responsibilities within the school, and one of them could be that teaching of the religious studies within the school.

It is program-specific to the Catholic school, but these are teachers who may have different responsibilities and may be teaching other courses within the school, including religious studies.

Ms. White: So, whenever we go through the FTE allocation, we often are told that there can be 0.5 of a position, like a 0.5 of an FTE could do something. So, if a teacher who is teaching religious studies is doing 50 percent religious studies and 50 percent something else, is the Department of Education paying for the 50 percent that is religious studies?

According to clause 7, that is not supposed to be covered by the Government of Yukon. If 0.5 of an FTE is religious studies, is the Department of Education paying for that?

Hon. Ms. McLean: We pay for the full FTE for these positions that are within the Catholic schools.

Ms. White: I am going to move on to the sexual orientation and gender identity policy. Are staff protected under this policy?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, it covers all staff and students.

Ms. White: In 2022, at the Catholic professional development day in May of that year, there was homophobia and transphobia used in a Mass that staff had to attend. It wasn’t optional; it was part of the day. It started off with that. All staff from the Catholic schools had to go to the Mass prior to going to the rest of the day.

The Mass was so upsetting for some that approximately 40 educators got up and left. Were those 40 educators protected by the Department of Education with the SOGI policy?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The Catholic schools of Whitehorse have traditionally held an annual professional development day focused on Catholic education. A planning committee, typically comprised of teachers, administrators, and a chaplain, selects themes and organizes the event. The Department of Education has limited input into the content of these sessions but supports professional development that aligns with Yukon education priorities.

At the Catholic administrators meeting, Bishop Vila suggested, of course, at that time that Christopher West be invited to be a presenter at the Catholic schools of Whitehorse professional development day. Christopher West was controversial for non-Catholics, as he is a proponent of Theology of the Body. Theology of the Body fits within the Catholic doctrine. Christopher West was not invited to be a

presenter, so when we became aware, he was not invited to be a presenter.

The Catholic schools of Whitehorse professional development day was held on May 1, 2023. As per tradition, a Mass was held at Sacred Heart Cathedral to begin the professional day and was presided over by Bishop Hector Vila. During the homily, Bishop Vila spoke of the Catholic belief on marriage, at which time approximately one-third of the people who attended left. The principal of Christ the King and St. Francis of Assisi remained for the entire Mass.

The professional development day continued at the Gold Rush Inn conference centre, from my understanding, with an online presentation from Father Martin, who does not live in the Yukon. Father Martin's message was well-received at the professional development day. My understanding is that Bishop Vila remained in attendance for the rest of the time at the Gold Rush Inn. That is the information that I have about that particular incident.

In terms of the requirement for folks who work within Catholic schools — and my understanding is that this was a traditional thing, that there would be a Mass — we certainly again are not part of developing the content and material for that Mass. Again, the Catholic schools — yes, they must adhere to our laws, and, you know, I believe — again, I've talked about it in the House and to the media that there are a number of ways in which we are working with the Catholic schools to address issues such as this that include a number of protocols that I have talked about today to deal with some of the governance challenges, but there are structures that are in place now that help our department to deal with the challenges that may be happening or timely situations, such as where we are at right now with some of the issues that have arisen at one of our schools.

We will definitely continue to ensure that this work continues and that those discussions to address the communication protocol between the Department of Education and the Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Whitehorse to ensure that all parties have a comprehensive and common understanding of the agreement — monthly meetings between the department officials, the deputy minister, and the bishop — and the YGLearn course on Catholic education in Yukon, providing guidance for educators and ongoing engagement on SOGI implementation in Catholic schools. Those are all areas that we are focusing on and we will continue to do so.

Ms. White: Is attending Mass a requirement for educators at the Catholic schools when it comes to one of their PD days?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, we will have to go back and see what was communicated at the time. I can bring back a bit more information about the professional development days that, as I said, are conducted and planned by the Catholic school through committee work that, as I said, typically includes teachers, administrators, and a chaplain. They are the ones who select themes and organize these events.

I can certainly bring that information back.

Ms. White: My understanding is that, at the beginning of the 2023 Catholic PD day, church Mass was required. It was

part of the job. So, my question still stands from before, which is: Are the employees who went to that who stood up and left — the minister herself said that one-third of the employees got up and left — protected by the sexual orientation and gender identity policy that has been adopted by the Department of Education?

Hon. Ms. McLean: There is a short answer and long answer. There is a process as well for raising workplace concerns. I would be happy to share this through this debate or in another way. Educators who have concerns related to their work should bring them forward, for sure, through the appropriate channels. These channels include the school administration team, the office of the superintendent, Human Resource branch, and the Yukon Association of Education Professionals. There is a whole process around employee supports as well. When matters of concern come up, I would be happy to share more information about that.

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

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Mountainview that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

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

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by Mr. Streicker 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 Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole?

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: 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 Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole.

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

The following document was filed March 13, 2025:

35-1-301

Changes to the Yukon Nominee Program and Impact on the Ukrainian Community, letter re (dated January 27, 2025) from Eileen Melnychuk, President, Ukrainian Canadian Association of Yukon, to Brendan Hanley, Member of Parliament (White)