



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 229

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35th Legislature

HANSARD

Monday, March 17, 2025 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2025 Spring Sitting

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

CABINET MINISTERS

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

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

| | |
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| Clerk of the Assembly | Dan Cable |
| Deputy Clerk | Allison Lloyd |
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| Hansard Administrator | Deana Lemke |

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Monday, March 17, 2025 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of a change made to the Order Paper. Motion No. 1182, standing in the name of the Minister of Community Services, has been removed from the Order Paper, as it is now outdated.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Introduction of Visitors.

Visitors introduced

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Yukon Quest

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the Yukon Quest. Since 1984, the Quest has been an iconic showcase of the challenges, triumphs, and frozen beauty of our amazing territory.

With a new route that took mushers, dogs, and spectators on a journey through some of the Yukon's most breathtaking landscapes, this year marked an exciting new chapter in the Quest's history. As the Yukon Quest evolves and changes, it continues to reflect the independent spirit of the north, showcasing our incredible territory and our history and tradition with dogsledding. The Quest trails carry stories of the land, its people, and its history. They remind us of the deep connection between this place and those who have lived, travelled, and thrived here for generations.

On behalf of the Yukon government, I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank every one of the tireless race officials, organizers, veterinarians, and volunteers without whom this fantastic event would not be possible. Merci, mahsi' cho, gūinilshish, thank you. Because of your round-the-clock efforts, the Yukon Quest touches individuals, families, and communities across the region and around the world.

To the mushers and their incredible canine athletes from both the 450- and 175-mile events, this House recognizes the incredible passion and endurance that it takes to compete. In the Quest 450, congratulations to Tagish's Michelle Phillips for her third consecutive win, to Jessie Royer for a hard-fought and close second-place finish, and to Jesse Terry for an impressive third-place run in his rookie year.

In the 175-mile event, we congratulate Quest rookie Alexander Pai on his victory, the Yukon's own Nathaniel

Hamlyn for taking second, and Misha Wiljes for her third-place finish.

Shout-outs as well to the Red Lanterns from each race: Mary England for the 175 and Eric Oline for the 450.

I would also like to recognize the Veterinarian's Choice Award winners for outstanding dog care: Connor McMahon from the 450 and Miriam Osredkar from the 175. The Spirit of the North Award for the best exemplifying the spirit of the race went to Benjamin Simard of Tagish Lake Kennel.

The Government of Yukon is a proud supporter of the Quest, the cultural and historic significance of the race, and the amazing spirit of community that it inspires.

I ask the members of this House to join me in paying tribute to this important winter tradition. From the frenzy of the start line to the fellowship along the trail, the event continues to embody the sense of adventure and perseverance for which the north is famous.

Applause

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the 2025 Yukon Quest.

This year's race looked very different from previous decades, which saw mushers overcome 1,600 kilometres of rugged and beautiful terrain traversing the border from Whitehorse all the way through to Fairbanks.

For the first time in Quest history, the chilly 2025 race took place entirely within my riding of beautiful Pelly-Nisutlin. Mushers competed in a 450-kilometre route beginning in Teslin, up the South Canol to Ross River, and then 70 kilometres up the North Canol, back to Ross River, and back to Teslin.

It was a cold journey for all this year, but I hear that mushers were happy with the trail as it was finalized and would be happy to use the route again.

Nine-time participant Michelle Phillips, a high school classmate of both me and the MLA for Copperbelt South, was the 2025 champion. We would like to offer our sincere congratulations to Michelle and all other participants this year. An additional note, Mr. Speaker: a big congrats to Michelle on her impressive fourth-place finish in the Iditarod as well, which ended just on Friday.

So, thank you to all volunteers and organizers of this year's race and to participating mushers and teams, and we certainly look forward to possibly seeing you all back again next year. I promise I will try to do a better job about the temperature next year.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon NDP to honour the Yukon Quest.

This race has long been a testament to the endurance and spirit of both mushers and their canine companions. The grueling journey through harsh and breathtaking landscapes has captivated the hearts of many, showcasing the incredible bond between humans and dogs.

The race's history is rich with tales of bravery, resilience — and also probably brilliance — and the unyielding determination to traverse the wilderness. This year, the Yukon Quest introduced a major change by moving the start line to Teslin. This move shows their commitment to evolving the race while honouring its traditions. It reflects their ability to adapt and thrive in the face of change, much like the mushers who navigate the unpredictable weather and terrain.

The new starting point not only adds a fresh chapter to the race's storied legacy but also highlights the vibrant community of Teslin and its deep-rooted connection to the land. Their warm hospitality and stunning scenery provided an inspiring backdrop for the beginning of this epic adventure.

We want to wish our congratulations to all the teams who joined the race. Thank you to the veterans who come back year after year; it is always so fun to see familiar names on the roster, and thank you to the rookies for their new energy and enthusiasm. We could not have a Quest without mushers taking on this formidable challenge, so thank you for the joy you bring to all of us.

We also couldn't have the Quest without the incredible teams of staff, board members, and volunteers who handle a truly dizzying array of tasks to get this event off the ground. Thank you to all of you as well. Just because I can, I would like to thank all the racing dogs themselves. From the clever and adventurous lead dogs to the steady workhorse wheel dogs, we want to tell you that you are all very good dogs.

Applause

In recognition of National Social Work Month

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to social workers in the Yukon and across Canada as we recognize National Social Work Month. Social workers are at the very heart of our communities. They provide essential support to individuals and families facing some of life's most difficult challenges, whether it be navigating mental health concerns, supporting children and families, assisting seniors, working in our health care centres and hospitals, or working with individuals experiencing poverty, disability, or homelessness. Their work is deeply personal, requiring compassion, resilience, and a strong commitment to their profession and to helping others.

Here in the Yukon Territory, we know that social workers make a difference absolutely every day. They are in hospitals, care homes, clinics, and programs helping Yukoners access the support they need. They work with children and families to ensure safety, stability, and support. They work with individuals struggling with addiction and mental health challenges, connecting them to services and walking alongside them on their journey. In rural communities, they provide outreach and advocacy, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Their work is not easy. It requires immense emotional strength, problem-solving skills, and a deep understanding of the complexities that people face. Yet despite the immense challenges, social workers continue to show up every day, driven by the belief that everyone deserves dignity, respect, and

the opportunity to thrive. We also acknowledge the ongoing efforts of social workers to promote reconciliation, cultural safety, and inclusive care. Many work within our First Nation government and closely with communities, recognizing the importance of culturally informed support and the need to address the lasting impacts of colonial policies.

Social workers are not just professionals; they are advocates, counsellors, and trusted voices for those who may feel unheard. Their impact is immeasurable, and their contributions help to build a stronger and healthier Yukon for all of us. To all of the social workers in the Yukon, we thank you. Your dedication does not go unnoticed. Your compassion and expertise changes lives.

During National Social Work Month, I encourage all Yukoners to take a moment to recognize and appreciate social workers in our lives and in their communities, like the ones who work right here in our community warming centre in this very building. Their work is everywhere. Social workers contribute to our territory and it is better because each and every one of them comes to work each and every day to help us all.

Thank you, merci, mahsi' cho, and gunalchish.

Applause

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize social workers across the Yukon during National Social Work Month.

We recognize and celebrate the role that social workers play in shaping healthy and strong communities. They provide supports for so many people, including helping families and individuals to navigate systemic barriers, assisting people with life challenges, supporting vulnerable populations, and much more.

Becoming a social worker is a choice to prioritize the health and safety of people within your community. Doing so takes dedication, compassion, empathy, and purpose, all qualities that help a social worker — helping people to deal with different situations and learning to empower themselves and their families. For those thinking about formal education in social work, Yukon University offers a bachelor of social work degree in partnership with the University of Regina, which students can complete here in the Yukon.

We would like to recognize all of those who have chosen to pursue a career as social workers and provide our thanks to those who work to provide supports to our fellow citizens across the Yukon.

Applause

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to National Social Work Month. This month provides us an opportunity to honour the work and dedication of the many social workers across our territory who serve within various systems to support Yukoners.

I feel grateful for the time that I have spent in this field and for the professionals whom I have had the privilege of working alongside. I have witnessed first-hand the passion and commitment that social workers bring to improving our communities and the systems they work in. Social workers are

eager to further this work, particularly with the ongoing efforts to establish a formal registration process for the field here in the Yukon. Registration is key in creating accountability and quality of service.

Social workers fill critical gaps in our systems. They are strong advocates who challenge policies, initiate system-wide changes, and tackle barriers, all to ensure that individuals and families receive the support that they need.

I also want to acknowledge the Yukon's bachelor of social work degree program, which is offered in partnership between Yukon University and the University of Regina. For 31 years, the Yukon has supported social work education. I had the privilege of attending this program and was able to witness its commitment to upholding high standards both through classroom lectures and hands-on experience. The program provides learners opportunities to explore core values and build the essential skills required in the field. A highlight of this program was the mandatory culture camp. I was fortunate to spend the final portion of my program in the beautiful territory of Klukshu within the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations where we were mentored and guided by community educators, elders, volunteers, and community members as we were immersed in their culture and way of life.

I commend all social workers who are bringing meaningful reconciliation and an understanding of cultural practices and protocols into their work. I also recognize the staff and volunteers who work diligently to ensure that the Yukon's bachelor of social work program remains focused on upholding Yukon First Nation culture and teachings while staying grounded in community values.

Finally, thank you to all the social workers across the Yukon who are doing the difficult but essential work of taking care of Yukoners and ensuring that their needs are met.

Mahsi' cho.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Petitions.

PETITIONS

Petition No. 28 — received

Clerk: Mr. Speaker and honourable members of the Assembly: I have had the honour to review a petition, being Petition No. 28, of the First Session of the 35th Legislative Assembly, as presented by the Leader of the Third Party on March 13, 2025.

The petition, presented by the Leader of the Third Party, meets the requirements as to form of the Standing Orders of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

Speaker: Accordingly, I declare Petition No. 28 is deemed to be read and received. Pursuant to Standing Order 67, the Executive Council shall provide a response to a petition which has been read and received within eight sitting days of its presentation. Therefore, the Executive Council response to Petition No. 28 shall be provided on or before March 27, 2025.

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 309: Act to Amend the Elections Act with Respect to Political Contributions — Introduction and First Reading

Ms. White: I move that a bill entitled *Act to Amend the Elections Act with Respect to Political Contributions* be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Leader of the Third Party that a bill entitled *Act to Amend the Elections Act with Respect to Political Contributions* be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 309 agreed to

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

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House thanks Skagway Vice-Mayor Deb Potter and Assembly member Orion Hanson, on behalf of the Government of Yukon, for their support on behalf of the Assembly of Skagway:

(1) recognizing the long-standing relationship between the Yukon and Alaska; and

(2) acknowledging Canada as a sovereign nation during testimony in the Alaska State Legislature on the House Joint Resolution "Recognizing and honouring the relationship between Canada and Alaska".

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House supports the Government of Yukon's efforts to ensure that foreign nationals currently established in the Yukon with work permits expiring between January 1, 2025 and December 31, 2025 will be eligible to apply for a new Yukon-specific permit.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to inform residents of Watson Lake and the municipality of Watson Lake when the 43 serviced residential lots referenced in the 2025-26 budget documents will be released and how much they will be sold for.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Community Services to provide fire chiefs and the public with a detailed update on the status of any personal protective equipment for firefighters that has been ordered, including:

(1) a list of any equipment that has been ordered;

(2) an itemized list by fire hall of what equipment they will receive; and

(3) the expected delivery dates of all equipment.

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

THAT this House congratulates Special Olympics World Winter Games Turin 2025 medal winners Darby McIntyre, with gold in the four-by-one kilometre relay, and Owen Munroe, with bronze in the four-by-one kilometre relay.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to inform residents of Haines Junction and the municipality of Haines Junction when the 44 serviced residential lots referred to in the 2025-26 budget documents will be released and how much they will be sold for.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Community Services to improve support for all Yukon fire departments, including working with municipalities and fire chiefs, to find solutions that reduce the administrative burden.

Mr. Dixon: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with the Yukon Medical Association to establish a joint task force tasked with finding solutions to reduce the administrative burden on doctors and increase the time that doctors have to see patients.

Ms. Clarke: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with the City of Whitehorse to invest in infrastructure that will alleviate traffic for residents of Porter Creek and Whistle Bend.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to work with the Yukon Medical Association to ensure consistency in physician payment arrangements by:

(1) allowing the Yukon Medical Association to represent doctors, surgeons, and specialists in the negotiation of contracts; and

(2) in the upcoming negotiating cycle, including both fee-for-service and contract payment arrangements in the next memorandum of understanding with the Yukon Medical Association.

MLA Tredger: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to end the eligibility of vehicles built by Tesla motors for the Government of Yukon clean energy rebate.

I also give notice of the following motion for the production of papers:

THAT this House do issue an order for the return of the grid stability study that was conducted by the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources with the Yukon Energy Corporation and ATCO Electric Yukon.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Canada to cancel its announced funding cuts to settlement service providers and language training for immigrants to Canada.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Health care professionals recruitment and retention

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, for years, we have been pointing out that many Yukoners do not have a family doctor. Even though there are thousands of Yukoners in this situation, the Liberal government has not been doing enough to respond. In fact, things are getting worse. In the last 18 months, four family doctors have closed their practices and one surgeon has left the Yukon. Last year, not a single one of the 153 locum doctors who came to the Yukon decided to stay. The number of physicians per capita has now fallen below the national average.

Why isn't this Liberal government doing more to recruit and retain doctors?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, we continue to prioritize through our incentives, our pay structure, and our health human resources strategy to work with the Yukon Medical Association and to work with doctors coming forward to the Yukon Territory to make it their home and to encourage additional practitioners. The Yukon government acknowledges that there are significant challenges that physicians are facing here in the territory. There is a strain on health care systems across the country, particularly those physicians who are providing acute care and emergency care through hospitals and absolutely, as well, primary care physicians who are on the very front lines of working with patients every single day.

There's a broader population of patients and older population of patients with more complex medical challenges every day. We must support them; we must recognize the urgency of the situation, and we are committed to working collaboratively with our health care providers to find solutions that ensure a sustainable and effective health care system. We have many initiatives designed to promote primary health care providers. They are truly the foundation of our health care system. Their ability to deliver care is a primary concern for us.

Mr. Cathers: According to Yukon doctors, the lack of stability in the territory's health care system prevents doctors from wanting to come or stay here. "Many are choosing not to put down their roots in that ... rocky ground" is how the YMA president put it in a recent interview with the *Yukon News*.

In the face of those challenges, Yukoners want their government to do more for doctor recruitment and retention efforts, but unfortunately, that's not what we're seeing. Last year's budget included more than \$6.4 million for physician recruitment and retention. This year's budget cuts that funding by almost half.

With thousands of Yukoners without a family doctor, why is the Liberal government cutting the funding for physician recruitment/retention initiatives by almost half?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Unfortunately, again, the member opposite has the facts misconstrued or is designing that to cause Yukoners concern and fear.

Most recent available physician statistics are available from the Canadian Institute for Health Information, or what's known as CIHI, and from the Yukon Medical Association, both providing 2023 statistics.

According to CIHI's analysis, the Yukon had 168 family medicine physicians per 100,000 population in 2023, placing us first in Canada for supply of family medicine physicians. As I've said, they are a priority for our government and must be supported.

CIHI reports show that Yukon consistently ranks first in the country per capita of family medicine physicians between 2010 and 2023.

The Yukon Medical Association reported having 101 full members in 2023, including 75 family doctors. Of these, 38 carry a panel of patients to whom they provide longitudinal primary care. The remainder of the YMA members provide a variety of essential health care services throughout the system.

YMA data also shows that a high proportion — 26 percent — of its membership roster are over the age of 55 and nearing retirement, which must be addressed.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Mr. Speaker, I remind the minister that I'm looking at the line item in the government's own budget.

Mr. Speaker, there are thousands of Yukoners without a family doctor. Not a single one of the 153 doctors who visited the Yukon last year as locums decided to move here. That's a zero-for-153 record on doctor recruitment.

In the last 18 months, four family medical practices closed and at least one surgeon left. According to the YMA, the Yukon is now below the national average for physicians per capita. It's clear that the Yukon's health care crisis is getting worse, but despite this, the Liberal government has decided to cut the budget for doctor recruitment and retention.

Can the minister please explain why this Liberal government has decided to cut the budget for these initiatives by almost half since last year?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I think it's incredibly important that we work with the leaders at the Yukon Medical Association and the Hospital Corporation — as those at the Department of Health and Social Services — to discuss the current pressures and that we explore potential options.

In 2025-26, the Department of Health and Social Services has allocated \$170,000 to support the Yukon Medical Association's physician recruiter position. The same level of support was provided in 2024-25. The physician recruiter

position has been crucial in supporting the hospitalist program through the recruitment of locum physicians. I think that we should remember, despite the member opposite's questions, that locum physicians have jobs in other places in Canada. They come here to support our programs and to learn about the Yukon. They don't initially move here following a single stint as a locum, but we certainly continue to ask them to return.

Additional funding has also been made available to the Yukon Hospital Corporation in 2024-25 to continue to recruit physicians. That is just one of the initiatives that we have, working with our partners, to make sure that Yukoners have the health care system that they need.

Question re: Physician recruitment and retention

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, last week, my colleague called on the Yukon government to launch a targeted campaign to reach out to doctors and other health professionals who are looking to leave the United States due to the uncertainty and chaos south of the border. In response, the Minister of Health and Social Services declined and stated that they were already doing well enough. Well, Mr. Speaker, we don't agree. It's clear that this minister has a disastrous record when it comes to recruitment and retention, which makes it all the more confusing for Yukoners why the government wouldn't want to take advantage of this unique opportunity to attract US-trained health professionals to the Yukon.

I will ask again today: Will the Government of Yukon agree to launch a strategic campaign to target health professionals who are considering leaving the US due to the political climate that includes streamlining licensing and credentialing, allowing US board-certified doctors to practise here, and marketing the Yukon to help professionals looking to relocate from the United States?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I think that my answer has been misinterpreted. What I said was that we are working with all manner of internationally trained physicians and all manner of internationally trained health care providers to market to them, to entice them to come, and to pay good salaries so that they will come here and work in the Yukon Territory. The focus that the member opposite made on the United States, I said, was a fine idea, but it needed to be broader than that and we need to address all issues involving internationally trained medical professionals to support the health care system that the Yukon needs.

I also noted that we are about to enter into negotiations for a memorandum of understanding with the Yukon Medical Association, and we look forward to working with them on their front-line ideas and opportunities for us to improve the health care system through those negotiations and through our initiatives to encourage internationally trained medical professionals of all types to come and work here in our territory.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, we seem to find ourselves with the unique opportunity to take advantage of the instability in the United States, and I think that this deserves specific attention, but we won't be the only ones taking note of this, so it's important for us to move quickly and move creatively. Nova Scotia started allowing US board-certified doctors to

practise in that province two years ago; BC is launching something very similar to what we're proposing — just last month. In fact, here's what former health minister Terry Lake said about the idea — quote: "If we can be a refuge for Americans looking for some sanity, and help our health care at the same time, all the better..." But it will take some initiative and action from this minister.

So, will the government stop cutting funding for physician recruitment and instead launch a specific, targeted campaign to attract US health professionals to move here to the Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I think I've cleared up the fact that we have not cut funding for recruitment or for recruiters in my former answer.

In order to support acute care during this time of high pressure here in the territory, we improved incentives for physicians to come to work as hospitalists and at the emergency room. We are committed to new physician recruitment measures, including allowing hospitalists to put in additional hours of work during periods of short staffing, implementing this as we go forward, and providing additional investment for the Yukon Hospital Corporation to expand hospital-based physician recruitment activities to boost efforts to attract additional physicians to acute care services at the Whitehorse General Hospital. They are fully aware of the gaps that need to be filled and their work is in partnership with the Yukon Medical Association, and we're committed to revising the MOU, as I said, as we go forward to help support recruiting new graduates to both primary and acute care.

The leadership of the Department of Health and Social Services, the Hospital Corporation, and the Yukon Medical Association has been joint and working to formalize programs to serve Yukoners better. I look forward to that work continuing.

Mr. Dixon: The problem is that what the minister is doing isn't working. We have seen four family physicians close their practice in the last 18 months. We have lost a surgeon. We have seen a zero-for-153 record on locums. What they are doing right now isn't working.

Last week, the Premier stood and lauded his MOU with Nova Scotia, which was signed back in 2023. The Premier's fondness of the pageantry of signing an MOU but failing to take any action is well-known. Unfortunately, that MOU has resulted in very little practical results for Yukoners.

Just a few months before he signed that agreement with Nova Scotia, that province took the initiative to allow US-trained doctors who want to practise there in Nova Scotia the ability to do so without additional certifications or exams. At the time, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia said that action would remove a huge barrier for doctors who are trained in the US but would like to practise in Nova Scotia.

My question is simple: Why doesn't the Government of Yukon do the same?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight some points from the last three questions. First, we do appreciate the concept of recruiting in the United States. Our Department of Economic Development focused, in 2018, after

the first Trump administration, on looking not just at health but also at tech and other high-skilled jobs. I know that the recruiter who is paid by the Yukon Medical Association — the same money that was in last year's budget is in this year's budget — will be in a position to communicate back to us some of the most fertile ground for doctors as we move forward, especially with some of the challenges in the US.

Again, I want to highlight that the celebrated approach by Nova Scotia by the leader of the opposition — we were criticized for doing that work; now it's being defined as best practices. I do appreciate the Leader of the Official Opposition coming back and now understanding why we signed that.

There was also work done; there was a motion today by the opposition around the reduction of red tape for doctors. That's work that — through that MOU actually, we had support as well from Nova Scotia on that work. Again, I thank the members opposite for coming around on this, and I thank the minister for the good work on making sure —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Highway maintenance

MLA Tredger: Last month, *CBC News* reported on a serious car crash on the Alaska Highway near Swift River. People were injured and have suffered long-term health consequences. The incident has brought to light long-standing concerns about the safety and maintenance of that section of the Alaska Highway. The icy conditions were a key factor in this accident. Two of the people involved in the crash have started a petition to draw attention to the maintenance of this section of highway.

What is this government doing to improve the maintenance and safety of the Swift River section of the Alaska Highway and prevent further accidents?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the questions.

The members opposite will know that the Department of Highways and Public Works is responsible for the maintenance of approximately 5,000 kilometres of highway, and they discharge themselves admirably in a yeoman's way over the course of — in difficult circumstances — have certainly received the concerns raised with respect to the Swift River section, and we are in a position where we will certainly be following that up.

The Alaska Highway through Whitehorse and in general is a vital link of local transportation in the Yukon that includes communities travelling to Whitehorse and for Whitehorse residents as well.

We are certainly aware of the problem, and we will get back to the member opposite, but it is absolutely paramount to the grader crews across the Yukon to keep the Alaska Highway as serviceable and safe as possible throughout incredibly challenging conditions.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, the petition by Watson Lake residents underscores the recurring issues with road conditions in the Swift River area. This stretch of road has become notorious for accidents, including a semi rolling in

2022. Some locals even avoid travel there because of safety concerns.

The petition and previous accidents show a strong need for a long-term strategy for maintenance and safety improvements. The community's call for action shows that they want accountability and proactive measures from the government. Addressing their concerns will require a detailed and transparent plan for the safety of all road users.

Can the minister commit to a long-term strategy for regular maintenance and safety improvements on the Swift River stretch of the highway?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: What I can say is that there is a considered program with respect to the maintenance of 4,831 kilometres of maintained surfaces within the Yukon, which includes 350 kilometres of asphalt pavement, 1,976 kilometres of bituminous surface treatment — BST or chipseal — 2,498 kilometres of gravel, and seven kilometres of bridge and ferry crossings.

Mr. Speaker, during the winter months, regional highway crews are scheduled to work seven days a week, with 24/7 coverage in and around Whitehorse. Highways are cleared based on priority, ensuring that school bus routes and highway traffic areas are addressed first; all other roads are cleared and sanded as quickly as possible in priority order thereafter.

Yukoners will know that winter came quickly and significantly in the middle of October when there was significant snowfall and, once again, a shout-out to the grader operators across the Yukon in reaching and meeting that challenge.

So, absolutely, with respect to Swift River, that is but a portion of the 4,831 kilometres of maintained roads throughout the Yukon, but we'll certainly follow up and address the concerns from the member opposite.

MLA Tredger: The severe injuries sustained by at least one person in the recent accident highlight the urgency of improved highway maintenance, especially during winter. The petition from Watson Lake citizens emphasizes the community's need for safer road conditions. The involvement of local residents in this issue is crucial, as they are the ones most affected by the state of the highways. Ensuring that their voices are heard and their concerns are addressed is essential for building trust and improving road safety.

The government's response to this petition will be a key indicator of its commitment to the well-being of Watson Lake residents. Will this government involve the local community in decision-making processes about highway maintenance, and if so, how?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to conjecture on the floor of the Assembly as to how the government will respond to a petition that I haven't seen yet, but when received, we'll certainly give it due consideration and respond in the absolutely professional manner in which Highways and Public Works generally and Highways and Public Works crews operate during the course of discharging their business.

So, just briefly with respect to some of the other work that is done with respect to safety on the Alaska Highway and

highways in general, HPW clears approximately 900 kilometres of highway right-of-way vegetation each year. Since the beginning of the road safety program in 2019, we have cleared approximately 4,200 kilometres of vegetation in the right-of-way. We have issued 25 contracts for vegetation control in 2023-24 for 804 kilometres; we have issued 25 contracts for vegetation control in 2024-25 for 716 kilometres. Each year on average, with respect to geotechnical work, we produce approximately 250,000 cubic metres of crushed granular aggregate.

Specifically with respect to Swift River — my condolences go out to the family, but certainly, we —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Physician recruitment and retention

Ms. Blake: In July 2023, this government signed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Nova Scotia to collaborate on addressing the ongoing challenges related to the recruitment, training, and retention of health professionals. Since then, the government has launched the *Health Human Resources Strategy*, which aims to create a coordinated road map for the health care system.

As part of this initiative, the HHR strategy has established eight working groups, each focusing on important areas of health care.

Can the minister provide an update on the specific outcomes that have been achieved?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, in July 2023 — the member opposite is quite correct — our government signed a letter of intent with the Government of Nova Scotia to work collaboratively on health human resources. Nova Scotia has adopted innovative strategies to create new opportunities to address recruitment and retention. Officials from both of our jurisdictions have developed a comprehensive set of issues and have partnered on shared information on several of these topics.

Collaboration continues as we work together. Officials from Health and Social Services attended a health care recruitment and retention community conference in Nova Scotia in the middle of last year, which was primarily related to the recruitment of health sector workers and the integration of internationally educated professionals from all jurisdictions.

These learnings have been developed into a framework of transitions to practice for both internationally educated nurses and new nursing graduates as well as other professions including physicians. We're also in contact with officials in the Province of Nova Scotia to explore options of more efficient physician licensing arrangements for Yukon-bound doctors.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotia is leading the country in initiatives that will measure and reduce the administrative burden on physicians. They have released a report that outlines 45 initiatives that have either been completed or are underway to reduce time spent on paperwork. Reducing administrative burden allows physicians to dedicate those 250,000 hours to patient care instead.

Which specific actions from Nova Scotia's report is the Yukon government considering adopting, and when will these be implemented?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, reducing administrative burden has been a topic of serious activity and conversation for us with the Yukon Medical Association since the beginning of the last memorandum of understanding, which will end at the end of this month. We look forward to entering into negotiations with respect to providing yet another MOU going forward that addresses the issues of concern to our medical community, but there was an initiative put in place in the last MOU that ended up providing additional finances to physicians on the front lines that could be used to address administrative burden. It was a cash payment to those individuals upon some information being provided.

The registrar in the Yukon of medical practitioners actively participates in national and cross-jurisdictional organizations and initiatives aimed at harmonizing and streamlining licensing pathways. We continue that work; we look forward to continuing that work to minimize administrative burden, which we know is an issue that draws resources away from the care — resources of time and finances — while ensuring that the health professionals are appropriately regulated and Yukoners have access to high-quality health care.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, one of the most successful changes that Nova Scotia made was to enable the use of physician assistants in several areas of their health care system. Physician assistants perform a variety of important tasks, such as conducting exams and prescribing medications or treatments. This allows physicians to focus more on specialized tasks that require their unique expertise, ultimately enhancing patient care and experiences.

In the fall of 2023, this House unanimously supported the motion to introduce physician assistants to our own health care system. Could the minister provide a detailed timeline for the implementation of this important change, including steps that have already been taken?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, we are certainly open to the introduction of physician assistants in our health care system. As a matter of fact, the Yukon is leading the way in transitioning our health care system into a system that includes team-based care. Physician assistants could well be a part of team-based care, but I think that the facts will be important to Yukoners — to know that there are simply not enough physician assistants being educated here in this country. Even internationally, physician assistants are a small number of individuals who can achieve that education.

We certainly hope to expand that. What I can say with respect to the work that we are doing is to focus on internationally educated health professionals of all kinds, including nurse practitioners, who are an integral part of our team-based care initiatives. It certainly is an integral part of the team-based care that was envisioned with respect to *Putting People First*, and it is certainly a core part of the work that we're doing to provide all variety of health care for Yukoners.

Question re: Highway maintenance

Mr. Hassard: Like many Yukoners, we appreciate the work of our highway maintenance crews in keeping our highways safe and open year-round. This year's budget for

maintenance is \$49.758 million, a mere \$13,000 higher than that of last year. With wage increases, fuel price increases, the trade war, and general inflation, this minuscule increase for funding will not cover increased costs.

Why does this Liberal government continually ask our highway maintenance crews to do more with less?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the question. As indicated, Highways and Public Works is responsible for approximately 5,000 kilometres of highway maintenance. Certainly, kudos to them for doing so. They are, in our view, well-funded to do so. I certainly look forward to going through the budget for Highways and Public Works during Committee of the Whole, and we can address the specific concerns that the member opposite may have with respect to maintenance across the territory, but as I have indicated, the Highways and Public Works crew does yeoman's service with respect to a lot of areas.

The Government of Yukon maintains a total of 137 bridges. Our road network also includes 267 large structural culverts and over 7,000 smaller drainage culverts. Many bridges in the Yukon were built in the 1950s and 1960s; our bridge inspection team inspects all the bridges at least once every two years and structural culverts every three years.

Mr. Hassard: I was hoping that the minister had already gone through the budget, but it appears he hasn't, but I will carry on.

Our busiest and arguably most important trade route is the Alaska Highway. Thousands of vehicles use this important route every year for commuting, tourism, and commercial purposes, among other things. This year's maintenance budget for the Alaska Highway is \$11.846 million, down from \$15.862 million last year. That is almost \$4 million in reduced funding for crews working along the Alaska Highway, and it is approximately a million dollars less than it was four years ago.

Can the minister explain why he is so drastically reducing the amount of money being spent on maintenance on the Alaska Highway this year?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: We do this every session, but it really is time now for a trip down memory lane again. In the fiscal year 2014, the Yukon Party had actual capital expenditures of \$191 million and, in 2015-16, \$238 million. So, then we go in the time machine to 2022-23 — actual capital expenditures \$506,247,000; in 2023-24, \$472 million; \$431 million in a budget of just under \$500 million for the fiscal year 2024-25, which includes, with respect to infrastructure and maintenance of our infrastructure, national trade corridors funding on the north Klondike Highway, which is the total budget of approximately \$270 million between 2023 and 2031 — also with respect to the improvement and replacement of the Big Creek bridge, the Crooked Creek bridge, and, of course, the Nisutlin Bay bridge.

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, I urge the minister, when he gets his next briefing, to ask the department to explain to him the difference between capital and O&M, because today we are talking about O&M.

One very important aspect that many Yukoners noticed regarding highway maintenance is vegetation control. We

know that in 2024, the Government of Yukon awarded \$2.8 million in vegetation control contracts. Those targeted 314 kilometres for brushing and 330 kilometres for mowing.

So, can the minister tell us how much will be spent on vegetation control this year and whether or not this work will be affected by the reductions that we see in this budget?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am very familiar with the difference between operation and maintenance and capital. Certainly, for the national trade corridors funding, by completely reconstructing those roads, building them up, and replacing completely unsuitable culverts — replacing them with much larger culverts — then the operation and maintenance spending that will take place between Carmacks and Dawson over the course of decades will be significantly less.

With respect to the Nisutlin Bay bridge project — just quickly — once again, in 2014, while the MLA for Pelly-Nisutlin sat in the Cabinet table, they abruptly cancelled the planned \$14.5-million repair project for that Nisutlin Bay bridge, losing nearly \$6.75 million in federal funding that could have addressed critical safety issues over a decade. Their reason? They claimed that there wasn't enough time for community consultation after years of inaction.

Mr. Speaker, it's quite astonishing that the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin now stands here criticizing both operation and maintenance and capital infrastructure spend. Perhaps if he and his party had spent less time ignoring community concerns and more time responsibly managing infrastructure projects, Yukoners would not be facing the significant costs that this government is today.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Government House Leader's report on length of Sitting

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 75(4) to inform the House that the House Leaders have met for the purpose of achieving agreement on the maximum number of sitting days for the current Sitting. I'm informing the House that the results are that there shall be a maximum of 32 sitting days, with the 32nd sitting day being Thursday, May 1, 2025.

Speaker: Accordingly, I declare the current Sitting shall be a maximum of 32 sitting days, with the 32nd sitting day being Thursday, May 1, 2025.

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 48: *Early Learning and Child Care Act* — Second Reading

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 48, standing in the name of the Hon. Ms. McLean.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I move that Bill No. 48, entitled *Early Learning and Child Care Act*, be now read a second time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Education that Bill No. 48, entitled *Early Learning and Child Care Act*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I'm pleased to bring forward Bill No. 48 for second reading. This bill is a modern, comprehensive piece of legislation to govern early learning and childcare in the Yukon. It reflects our government's vision for a high-quality system that is inclusive, accessible, and affordable for all families.

The need for this legislation is clear. The *Child Care Act* and the accompanying regulations, which we seek to replace, were drafted in 1990 for a much different time and a much different population. The *Child Care Act* primarily focuses on ensuring the safety and well-being of children, similar to other childcare laws in Canada at that time. Over the years, experts in early childhood education have recognized that children require more than just safety; they need high-quality, diverse, and nurturing experiences to support their learning and development. The new bill will support current best practices for the early learning and childcare profession.

When it first came into effect 35 years ago, it replaced the *Day Care Act* of 1980, marking a shift in how childcare was viewed in the Yukon. Back then, the childcare focused on basic supervision and babysitting rather than supporting children's learning and development. The definition of "parent" was more traditional, whereas today, it is inclusive, non-gendered, and recognizes care provided by extended family members such as grandparents.

Additionally, the territory itself was different. In 1990, the Yukon had fewer early learning and childcare centres and family day homes compared to today's 80 licensed operators, including nine Yukon First Nation government-owned and -operated programs. This represents over 2,365 licensed spaces across the Yukon, 26 percent higher since the implementation of universal childcare. In January 2025, there were approximately 1,922 children enrolled in licensed childcare programs across the territory, an increase of over 31 percent since the implementation of universal childcare.

These are some of the reasons why our government took on the task of rewriting the *Child Care Act*. Our government knows that the bill will affect many Yukoners. We have written this bill in a modern, flexible way so that it can grow and change with us over time. We moved many of the pieces that were formerly in legislation into regulations. This will allow flexibility.

The bill before us today, the *Early Learning and Child Care Act*, is the result of years of dedicated work, research, and engagement.

I want to, of course, thank the public service for all of their hard work and to all of the partners who worked with us to identify the areas which we needed to modernize and change in this act.

Additionally, in their 2021 annual report, the Yukon Child Care Board recommended that the *Child Care Act* be modernized to address current issues, reflect best practices in the field, and to strengthen the early learning and childcare

sector as a whole. We developed this bill in a collaborative manner, working with many Yukoners dedicated to advancing early learning and childcare. We began the review of the *Child Care Act* by reviewing feedback from previous engagements with Yukon First Nation governments, the Yukon Child Care Board, and stakeholders that have been undertaken since 2021.

In 2023, we conducted a public engagement on the modernization of the *Child Care Act*. We used a variety of methods to engage a wide range of partners and individuals, including 32 engagement sessions and one-to-one meetings both virtually and in person. The project team directly surveyed families, resulting in 434 responses, and received 12 written submissions from Yukoners.

I would like to share some of the key themes from the “what we heard” report following these engagements: the inclusion of First Nation cultures and language; the importance of including principles of quality, inclusivity, accessibility, and affordability; the inclusion of an early learning framework; ensuring affordability for Yukon families; making updates to the children registration in kindergarten — that they are part of the school-aged group — to increase capacity in the system; and increased access to professional development.

I am happy to share that this bill reflects what was shared by the Yukon Child Care Board, First Nation governments, licensed program owners, early childhood educators, early learning advocates, parents, caregivers, and others. For example, through the engagements, the early learning and childcare sector expressed a desire to remove medical assessment requirements for early learning childhood educators. This requirement will be removed when drafting the new regulations.

Early learning experiences play a crucial role in not only shaping children’s brain development but also shaping children’s futures, supporting their education success and positively influencing their development well into adulthood.

Universal childcare also provides essential supports for families, especially for women, who are often primary caregivers. When families have access to affordable, reliable childcare, caregivers are empowered to pursue education, employment, and community involvement — factors that strengthen Yukon communities and create a better future for everyone.

Investing in early learning and childcare is a long-term investment because it lays the foundation for children’s future success, improving educational, social, and economic outcomes for individuals and society.

Additionally, Bill No. 48 recognizes that families have different needs depending on many factors, including the age and developmental abilities of their children, when it comes to accessing early learning and childcare.

We will continue to work with Yukon First Nation governments, the Yukon Child Care Board, stakeholders, and Yukoners to realize our shared vision of high-quality early learning and childcare that is inclusive, affordable, and accessible. I want to reiterate that all of the proposed changes support this vision and are aligned with national best practices, extensive research, and feedback from engagement conducted

over the three-month period in 2024 as well as the two previous engagements on early learning and childcare.

The changes include modernizing terminology and provisions to reflect the shift to early learning and childcare philosophy. This bill emphasizes the importance of reconciliation and partnerships in the provision of early learning and childcare services across the territory. The bill highlights early childhood educators, including the requirement for an early learning framework that will leave space for recognition of Yukon First Nation ways of knowing, doing, and being.

The early learning framework and foundation of a quality early learning system will be developed and implemented in collaboration with Yukon First Nations, nine of which are owned and operated licensed early learning and childcare programs. All licensed programs will then create early learning plans that are based on the approved framework. These plans will be inclusive and respond to children with diverse strengths and needs and those of different ages.

In meetings with Yukon First Nations, we heard that First Nations want to be involved in the future development of a new early learning childcare framework to ensure that their values are represented in programming on their traditional territory.

We also heard that First Nations want to be involved in creating vision and competencies of a qualified educator. Bill No. 48 allows for that collaborative work to take place.

A significant addition is the requirement for the Minister of Education to table annual reports on the progress made toward achieving the principles of quality, affordability, accessibility, and inclusivity, ensuring greater transparency and accountability. The new legislation will expand the definition of “school age” to include children registered in kindergarten, which will add capacity to programs by reducing the number of educators needed to supervise after-school programs.

A regulation-making authority will allow for a reduction of the ratio of infants to educators from one educator to four infants down to one educator for three infants. This was strongly advocated for by early childhood educators and others and aligns the Yukon with best practices across Canada.

A strong emphasis is placed on early childhood educator education and benchmarks of quality in early learning and will help improve outcomes for Yukon children. This work complements the Department of Education’s ongoing efforts, such as reimagining inclusive and special education and the integrated outcome strategy for Yukon learners.

This bill aligns with the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* by: integrating the best interests of the child throughout their education; setting standards for safety, health, suitability of staff, and supervision competencies; co-creating the goals of education in the early learning framework in collaboration with First Nations; recognizing the importance of integrating First Nation ways knowing, being, and doing into programming; and ensuring inclusion and supports for children with disabilities.

We know that by implementing this legislation, we are setting up the early learning childcare system for a better future. With the new legislation in hand, government will be better-

equipped to support the provision of quality early learning and childcare services for Yukoners.

Bill No. 48 will also help support commitment and obligations in truth and reconciliation calls to action, the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit+ people strategy calls for justice, and the LGBTQ2S+ *Inclusion Action Plan*.

I want to thank First Nation governments, the Yukon Child Care Board, early learning program owners, educators, stakeholder groups, and families for the perspectives they shared on early learning and childcare that are reflected in this bill. Your voices are integral to the modernization of the early learning and childcare system. I am excited about the opportunity to enshrine the principles of quality, affordability, accessibility, and inclusion into law to support Yukon families and our future generations.

To achieve these goals, the early learning sector will be supported by the Early Learning and Child Care branch at the Department of Education. Together, we will implement the necessary changes to support and advance the quality of early learning and childcare in the Yukon. We are committed to enhancing the legislation to better embody the principles of quality, affordability, inclusivity, and accessibility within the early learning and childcare sector. I also believe that, with this bill, we are providing clear, functional legislation with practical measures that bring us in line with the current standards of other jurisdictions across the country. This bill focuses on fostering a strong, inclusive, and culturally responsive childcare system by supporting healthy families, healthy communities, promoting quality childcare, and honouring Yukon First Nation aspirations.

There are more than 500 childhood educators working within licensed early learning and childcare in the Yukon. I would like to conclude by absolutely raising my hands to all of those folks who provide critical roles in providing education and care for our youngest citizens in the Yukon. Your dedication to Yukon children as they grow and develop is making such a difference and will be felt for generations.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to elaborating on the finer details of Bill No. 48 and how our government will be bringing it into force. I look forward to Committee of the Whole debate as we move through the various stages of this legislation. Again, I want to thank all the public servants who worked with their hearts to develop this legislation and to all of our partners who contributed to this. I look forward to hearing from other Members of the Legislative Assembly today as we move through this second reading.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill No. 48, *Early Learning and Child Care Act*, today at second reading. I appreciate the briefing that was provided by officials from the Department of Education last week and the thoughtful information that was provided to us there. I will be fairly brief in my comments today at second reading. I look forward to getting into Committee of the Whole and asking some detailed questions. I will, though, make a few general observations before proceeding to vote in favour of this bill.

The first comment I would make is that the early learning and childcare field has changed, grown, and evolved considerably over the years, and I do see that evolution and that growth reflected in this bill. I do see the language changing and some of the principles and concepts behind the ELCC field within this bill. I would also note, though, Mr. Speaker, that one of the biggest observations that I have about the bill is that it is very much an enabling piece of legislation. It creates significant new abilities for regulation creation, and it's my view that the most substantive pieces — the pieces that are most substantive for those who work in the industry, for those who practice in the field, for those who care about this field — are all things that are going to be dealt with in regulation.

There are a lot of questions that we will have that aren't answered in the bill itself and will require the minister to give us some idea of what the intention of the Yukon government is when it comes to the creation of these regulations. As one would see when you review this bill, section 77 of the act creates significant new regulation-making powers. I believe that they go all the way from (a) to (ee) in section 77, which is a significant listing of new regulation-making powers. What is also notable, Mr. Speaker, is that this bill would not come into force until those regulations are enacted. For those listening, watching, or reviewing the proceedings of this bill, there is a significant amount of work that needs to be done beyond the floor of the Legislature to see this bill come to fruition.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to note — I have taken the opportunity to share the bill with a number of different stakeholders and seek their feedback, so I will be doing my best to reflect the feedback that has been provided to me in Committee of the Whole. I know that those on the Child Care Board are very interested to see the bill come forward, as this will make some significant changes for members of the Child Care Board. I do have some questions about the change to the composition of the Child Care Board and whether or not the Child Care Board itself was consulted about the new composition.

As well, I had some questions about the appeal process for the Child Care Board — the appeal process that one can use to bring a matter before the Child Care Board is something that has been the subject of recommendations from the Child Care Board in previous annual reports, so we will be looking to discuss those with the minister.

As well, I think it's worthwhile to hold up the previous annual reports of the Yukon Child Care Board to see how they match up with what is achieved in this bill. This is something I look forward to doing in Committee of the Whole when we have the chance later on.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister bringing this bill forward. I welcome the new act, but I do have questions about some of the content and in particular some of the regulations that have yet to come. With that, as I have noted, the Yukon Party will be voting in favour of this bill at this stage, and we look forward to asking questions further in Committee of the Whole.

Ms. White: It is a pleasure today to rise on behalf of the NDP to talk about the *Early Learning and Child Care Act*. I want to take a minute to acknowledge all the early years professionals, the early childhood educators, the early years educators, and early learning programs, facilities, and centres. I would make special note that we have Anne Pinkerton sitting in the Legislative Assembly, who holds the equivalent of, I believe, a masters in early childhood education, something that we wish deeply to allow for early childhood educators here in the territory, which is a continuance of that education.

In other jurisdictions, particularly other countries, not only can you get the designation of early years professional or early childhood educator, but you can go all the way up to a PhD in the field. I think that it is important, when we talk about expanding and allowing this important education field to grow, that we allow that for the learners.

A lot of the comments I have are going to be more directed during Committee of the Whole, but I think it's important to note that, when we talk about the Child Care Board and their ability to review any policy coming forward, one of the questions that was asked of me is: Is this a suggestion, or is it going to be binding? If we are asking the professionals from the Child Care Board to review policies and procedures, is it just a recommendation, or is it going to be actually actioned?

There are important questions about a definition of "inclusion". The reason for that is that inclusion can have many interpretations, but if we're going to put that into the learning plan, that's one way, but making sure that everyone has the same understanding of what inclusion means.

There are questions that we have around the wage grid. We think that it is really important that section 20, for example, recognizes support staff. We think that this is really important, but we know that they won't be included in the wage grid, because they won't be captured under the registrar as early childhood regulators.

We are happy to see the proposed changes. We want to ask questions about outdoor learning space and access to outside. We want to ask questions about how we are going to make sure that this really important field can continue to grow and learn. Again, I use an example of someone who holds a master's in early childhood education and just what that means and making sure that the more we lean into something that is so important as early learning, we recognize that those professionals doing that education are just that: they are professionals and they are educators.

With that, Mr. Speaker, we look forward to voting in favour of it now in second reading and we look forward to having more conversations in Committee of the Whole.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak at second reading to Bill No. 48, entitled *Early Learning and Child Care Act*.

Today marks a pivotal moment in Yukon's journey toward a comprehensive, high-quality early learning and childcare system. The legislation, of course, represents not really an update to existing law but a transformative vision for how we

nurture, educate, and support our youngest citizens during their most formative years.

The *Child Care Act* that has served Yukon since 1990 was created for a different time and population. When that legislation was drafted, the focus was primarily on ensuring basic health, safety, and custodial care, reflecting the understanding of early childhood development at the time. Over the past three decades, our understanding has deepened significantly. Research has consistently shown that quality early learning experiences profoundly influence children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. When we invest in high-quality early learning, we invest in healthier, more equitable communities and create ripple effects that benefit our entire society.

The landscape of early learning in Yukon has transformed dramatically since 1990. Today, we probably point to 80 licensed operators providing 2,365 licensed spaces across our territory, including nine programs owned and operated by First Nation governments.

Since implementing universal childcare, enrolment has increased by over 31 percent, with approximately 1,923 children benefiting from licensed programs. Universal childcare has made a remarkable difference for Yukon families. Under this system, families pay an average of \$10 a day, with some paying more and some less based on their circumstances. Grandparents with primary responsibility for their grandchildren and young parents attending high school receive childcare at no cost. Families continue to save up to \$8,400 per year per child in licensed programs, creating more disposable income and greater choices for primary caregivers who may want to pursue education or employment outside of the home.

Mr. Speaker, the savings of up to \$8,400 per year per child in licensed programs aren't just numbers; they represent a profound transformation in the lives of Yukon families. This is truly a game-changer. When families save \$8,400 annually for each child in care, we are not simply talking about extra money in bank accounts; we are talking about parents who can now afford to return to school and advance their careers, families who can invest in their children's futures through other enrichment activities, primary caregivers, particularly women, who no longer face the impossible choice between career advancement and quality care for their children, and new opportunities for economic participation that strengthen our entire territory.

For a family with two children in licensed care, these savings could represent up to \$16,800 annually, equivalent to a substantial portion of a mortgage payment or rent for many Yukoners. This is real, tangible economic relief that changes lives.

Universal childcare isn't just a family policy; it's an economic policy; it is workforce policy; it is equality policy. By removing financial barriers to quality early learning and childcare, we are unlocking the full potential of Yukon families in order to contribute to our communities while ensuring that their children receive the excellent care and early education that they deserve.

The ripple effect of these savings will be felt across generations, as more Yukoners can pursue their educational and career goals while knowing that their children are thriving in high-quality, affordable care settings.

This legislation emerged from years of dedicated consultation and collaboration. In 2023, our government conducted an extensive engagement process that included 32 in-person and virtual engagement sessions with stakeholders, 434 responses from parents and caregivers to an online survey and 12 written submissions from Yukoners, dedicated sessions with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation, and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, as well as multiple consultations with the Yukon Child Care Board.

Several key themes emerged from this engagement, namely: the importance of incorporating First Nation culture and languages; the need to emphasize principles of quality, inclusivity, accessibility, and affordability; strong support for including an early learning framework; ensuring affordability for Yukon families; updating regulations so that kindergarten children are part of the school-age group; and increasing access to professional development for educators.

I am proud to say that Bill No. 48, tabled by the Minister of Education, reflects this valuable feedback. It is truly legislation built by and for Yukoners.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to expand on some of the key elements of the new legislation.

First, modernizing terminology and philosophy — the change from the *Child Care Act* to *Early Learning and Child Care Act* reflects the shift in understanding across Canada. We are updating terms like “childcare worker” to “early childhood educator”, recognizing the professionalism and significance of this role.

Second, we are embedding core principles. Quality, affordability, accessibility, and inclusivity are enshrined in this legislation as the guiding principles for all aspects of early learning and childcare in Yukon.

Third, prioritizing reconciliation and partnerships — the bill requires collaboration between the Department of Education and Yukon First Nations on developing and implementing an early learning framework, ensuring that First Nation ways of knowing, being, and doing are integrated into programming.

Fourth, enhancing transparency and accountability — the Minister of Education will now be required to table annual reports on progress toward achieving the principles of quality, affordability, accessibility, and inclusivity.

Fifth, expanding capacity and reducing barriers — by expanding the definition of “school age” to include children registered in kindergarten, we will reduce the educator-to-child ratio needed for after-school programs, adding capacity to the system. The bill also provides authority to reduce infant-to-educator ratios from 1:4 to 1:3, aligning with national best practices.

Sixth, supporting early childhood educators — we recognize that the backbone of quality early learning is a well-supported professional workforce. This bill acknowledges early childhood educators and establishes a certification process. It

also enshrines the wage grid into legislation, ensuring that educators continue to receive fair compensation that reflects their training and contributions.

Mr. Speaker, our government never loses sight of the big picture. This piece of legislation is in alignment with broader critical commitments such as: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action, particularly regarding culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families; the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit+ people strategy by supporting First Nation children to be educated in accordance with their cultures; the LGBTQ2S+ *Inclusion Action Plan* through provisions for cultural competency training; and the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* by integrating children’s best interests, setting standards for safety and competencies, co-creating educational goals with First Nations, and ensuring inclusion for children with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not mention that our government continues to support our educators. Currently, more than 500 early childhood educators work in licensed programs across the Yukon, receiving some of the highest wages in Canada through our wage enhancement program. This bill further recognizes their professional status and the critical role that they play in shaping our children’s future. We continue to invest in their development through monthly learning and development opportunities, bursaries for post-secondary study, enhanced funding for professional development, and partnerships with Yukon University and the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate in order to expand training opportunities, particularly in rural communities.

The *Early Learning and Child Care Act* provides a framework that we have needed for decades, setting the foundation for a system that truly delivers on our commitment to quality, affordability, accessibility, and inclusivity. Implementation will be supported by the Early Learning and Child Care branch at the Department of Education, working in partnership with the sector. We recognize that changes require supports, and we are committed to providing guidance and appropriate transition periods as these new provisions come into force. I want to express my sincere gratitude to all who have contributed to shaping this legislation: First Nation governments, the Child Care Board, early learning program owners, educators, stakeholders, and families across Yukon.

This bill reflects our shared vision for the future of early learning and childcare in Yukon, one that honours diverse perspectives, prioritizes equality, and creates the conditions for all children to thrive. Our dedication to Yukon’s children as they grow and develop is making a difference that will be felt for generations. I look forward to elaborating on the details of this bill and look forward to the debate that will occur and the answers provided by the Minister of Education in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak at second reading to Bill No. 48.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleagues from the Legislative Assembly who spoke to the bill today — taken good notes and definitely know that our department is carefully listening to the second-reading discussion today. I just want to thank the members for being very specific about areas that they would like to cover in Committee of the Whole so that we will make sure, of course, to have good materials prepared for that discussion.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I thank everyone in the Legislative Assembly. I thank all of those who helped to bring us to this place of actually tabling new, modern legislation, which I believe is encompassed in Bill No. 48. Again, I look forward to the vote today and for the support that has already been indicated by both the Yukon Party and the New Democratic Party to vote in favour at this stage of the debate, and look forward to the Committee of the Whole to come later in the Sitting.

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 yea, nil nay.

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

Motion for second reading of Bill No. 48 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 52, Department of Environment, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Ms. Blake: Committee of the Whole will recess for 15 minutes.

Recess

Chair: I will now call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill No. 216: *Third Appropriation Act 2024-2025* — continued

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 52, Department of Environment, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-2025*.

Department of Environment

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am happy to rise today as the Minister of Environment to provide a fiscal update regarding the department's 2024-2025 supplementary budget.

To my right, assisting me, we have Deputy Minister Berry and, to my left, Assistant Deputy Minister Marc Cattet.

Today, I stand before the Assembly to request an additional \$2.185 million to be added to the Department of Environment's 2024-2025 operation and maintenance budget.

The Department of Environment is dedicated to finding cost-effective ways to meet the territory's climate goals and ensuring that the Yukon environment is protected for generations to come. Of these funds, over \$500,000 is recoverable through agreements with the Government of Canada and third parties, with a significant portion of non-recoverable funds being dedicated to our response to the Victoria Gold heap leach failure.

Over \$1.6 million is dedicated to support the Department of Environment's water quality, fish and mammal monitoring, and reporting work in response to the heap leach failure that occurred at the Victoria Gold Eagle mine site this past June.

Following the heap leach failure, the Department of Environment took immediate action and worked closely with the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, the Government of Canada, and other affected stakeholders to mitigate impacts to the environment and inform the overall response.

These funds will support the Department of Environment's continued work to analyze water-quality results, monitor impacts to fish and wildlife in the area, develop maps of the site, and communicate environmental impacts to the public.

As of March 1, over 517,000 data points have been collected to assess water quality in Haggart Creek. Water-quality results are posted to www.yukon.ca as they become available.

Recently, the department's Water Resources branch developed a new template to present water-quality results, which includes all data collected since the heap leach failure and graphs that show the trends of different contaminants in Haggart Creek. This information helps us to develop appropriate site activities and environmental mitigation options.

The department is also playing a critical role in monitoring fish and wildlife in Haggart Creek. Last summer, the Fish and Wildlife branch, with the support from the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, took tissue samples from 178 fish from 47 different locations in Haggart Creek. Analysis of these fish tissues has established baselines for heavy-metal levels to compare with samples that will be collected this year as part of our ongoing fish monitoring program. To help us develop comparative data to monitor for potential long-term impacts of exposure to heavy metals on mammals in the area, we have asked harvesters to provide samples of moose that they harvested in the north Mayo area and have also been working with trappers to collect samples from the animals that they trap.

While cyanide released into the water from the mine can cause sudden death in fish that are exposed, cyanide disappears rapidly and does not accumulate in moose or caribou that have short-term contact with cyanide in water. The chief medical officer of health confirmed that animals harvested in the area remain safe to consume.

While responding to this disaster comes with significant cost, the cost of inaction is much higher. These additional funds will support this work and give us important insights into the level of contaminants reaching the surrounding environment and how they are impacting fish and wildlife in the surrounding area.

Moving on to wetlands mapping, this supplementary budget also includes \$275,000 of fully recoverable funds through Environment and Climate Change Canada to advance mapping of wetlands in the Yukon. In 2022, the Government of Yukon released the territory's first wetlands stewardship policy, which is guiding our work to improve our knowledge of the territory's wetlands, minimize our impacts on wetlands, and protect these sensitive areas. Understanding and mapping wetlands is foundational for determining how we manage human activity and impacts on the territory's wetlands.

The territory's wetlands stewardship policy commits the Government of Yukon to create a broad-scale, territory-wide wetland inventory while supporting local-scale wetland mapping where needed. So far, the Department of Environment has mapped wetlands for around one-third of the Yukon and aims to map all priority areas by the end of 2027. The Department of Environment will continue to work to better protect and manage the Yukon's wetlands. I look forward to providing additional details of this work in the 2025 state of the environment report.

Madam Chair, in this supplementary budget, we also have \$185,000 in funding, 100-percent recoverable, through an agreement with Parks Canada to support the department's capacity to advance significant conservation and land protection initiatives in the territory. This includes our work to understand the feasibility and desirability of a national park in the Turner Lake Wetlands, Caribou River, and the Peel River corridor. For years, Indigenous leaders fought to protect this area of land from development. Because of their dedication, the Government of Yukon is taking steps to ensure its protection for future generations.

This funding will also support our work to establish permanent protection for Chasàn Chuà, also known as McIntyre Creek. This continues to be an important area of use by First Nations, supports a diversity of wildlife habitats, and is a valued recreation area used by many. Recently, a steering committee for this work, which includes representatives from the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Ta'an Kwäch'an Council, the City of Whitehorse, Parks Canada, and the Government of Yukon, concluded public engagement to help inform the best way to protect and manage this area. I look forward to seeing this area receive legal designation in order to ensure its protection for generations to come.

Madam Chair, the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act* plays an important role in considering potential environmental and socio-economic effects of land use activities, including development and mining. This work ensures that activities in the Yukon are aligned with our goals as a territory and benefit Yukoners and their communities. This supplementary budget includes \$64,000 carried forward from the fiscal 2023-24 budget in order to continue this work. The Government of Yukon will work closely with our partners, including the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board, in order to ensure that all projects going forward in the Yukon align with the values of Yukoners and benefit our communities.

Fish monitoring — freshwater fish are an integral part of the Yukon's environment and continue to be an important part of Yukon First Nation culture and way of life. The Department of Environment manages freshwater fish in the territory to ensure that they continue to contribute to the well-being of the Yukon's environment and can be sustainably harvested for generations to come.

This work requires us to monitor populations of freshwater fish in the territory through surveys and assessments, angler harvest surveys, and field programs and maintain a stocked lakes program.

Most recently, through this work, the department estimated a 61-percent decline of lake trout populations between 2015 and 2021 in Little Atlin Lake. This resulted in the department working with the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board to seek public support for three proposed regulation changes for fishing lake trout in Little Atlin Lake. The three changes are: (1) implementation of a harvest slot or allowable fish size for lake trout from 58.5 centimetres to 65 centimetres; (2) a seasonal closure for fishing lake trout on Little Atlin Lake between July 1 and November 30; and (3) a requirement to use

single-point barbless hooks for all fishing in Little Atlin Lake. These changes will ensure that lake trout continue to live in this lake and can be sustainably harvested for generations to come.

This supplementary budget also includes \$15,000 to collect data on whitefish in the territory. The department is undertaking this work in collaboration with Fisheries and Oceans Canada to provide more information on the presence and distribution of European whitefish — a threatened species.

The Department of Environment will continue to monitor fish health and populations in the territory and take action to ensure that all fish species continue to thrive in the Yukon.

Environmental protection and assessment — the Department of Environment plays a critical role in preventing and responding to the release of contaminants in the environment. When spills are reported, we work with the responsible party to ensure that contaminants are properly cleaned up and that impacts to the surrounding environment are mitigated.

This supplementary budget also includes \$19,000, which is recoverable through an independent third party, to remediate contamination caused by a fuel tank leak that happened in Dawson City.

The Department of Environment maintains a 24-hour Yukon spill report line that can be reached at 867-667-7244. I encourage Yukoners to report any spills that you are aware of to ensure that we protect our environment and have the opportunity to work together to ensure that soil and water are properly cleaned up.

Madam Chair, I want to acknowledge all the hard-working people within the Department of Environment who continue to advocate for the success of Yukon's environment and our communities. Over half a million dollars of the funds that I present today are fully recoverable through our strong partnerships with the Government of Canada and our work with third parties. This is directly due to the department's ability to effectively advocate for the Yukon's priorities at national tables, which is allowing the Government of Yukon to advance our environmental goals and values in a cost-effective way.

We know that in the Yukon, the success of our communities goes hand-in-hand with the success of our environment. These funds are directly contributing to our work to ensure that future generations of Yukoners inherit a territory that supports a way of life that we are accustomed to today. I want to thank all Yukoners who are taking actions every day to reduce their impact on the Yukon environment. It is more important now than ever that we continue to work together to strengthen our connection with nature and take collective action to respond to our changing environment.

Madam Chair, thank you for the opportunity to present some of the critical work that the department is undertaking to advance our shared goals.

Mr. Istchenko: I want to thank the staff who are here today, as always. I want to thank those listening on the phone who are prepared to get all the information that we are going to be looking for from this side and the good work that they do. The briefing was good. I want to thank staff for the briefing

also. It was pretty informative. I do have a few questions but not many.

In the supplementary, the minister spoke a little a bit about the \$1.6 million for the Eagle Gold mine response, and it does mainly have to do with water sampling and wildlife response.

So, my first question is: When the mine was operational, I assume that the mine's water licence required frequent water testing. What water testing was done by Eagle Gold when it was in operation versus the new testing that they're performing now?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I do have detailed information that I could and can provide to the Member for Kluane with respect to the Department of Environment's response as it pertains to outside of the Victoria Gold Eagle site, which is how the Department of Environment became engaged in this process. I'm advised that Energy, Mines and Resources, which is the department that will be in the Assembly next to answer questions with respect to their supplementary budget, will be in a position to answer specific questions with respect to the on-site water monitoring. But if the member opposite is interested in the specific response by the Department of Environment after June 24, 2024, I'm certainly in a position to provide that information to the member opposite.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for that, and I'll make sure that my colleague the critic for Energy, Mines and Resources — that we do get to this, because I would like, for the record, to just have the minister clarify that, when the mine is operational, the Department of Environment does comment on their water licence permit, and I'm sure that they have to do testing.

So, I'll move on. When the minister was also speaking about that \$1.6 million, he talked about getting samples from trappers and hunters on some of the animals and that the cyanide that they had found in some of the water was okay for the species and you could still basically consume the species — eat them traditionally and how the people, Yukoners, use that meat for sustainability.

I am just wondering what the department is doing to inform the hunters and the trappers and everyone else that those animals are okay to harvest and that there isn't an issue.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am asking if there is any more specific information that I can provide to the member opposite this afternoon, but I certainly can provide some general information for the House.

The chief medical officer of health has confirmed that there are no indications that meat of harvested animals in the area is unsafe to consume. As I indicated previously, while cyanide released into water from the mine can cause sudden death in fish that are exposed, cyanide disappears rapidly and would not accumulate in moose or caribou that have short-term contact with cyanide in the water.

This past fall, we asked harvesters of moose and caribou in game management zones north of Mayo to submit samples of liver, kidney, and muscles for heavy-metal testing. We also require the incisor bar from the lower jaw to get an accurate age of the animal, because the metals that we are concerned about are built up over the life of an animal, not within weeks or

months. Sampling kits and instructions were made available at the Mayo, Dawson City, and Whitehorse district offices. To date, samples have been received from two caribou and four moose.

We are also working with trappers near the mine to collect samples from fur-bearing species to assess their exposure to heavy metals in the environment and/or diet.

That is what the Department of Environment has done with respect to outreach. If the member opposite wishes some additional information with respect to outreach, I can certainly provide same, but that's where we're at so far. While I am on my feet today, I would just encourage all Yukon hunters who are in that game zone, which is management subzones north of Mayo, if you are in a position to assist the Department of Environment, to submit samples of liver, kidney, and muscles for heavy-metal testing. In my briefings, I understand that we want to have base-level data for our wildlife biologist in order to determine if there are any concerns going forward with respect to the heavy metals.

Mr. Istchenko: So, for the minister, my question was around educating. You are gathering samples and data, and when those samples of data come in, he had indicated that there weren't concerns with animal populations. I was asking what direction the minister has given to the department to educate locals — Yukon hunters and local organizations like the Yukon Trappers Association, the Yukon Fish and Game Association, the Yukon Outfitters Association, or First Nation resource councils — that it's okay and those animals are safe. I think that, quite often, when you go on social media, you can see some misinformation when something happens. If the department itself or the minister and the government of the day doesn't correct that information, I don't think it is right. That was my question.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The Department of Environment took immediate action after the heap leach failure occurred at the Eagle Gold mine site in June 2024. Staff have been working closely with other Government of Yukon departments, the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, the Government of Canada, and other affected stakeholders to better understand and mitigate impacts to the surrounding environment and inform the overall response. Environment officials have been proactively communicating with the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, response partners, and the public. As of January 20, 2025, experts in the department have participated in nine technical briefings and contributed to 27 information bulletins and water-quality result publications. Officials have also conducted briefings with the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee, the Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and Yukon First Nation chiefs.

Environment is also working with Health and Social Services to communicate. As this comes from the CMOH, Environment is not the lead communicator regarding human health consumption. But grant you, that is not the member opposite's specific question, although I guess it is human consumption of the meat.

So, nine technical briefings, 27 information bulletins, and attendance by Yukon government officials at the general

assembly of the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun — and as indicated in my preliminary comments, Environment has certainly made best efforts to have a good working relationship with the technical officials at Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, and all indications that I had as of a while ago were that the working relationship has been quite positive.

I take the member opposite's point that, of course, one can never have enough accurate information out there, and if there is any sort of peril of there being social media misinformation, I know that the hard-working staff at communications of the Department of Environment are going to be, hopefully, aware of that and monitoring it to an extent. But we are certainly aware of our role in getting information out to Yukoners and specifically to Yukon hunters.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for that answer, because I agree that it is imperative that the proper information goes out there and it looks like the department is working with a lot of different organizations to pass on that information and letting them know, so that's good.

In the briefing, we discussed the \$185,000 for national park feasibility, and I was told that it is the first year of this feasibility study. The minister, in his opening remarks, did talk about the areas that he was looking at and that the department is looking at. My question is — is the Department of Environment that is leading this work. It is a question: I just want to know which organizations are going to be met with. When I say "organizations", I am talking about governments — whether it's municipal, First Nation — but there are a lot of other key players out there, like the trappers association, the outfitters association, Klondike Placer Miners' Association — there are many organizations out there. I just want to make sure that when this is consulted on — I have a national park in my backyard and it came in the late 1960s — everyone gets input into it. Not everyone out there who I talk to is in full support of any more parks in the Yukon, but there are some who are. I just want to make sure that it's a wholesome debate among all of the organizations, that everyone gets input on it, and that it's fair, open, and transparent for all Yukoners — so if the minister can update me on who they will be communicating with.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: For the member opposite, with respect to the Peel land use implementation process with respect to both national and territorial parks, I will provide some information to the member opposite and to Yukoners with respect to this process.

The Government of Yukon continues to work with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, and the Gwich'in Tribal Council to implement the Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan. We have been working together to designate specific special management areas identified in the Peel plan as protected areas under legislation. As part of this work, we are collaborating with the federal government, the Gwich'in Tribal Council, and the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun on a feasibility assessment for a national park that could include the Turner Lake Wetlands, the Caribou River, and the Peel River corridor.

We are also working toward designating the special management area that covers the Richardson Mountains and

Vittrekwa River area as a territorial park and confirming the best designation to achieve full protection for the Wind, Snake, and Bonnet Plume rivers. Combined, these three areas cover approximately seven percent of the Yukon. The Government of Yukon and the Gwich'in Tribal Council, the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, and Parks Canada announced a public engagement period for the proposed new national park in the areas that I have indicated previously.

The parties to the Peel plan — which include the government of First Nation Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, the Vuntut Gwitchin, the Gwich'in Tribal Council, and the Yukon — are discussing the establishment of two territorial parks in the Peel watershed. We are working together to designate the first park under the Yukon's *Parks and Land Certainty Act* in the Richardson Mountains and Vittrekwa River and hope to have it established in 2025.

Once designated, the Government of Yukon will work with First Nation partners to co-develop management direction for the park, which will include the opportunity for the public to provide input. The parties are also working together to achieve full protection of the special management area that includes the Wind, Snake, and Bonnet Plume rivers.

This area covers about six percent of the Yukon, and if designated as a territorial park, it would be 14 times larger than the Tombstone Park.

In the proposed territorial park areas, non-industrial land uses such as hunting, trapping, outfitting, and commercial tourism can be allowed or will be allowed to continue within the parks. As for the Peel plan, no new industrial development or new surface access will be allowed. Existing mining claims will be recognized.

The proposed national park area — I think, as I provided answers in the House over the last year or so — does not overlap with any outfitting concession and licensed resident hunters rarely visit the area because of its remoteness. Subsistence harvest rights in this area will not be affected should it become a national park. There are no mineral claims in that area.

In the data that I was provided with respect to one of the national park areas, I think that it was estimated that there had been three animals harvested since 1995, but I can confirm that.

As led by Parks Canada on the Peel national park feasibility assessment, the parties involved — which I have indicated at some length — have engaged extensively with stakeholders. This includes a broad public engagement open to all Canadians, upcoming meetings with RRCs, and a meeting with the Chamber of Mines. This is with respect to the Peel national park. Letters were sent out on February 3.

Mr. Istchenko: I will just continue on this. With that \$185,000 — and this being the first year — one of the other things that it says in there is that the expiration of permit protection in McIntyre Creek and for the new national park in the Ross River area — and the Ross River area park is the one that I would like a little bit more information on — that process, who is going to be engaged, and the key stakeholders. The minister did mention, just before he sat down, maybe the Chamber of Mines — the minister was talking to a few of those

organizations and, of course, First Nations, but I would just like him to go a little bit more in depth and give a bit of a timeline for when this work is going to be done and who he will be engaging with.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: With respect to the feasibility study in the Ross River area, I can advise that the Executive Council Office is the lead department with respect to that engagement. I will provide some very high-level observations and then I certainly would invite the opposition critics for the Executive Council Office to follow up with that minister at some point in the future — in the Spring Sitting.

In December 2024, the Government of Yukon, Ross River Dena Council, and Parks Canada initiated a collaborative process to examine the feasibility of protected lands in the Ross River area. This study will provide a basis for advancing reconciliation, land use certainty, and economic development within Kaska asserted traditional territory where there is no treaty or final agreement. Existing land access, tenure, rights, and permitted areas in the area will not be affected by the study. This includes mining land use approvals, outfitting and trapping concessions, licensed hunting, and tourism.

It is indicated that ECO anticipates that the steering committee leading the feasibility study will identify opportunities for stakeholders and the public to provide input on their values and interests beginning in early 2025. As I indicated, that is a high-level observation that I have, but the Executive Council Office is the lead on the feasibility study for lands in the Ross River area.

Mr. Istchenko: Thank you for that, Madam Chair, and it is interesting that there is a line item in the minister's budget about the feasibility for the new national park in the Ross River area. Maybe as a whole-of-government approach, the minister might be able to be a little more fulsome with his answer, but I will move on.

I see that in the supplementary there is also \$64,000 for YESAA implementation, and it is funding to complete the YESAA priorities. In his opening remarks, the minister talked about the values and the YESAA priorities. Can the minister tell me what those values and priorities are?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I have a fairly detailed response with respect to the priorities of the Department of Environment as it pertains to environmental protection, and I will also try to receive specific information with respect to that budget item of \$64,000.

The Yukon government has a role to play in ensuring that environmental protection efforts in the territory are responsive, dynamic, and adaptive. The Department of Environment works with Yukon communities, Yukon First Nations, and federal partners to ensure that Yukon communities remain clean, sustainable, and healthy for Yukoners. We do this work to ensure that our territory's environmental protection remains a priority and that our way of life in the Yukon is preserved for future generations of Yukoners.

Through the development and management of environmental legislation, we are creating stronger, cleaner, and more sustainable Yukon communities. Robust environmental standards, along with compliance and mitigation

tools, ensure that Yukoners have the tools they need to reduce waste and better protect our territory's environment.

With respect to waste reduction and management, the Department of Environment regulates municipal and commercial solid-waste facilities. The Department of Environment collaborates with provincial and federal partners on national solutions to reduce waste, such as the Canada-wide action plan on zero plastic waste.

I can move to air-quality monitoring. Although the Yukon has been known to have some of the cleanest air in the world, Yukon's air quality is not immune from the impacts of wildfires, wood smoke, and vehicle exhaust. Canada has seen unprecedented threats to air quality due to increasing wildfires across the north and in the west.

The Government of Yukon, with support from Environment and Climate Change Canada, operates the National Air Pollution Surveillance station in Whitehorse. Over the last several years, the Government of Yukon also deployed PurpleAir sensors, which are sensors that measure levels of fine dust particles in the air, across the Yukon. Data collected at the National Air Pollution Surveillance station and from the PurpleAir sensors help us to monitor air quality in the territory and provide recommendations to Yukoners to ensure their health and safety during severe air-quality events, like wildfires.

With respect to environmental assessments, the Department of Environment also works to review and assess the effects that development has had on land, air, water, wildlife, and wildlife habitats. Department of Environment scientists help to determine ways to mitigate adverse effects that development projects could have on water, soil, fish, and wildlife in order to ensure that industry continues to be successful in a responsible and ethical way. Environmental assessments are critical tools in ensuring that our growth as a territory does not come at the cost of the long-term health of our environment.

With respect to the budget, generally speaking, they are projects that contribute to the outcomes of YESAA, such as wildlife monitoring in areas where significant projects are proposed, water monitoring, and air-quality monitoring — which I have gone into some detail about. Some priorities include Casino mine, contracting for cumulative-effects development scenarios, and contracting for water licence and quartz mine licence review. With respect to the Kudz Ze Kayah mine, there is contracting for water licence technical services.

In addition to the proactive monitoring and assessment work, the Department of Environment also works to prevent and respond to the release of contaminants into the environment. The Department of Environment inspectors verify compliance with over 500 *Environment Act* permits and 150 *Waters Act* licences throughout the territory. We permit and regulate businesses that handle and treat contaminated material throughout the Yukon to prevent severe environmental impacts that often come from the release of contaminants. The Department of Environment will continue to work with community partners across the territory to ensure that the Yukon's environmental legislation meets the needs of

Yukoners and protects our environment for generations to come.

I think that I have provided the answer with respect to the additional budget ask.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for that answer.

I just have one more question before I turn the floor over here. It's about the court-mandated cleanup. There's \$19,000 in the supplementary budget for that. In the briefing that the officials gave us, we were told that it was for Home Hardware in Dawson City. As we know, there has been much discussion in this Legislature about Lodgepole Lane. It has been requesting a cleanup for a long time. I am just wondering: How are these court-mandated location cleanups decided and prioritized within the department?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the questions from the member opposite this afternoon. Look forward to having further discussion in Committee of the Whole for the budget mains discussion going forward.

It's the approach of the department to work with the responsible parties to voluntarily mitigate spills. When this fails, the department then seeks court-ordered sanctions to protect the environment. The Dawson hardware file had a clear responsible party for the spill that occurred. Conversely, the reported spills at 2 Lodgepole Lane cannot be attributed. It is the Department of Environment's view that they cannot be attributed to a responsible party. Management of other issues at 2 Lodgepole Lane, such as unsafe structures and waste, fall under the jurisdiction of the City of Whitehorse.

Anyway, that is the differentiation. The ordered amount is evidently relatively modest, as it pertains to the Dawson City fact pattern. In any event, that is the assessment of Lodgepole. Of course, I do have significantly more detailed notes on Lodgepole, but perhaps we can continue that discussion at a later date in the mains discussion.

Just for the record this afternoon, the department continues to offer the City of Whitehorse support with technical expertise and assistance in navigating applicable regulatory requirements. I am certainly open to there being additional asks or additional discussions with the new mayor and council, but that's what I have so far.

Mr. Istchenko: Thank you to the staff who are here. I will turn the floor over.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the officials for being here and all those in the department preparing notes and listening in today.

I will actually start by following up on a question from my colleague. I understand that there is \$64,000 in the supplementary budget for completing YESAA priorities. The minister was saying that is about doing things like wildlife and air-quality monitoring — I believe to support reviews going before YESAB.

My understanding was that typically the proponent is responsible for the monitoring and data collection ahead of YESAB assessments. I am wondering if he could talk a bit about how those fit in together.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Could the Member for Whitehorse Centre just repeat that question?

MLA Tredger: Certainly. The minister was describing — my colleague the Member for Kluane had asked about some details about what the YESAA priorities are that there is \$64,000 to complete in the supplementary budget. My understanding of what the minister replied was that it was about air and wildlife and water monitoring. I believe that is for projects going before YESAB — before the board.

I had been under the impression that typically the data collection that happened ahead of a YESAB review was done by the proponent of the project, so I am wondering if the minister can explain how the data collection done by the department fits in with data collection done by the proponent of projects like — he mentioned Casino and Kudz Ze Kayah.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Madam Chair, I'm waiting to receive some guidance with respect to the specific question about data collection being the responsibility of the proponent versus the department. I think I have at least a provisional answer on that question. If it requires some greater investigation, I can certainly do so.

It is the approach of the department to work with the responsible parties to voluntarily mitigate spills, for instance. Sorry — while the proponent is responsible for the data collection directly related to their project, the department is responsible for monitoring environmental values in a broader region where a project is proposed. Government also has a role to input into the independent environmental assessment process as led by YESAB. For example, for Kudz Ze Kayah, the Department of Environment provides technical reviews of projects that YESAB is assessing.

Once again, while the proponent is responsible for data collection directly related to their project, the Department of Environment is responsible for monitoring environmental values in a broader region where a project is proposed. Government also has a role to input into the independent environmental assessment process as led by YESAB.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister, that is really interesting.

So, if I understand correctly, the proponent is responsible for the area where there are expected to be direct effects, and then the Department of Environment would monitor a broader area for perhaps unforeseen consequences that might affect a larger area. I am wondering: Is the money in the — the \$64,000 — is that the total of those projects that the Department of Environment has taken on for YESAA for the last calendar year, or is there additional money from earlier — the 2024-25 budget and first supplementary that were part of that work that is done for YESAB reviews?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: With respect to the supplementary budget, I am advised that the YESAA implementation funding, which I have indicated was \$64,000, is identified as a carry-forward from 2023-24. There are some additional funds, and I am just asking for the breakdown, which I appear to have just received. The total of the projects was \$100,000: \$30,000 for the Casino mine, contracting for cumulative-effects development scenarios; \$40,000 for the Kudz Ze Kayah mine, contracting for water licence technical services; and \$30,000 at

the Coffee mine, contracting for water licence and quartz mine licence reviews — so, that is the budget.

MLA Tredger: Thank you, Madam Chair and to the minister. I found that very interesting. I wanted to ask a little bit about wetlands. The minister talked about some of the mapping that has happened. Has there been work done on a protocol or procedure for nominating wetlands of special importance? Is that expected to be available for people to use? I am curious about the date for that.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

I am advised that drafts of the wetlands of special importance guidance for nomination and evaluation and the Yukon wetland classification standards are complete. The development of these guidance documents is identified as a near-term implementation action in the policy of the stewardship of Yukon's wetlands as committed to in the policy. Yukon government is sharing these documents with Indigenous governments and groups, partner boards and councils, municipal and federal governments, industry representatives, and non-governmental organizations. We will consider their feedback on these documents and make changes as needed.

Yukon government hopes to begin accepting nominations for wetlands of special importance in the summer of 2025. This is exciting news. I don't want to get ahead of myself, but there is certainly the prospect of the nominations moving forward in the foreseeable future. I know that the member opposite has asked questions about wetlands over the course of the last few years and it does appear that we're making progress. We're looking for responses by April 17.

I'll see whether I have any additional information while I'm on my feet.

As indicated, we are also currently implementing the wetlands stewardship policy, which will improve our knowledge of Yukon's wetlands, manage and minimize our impacts on wetlands, and protect the most important wetlands while promoting paths toward responsible and sustainable resource development and land use activities.

In 2022, we signed the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*, which supports our efforts to monitor and conserve Yukon's unique biodiversity, advance land use planning, increase Indigenous leadership in conservation, and support the protection and conservation of species, lands, and waters.

These notes are substantially the same as what I've indicated in my previous comments, but the wetlands policy will guide the government's continued work to develop wetland maps, establish mapping standards, develop a new protection tool for wetlands of special importance, and provide clear, consistent guidance to private industry stakeholders. It will also improve our processes for considering wetlands in project assessments and reviews.

MLA Tredger: That's really exciting to hear. Congratulations to everyone who has been working on that. That must be an exciting milestone, to have the drafts out. I imagine that everyone is really looking forward to that being implemented, so it's really exciting.

I want to ask some questions about the 2023 *Our Clean Future* annual report that is out now. It came out at the end of November 2024, so now we have the chance to ask about it in 2025.

I am going to ask about some specific actions, and I want to start with H11, which is: “Assess options to provide financial support for actions to improve the climate resiliency of homes and buildings by 2023.” That’s under Environment as the lead department and the status is “Complete”, so that’s exciting.

I am wondering, now that those options have been assessed, what kinds of financial support and actions the department is thinking about taking to improve climate resiliency of homes and buildings.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: With respect to H11 under the *Our Clean Future* plan for action to assess options for a program to provide financial support to homeowners to improve climate resiliency to homes, a research paper was completed internally. A contract to inform the design of a climate resiliency funding program has been completed. The contract listed potential climate resiliency measures for houses by climate hazard as well as looked at administrative work flows for a potential funding program. These deliverables are informing what climate home resiliency funding could look like in the Yukon, such as how support for climate resiliency measures could be integrated into existing funding programs that support housing.

Of course, in an all-of-government approach, which would be EMR, Environment, HPW, and Community Services, over the course of the last eight and a half years, there have been many programs that have been in furtherance of climate resilience. Of course, most recently, the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources was able to announce that the heat pump program has been extended. The Yukon Conservation Society had an electric thermal storage pilot project. There have been many retrofits that have occurred, whether private buildings or public buildings, through Highways and Public Works.

As anticipated, implementation is in the beginning planned stages in collaboration with other government departments, which I indicated. The assessment of options is complete. The next phase is implementation.

Related actions include C22 by 2025 to develop terms and conditions for business support programs as well as departmental operating procedures ready to be used in the event of a climate change-driven natural disaster in the Yukon, led by Economic Development.

The Department of Economic Development is working to develop a program to support Yukon businesses in the event of a climate emergency. This action works to ensure that we are prepared for impacts that are becoming more likely due to climate change.

I guess the medium-length answer is that there have been various initiatives and funding streams which have been available to Yukoners over the course of the last eight and a half years.

I take the member’s anticipated point that H11 might contemplate a different stream or different programs going forward.

MLA Tredger: The minister mentioned a report that came out of that action. Would he be able to table it in the House?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I will certainly take guidance from my department as to the disclosure of the report, but at first blush, it certainly looks like there are no impediments to it being released. We will make best efforts to do so. We will come back to the House if there is any particular issue.

MLA Tredger: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister for that. It sounds like some really interesting work went into that report and I think that it would be interesting for all of us to know more about it.

I want to ask next about E12 in the *Our Clean Future* report, which is to: “Research the potential to use geothermal energy for heating and electricity, with a focus along Yukon fault systems, by 2025...”, which is in progress, according to the chart. I am wondering if the minister can tell me a bit about the work that’s happening there. Is it research about locations that might be useful, about how it can be integrated into the Yukon’s electricity grid, or some other aspect of geothermal energy? That would be great; thank you.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: With respect to action item E12, which is to promote local and community-based renewable energy projects for heating and electricity, notable actions have been taken. A geothermal energy data layer was created on GeoYukon consisting of all publicly available data related to geothermal energy. A final report on the Whitehorse geothermal energy study is being written, with an anticipated release of late summer or early fall of 2025.

I am just seeing if there is any additional information that I can provide at this time. While I wait for perhaps a little bit more information on this topic, I would just say that, with respect to the territorial disaster financial assistance and the issue about resilience funding in C13, there is an action item to: “Develop a territorial disaster financial assistance policy by 2022 to support recovery from natural disasters that result in extensive property damage...” Community Services is working on creating a permanent disaster financial assistance program in line with the new federal disaster financial assistance arrangement guidelines. We anticipate that this will be released in the spring of 2025.

Back to geothermal — led by the Yukon Geological Survey, the microgeneration program remains open for intake for Watson Lake, Beaver Creek, Old Crow, Burwash Landing, and Destruction Bay.

Just to confirm, it is a geothermal energy data layer created by GeoYukon that is going to amalgamate or aggregate all publicly available data related to geothermal energy.

Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 52, Department of Environment, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Is there any further general debate?

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister for updating on the progress on the geothermal. It's exciting to hear that moving along.

I wanted to ask next about H24, which is about amending the air emissions regulations by 2025 in order to regulate air emissions from commercial and institutional biomass burning systems to minimize the release of harmful air pollutants, which is in progress. I saw that the "what we heard" report came out, I believe, last month, so that's exciting.

When does he anticipate that the new regulations will be ready? Is there any part of it that will have to come back to the Legislature, or will it be done by Cabinet?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Then, with respect to H24 of the *Our Clean Future* road map — so, once again, it's to: "Amend the *Air Emissions Regulations* by 2025 in order to regulate air emissions from commercial and institutional biomass burning systems to minimize the release of harmful air pollutants." As the member opposite will know, efforts are being made to expand the use of biomass and other renewable energy sources for heating in line with this objective. The process to amend the air emission regulations is currently in progress.

The department has completed the engagement phase and is planning to draft the regulation amendments over the upcoming months. Consultation on the regulation amendments is complete. The department has since released a "what we heard" document summarizing the results of engagement.

Just for the benefit of the House and also for Yukoners listening at home, yes, there are a number of not insubstantial biomass projects that are either coming onstream or have come onstream. Elijah Smith school has a dual purpose woodchipper for biomass; that is operational. There is a contract to increase the efficiency of the Whitehorse Correctional Centre biomass system. Of course, YG has heat source or a heat provision agreement with Teslin Tlingit Council as it pertains to the Teslin school. There is active planning for district heating in Haines Junction, attaching the YG buildings in downtown Haines Junction.

There are other examples as well — but just to emphasize that, yes, we do wish there to be a viable, made-in-Yukon biomass industry and there are industrial or significant public buildings or district heating systems where this can be applied. That creates urgency for the air emission regulations.

The final answer is that regulations require a Cabinet decision.

MLA Tredger: My next question is about C8: "Expand monitoring networks and improve modelling tools to generate reliable daily flood forecasts and relevant warnings for all at-risk Yukon communities by 2024." That was marked as "In progress" in the 2023 report. I am wondering if that has been completed and what that looks like and if that will be in place for this coming flood season. I am interested in the information that the minister has about that.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Yes, there has been quite a significant amount of funding that has been provided under the bilateral *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* specifically with respect to flood-hazard mapping. I have a relatively lengthy answer on this, but I will try to be as concise as possible and can certainly follow up if necessary.

Here at home, we are seeing changes in temperature and precipitation, which in turn are driving changes in ecosystems, flooding, wildfires, and permafrost thaw. To enhance preparedness for flooding events, we are taking steps to plan and forecast. In May 2023, a new online flood atlas was launched to improve the communication of flood advisories and information. Improvements to the platform were implemented in 2024, including the online publication of Water Resources branch's seasonal flood-risk assessments and the addition of a current-conditions page.

Monitoring network expansion in 2024 included site preparation for the future installation of a new automated snow weather station on Chair Mountain. Top marks if you get that trivia question as to exactly where it is — but Chair Mountain in southwestern Yukon. Work was done in August 2024 to install real-time telemetry to Boulder Creek. A new station was also installed on the Mayo River near the Village of Mayo by the Water Survey of Canada upon request from Yukon Energy Corporation.

Improvements were also made to forecasting tools, including improvements to management of incoming live data, ice breakup tools, streamflow forecasting models, the flood early-warning system, and creation of a new database for snow monitoring data with associated scripts to generate snow bulletin visualizations. I would say that we're a lot further along than we were in May 2023 — and kudos to likely mainly departments, but certainly kudos to the Water Resources branch for their work, and we are certainly thankful for the bilateral *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*, which provided really significant funding to advance this work and do the mapping in various communities in the summer of 2023 and the summer of 2024, and there is work that will be completed in the summer of 2025 as well. We're beginning to get quite a complex and sophisticated picture of the Yukon, and these are some of the examples of how this can and will protect Yukoners going forward.

MLA Tredger: Will the flood app on this website have daily flood forecasts this flooding season — for the spring and summer?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: To be clear, the question is as to whether this dashboard would have daily forecasts? Is that the question?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The answer is yes.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister. That is exciting, and it sounds like a very difficult task. I'm really excited that the department has taken that on. I think that a lot of people will really appreciate that.

I want to ask next about L21, which is: "Complete an assessment of wetland soil carbon reserves within priority watersheds by 2027." In the last report, it said that it was not

yet started. I know that there is a project that I believe EMR is leading about carbon storage in peatlands. I'm not sure if this is the same project or if it's a different project, so I'm hoping that the minister can give me a bit of an update about that item.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: In order to build support of our understanding of wetlands and ensure that we have information to make evidence-based decisions, as I have indicated in prior responses, we are building a wetland inventory and, in my view, are making good progress, but the action specifically with respect to *Our Clean Future* action L21 is anticipated to be completed by 2027.

The Department of Environment is supporting the Wildlife Conservation Society Canada through a three-year transfer payment agreement to undertake research into carbon in peatlands in the goldfields. This project is led by WCS Canada and it is currently in its second year.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister. I feel like I have a better understanding of the project. I appreciate that.

My last question is about L23, and that will be my last question for this department for the supplementary budget. It says: "By 2024, work with various levels of Government to develop guidance on greenhouse gas emissions accounting practices that support consistent, simple and transparent reporting of emission reductions." It is described as "In progress".

I know that one of the recommendations from the Climate Leadership Council was to use carbon accounting in proposals within the government so that when a new project is proposed, part of deciding whether that project would go ahead would be looking at the amount of greenhouse gas emissions that the project would produce. Is that what this item is getting at?

So, maybe the minister can answer that and talk a little bit about what that guidance is and what it looks like and if it's complete.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the question of the member opposite, and I look forward to further discussion in Committee of the Whole for the Department of Environment for the mains debate in the future.

So, just a bit of an overview and then I think I will give a specific answer to *Our Clean Future* action L23.

Government of Yukon's emissions are largely the result of heating and powering buildings, operating road maintenance equipment, and fleet vehicle use. Given this, the Department of Highways and Public Works represents the largest share of emissions due to the significant role that they play in maintaining our buildings, roads, airports, and fleet vehicles.

The Department of Highways and Public Works also leads a one-government approach to reduce emissions from Government of Yukon buildings by improving energy efficiency and installing renewable energy systems. Investments in buildings are not tied to any one department and are prioritized where they will make the most impact in reducing emissions. The Government of Yukon also provides homes, health care, and electricity for Yukoners. These areas also represent a high portion of the Government of Yukon's emissions.

In order to reduce emissions from our operations, we have, among other actions, finished 31 retrofits of Government of Yukon buildings to improve efficiency and reduce emissions. We have completed 112 energy assessments in high-emitting Government of Yukon buildings. In 2024, 36 of those were completed.

As I indicated previously in a response about biomass and air regulations, we installed a biomass heating system at Elijah Smith school and invested in a district heating system expansion at Whitehorse Correctional Centre connecting Takhini Haven and the Young Offenders Facility.

As well, installed solar and battery energy storage systems at the Klondike and Ogilvie highway maintenance camps and started work on solar projects at Blanchard and Tuchtua highway maintenance camps. Of course, there is more.

Specifically with respect to L23 — action L23 looks at developing guidance on corporate organizational greenhouse gas — GHG accounting — jurisdictional GHG accounting for use by municipal and First Nation governments; project-level GHG accounting to measure impact of specific projects and guidelines created for corporate organizational GHG accounting, which will be released later this year.

We have been taking the time to ensure that this tool is as effective as possible upon its release. We have distributed and received feedback on a draft from several government departments and are working to incorporate the feedback. We are expecting this to be released this year.

The project-level greenhouse gas accounting work is underway.

MLA Tredger: I will just thank the officials for being here, and I conclude my questions for today.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 52, Department of Environment?

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

MLA Tredger: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 52, Department of Environment, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 52, Department of Environment, cleared or carried

Chair: The Member for Whitehorse Centre has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 52, Department of Environment, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures
Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$2,185,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures
Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of nil agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$2,185,000 agreed to
Department of Environment agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 53, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, 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 five minutes.

Recess

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

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

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 53, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Department of Energy, Mines and Resources

Deputy Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I spoke at second reading about this and laid out some of the things that EMR is addressing with the supplementary budget, so I won't give any departmental opening remarks today. I am just looking forward to questions from the members opposite. I will welcome deputy ministers. To my right is Sierra van der Meer and to my left is Paul Moore. We are looking forward to questions today.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate the brevity of the minister's opening statements so that we can get into some questions. I too would like to welcome the officials here today and thank them for the briefing that we received this morning on the supplementary estimates and the main estimates. I would also thank those other officials who attended this morning and those who are providing support remotely to the minister here this afternoon.

Before I get into the supplementary budget, there are a couple of written questions that are on the Order Paper. They are on page 24 of today's Order Paper. I just wanted to get into those to see if we could clear those off and I could have them removed. Normally, there is a legislative return done, but I do want to ask the minister about these.

The first is Written Question No. 59 from October 16, 2024, so about six months ago. It was from me and addressed to the minister. It says: "With respect to the September 17, 2024 Government of Yukon news release, entitled 'Residential lottery and industrial tender for lots in Haines Junction, Mayo, Teslin and Watson Lake now open', which included a statement that the government had 'released 685 lots across the territory since 2021'..." So, what I'm looking for from the minister is:

What is the breakdown of these lots, including location, community, and date of release?

Then there's just a subsequent question as well. I was told at the briefing this morning that Community Services will set the prices for those lots. We're just looking for some clarity, because when the Minister of Community Services was on his feet, he said that calculations for the cost of land in some of the communities are handled through Energy, Mines and Resources, so we're not sure exactly where we are at with who sets the sale prices for the lots.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I'm going to refer the member, first of all, to a document that I tabled last week.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Okay. Well, what I will do is that I will just ask someone to be able to get me a copy and I'll sort of refer to this, and then I will make sure that I table it again or that it becomes available. But during my second reading speech, I did table a document. It does have a breakdown of which lots were in communities by year. Also, the department did work to develop a response to the written questions — was it 59? I can't remember which one, but there were two written questions and the department had a draft of that in front of me, and I was just working my way through it, so we'll get that information over.

In terms of how lot prices are set, the range for lot pricing — or the default range, let's say — is between the market price and the development cost. There are times when we do lots at different prices. For example, for Habitat for Humanity or other organizations — sometimes for other governments — we bring the prices down in order to alter that. But generally speaking, that is what the rules say for it.

What the Department of Community Services does through their Land Development branch is provide the information to EMR's Land Management branch around what were the costs of development, and then the Land Management branch sets the prices and — well, I think that they actually go to Cabinet, but I would have to check that. I will check on that step, but it is EMR that sets the prices and puts them out there. I heard — for example, even today, I think, in tabling of motions — two motions asking about how we're setting those prices, so I haven't had a time yet to turn back to the department for the ones that are coming up this year, but those are the bookends for that pricing.

Mr. Kent: I just want to make sure that I heard the minister correctly. Energy, Mines and Resources sets the prices for the sale of the lots — I'm just looking for clarification there.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Deputy Chair, I believe that is the case. I will check back with the department to make certain. When the Minister of Community Services and I were just in Teslin talking to both the Village of Teslin and the Teslin Tlingit Council, that was my understanding. I will check to make sure who has the authority. It may also be that they have to be reviewed by Cabinet, so let me just check on that. But the technical piece is that it has to be between the market price and the development cost.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate that from the minister and I appreciate the document that he has just sent over here this

afternoon as well. We will take a look at it and perhaps have more questions the next time that we have EMR up in debate.

The second written question — and I apologize; I think I said that it has been on the Order Paper for six months; it has been on the Order Paper for five months. The second written question is Written Question No. 60 on page 24 of today's Order Paper. It is a series of questions that I submitted with regard to the Eagle Gold mine. So, I will ask them one at a time rather than getting into reading out the entire set here for the minister.

The first one was with regard to the receivership. There are three parts to this question. I am curious what the date is that the receiver, PricewaterhouseCoopers, began billing for preparations for receivership. What is the value of the invoice and nature of work done by PwC prior to that August court date? Did the Yukon government retain PwC prior to the court date to prepare for the court process, and if so, was there a contract in place for that work?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Again, the department had prepared a response to this written question. I will still seek to table it, because my understanding is that the written questions don't come off the Order Paper unless we give a response, so we have to table them. That is one of the points.

Second of all, I just did just confirm with the department that it is EMR that sets the price, and it's based on the development costs that Community Services prepares for them, which is, I think, how I described it.

With respect to the questions about the receiver, PricewaterhouseCoopers, their billing goes back to July 25, 2024. Invoices were not issued by the receiver in relation to Victoria Gold prior to their appointment as the receiver. The first invoice for services related to the receivership was provided to YG for the purposes of review and confirmation on September 11.

What is the nature of the work that was done? It includes them reviewing publicly available information regarding Victoria Gold, reviewing regulatory and enforcement aspects in relation to the failure response, and preparation of court materials. The invoice total was approximately \$82,000 for that. I think that is like a three-week period ahead of the court date.

Then the question was around contracts. The Government of Yukon did not retain PricewaterhouseCoopers prior to the court date. There is no contract in place with PricewaterhouseCoopers. They are a court-appointed receiver. They are appointed by court order on behalf of all stakeholders and they are not acting on behalf of us specifically. Invoices are paid through the receivership in accordance with the mechanism established and approved by the court order.

So, I will stop there, and I will let the member know that the written response will have a few more details.

Mr. Kent: The second part of that written question was with respect to historical contracts to PwC. Going through the contract registry, there are seven contracts between the Yukon government and PwC that began in 2018 and totalled just short of \$21 million. I'm curious if there were reports produced as a result of those contracts and which of those contracts were

direct award and which ones were part of the competitive bid process.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Again, if we are talking about historical work with PricewaterhouseCoopers, this is not a contract with us on the Victoria Gold one, but if we're talking about work historically, some of that work is with Highways and Public Works. There is some work with Energy, Mines and Resources — specifically I think around the Wolverine mine. Most of this information can be found on the Government of Yukon's contract registry, because it's all there publicly.

There were seven contracts: Four were direct-award contracts and three were part of a competitive bid process.

Mr. Kent: What were the deliverables, or were there reports produced as a result of that \$21 million in contracts?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I would have to dig back. Some of them are not even Energy, Mines and Resources'. I don't have that information and I would have to ask the department to go and check. Let me ask the member for clarification: If he's looking for the ones that have to do with EMR, I'm happy to get it. If he's looking for ones that have to do with Highways and Public Works, I'm happy to pass that request across.

Mr. Kent: Again, I'm not trying to be snippy here, but this question has been on the Order Paper since October 21, 2024, and I did ask: Were reports produced as a result of those contracts? These are either EMR or any of the seven contracts that I referenced that I found on the contract registry going back to 2018.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: What the note in front of me has — from the department that is getting this information for me — is that the work performed by PwC did not result in reports from each of these contracts. I will happily go back and check, but I will also point out that, of the written questions that I've looked back to when members were in government, they answered none or one over all their time.

I appreciate that this has been on the Order Paper for five months. I also appreciate that the department has been doing a lot of work around this. We also have provided three briefings for opposition members. I think that the department is doing good work, and we will get the information as available for members opposite.

Mr. Kent: I think the minister said earlier today that he has had these responses on his desk for some time from the department. I really do appreciate the work that the department has done, but it's getting from the minister's desk to the floor of the Legislature, and that's why I'm asking these questions here today — because these are two written questions.

The minister is correct that they can only be removed once a legislative return is filed or at the request of the member. So, I'm hoping that we can get through this today and then I can just have these questions removed from the Order Paper.

The third part of that Written Question No. 60 is regarding the heap leach review. So, were all of the recommendations within the 2022 report entitled *Eagle Gold Heap Leach Facility and Cyanide Management Review*, which was authored by Piteau Associates Engineering Ltd., implemented? If not, which recommendations were not implemented, and why weren't they implemented?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Just to be specific, I did not indicate that I had the responses to these questions on my desk for some time.

What I indicated was that, when the members opposite were in government, they did not respond to written questions. I also noted that, as I prepared for session, I noted that there were written questions. I passed them across to the department, and I got the responses. If I missed getting those to the department earlier, my apologies to the House, but we have made all attempts to answer questions from members opposite. I think that it is a little bit rich, as I look back at the 33rd Assembly and see that the members opposite didn't provide legislative returns and didn't provide responses to written questions, that now there is criticism about how fast the answers are coming.

Just to go to the specific question that was posed to me, all of the recommendations were accepted and included as implementation expectations on the quartz mining licence of the Piteau report. Victoria Gold did not fulfill all of the expectations. They were in the process of submitting information when the heap leach failure occurred, so it was curtailed at that moment.

Mr. Kent: So, this was the 2022 report that was authored by Piteau Associates. The minister has said that all of the recommendations were accepted, but not all of them were implemented. We don't have to get into specific ones, but how many of those recommendations were not implemented, and what role did the department have in ensuring that those were implemented? This report was authored a couple of years prior to the incident with the heap leach that happened last June.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will have to ask the department to dig in and go back through it again. It's always a range. Some of the things can be implemented quickly, and some take more time. There are some that become part of the quartz mining licence, so what the department has let me know at this point is that it was a blend, that they were in the process of being implemented, and the last stage was that the company was submitting information back to Energy, Mines and Resources, but then the failure happened. At that point, everything refocused on dealing with the slide itself.

Mr. Kent: I will look forward to receiving more information from the minister, including what role Energy, Mines and Resources — and in particular Compliance, Monitoring and Inspections — had with respect to the implementation of all the recommendations from that 2022 report that were accepted by the government.

The final question in this is regarding water treatment. I noted in here that I didn't believe that the receiver was being held to the same standard as was expected of Victoria Gold prior to the decision to put them into receivership.

There was an inspector's order dated July 20, 2024 where the Yukon government ordered Victoria Gold to be ready in four days to begin treatment and discharge water at a rate of 15,000 to 20,000 cubic metres per day, yet at the time that I submitted this in October, there still wasn't water treatment underway, and I referenced for over two months after the receiver took over the site. Unless something has changed, I

don't believe that there is water treatment underway today. I am just curious why Victoria Gold was given four days under a Yukon government order and then PricewaterhouseCoopers was allowed to go for weeks, if not months, without having to adhere to a similar order.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The member's question is not framing this correctly. First of all, I think that we are holding the receiver to the same standards and expectations with all things — not just water treatment but including water treatment — as we did to Victoria Gold. If I go to the inspector's directive and I go to the third page — this is a July 20 inspector's directive. It says — and I quote: "By July 24..." — which is four days after — "... provide certainty that..." — the Victoria Gold Corporation — "... has the ability and necessary degree of readiness to successfully treat and discharge water from site..." So, it is not about having it in place; it is about demonstrating that you are going to have it in place, that you have the intention to get at it, that you are working toward it. That is the thing that is still there with PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Mr. Kent: So, the receivership date, I believe, was August 14. So, by August 18, PricewaterhouseCoopers was able to give those assurances to the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources and the minister that they were in a position to be ready to treat this amount of water? I guess that is what I am asking. So, they got those assurances by August 18, which was four days after the receiver took over.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, in fact, it is part of the court order that the receiver take on the directives that we had issued. So, they did have a responsibility to demonstrate that they were intending to treat the water and that it was going to happen. I mean — I will just say clearly that there is a difference with how PricewaterhouseCoopers has been addressing the directives that we issued compared to Victoria Gold Corporation. That does not mean that any of these tasks are easy. Building a berm to protect the camp from a secondary slide, drilling boreholes to collect groundwater, putting in place water treatment which had not been contemplated — these are all large tasks. But what we expect is that they are working diligently toward it, and that is the case.

Mr. Kent: I guess, you know, the incident happened in late June, and then six or seven weeks later, the government went to the courts and had Victoria Gold put into receivership. PricewaterhouseCoopers took over. There were a number of directives issued to Victoria Gold — maybe that will be the question that I ask: How many directives were issued to Victoria Gold versus how many new ones have been issued to PricewaterhouseCoopers? I mean, as I said, the — you know, Victoria Gold, after the incident, was on-site managing it for seven weeks, and PricewaterhouseCoopers has been there for seven months.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I am going to have to go back and ask the department to count them up for us.

Again, I will state that all the directives that were not met by Victoria Gold extended across to PricewaterhouseCoopers, so they became PricewaterhouseCoopers' directives as per the order of the court.

The sort of thing that was not happening was water storage on-site. Let me say it the same way that I said it earlier. We said, “You are going to need to get more water storage on-site; we need to see your plan around water storage —”, and the response that we got was, “We’re not sure that we need more water storage on-site.” We talked about water treatment. We talked about the safety berm. Finally, we also talked about communications with the public and in particular with the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun. That is also one of those requirements.

I will go back and check, but what I can say is that, when we were issuing those directives in the time following the slide and up until the court case, we weren’t getting from the company that they were willing or able to complete those. We have been getting that from the receiver, and that is an important distinction.

I will ask the department to count up all those directives so that I can answer the specific question.

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair’s report

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 216 and has asked 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: I move that the House do now adjourn.

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:28 p.m.

Written notice was given of the following motion March 17, 2025:

Motion No. 1209

Re: recruiting health care professionals (Cathers)