



Yukon Legislative Assembly

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HANSARD

Monday, March 24, 2025 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2025 Spring Sitting

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

CABINET MINISTERS

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

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

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

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Monday, March 24, 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: I hope you all don't mind my voice today. I have been cheering hard and coaching hard this weekend for the Yukon Native Hockey Tournament, so my voice is a little deep today.

The Chair would like to inform the House of a motion not placed on the Notice Paper. Motion No 1021, notice of which was provided Thursday by the Leader of the Third Party, was not placed on today's Notice Paper, as the action requested has been completed in whole or in part.

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 Indigenous Employee Awards of Honour

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to the recipients of the Indigenous Employee Awards of Honour for 2024-25, recognizing the accomplishments of Government of Yukon Indigenous public servants who provide excellent service and leadership.

We had a record this year — 34 nominations. These nominations were in three categories: Outstanding Achievement, Excellence in Leadership, and Public Service.

The Naats Tláa Award recognizes long-standing Indigenous public servants who have made a significant contribution throughout their career in the Yukon government. This award was named after Marge Baufeld, who worked for 20 years in the Public Service Commission and was instrumental in implementing several foundational initiatives related to the representative public service plan that are still being utilized today. Marge retired in 2019 and Naats Tláa is her Indigenous name.

The Sta'aach Award is named in honour of Jay Greenway, who was an employee of the Public Service Commission and was a champion of our government's final agreement representative public service plan. Sta'aach was Jay's Indigenous name, and that means "A Good Swimmer".

This award calls attention to and recognizes the good work of those individuals or small teams who work within human resources or show leadership in supporting efforts to achieve representative public service.

I had the honour of presenting these awards nearly two weeks ago at the beautiful ceremony at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre.

This year's recipient of the Outstanding Achievement Award of Honour is Tammy Stoneman. Tammy is a First Nation educational consultant at the Curriculum and Assessment branch in the Department of Education.

The Excellence in Leadership Award of Honour was awarded to Daniel Vigneau. Daniel is a manager of Correctional Services in the Department of Justice.

The Excellence in Public Service Award of Honour was awarded to Jim Sias, who is an automotive mechanic at the Transportation Maintenance branch of Highways and Public Works.

Our second Excellence in Public Service was for Liz Porter, who is the manager of the Watson Lake liquor store and territorial agency for the Yukon Liquor Corporation.

The Naats Tláa Award was awarded to Danny Kassi, building maintenance worker with facilities management in Old Crow, in the Department of Highways and Public Works.

Finally, the Sta'aach Award was awarded to the Community Services human resources team of Desiree Hombert, director of Health, Safety and Human Resources, and Cassandra Henderson, senior HR projects, for their work to expand a very successful Indigenous training program in the Department of Highways and Public Works that they launched in 2023.

Mr. Speaker, congratulations to all the nominees and recipients for the prestigious awards and a shout out to the Diversity and Inclusion Services branch of the Public Service Commission for an amazing ceremony to honour them all.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to tribute those employees recognized for public service excellence for the 2025 Indigenous Employee Awards of Honour.

I would like to give our thanks and congratulations to all recipients. The Outstanding Achievement Award went to Tammy Stoneman, First Nation educational consultant. The Excellence in Leadership was awarded to Daniel Vigneau, manager of Correctional Services. As well, Excellence in Public Service awards were given to Jim Sias, automotive mechanic at HPW, and Liz Porter, manager and territorial agent for the Yukon Liquor Corporation in Watson Lake.

The Naats Tláa Award presented to a long-standing public servant who has made a significant contribution went to Danny Kassi, building maintenance worker in HPW. The Sta'aach Award this year went to the CS human resources team of Desiree Hombert and Cassandra Henderson. Again, our congratulations to all those recognized this year, and thank you for your dedication to public service.

Applause

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the NDP to pay tribute to Yukon government's Indigenous Employee Awards of Honour, which celebrates and recognizes individuals whose dedication, resilience, and commitment have left a lasting impact on their community, workplace, and beyond.

The recipients of the 2025 Indigenous Employee Awards of Honour embodies the very essence of leadership, cultural pride, and excellence. Through their hard work, they have not only excelled in their field but have also uplifted others, ensuring that Indigenous voices, traditions, and knowledge remain strong in every space that they occupy. Their passion for mentorship and advocacy has opened doors for future generations, creating pathways for Indigenous professionals to thrive and succeed. We are delighted to congratulate Tammy Stoneman, Daniel Vigneau, Jim Sias, Liz Porter, Danny Kassi, and Desiree Hombert. With a deep-rooted connection to their culture and a tireless spirit, they have demonstrated the strength and wisdom passed down through generations. Whether through their contributions to economic development, social justice, education, or cultural preservation, their impact is profound and far-reaching.

This recognition honours not just their professional achievements but the heart and spirit that all recipients bring to their work daily. They remind us that success is not only measured in accomplishments but in the lives they have touched, the traditions upheld, and the legacy built for the next generations to come.

We extend our deepest gratitude and admiration to this year's recipients. May their journey continue to inspire and may they always walk with the strength of their ancestors and the support of their communities.

Mahsi' cho.

Applause

In recognition of Emergency Management Exemplary Service Award

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon on behalf of all members to tribute the Yukon recipients of the 2024-25 Emergency Management Exemplary Service Award.

This national award recognizes emergency responders, response experts, community members, organizations, and volunteers who make exceptional contributions in confronting severe weather events or emergencies. Recently, a contingent of Yukoners was in Ottawa where the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, the Government of Yukon, ATCO Electric, Stantec, Porcupine Enterprises, Ketza TSL, and Totaltrac all received the award for their efforts in preparing for and responding to the high-risk spring breakup of the Porcupine River at Old Crow in 2024.

Mr. Speaker, I am certain that we all remember those anxious days last spring when Old Crow was faced with the possibility of a devastating flood due to record-high snowpack and the threat of ice jamming.

Through a historic collaboration between the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation and an across-department team from the

Government of Yukon, a unified incident management team was assembled to ensure the community's safety. The team of experts used traditional knowledge, on-site observations, and flood forecasting to make decisions about how best to protect the community and respond if flooding arrived.

This team cooperated to secure the physical safety of Old Crow with flood barriers while focusing on the community's cultural needs. In 1995, sociologist Tom Horlick-Jones said: "... disasters are disruptions in cultural expectations..." We agree, Mr. Speaker, and acknowledge that ensuring the cultural safety of a community is just as important as protecting their physical well-being.

We also thank our corporate and private sector friends who were crucial to the response. This positive outcome does not happen without their efforts, and we thank them for being a valuable and reliable part of the response effort.

Every event is an opportunity to learn, and we will learn and grow with our experiences in Old Crow and building on the tremendous success we had working together. The event set a new standard for emergency management in the Yukon and a model for unified emergency response. It also provided one more example of how Yukoners are always there for each other and will always rise to the challenge of taking care of our own. There are too many names of all involved to list here today, but on behalf of a grateful Yukon government and all Yukoners, I salute every single one of them.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling today two documents: statistics of the 34th and 35th Yukon Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling a letter dated January 27, 2025 addressed to the Member of Parliament and cc'd to me.

Speaker: Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House thanks all candidates who have put their name forward for the upcoming federal election and encourages Yukoners to vote in the federal election on April 28.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House supports the Government of Canada's \$56.25-million investment to build the Yukon Gathering Place, a new convention centre in Whitehorse, with Chu Níikwän.

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

THAT this House supports the Government of Yukon signing a \$9.5-million pharmacare agreement with the Government of Canada to provide universal access to contraceptives and diabetes medications and supplies for all Yukoners in addition to the Government of Yukon's current coverage programs.

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

THAT this House urges fuel companies to reduce prices for consumers by the full amount of the current carbon price, reflecting the end of carbon pricing effective April 1, 2025.

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

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Yukon nominee program

Ms. Clarke: Last week, the *Yukon News* reported that the Ukrainian Canadian Association of Yukon had asked the Yukon government for help with nine applications of Ukrainians seeking to come to the Yukon through the Yukon nominee program. According to that article, the Premier of Yukon had given the association assurances that those applications would be — quote — "... expedited as a gesture of solidarity and support."

Since then, the association has said that they are worried that the commitment is now in jeopardy and that they haven't heard back from the Premier about his promise. Can the Premier confirm whether or not he made this promise to the Ukrainian community to expedite nine Ukrainian applications under the Yukon nominee program? If so, has he taken any action to fulfill that promise?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, later this week, we will be providing some information to the business community about the Yukon nominee program. There has been a lot of discussion back and forth over the last number of months because of the fact that we had less allotment than we had in previous years.

I know that I have asked our team to look specifically at these requests from the Ukrainian community — just trying to take a look to make sure that the federal processes that are in place will support the ability to expedite these individuals, making sure that they also can be supported by the announcement that we had last week, which is, depending on whether they have a post-secondary or work visa — in these cases, it would likely be a work visa. They also have an opportunity to be extended over the next year and potentially two years.

We are absolutely making sure that our team is focused on this and I am looking forward to sharing more news with our

business community and Yukoners over the next number of days.

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, according to the letter from the Ukrainian association, it sounds like the Premier made a promise to the organization to expedite these nine applications, but that seems to be no longer the case. We are hoping that the Premier can clear this up. Did he make a commitment to the Ukrainian association to expedite these applications, and if so, what action has he taken to live up to that promise?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, again, I'm making sure that our team has an opportunity to look at exactly how to expedite. As per the request that has come, we have sat together, as have many members of the House, and have been there supporting the Ukrainian community. Some of the first dialogue on this conversation occurred outside of Whitehorse city hall. Many of the community members came up and they were concerned. There were two things at play. One was that they felt that their work permits would lapse and they would have to leave. Of course, we dealt with that problem specifically and negotiated with Canada directly, unlike many other jurisdictions, to ensure that we actually can have a number of individuals stay in the territory and continue to work and contribute to the economy and to their life here in the Yukon.

Over and above that, we also have an ability to prioritize within our Yukon nominee allotment.

We are very focused on helping the community, which we have done. It was within a few days of the first incidents in Ukraine that we came together with our teams to support the community and we have continued to do that work since that point in time. Again, we are looking forward to making sure that individuals who want to be Yukoners who are from the Ukrainian community have that opportunity.

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, last year, the Yukon nominee intake process was closed temporarily for Whitehorse-based businesses but allowed to continue to operate for rural businesses.

Can the Premier tell us how the remaining allocation will balance the needs of businesses based in Whitehorse versus those in rural Yukon communities?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, the time allotted to me right now won't suffice in our ability to talk about how we have worked with Yukon business communities. The general message that I want to share here with Yukoners is that we thought it was necessary to go out and work with the chambers — the Yukon chamber, of course, and their ability to represent the business sector not just in Whitehorse but across the Yukon as well as the Whitehorse chamber and other business leaders just to get a sense of what they think we should do.

Of course, this program has been driven by the needs of our business community, so that will be part of the information that will be relayed later this week — our ability to manage a smaller number of allotments but an ability to meet the needs of both our businesses in rural Yukon as well as in Whitehorse.

Question re: Immigration fraud

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has been in charge of these immigration programs now for more than eight years. It is becoming increasingly obvious that these programs have serious issues. In less than a year, the department's immigration offices have been raided by the RCMP twice — once in June and again, just a few months ago, in December — and in the past few months, the Auditor General of Canada has launched a performance audit of immigration programs in Yukon only to then pause the work because of the ongoing criminal investigations.

Following that, the Auditor General wrote a management letter in January to the Yukon government with some troubling observations and recommendations.

My question for the Premier is this: Should Yukoners continue to have confidence in the administration of these immigration programs here in Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I think it's first important to discuss the fact that Yukon continues to ensure that we work with our business community to be able to understand how to best use this program, but moreover, there have been challenges to these programs across the country. So, part of the work that we have consistently done is to go back and ensure that we make sure the programs can be delivered better at all times — to make sure that not just the employers who will lean on the programs but the individuals coming through the programs have the right supports.

There was work that was done to have the Auditor General take a look at the programs, which happens throughout many programs in the Yukon government. Our response at the department was: Yes, please, come and show us where we can improve our programs. We know that there were some recommendations made. Those recommendations — the team there is taking a fulsome approach to ensuring that we use that as guidance. But again, the challenge with the allotments — that was a federal decision. We always think that programs can work better, and I think the member opposite knows full well that, under Yukon Party leadership, there were challenges. I don't think that this is about a political party; I think that it's about the constant challenges that you have with these programs.

Mr. Dixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the letter from the Auditor General raises some very serious concerns about the administration of this program over the last few years. Based on discussions with stakeholders, current and past nominees, and current and past employees as well, the Auditor General of Canada observed that confidence in the integrity of the administration of this program is very low. They point out that programs like this are susceptible to fraud and corruption, and they recommend that the government move quickly to take steps to safeguard the program's reputation and ensure that integrity and fairness are ensured.

Mr. Speaker, what steps has the Premier taken since receiving this letter back on January 25 to restore Yukoners' confidence in the integrity of these programs?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Well, Mr. Speaker, this week, we will have an opportunity to talk about how we are going to be using

the Yukon nominee program going forward. We'll have a chance to talk about how we are not just having the internal administration make sure that things are done in a good way but that we're actually going to have guidance from outside of the department. I think this is something that is a nice added element to our ability to understand how this program can work best.

Again, we will have a discussion about some of the advising that we are going to get from the business community. Of course, our officials came back and said that this is something that we can do that we think would be important. Again, we are taking the recommendations that are there. Our team now is working on it. We'll have an opportunity here — I think during budget debate — to have a fulsome conversation about each and every element that is in that letter. We're taking each and every element of that letter very seriously. We look at it as a road map to improve the delivery of the program.

Again, I sit down at the table with leaders from across the country. These are challenges happening in British Columbia; they're happening in Ontario; they're happening in — you know, you name it. These are things, again, that I hear. I just like the fact that our officials are taking the lead to make sure that we can have even a better program.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I hope that the Premier is taking this seriously. His department has been raided by the RCMP twice, and now the Auditor General is saying that confidence in this program is very low and that there is a question around the integrity of the administration of the program.

Here is another recommendation from the Auditor General — quote: "... given the higher risks of fraud and corruption associated with any immigration program that can lead to permanent residency, the Yukon Department of Economic Development should evaluate whether the Government of Yukon's conflict of interest policy is being adhered to by its Immigration Unit..."

They go on to recommend that decision-making about this program should be removed from a single individual and handled by a so-called "objective, impartial and disinterested third party".

Mr. Speaker, has the department made this change to the decision-making about the immigration program and made the changes that are reflected in the grave concerns by the Auditor General?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, again, we will have an opportunity to come in. I know that our senior leaders in the department have been doing a lot of work to ensure that we have the integrity in our program the way it should be. I think it's important to note — it's difficult when the Leader of the Official Opposition leads Yukoners who are here today or others to reflect on something that is happening in the department. We know that —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Pillai: As they holler across the way — we have clients — as is our understanding — that there have been some challenges with — clients of the department. It wasn't the department. So, the reflection on that shines a really negative

light on the whole team in the unit and I don't think that is appropriate.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Again, you know what? At this point, this, again, has been a situation —

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Order, please.

When a member is speaking, please be respectful.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, we are sharing the facts, Mr. Speaker. What is happening across the way is that members opposite want to weave a narrative that doesn't meet with the facts, and so now they are getting angry and two or three of them are yelping off-mic. At the end of the day, we will do the work that we need to do. I want to thank our public servants for taking on the challenges that they have had. This is something, again, that happens across the country. I am just glad that we are taking a leadership role on it.

Question re: Public transit funding

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, as part of their commitment under the confidence and supply agreement, this Liberal government was supposed to work with the City of Whitehorse to fund a free city transit program. Although the government was not able to make that happen as planned, they did make free transit passes available to Yukoners through NGOs and other service providers. In 2024, the transit initiative cost \$330,000; however, this year, the government has budgeted just \$200,000, so that's a 39-percent cut compared to last year's cost.

Will the minister tell Yukoners why cuts are being made to this very popular program?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I am really happy to talk about another program that we have delivered on behalf of Yukoners to make their lives a little bit better. I was happy to work with the Third Party and the City of Whitehorse on this initiative. As we noted at the very beginning of this thing, transit is a city responsibility and they control the way that it's rolled out. We had almost 18 months' worth of discussions on that until we finally came to a system that works.

So far, between October 2024 and February 7, 2025, we have distributed 1,579 adult passes. We have handed out 354 senior passes; we handed out 356 youth passes and 164 passes for people with disabilities. We are seeing 24 NGOs enrolled in the program, and we are distributing it through the library and the warming centre as well as a few NGOs who have decided to pick it up and give it out to their members — to the people using the services.

We are very happy with the way this is going out. We are funding the program, and we are basing it on the projections that the department has on the funding. I am happy to talk about this further.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, like so many other items in the confidence and supply agreement, Yukoners are reliant on this program, and the minister's numbers just show how important it really is. We have heard from transit pass providers that the

program is wildly popular and that they frequently run out of passes. We have heard from Yukoners about how this has made a difference for them.

During a briefing from the Department of Community Services, we were told that this budget decrease is because the program is planning to end in November. This is deeply disappointing, if true. No government only budgets to the end of their term; they budget to the end of the fiscal year. So, if the government really believes in the commitments under the confidence and supply agreement, I would hope that they would be budgeting for them to continue regardless of who wins the next election.

Can the minister confirm that he intends to cancel the free transit program in November, and if so, has he informed community partners of his intent?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, we have continued to support the project. I have not told anybody that we are not supporting the project. I can update the House as well. Tickets: adults — we have handed out 29,270 tickets to adults, 5,000 senior tickets, and 4,950 tickets to youth as well.

As the member opposite said, this is a popular program within the City of Whitehorse. It was launched last fall and aims to reduce barriers to transportation and increase access to essential services for those who need it most. Non-governmental organizations have been invited to participate by distributing tickets and/or monthly passes to Yukoners who need it. As I said, we are also doing it through the warming centre and the library. Access to free transit has been made available to the public through those two channels, and the program has been successful in ensuring that those who need transit have access to it. Tickets and passes are distributed through 24 non-governmental organizations and government-distributed sites.

I have given the details on how many people are using this program. It is popular, and we are happy that it is being used, and we celebrate its continuance.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, hopefully, this program doesn't end in November, like we were told in the briefing. There are so many crucial new supports for Yukoners in the confidence and supply agreement, and I'm deeply concerned about the future of these programs. Usually, what happens after an election is that the next party in power makes its decision on how to carry on programs from its predecessor, but this government seems to be making moves to cut free transit early. But what about all of the other programs: the Yukon dental program, the work on successor mining legislation, the supervised consumption site, and new supports for students in schools — and the list goes on? Yukoners deserve to know: What other confidence and supply agreement commitments does this government plan to cut before the next election?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I prefer to deal with the tangible, not the hypothetical. Here we have the Leader of the Third Party dealing wholly in hypothetical: This is going to happen; that's going to happen. Quite frankly, you can't predict the future. The future is quite complicated these days.

We are funding free transit. It's wildly successful. We're handing out the passes; we're handing out free tickets. I'm glad

that people are using it. I'm glad that people are using transit, and I look forward to seeing it continue into the future.

Question re: *Health Professions Act* modernization

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, this government is in the process of updating the *Health Professions Act*, which sets out the rules for many health care professions and makes sure that Yukoners get safe, quality care. All health care professionals who will be affected by this act need to be included in the engagement process. They need to know when engagement sessions are and what is happening in the meantime, but currently, this is not happening.

What will the government do improve communication around the engagement process?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I'm really happy to be able to talk about our *Health Professions Act* and the modernization that we have undertaken to actually make sure that the health professions that currently operate in the territory not only are properly managed but they are also able to manage to the fullness of their profession.

What we have found is that so many professions cannot do all the things that they're able to do in other jurisdictions, and the *Health Professions Act* modernization will help to broaden the scope for health professionals, giving them the ability to practise a wider offering of services to Yukoners, perhaps the full complement of services that they are able to provide in some southern jurisdictions.

It regulates health care service professionals. This helps Yukoners by ensuring that health professionals are competent and safe to practise, as we saw with the psychologists, who we just recently brought under the umbrella, as well as providing clear processes for dealing with complaints and disciplinary issues.

I have heard the concerns that the member opposite is alluding to with the consultation. I have said and will continue to say publicly and on the floor of this House that this is at the very beginning of consultation. It is going to take several years to roll out in its entirety. We are listening to health professionals, and we will continue to listen to their concerns and address them.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, in June 2023, a coroner's inquest recommended regulating social workers in the Yukon. There have been growing calls for social workers to be regulated, particularly following incidents in rural communities, such as a social worker employed by this government who was sharing QAnon conspiracy theories with their clients.

The government has announced that it will update the territory's *Health Professions Act*; however, according to this government's timeline, nothing will happen until 2027. This leaves the field of social work unregulated for at least two more years. Given the ongoing issues with the lack of social worker regulation, will this government expedite this process?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I too heard the concerns about the social workers. I had a meeting with the social work association in the late fall, early winter of last year. We had a good conversation about that. I explained to them the

process going forward. They thanked me for the conversation that we had. They said that there is work that they have to do on their side as well, so we are working now with the health professions, with the social workers. We know how important their role is and how diverse it is. Social work cuts into so many different channels in the health care field.

We are working with them and have opened up the consultation. Currently, we are just beginning; it is in its very infancy. We are continuing that work and are now including social workers in that gathering of information so that we can begin the work of properly regulating that industry as part of our *Health Professions Act* rollout.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, as the Yukon's population and needs continue to grow, the need for social workers does as well. This places further urgency on the need for professional standards of practice. Regulating social workers establishes professional standards, increases accountability, and provides opportunities for ongoing professional development.

Yukon is one of the last jurisdictions in Canada that does not regulate social workers. We have already seen the consequences of this inaction, and this leaves Yukoners vulnerable to further harm. Can the minister explain to Yukoners why there is such a significant delay in regulating social workers?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, the intent of the Yukon *Health Professions Act* is to ensure that the regulation of health professions remains current and adaptable, aligning with best practices across Canada to protect public safety and to promote high standards of care. The current *Health Professions Act* was written in 2003 as umbrella legislation only and only had four professions regulated under it. I think that was the former Yukon Party government at the time.

The current legislation has not kept pace with evolving standards across Canada, and the Government of Yukon is working to review and modernize the *Health Professions Act*, as my colleague has said, to be consistent with best practices and to bring all regulated health professions under this act. Of course, that requires some extensive engagement in order to regulate health care professions and modernize this legislation.

Engagement is an opportunity to gather input from the public and health professionals. Social workers are very trusted and an integral part of allied health professionals. We look forward to being able to talk to them further about changes that need to be made to the *Health Professions Act* to serve Yukoners the very best way possible.

Question re: Mineral exploration industry

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, the Yukon mineral exploration program, or YMEP, provides funding to help locate, explore, and develop mineral projects to an advanced exploration stage. The deadline for applications is March 31.

According to the Yukon Chamber of Mines spring bulletin, there have been concerns raised — quote: "... regarding changes to funding criteria for the year's program, and that the changes may affect exploration opportunities."

They go on to say — and I'll quote again: "... YMEP funds can only be applied to work on existing claims, successful

applicants must provide proof of relevant permits/authorizations prior to receiving a signed funding agreement, and funds cannot be applied to staking of new claims.”

From all indications, these changes came as a shock and surprise to industry stakeholders. So, why was there no consultation with industry on significant changes to a program that has been so successful?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, the Yukon mineral exploration program has been a very strong program and continues to be. My last recollection of it is that, for every investment dollar that we put into the Yukon mineral exploration program, I think it quadruples that in terms of investment from the mineral sector, and it has been very important.

I’m just trying to find the note on the mineral exploration program; I’ll have to come back to the member opposite.

Anyway, it is a good program. The member opposite is talking about concerns that have been raised. I’m happy to have that conversation with the Chamber of Mines to see if we can support that further.

I will answer the questions when the member gets up again.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, the minister admits it is a good program, but then why did he make these last-minute changes?

A number of individuals in the mining industry reached out to me over the weekend to criticize these changes. One of them said that the previous version of the program was designed to get new discoveries in under-explored areas and to get people to look for lesser explored critical minerals. Another told us how disappointing it is to see the rest of the country rallying around critical minerals and natural resources while Yukon is headed sharply in the other direction. Just this morning, someone called me to say: If we’re happy with not making any new discoveries, this is the way to go about it.

So, since we know that nobody in the industry was consulted about these changes, can the minister tell us who came up with the idea to make this successful program more restrictive? Again, why was there no consultation on these changes with industry?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to check back with the department to follow up on the questions from the member opposite, but I will say that the Yukon has a strong mineral sector and that we have had challenges. The Eagle Gold mine was an incredibly difficult challenge and still is being navigated, but in the meantime, our overall investment in exploration last year was up. That includes the time when the members are criticizing that there have been changes to this program. So, I will investigate to find out about any changes, but what I will say is that the department is working hard to make sure that mining is being done safely, done in support of our communities and in support of First Nation treaty rights. I know that Economic Development has been doing great work to promote mining overall. That is because, for us as a territory, we believe that there is a path forward for mining. It is a very important path. I think that I spoke about that in the budget response, but we need to make sure that is done well and right.

The mineral exploration program has been a strong program, and we will continue to support it.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, the minister should be very concerned, because it sounds like these changes were made without his knowledge or consent.

This program has enjoyed support from all political parties since its inception. It has helped lead to major discoveries and has always shown a return on investment, with additional funds being spent, as the minister mentioned earlier today. This current Liberal government has made unilateral changes to the program without talking to any industry stakeholders.

Unfortunately, they have also tried to hide this by not doing any communication about it, with approximately one week before the deadline for applications.

Here are my questions for the minister — and I guess he has to go back to the department, since he didn’t know what was happening. Why were these changes made without consulting industry? Why were they done at the eleventh hour? And why did the Liberals fail to publicly communicate these changes?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, with respect to mining, in 2024, the exploration investment in the territory was up, and that’s while we were dealing with Eagle Gold as a catastrophe — and will continue to do that. At the same time, we have been working to rewrite new minerals legislation — successor legislation — with First Nations, which was agreed upon through the devolution transfer agreement. At the same time, we have also been working on land use planning to progress that across the territory.

We believe that mining is important for the Yukon. We believe that it’s important to get it right. There is a program — the Yukon mineral exploration program — that has been helpful in incenting mining activity in the territory. I will check in on what the rules are around that, but I will say that, at all times, the department has always worked with the chamber and with mining companies. They meet with them often; I meet with them often; we will continue to do that.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Introduction of visitors outside of the usual proceedings.

Visitors introduced

Hon. Mr. Streicker: 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): Order. Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

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

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Department of Education — *continued*

Deputy Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am happy to rise today to further debate in Committee of the Whole *Supplementary Estimates No 2* for 2024-25. I am happy to welcome as well Mary Cameron, Deputy Minister of Education, and Ashley Kayseas, the department's Assistant Deputy Minister of Corporate Services and Programs, back to the Legislature for this debate.

I note that I do have time left; however, I will move right to questions to expedite the business of the Legislature here today.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for opening it up and, of course, welcome back the officials today. One of the last questions I asked last time we were up was asking the minister if she could let me know how Mass for the Catholic PD day was voluntary. Again, can the minister just let me know how that was communicated?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am happy to continue this discussion around the Catholic schools' professional development day in May 2023. At this point, the Department of Education communication implies that attendance at the Mass — we are looking, Deputy Chair, we are continuing to review, and we are going back in some of our archived communications and continuing to review to determine if there was anything that may have been missed. However, at this point in time, I do not have any communication that would state that this was mandatory. However, we are continuing to review this and happy to share that information with the member, as we are continuing that work in the department.

Ms. White: I appreciate that from the minister.

Not necessarily the last time we were up but the time before that, the minister told me that there were proper channels if staff had concerns. Can she remind me of what those steps are? If, for example, Catholic educators were concerned about

a Mass that they attended, that it was in contravention to SOGI, how were they supposed to make complaints about that?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Deputy Chair, educators who have concerns related to their work should bring them forward through the appropriate channels. These channels include the school's administration team, the office of the superintendents, Human Resources branch of the Department of Education, and the Yukon Association of Education Professionals.

There are a number of supports as well that are available to Government of Yukon staff. The employee and family assistance program is provided for all Government of Yukon staff and educators. It can provide all Yukon government employees with confidential, expert support for various personal and workplace challenges. There is the employee and family assistance program available through telehealth, and I have that contact information as well. The *Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act* is also available. Employees can raise concerns under this legislation; the process involves multiple steps. Educators can learn more about their rights and obligations by enrolling in self-paced online *Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act* for a Government of Yukon employees course on YGLearn. Then there are conflict management services also available. These are available through the Public Service Commission. There is the investigations office of the Public Service Commission. There are workplace injury claims. You can also submit a claim through the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board. There is the Yukon Association of Education Professionals. They provide support and advocacy for educators. Critical incident debriefs — this is coordinated through the Human Resources branch of the Department of Education. Those are some of the supports that are also available, but those four areas that I had indicated are the process of bringing forward workplace concerns, but then there are also those other avenues through other supports that are available through the Government of Yukon.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. Just in trying to make sure that the minister has access to this, I have emailed a letter from Tuesday, May 16, 2023 to her. It's actually a letter to superintendents from the Yukon Department of Education from the Catholic Schools of Whitehorse PD Committee, and it's regarding Bishop Héctor Vila's homily during the May 1, 2023 Catholic Schools of Whitehorse PD Day Mass. I'm just going to read a bit from that. It says: "Dear [superintendents]: The Catholic Schools of Whitehorse PD committee is very concerned about the homily that Bishop Hector Vila delivered during the Mass on May 1 Catholic Schools of Whitehorse PD Day.

"In your letter dated March 2, 2023 and titled Re: Clarity regarding professional development aligning with public policy, you stated 'All Yukon schools are required to uphold the principles in the Education Act, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Policy, Safe and Caring Schools Policy and the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Protection Act, which bans conversion therapy. This applies to curriculum delivery and professional learning for educators.'

“The May 1 Mass was a mandatory part of our PD day and what happened there was a contravention of the SOGI policy and completely unacceptable to most administrators, teachers and education assistants.”

So, the reason why I’m bringing this up is that this was following the line of communication where they reached out to their superintendents. The letter goes on, but I think that the important part is the request.

In leading up to the planning, the PD committee goes on to say: “In your March 2 letter to all Catholic educators in Whitehorse you stated, ‘We will be scheduling a meeting in the coming weeks to further address the concerns we have been hearing from your school communities. The Department of Education seeks to ensure that each student, staff and school community member feels safe, welcomed, and comfortable in Yukon schools.’” This meeting never happened. No one from the Department of Education has been in touch with the PD committee since the PD day, although three superintendents attended at least part of the May 1 Mass and PD day.

“The PD committee members are requesting that the Department of Education does two things:

“1) Directly address the contravention of the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) policy on the May 1 PD Day Mass, a mandatory event during the government work day, with the staff members of all three Catholic schools...

“2) Assist the three Catholic schools of Whitehorse and the Diocese of Whitehorse in a reconciliation process. Staff members of Yukon Government and members of the Yukon Association of Education Professionals should not have to be subjected to the bigotry that we experienced during the May 1 PD Day Mass. And the children that we are responsible for should be protected from harmful messages like the Bishop’s homily. The PD committee members do not think it would be appropriate for Bishop Hector Vila, nor any of the priests of the diocese, to address the students or staff of the three Catholic schools until there is some sort of reconciliation process between the Catholic schools and the diocese. Trust has been broken and it needs to be rebuilt.”

So, Deputy Chair, the reason why I’m bringing this up is because, for the last two times the Department of Education has been up, I have been asking about reconciliation.

How do we support educators from the Catholic schools who feel that the trust has been broken not just between them but with the diocese? I am wondering what the path forward is.

The educators reached out to the superintendents. This letter is to superintendents. They followed the process. Weeks ago when I was at the Holy Family Elementary School Council meeting, teachers again said that no reconciliation or acknowledgement of the May 2023 PD day had ever happened. The Mass was mandatory and was part of the day. It was not optional, so the teachers still want to know what protects them as Yukon government employees. Why hasn’t there been a response from the Department of Education or Yukon government?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you to the member opposite for the discussion. In our last debates, I had stated that we were digging deeper, of course, into this matter and moving to work

through archived files. I just want to be clear that, while there have been no formal workplace health and safety complaints or concerns documented, in continuing to thoroughly review archived files from previous employees, the department located a letter signed by some of the members of the Catholic professional development committee, the teacher committee that organized the May 1, 2023 professional development day. That was sent in May 2023. Both recipients of the letter have moved on from the office of the superintendents, which is why those files are archived, and so we have been digging in. I definitely take these matters very seriously. As we continue to work through this, we certainly will have more to say.

With renewed awareness of these concerns, the Department of Education, of course, takes these concerns and previous complaints from 2023 very seriously. The department is following their established human resources processes to review the matter and address the concerns raised by some of the committee members.

We are looking into the past correspondence of these former employees to identify if any further follow-up or action is needed. The last time we debated this, I was asked if we would meet with these educators and those who brought forward these concerns. I can assure the member opposite that these matters are being followed up on and that we will certainly work toward reconciliation, as noted. Senior staff will certainly be working as part of that process. There is more to look into here, and I am happy to bring information forward as I can and as appropriate on this matter.

I had planned, in fact, to correspond directly with the member opposite regarding this and I will still do that.

Ms. White: The reason why I just can’t drop this is that the letter was sent in 2023, and I can understand that there has been a staffing change and we are not going to talk about that, but if the staffing change didn’t happen on May 17, 2023, something should have happened. There should have been follow-up, because this is still affecting teachers today, and it is still a conversation I have with teachers today.

I appreciate looking through the historic stuff to see if anything happened, but what I would suggest — what I would encourage — is that, regardless of what did or did not happen in 2023, an invitation be sent out to teachers that this conversation happened. The fact that I’m reading a letter from 2023 — and I heard about this a couple of weeks ago at a school council meeting and it’s still an issue. I am hoping that really what happens is that a meeting is set. Then the Department of Education can hear from the teachers themselves about how they felt and how they still feel, how they feel that they are not protected by the SOGI policy as staff members, how they feel that they have to defend themselves, and how they feel they have to be in the umbrella for their students. My hope is that this is what will happen. It won’t be looking back in the past, but it will be looking forward into the future.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Absolutely, there will be action, and it is important to understand what has happened and where we are today and where we are going, how we are moving forward. That will be how this is actioned — and certainly committed, as always, to the SOGI policy. We have taken steps to update

that policy; we are actively reviewing it now as we move into the future. It is absolutely a policy that I stand behind, as the Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate and the Education minister, and work that our government supports.

We will continue to strengthen those policies and ensure that they are adhered to, because they are in place for a very good reason. We certainly want to make sure that all of our policies are followed and respected. They are in place to help guide our education system. Again, we stand behind those policies, and we want to strengthen them. I look forward to more action around this and happy to share aspects of that as appropriate with the member opposite.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that.

I want to move on. We have talked about this and we have touched on this before, but we have more time today, so I want to go back to the 1962 Catholic schools agreement, particularly around clause 7, which says that the Department of Education will pay for education and that the Catholic diocese will pay for religious things. I am taking that to mean books. I am also taking that to mean the education of — for example, religious education.

We talked about this a bit before. The minister told me that Catholic educators, the ones doing the religious education, taught other things. I know that, in briefings, I can ask if a teacher, for example, at F.H. Collins — if different parts of their day are for different classes. I am interested to know: Of the Catholic school educators, the Catholic education, the religious education, what percentage of those positions is religious teachings?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The 1962 agreement has been in place for over 60 years. As with many historical agreements, some processes have evolved over time. However, the Department of Education remains committed to upholding the spirit and intent of the agreement, providing high-quality public education while respecting the religious values of the Catholic community.

Like all public schools in Yukon, Catholic schools sometimes have a change in fees or certain programs that enhance a student's learning experience. The Government of Yukon supports Catholic schools by covering the costs of educational materials, including funding for Catholic religion coordinators, while the Catholic Episcopal Corporation provides religious instruction and training.

For Christ the King Elementary School, there is an assigned 0.5 position; Holy Family Elementary School has a 0.3 position; and St. Francis of Assisi secondary school has one FTE. So, there is a total of 1.8 FTEs that are provided. The Government of Yukon provides operational support for Catholic schools, including facilities and staffing, while the corporation maintains the religious and ethical components of Catholic education.

I will just stop there and wait for another question.

Ms. White: So, that 1.8 FTE who is teaching religious education, is that 1.8 FTE — is that funding coming from the Department of Education?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The Government of Yukon continues to honour the commitment made in the 1962 agreement by providing separate schools for Catholic students. This ensures that families across the territory have access to education that aligns with their religious and cultural values.

Separate Catholic schools receive equal financial support and resources as other Yukon public schools. The Department of Education is dedicated to fairness and equity in ensuring that all students receive high-quality education while respecting diverse faith traditions.

Again, the 1962 agreement with the Catholic Episcopal Corporation has now been in place for over 60 years. Understandably, some practices have evolved over time. The department regularly reviews the education materials in Catholic schools to ensure that they meet Yukon curriculum standards, including alignment with SOGI policy, while respecting the religious considerations.

Schools across the Yukon — both Catholic and non-Catholic — may change fees for certain program enhancements that enrich student learning. The Department of Education regularly reviews these fees as well.

At this time, as I have stated, the Government of Yukon is covering the costs of these positions. Again, the agreement and the application of this agreement have evolved over time. I believe that folks are working toward ensuring that there is equitable access among schools within the territory. I am certainly digging deeper into how things have evolved over time. This work is ongoing with the department and has been for some time.

Ms. White: So, clause 7 of that 1962 agreement — I am going to read it. Clause 7(1) says: "The Corporation shall be responsible for instructing and training the pupils attending separate schools established by the Government of the Yukon Territory pursuant to section 2 of this agreement in the Roman Catholic religion and morality and for this purpose will provide at no cost to the Government of the Yukon Territory all necessary instructors, religious books, whether hymn, prayer or otherwise, sacred objects and all other religious accessories appointments, furnishings and paraphernalia."

Can the minister help me understand how the Yukon government paying for religious education is in respect to clause 7 of the 1962 agreement? Can the minister help me understand how clause 7 and the Yukon government paying for that 1.8 FTE — how those two work together?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The 1962 agreement has been in place for over 60 years. As with many historic agreements, some processes have evolved over time.

As we work to review the 1962 agreement, we certainly are digging into those records and may be able to shed more light on when and how this evolved to be what it is today.

Our department continues to remain committed to children who are attending our schools — all schools — so this has been the focus: continuing to put children at the centre of education in our territory, which is what we need to be doing. We are reviewing and looking at the evolution of this agreement and how it came to be as it is today. There is a lot of complex material that is being reviewed. I am happy to bring more

information about that as I receive it through the work that is being done right now by the Department of Education.

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

I guess that, even through she keeps telling me that processes evolve over time, it seems clearly against what section 7 is. So, maybe the minister can tell me how long the Yukon government has been paying for religious education teachers. Has it gone back since 1962? Has it been the entire time since 2016, when her government took over? If I can get an approximation of how long the Yukon government has been paying for religious education.

Hon. Ms. McLean: We are looking at the span of the agreement. This goes back 60 years. I am sure that the member can appreciate that things have evolved. We have introduced new laws and new legislation along the way, so we are digging into all of that. I am happy to bring back information as I receive it and to share the findings of the review of the historic 1962 agreement.

Ms. White: Can the minister tell me if, in her tenure as Minister of Education, if the Department of Education has been paying for religious education?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, based on the work that is happening right now within the Department of Education, at this point, we have gone back to 2006, and this way that Catholic education has been funded goes back to a minimum of that period. We are continuing to work backward from 2006 to obtain more information about how Catholic education under the 1962 agreement has evolved since then.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. So, 2006 — that's a long time. That's a really long time, to be perfectly frank. I ask this because when — so, 18 years, if we go to 2024 — and I picked a number nicely in the middle. I picked a number — the teacher pay grid — let's say five years of experience in category 4. So, I said \$105,000 a year. So, that at 1.8 is — let's say — \$185,000. That is just roughly \$3.3 million that the Yukon government has been paying for the teaching of religious education, which — like, I am floored — I am floored, because when I read the 1962 agreement — if the 1962 agreement sets all of this in place and lines this all up for us and it tells us what the expectations are, including following government policies, including following Department of Education rules and guidelines, to know that \$3.3 million — again, this is just an estimate here on a calculator — has been funded is a lot.

I appreciate that the minister is going backward, even from 2006, but again, I am just trying to understand how \$3.3 million of Yukon citizens' funding to pay for education from the most well-to-do religious establishment in the world — how does that jive with section 7 of the 1962 agreement — \$3.3 million minimum. How does that work with section 7 of the 1962 agreement?

Hon. Ms. McLean: We are reviewing the 1962 agreement, working our way backward to determine when, where, and how — based on the records that we have available to us — the evolution of this agreement — and again, many laws and agreements, collective agreements, all of which have come into place at different times during that historic view of

Catholic schools in the Yukon. The Department of Education and the Catholic Episcopal Corporation work together to create a unique, inclusive environment in Yukon schools. We continue to have regular meetings between the department and the corporation. This provides a forum for discussions on shared priorities, identifying challenges, and exploring collaborative solutions.

I have talked about the protocols that we have in place between the Yukon Department of Education and the Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Whitehorse — currently have in place, along with the priority levels for protocol development. These protocols support both the Department of Education and the Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Whitehorse around roles and responsibilities. Those protocols are around communication, staffing, curriculum and instruction materials, funding for religious instruction, professional development, and development of policy. Those are the areas where we are working together toward the establishment of work under each of those areas.

This is a historic agreement over 60 years in existence. It was certainly in place long before I was born, and we are continuing to do this review to look at how the agreement has evolved over time. Happy to bring that information forward when that is available to us.

Ms. White: Does the Department of Education pay for any religious textbooks, any reading material, or any other items that are of the Roman Catholic religion? Do they pay for anything else beyond the religious education teachers?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Government of Yukon supports Catholic schools by covering the cost of education materials related to curriculum.

Ms. White: Just to clarify: so, no religious affiliations, no religious textbooks, no Bibles, no reading material — just the Department of Education curriculum.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Happy to bring back more detailed information around those materials.

Ms. White: I appreciate the minister's commitment for that.

Again, I'm going to refer to section 7 of that 1962 agreement, because within that, it says the Yukon government won't pay for religious books "... whether hymn, prayer or otherwise, sacred objects and all other religious accessories appointments, furnishings or paraphernalia." It also says that the Yukon government won't pay for the instruction of them — the Roman Catholic religion. I'm just interested to know what part the Yukon government is following — whether it's not the accessories — because I know that, based on that kind of \$3.3 million approximation, that we're certainly paying for the education of the Roman Catholic religion, so I do look forward to hearing back from the minister on that.

There was an article in the *Yukon News* in 2013 — well, there were a lot of articles in 2013, to be honest — in March, and it was because, at the time, a student at Vanier — their locker was vandalized with a slur across it, and it was just left there for days until it was finally covered by a teacher. It was terrible — it was a terrible time, but that's when questions around Catholic school funding really started to come up and,

like, the responsibilities, the roles, and the obligations of both the Department of Education and the Catholic diocese.

At the time, the Minister of Education was actually a member who is currently in this Assembly, and he actually wrote a letter to the bishop at the time restating the roles and obligations of the diocese in following the Department of Education's directions and policies.

I am wondering if the minister has done anything similar to reiterate what that relationship is supposed to be between the Catholic diocese and the Department of Education.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Certainly, there have been communications with the Episcopal Corporation and the bishop regarding Catholic education. Happy to bring back information about that specific correspondence. I don't have that detail with me today, but I am happy to do that.

Ms. White: I do appreciate the conversation with the minister. I know that none of this is easy on any side, to be perfectly frank. I know that, in the media, the minister said that if I was so intent on defunding Catholic education, I should have included it in the confidence and supply agreement. I would remind the minister that was something that had to be negotiated, and I would have to have had a willing partner on the other side or that it should have been in the 2021 election platform. I heard what was said. I think that Yukon is in a place right now wanting to have a conversation, and so I am just going to reference an article from March 27, 2023 from the *Yukon News*. I am going to read portions of it — and I quote: “The Yukon government could get rid of religious school funding without amending either the Yukon Act or the Education Act.

“It would have to end a 51-year agreement with the Catholic Episcopal Corporation that was signed in 1962 when the corporation sold two of its private schools — Christ the King Elementary and Christ the King high school — to the Yukon, and the Department of Education began running them with public money.

“That agreement — and not the Yukon Act or the Education Act — provides the government's obligation to fund Catholic schools, explained Tom Ullyett, assistant deputy minister for the Department of Justice.

“The Education Act also doesn't explicitly protect separate funding. It only refers to the 1962 agreement, saying that it is still in effect. If there was to be a change in funding, the parties — I'll say the minister and the bishop, but formally it is the commissioner and the Episcopal corporation — would have to go to that agreement and use that as their basis for discussions about funding”, Ullyett said.

“The Yukon Act does mention a separate school system for the territory, but not a publicly funded one. The act says that religious minority ‘ratepayers’ may set up their own school system — whether Catholic or Protestant — but they would have to pay for it themselves. That hasn't been happening since the early 1900s, when the Yukon government first started giving grants to the Catholic Church to run its schools.

“The Yukon Act, you can just sort of push that aside because it describes a model of funding that hasn't been in place

since modern times, and of course it's an act of Parliament, and so on,” Ullyett said.

“Like most agreements, the 1962 document does not provide terms that give either party the power to unilaterally end the agreement. Ullyett compared the agreement to a rental contract.

“Generally speaking, though, with any contract, if there has been a fundamental breach of the contract, generally under contract law that does allow one party to say, ‘OK, the agreement is over...’

“A fundamental breach isn't a simple disagreement or even a violation of the contract. Ullyett explained that a fundamental breach would be something that goes right to the core intent of the document. He would not speculate about what might constitute a fundamental breach in this case. He did say that the 1962 agreement contains commitments by both parties to abide by all territorial and federal laws.

“Those are two pretty important clauses. The parties have agreed between them that they will observe the laws, whether it's federal laws like the Human Rights Act or the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, or whether it's decisions of the courts. This is what (Education Minister...)” — was referring to and — “... that the church's policy has to be on-side with the law because that's what they agreed to in 1962 and he wants to make sure that that is still the case. Those are important clauses in the agreement, there's no question about it...”

The reason why I'm bringing this up is that it turns out that — like a lot of thought, a lot of us believed — it was the *Yukon Act*, which, of course, is federal legislation, but it really goes back to this 1962 agreement. This 1962 agreement, in clause 7, says that “The Corporation shall be responsible for instructing and training the pupils attending separate schools established by the Government of the Yukon Territory pursuant to section 2 of this agreement in the Roman Catholic religion...” and that it should be “... at no cost to the Government of the Yukon Territory...”

That is a really big deal — that is a huge deal — to know that, since 2006, for sure, Yukoners have been paying for religious education, to know that, in 2013 when all of this was going down, they were paying for the religious education that forced a student out of school.

I'm prepared to have this conversation; I've been having it publicly — very publicly — on the radio and other places. I guess I want to know if the minister is ready to have this conversation and if her government is ready to have this conversation.

Hon. Ms. McLean: There are four sections in the 1962 agreement that are most relevant, I think, to the discussion.

Section 5(1): “The Commissioner shall, before engaging any teacher for a separate school established pursuant to section 2 of this agreement consult with the Corporation with a view to obtaining the Corporation's approval...” This is in relation to the teacher's suitability.

Then there is section 2: “The Corporation shall undertake programs...” — or actually, maybe I'll just skip over to: Under the *Education Act*, the key provision related to the Catholic schools is section 57, which states: “All rights and privileges

arising out of the *Yukon Act* (Canada), any agreement or understanding between the Commissioner of the Yukon Territory or the Minister and the Catholic Episcopal Corporation shall be respected and continued under this Act and any regulations passed thereunder.”

So, as we know, there has been a lot of change along the way and different regulations have come into place. There have been some amendments to the act and certainly a new act that came into place in 1990.

Then, under section 82(3), it states: “For the election of trustees of a School Board or members of a Council that is established on the basis of religion pursuant to the rights referred to in section 57, only those persons who are recognized by the Catholic Episcopal Corporation may vote in the election.”

As I have stated today, I hope that the member takes away from this debate today that we certainly are digging into the history of the agreement and how it has evolved over time. I want to, of course, understand how those changes happened along the way — certainly not changes that I have made, nor the former Minister of Education under our government. So, we are certainly looking back at the history of this agreement and happy to bring back more information as I obtain it. I’m committed to understanding this.

I certainly have received correspondence from folks whose children attend Catholic school and have made a very conscious decision for them to be part of the Catholic school system. Parents and guardians, upon application to the Catholic school, have to agree with the mission statement and the statement of values and beliefs of the Catholic school of Whitehorse. School admission is prioritized: first for children who are baptized Roman Catholic, then for siblings of students who are already enrolled in the Catholic school system, and then for non-Catholic children whose parents or guardians support the Catholic school mission statement. So, that is part of the consideration for children to be enrolled in those schools, and we do have three schools under this agreement: the Christ the King Elementary School, the St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Secondary — those two schools were part of the original agreement, and the only new school that was added was Holy Family Elementary School in Porter Creek.

Ms. White: I appreciate that the minister brought up clause 5.1 of the 1962 agreement, because I actually have clarification questions around that.

Previously, a teacher could get a letter of support from, for example, their home jurisdiction, from the bishop at their home congregation, in support of their ability to teach within the Catholic religion. My understanding is that this practice has changed and only letters are accepted now from the Whitehorse diocese.

Can the minister confirm or elaborate on that?

Hon. Ms. McLean: In terms of this section 5, the section outlines the teacher hiring process for separate schools established under section 2. It says the Commissioner shall consult with the Catholic Episcopal Corporation before hiring any teacher to ensure their suitability for teaching in a Catholic environment, with a view to obtain the corporation’s approval.

The corporation is tasked with running recruitment programs for teachers, including principals and vice-principals, and recommending candidates to the Commissioner as needed. Teachers can be either members of the Catholic teaching order or competent lay teachers to minimize — and this is all within the section, so it may not pertain exactly to the question, but I wanted just to say what this section covers. It also is to minimize accommodation costs, and the Commissioner must prioritize hiring qualified lay teachers already residing in the community where the teaching vacancy exists, balancing cost efficiencies and the need for appropriate staff. Again, laws and agreements that may be in place around the collective agreement — other things may change some of that, given the modern context.

The Government of Yukon works closely with the Catholic Episcopal Corporation to ensure that teachers hired for Catholic schools meet the specific needs and values of the Catholic educational environment. The Catholic Episcopal Corporation actively participates on hiring panels for Catholic school administrators, ensuring that preference is given to qualified candidates who are practising members of the Catholic faith. The Government of Yukon recognizes teachers, principals, and vice-principals as public servants and unionized employees represented by the Yukon Association of Education Professionals. Their rights and working conditions are fully respected through this hiring process.

The department hires educators based on merit and professional qualifications, ensuring that all staff meet the high educational standards required across Yukon schools. Teachers of religion are integral members of the school system and may teach a variety of subjects, including language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, in addition to religious education. They are hired through the *Education Act* and are employees of the Department of Education, ensuring that they meet the same high standards of qualification and professionalism as all teachers in our schools. Educators in Catholic schools professionally navigate Yukon curriculum requirements, including the sexual orientation and gender identity policy, in a manner that respects both Catholic teachings and the diverse needs of the students. The department appreciates the commitment, of course, of educators to creating safe, inclusive learning environments while honouring the unique mission of Catholic education.

In terms of the specific question, applicants can provide a pastoral reference of their choice, and that is integrated into the hiring process.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for helping me get the right terminology — so, a pastoral reference. Are pastoral references from out-of-territory or from different congregations being accepted, or are only pastoral references from the current bishop in the Yukon being accepted?

Hon. Ms. McLean: It is our understanding that it is of their choice, but we will verify around the other jurisdictions.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that and, of course, the commitments to get back with some of the answers that we didn’t have here.

I am just going to assure the minister and her officials that I am only going to ask these questions during supplementary. When we get to the mains, I am going to focus on the mains. I just want to thank the minister for the engagement today. I think it's important. I know that she is committed to reconciliation with the educators, and I appreciate that very much.

I believe that can go a long way to healing the pain that many of them are feeling right now, so I thank her for her time today and the time with her officials.

Hon. Ms. McLean: These roles sometimes bring debates around areas that are sensitive and impact a lot of people, so I very much take my role in this seriously. I have certainly always been committed to restorative practices and reconciliation on all levels, so I am happy to be able to work in that way, and certainly, that is the level of discussion that we are having at the department level.

Thank you very much for the debate today. It certainly brings more insight for me in terms of where we need to go around this review that is underway. I am happy, as I have stated, to share information as it becomes available to me. I too would like to thank our deputy minister, Mary Cameron, and assistant deputy, Ash Kayseas, for their time today, and to all of the department officials who are supporting behind the scenes, thank you very much.

Chair (Ms. Blake): Is there any further general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education?

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

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 3, Department of Education, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 3, Department of Education, cleared or carried

Chair: The Member for Takhini-Kopper King has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 3, Department of Education, 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 \$17,478,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures underexpenditure in the amount of \$5,519,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$11,959,000 agreed to

Department of Education agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-2025*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Committee will recess for 15 minutes.

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Department of Health and Social Services

Deputy Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Deputy Chair, I am pleased to be here this afternoon to speak about the second supplementary budget for the 2024-25 fiscal year for the Department of Health and Social Services. I am joined by Deputy Minister Matt King, immediately to my right, and also by the director of Finance, Melanie Wallace, just to his right.

I also think listening would be our new Assistant Deputy Minister of Corporate Services, Gurmam Rai, and I want to welcome him. This would be the first time that he's in this role, as we are presenting a budget here today.

I am really pleased to provide this important update on the steps that we are taking to enhance our Health and Social Services systems and to respond to the issues and the priorities of Yukoners. I acknowledge the tremendous work of everyone at the Department of Health and Social Services, the Yukon Hospital Corporation, and health and social professionals across the system. I certainly want to take this opportunity to thank them. They work so closely with our officials at Health and Social Services to craft all budgets but certainly this supplementary budget, which brings us here today.

I would particularly like to acknowledge the hard work of our front-line health care staff. They all work difficult and demanding long hours and in complex jobs to help keep Yukoners healthy and well. Each day, their efforts are ensuring that Yukoners have access to essential services and programs.

The Department of Health and Social Services second supplementary operation and maintenance budget, if passed, will bring the 2024-25 mains to \$674.8 million. This represents an increase of 4.3 percent over the 2024-25 first supplementary estimate. We're also presenting a revised capital estimate of \$15.4 million, which is an increase of \$2.3 million compared to the 2024-25 first supplementary estimate.

This includes more funding for the new mental wellness unit at Whitehorse General Hospital as well as increased capital maintenance funding for the Yukon Hospital Corporation.

The increase of \$28.1 million in operation and maintenance funding will support the department in meeting the rising costs associated with meeting the needs of our growing and aging population. Our government is providing additional funding of \$13 million for insured health services. We are responding to the growth in areas such as chronic disease and disability benefits, medical travel, physician claims, and out-of-territory hospital claims. Some of these costs are related to our programs to make medical care more accessible. The medical travel subsidy increases each year with inflation. In 2024-25, it was \$174 for overnight and \$88 for

same-day travel, more than double what it was in 2020. We were also pleased to add travel for fertility treatment and surrogacy to medical travel last November, allowing Yukoners to grow their families when and how they wish and to have support to do so.

In the coming months, you will begin to see new health care cards arrive in your mailbox, and we are modernizing the cards that Yukoners use to access services. These new cards are more secure, convenient, and inclusive.

We are expanding our commitment to land-based healing. This supplementary budget includes an increase of \$264,000 for Shāwthān Nāzhì: Healing with the Land Society for their programs. This means more treatment for intergenerational trauma, for grief, for families, and for holistic First Nation healing programs.

In response to the ongoing substance use health emergency, we have allotted a further \$1.3 million for life-saving Naloxone kits. We are providing \$579,000 for the Canadian Mental Health Association, Yukon division, and this allows them to continue to offer counselling appointments with extended hours for walk-in and phone-based appointments. The supplementary estimate includes increases for legislated grants that make life more affordable for low-income Yukoners.

There is an increase of \$3.5 million for social assistance. In addition to basic social assistance, we offer the supplementary allowance, social work supports, connection to employment and training programs, and approval-based prescription drug coverage. There is also an increase of \$300,000 for the pioneer utility grant. This fund goes toward helping seniors with the cost of heating their homes.

Our government is working with partners to address the staff shortages experienced across the health care sector. In December 2023, the *Health Human Resources Strategy* was released. It includes 25 actions under the topics of: retain, recruit, plan, innovate, and learn. In addition to system-wide efforts to recruit and retain health care professionals, we are providing an additional \$2 million for more staffing at Emergency Medical Services. We are adding staff to both ground and air ambulances. This will help to ensure that Yukoners continue to receive the fastest possible assistance when they are faced with a medical emergency.

Deputy Chair, we work in close partnership with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to advance our shared priorities. We are united in our focus to ensuring that Yukoners have access to services and programs that they require. In this second supplementary estimate for 2024-25, we are providing an increase of \$1.5 million in O&M funding and \$3.7 million in capital funding for Yukon hospital services. This increase has enabled the Yukon Hospital Corporation to replace equipment as well as respond to staffing and operational needs.

Once again, I want to thank everyone at the Department of Health and Social Services and all of our health system partners for the work that they do each and every day to support Yukoners. Yukon, like all jurisdictions in Canada, faces many challenges when it comes to health care delivery. We continue to work together across the system to bring more stability and capacity.

This second supplementary estimate for 2024-25 reflects our government's ongoing commitment to Yukoners. I look forward to answering any questions about the second supplementary estimate for Health and Social Services.

Mr. Cathers: Thank you, Deputy Chair, and I would like to thank officials as well for being here today and for the information that the minister provided in her introductory comments.

I would note, as it comes down to Yukon Hospital Corporation funding, as the minister will know, that we remain concerned about the lack of adequate funding and note that, even with the amount provided in this supplementary estimate in the revised vote, if this is approved here in this Assembly, would still be less than what the hospital's actual costs were in the fiscal year that wrapped up last March, as the minister well-knows.

I want to ask about the interruption of surgeries caused by the sterilization equipment failure at Whitehorse General Hospital. Could the minister tell us how many surgeries have been either cancelled or delayed as a result of that, and can the minister let us know what has been done to determine the cause to date and if that cause has been determined? Looking at information that we have seen from Yukon Hospital's posts on social media, as of March 14, they noted — and I quote from that post: "Our teams continue work to restore on-site surgical instrument cleaning and sterilization." It further goes on to note — quote: "... there has been an impact on many Yukoners experiencing uncertainty, disruption or delay in care."

Also, a service alert shared with staff and physicians at the hospital corporation, which has been passed on to us from March 19, notes — quote: "Our teams are working with continued urgency to restore on-site cleaning and sterilization." It further notes — quote: "Restoring on-site service continues to be a top priority."

Again, the question is: Do they know what the cause is yet? If not, does the minister have a sense of when they will? We have heard some reports that there may have been requests to replace this piece of equipment prior to this or upgrade the system. That is something that I have had patients contact me and advise me that they have been told that — what I would ask is: Can the minister confirm or clarify that this is correct? Were the requests made by the hospital or hospital employees to replace the sterilization equipment prior to this problem? If so, how far back do any such requests date? Of course, the point of my question is wondering whether this was an avoidable problem if indeed there were requests for upgrades — when were those requests made and what is happening currently?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think that I can comment on a few things. Of course, this is the responsibility of the Yukon Hospital Corporation and there are some details being asked about that I don't have, but I can advise that, first, with respect to the 2023-24 funding prior to this budget, which is the supplementary for 2024-25, that there were a number of items in the 2023-24 budget that were one-time funding expenses and, as a result, they did not appear in the 2024-25 budget for the Hospital Corporation overall.

In 2022-23, there was a deficit of \$7.6 million to the Hospital Corporation and that was adjusted in the 2024-25 budget. O&M was used for capital, and that was the issue that we are well aware of — of capital. There was also an expense of pension solvency of \$2.3 million and a capital expense of \$936,000, so a total of \$10.8 million of one-time expenses, which do not appear in 2024-25. As a result, comparing those figures is not a good exercise, because 2023-24 included some one-time expenses that were not included in the mains in 2024-25.

With respect to the surgical instrument sterilization, I do not have numbers about how many surgeries were delayed. What I can say is that the first week was very difficult as the Hospital Corporation sorted out what was happening and what the plan would be to adjust. But in subsequent weeks to the first week, approximately 90 percent of the planned surgeries were completed. All emergency surgeries, of course, were prioritized, and they were completed. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the team at the Hospital Corporation for their efforts to stabilize acute care services while also responding to equipment issues related to the sterilization of surgical tools. Recognizing the complexity of the problems, the team at the hospital has developed redundancies while they are working to diagnose and to take action to fix the equipment issues. The Hospital Corporation has purchased more surgical sets and is expanding on-site sterile storage capacity. They have also established a protocol for out-of-hospital equipment sterilization and have implemented that approach. In the meantime, the team continues to employ experts, engineers, and the manufacturer and all necessary support to identify and resolve the problems. The efforts of the Yukon Hospital Corporation staff have really been amazing to help to reduce and minimize the impacts of the surgical wait-lists.

All emergency procedures, as I have noted, were happening. Hospital schedulers were working furiously to rebook patients as soon as possible, and the Yukon Hospital Corporation is committed to working with hospital staff and physicians to plan to make up any of the impacts both on their schedules as well as patients' schedules.

They are actively developing plans to ensure that all surgeries are caught up once the equipment situation has been fully resolved. Health and Social Services continues to support the hospital as requested, and this has included collaboration through the incident management team — quality and infection control support — to work with the team to meet the requests.

The Whitehorse General Hospital reports that they continue to work with external experts to try to pinpoint the root cause of the issue. It was detected in February 2025. The priority has been to preserve emergency surgery capacity, of course, and the Whitehorse General Hospital team partnered with Vancouver General Hospital to develop a protocol of supports, sending instruments out of territory to be sterilized and for, as I've noted, some additional purchases.

I can also indicate that it is the case that some equipment that is provided and used in relation to these activities at the hospital was ordered before this situation occurred, but it's clear from the reports that we have from the Yukon Hospital

Corporation that they still need to determine how that equipment could — or if it will — resolve the issues that have presented themselves.

I can also note that there is a \$4.1-million budget in 2024-25 for capital maintenance between core and capital items in the Yukon Hospital Corporation budget. This is planned to be \$4.2 million in capital maintenance in the hospital budget that will be debated with respected to 2025-26.

Mr. Cathers: I appreciate the information. The minister made reference to equipment that had been ordered for sterilization at the Whitehorse General Hospital. Could she provide a little more information about what that equipment is? I am not an expert on the system that is involved there, but I would appreciate if the minister could describe whether it is a replacement to the whole system or a part of it or what exactly has been ordered and what the expected timelines of delivery and installation are.

Secondly, the minister will not be surprised that I have questions about the status of the surgical services renewal project, which is, of course, to expand the surgical services area of Whitehorse General Hospital as well as add more bed space. The minister knows that it was presented to the current government over six years ago and called an "urgent need" by the Yukon Medical Association four years ago, next month, in April 2021.

I am pleased that, under pressure, the government has finally agreed to allocate some funding to move forward this project, which was collecting dust, since it is very much even more of an urgent need now than it was when the Yukon Medical Association called it that four years ago.

Could the minister tell us what the timelines are for the project as well as provide information about what the scope of it and location are? Specifically, I am referring to where it is located, the approximate size of both the surgical services area upgrade and the addition of bed space, and the envisioned number of beds that will be provided within that project. If the minister could provide that information, it would be appreciated.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question. I am afraid I do not have details with respect to what equipment — I probably wouldn't be qualified to describe it in any event.

I probably should have said at the end of the last question that further enquiries can, of course, be made to the Hospital Corporation to determine the kinds of details that are asked about.

Certainly, there is a sterilization system, and on the week that we were aware of it — that the Hospital Corporation was aware of it — it was not properly getting some residue off of the instruments and therefore they needed to be redone. Clearly, they took quick action.

So, I won't say more about that, because I'm not aware.

I can note, with respect to the Whitehorse General Hospital surgical services, that the program has been operated here in the territory at the Whitehorse General Hospital since 1951. There is a proud legacy of work that has been done here in the territory to frankly save people's lives — often emergency-style surgeries prior to more regularly scheduled general surgery and

orthopaedics. The infrastructure, however, has not seen a significant upgrade since 1997. Other factors, such as the Yukon's growing and aging population and the evolution of surgical standards, of course, impact all of that.

A need to meet modern standards and the work to support Yukoners' access to services that are closer to home, of course, have had an impact on the health system and surgical planning.

Back in 2012 — I think is what is being referred to — the Hospital Corporation developed a strategic master plan. The plan identified capital development needs through 2035, including a new surgical wing and additional inpatient beds as priorities. The priority need was stated to be the third priority after the implementation of a new emergency department and a mental wellness unit.

The emergency department was completed in 2018. The mental wellness unit is on track to open in June 2025 — just in a few months from now. We're very pleased about that.

In keeping with the master plan, the Yukon Hospital Corporation conducted long-term planning related to future needs of surgical services in Whitehorse in 2019. That resulted in the surgical services renewal project report. This is a large, complex, long-term planning initiative with a five- to seven-year time horizon. A needs assessment and high-level functional services program were completed with engagement of surgeons, other physicians, surgical nursing, and support staff. Planning included consideration of the current and rapidly changing quality standards.

Of course, since that time, the Government of Yukon and the people of the Yukon have gone through a world pandemic. There has been a huge increase in population. There has been an aging population, which we, of course, and everyone could see coming.

If you were a babyboomer or a family with babyboomers, you would know that eventually those folks are going to hit retirement age and often require more medical care, and there are increasing complexities to medical care. As a result, our government has taken upon itself to further investigate the needs of an entire health and social services system infrastructure study. We expect the results of that study in the late spring of 2025, perhaps near the time that the mental wellness unit is opening. The work to be done there will provide us with the necessary knowledge to again work with professionals in the medical field and the surgical services teams and consult with them further to move a plan forward for an integrative, collaborative, and patient-centred surgical services program providing excellent, efficient, and safe ambulatory daycare and inpatient surgeries. We look forward to that. The work will continue following that report coming to us. We will work with the teams going forward and also take into account the advice given in the reports that have come before now.

Work is ongoing with the orthopaedic group to determine how to best support the staff and the patients given the rising demand for orthopaedic surgeries. This includes investment in increasing the number of total knee and total hip replacement surgeries completed each year. Strategies to support staff recruitment and retention include efforts made to recruit, retain,

and develop operating room registered nurses from within through a mentorship program — so, growing that skill set here in the territory. These efforts have been successful. Currently, there is only one vacant nursing position within surgical services. Interim plans implemented to better support the service and the staff through extension of resourced surgical hours — staff are regularly scheduled later in the day, which decreases the use of overtime resources and the risk of staff burnout. Surgical hours were recently expanded, along with the surgical staff increases, to establish the operations of the operating room and reduce pressures on staff. These are all actions that have been taken in the interim, Deputy Chair, with respect to providing better service, more expansive service, and more responsive service for Yukoners.

While nobody is interested in sitting here with numbers that do not change or plans that aren't responsive to the needs of Yukoners while we consider infrastructure needs and how those will come forward or be in the planning stages — which is a number of years out — we need to respond now to make sure that services are meeting the needs of Yukoners as best we can. That work has continued and will continue as we work to receive the report and assess the overall needs of health infrastructure here in the territory.

Mr. Cathers: Early last year, the resident orthopaedic surgeons announced that they had stopped taking non-urgent referrals for joint procedures. Then later in the year, one surgeon left, citing a lack of funding. Can the minister tell me, to begin with, what the wait time is for orthopaedic surgeries, specifically for hip and knee procedures as well as other orthopaedic surgery? Can the minister provide us with what the cost has been of sending people Outside to other hospitals for orthopaedic surgeries and the number of patients sent out since last April following that announcement by the local surgeons? Also, if the minister could provide us with an update on the current cardiac wait times, the current MRI wait times, and the mammography wait times as well as the number of mammography screenings being done per week.

Finally, just grouping my questions together to give the minister and officials time to pull the answers together, can the minister provide us with an update on the status of the health authority project, the timelines, and also indicate what payments are being made to other entities this year in relation to it? If I understand it correctly, there is a transfer payment to CYFN. Can the minister explain what that is for and the cost — and I believe another transfer to a contractor who I think is called the Health Innovation Group — please correct me if I have the name wrong. What was the process for the awarding of that contract, what is the cost, and what are the timelines and work associated with that work being done by the contractor?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Deputy Chair, there is quite a bit of information being asked for there, so I am going to go, hopefully, quite quickly. With respect to wait times on hospital surgeries, hip fracture repair in the territory is based on clinical assessment alongside the Hospital Corporation's urgent surgical bookings guideline. The orthopaedic program aims to perform surgeries within six months. As of November 2024,

the wait time for hip surgery is 12 months, and knee surgery is closer to 18 months.

With respect to cardiology, wait times in the territory are approximately six months. For cardiology services, obviously things that are of concern are dealt with on an emergency basis. Cardiologists triage patients and prioritize based on urgency. Patients can be sent out of territory as needed.

As of December 2024, annual and high-risk screening mammograms are being completed within 14 months, with the goal of 12 months. Routine screening mammograms are completed within 27 months, with the goal of completion every 24 months.

MRI wait times are as follows: Urgent MRI cases are aimed to be supported within seven days and are completed within this target. Semi-urgent MRI cases are aimed to be supported as close to within 30 days as possible. As of December 31, 2024, semi-urgent exams are being completed within 36 days. Non-urgent MRI cases are aimed to be supported as close to 180 days as possible, and these are being completed within 119 days as of December 2024.

I think that's all that is being asked with respect to those programs. I can note as well, with respect to the wait times regarding orthopaedic surgeons, that we are working closely with that team and with doctors to determine whether or not a surgical blitz of some kind could be done where we would have focus on getting the entire team together with some extended hours and extended opportunities to work on the wait-list. We continue to do that work alongside physicians and surgical specialists.

With respect to the health authority, the Health Transformation Advisory Committee and the Chiefs Committee on Health continue to work on work plans — as does the Department of Health and Social Services — to determine priorities for the initiation of a health authority here in the territory. I can advise that I met with the Chiefs Committee on Health just — I want to say last week, but it might have been the week before — within recent days — and we talked about work plans going forward and priorities for this year. We had a very fruitful meeting.

What I can indicate is that the priorities from the work plan, developed in collaboration with the Health Transformation Advisory Committee and the Chiefs Committee on Health, involve health system mapping — so determining the current state of the health system gaps and issues that we want to address.

We will be focusing this year on development of community wellness plans with each and every community in the territory. We are working on a cultural safety framework, which is part of what is required under the health authority contemplation, and we are focusing on the determination of an interim board — the requirements for skills and assessments for what interim board members and determining if we can proceed with an interim board this year.

Lastly, with respect to the question of the Health and Wellness Yukon budget, the CYFN amount of transfer payment agreement for the Health Transformation Advisory Committee and the Chiefs Committee on Health secretariat services is

\$750,000. The Yukon Hospital Corporation has been granted in this — I will just check — 2024-25 budget or 2025-26 going forward — 2025-26. Thank you for that amount.

The Yukon Hospital Corporation also does a piece of the work for health system transformation. They have \$686,000 in their budget. The Health Innovation Group health system design focus that has been asked about, I think — I understood that to be part of the question — is a total contract for \$321,000, and it was awarded through a competitive process.

I hope that answers all the questions.

Deputy Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Is there any further general debate?

Mr. Cathers: In the last response, the minister made reference to doing a “surgical blitz” — or considering it, I should say — to deal with orthopaedic wait times. That is something that — I have heard that proposal as well from surgeons, and we look forward to hearing more about whether the government believes it can be done and, if so, when. We certainly welcome this idea of reducing the number of people on the wait-list, with the only caveat being just if it's possible to do it in a way that doesn't put too much pressure on health professionals who are already feeling overloaded right now. We do understand that there were some interesting ideas of how to actually achieve that. Again, we welcome the idea and hope that it's possible to reduce that wait-list in a way that enhances existing services without leading to too much load on any of our health professionals who are already struggling with heavy loads right now.

I also want to — also on the issue of Whitehorse General Hospital — ask the minister a few questions related to the capacity there. First of all, within — actually, I should say generally within the Yukon Hospital Corporation, including Whitehorse General Hospital and the two community hospitals in Dawson and Watson Lake — can the minister provide us with information about whether there are any departments or specific areas where they are dealing with serious staff shortages right now, and if so, what is being done to address it?

Next, with regard to hospital physician coverage, we know that the hospitalist program has struggled to provide coverage and that 75 of the 153 locums that the Yukon Medical Association was able to recruit last year were required just to keep this program operating. We understood that, in February, there were serious concerns among doctors about whether that hospital doctor coverage at Whitehorse General Hospital would potentially either collapse or have serious gaps in it during the

month of March and that a temporary solution was found to that. However, could the minister provide an update on what the government, along with the Hospital Corporation, is doing to provide a more stable model going forward, including for the month of April, to ensure that there is hospital physician coverage at Whitehorse General Hospital?

Next, on the issue of representation rights, we know that the Yukon Medical Association has been requesting the ability to represent members in contract negotiations for multiple years, including several AGMs where they have passed motions in support of that as well as recent indications that they have very strong support among the membership before moving to that model.

One thing that we have yet to receive a clear answer on from government is the question of why government can't simply just make that change through policy. We've heard suggestions of legislation that might possibly be an impediment, but when it comes to legislation, of course, the details are absolutely key to whether there is or is not a legal impediment.

So, with regard to representation rights for all physicians by the Yukon Medical Association, could the minister be specific about what legislation, if any, and what sections of the legislation prevent government from simply doing such a change through policy?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Since 2022, work has been underway to formalize the hospitalist program at Whitehorse General Hospital. In partnership with the Whitehorse General Hospital and the Hospital Corporation, the Yukon Medical Association, and our government, the hospitalist service is a dedicated roster of physicians who provide inpatient care to attached and unattached patients. If you are a patient in the hospital, it frees up the time of the primary care physicians, and the focus for a hospitalist is to provide care while in hospital.

In previous years, inpatient care was provided by family physicians supporting their own patients while in hospital in a doctor-of-the-day model, but we have modernized that program to be more of a hospitalist model. Formal program development and implementation progressed slowly, as issues related to the contract work, patient flow, and staffing had to be addressed with the medical profession. The Government of Yukon always works collaboratively with the Hospital Corporation and the Yukon Medical Association on a tripartite committee in support of quality and sustainable hospital care.

Recently, progress has been made to improve the admission process and the flow from emergency room to inpatient care and to align the Yukon with best practices across Canada.

At present, the program is heavily reliant on locum physicians, although local physicians have also signed up. We were experiencing some vacancies, as noted by the member opposite in the question. In partnership with the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the Yukon Medical Association, an enhanced compensation package and expression of interest has been shared locally and nationally. The Yukon Medical Association's active and successful recruitment has resulted in 41 locum physicians supporting the hospitalist program since

January 2024. The program will contribute to a health care system that values people and achieves overall wellness for Yukoners. We anticipate that the program will be supported with continuous availability of physicians, particularly during the daytime, and to provide inpatient care and consultation with allied health providers.

It is a model that is in transformation for the hospital. The focus is on having this program up and running. There were incentives put in place to deal with the vacancies that we had in the month of March. I can indicate that they have been successful in filling all of the vacancies.

We also, through the tripartite conversations and agreement, put forward an additional pressure-period premium, a travel day stipend for locums, and also made reference to the application of the attachment and attraction requirement so that positions could work in a hospitalist program and still maintain that availability. We allowed scheduled hospitalists to opt into additional hours to work during periods of short staffing. There was an opportunity then for all of those vacancies to be filled.

A new contract comes in place with respect to work done jointly with the Hospital Corporation for hospitalists beginning in April of 2025, so in a few days. We expect that this contract will make five lines available for those individuals. That is how doctors are scheduled, but for those individuals who work in the hospitalist program, we expect that will solve many of the issues that we have had with respect to getting this program as robust as it could and should be.

I will move quickly to representational rights. I met this morning with Dr Bryant, president of the YMA, and with Dr Kmet. We have committed in our conversations about negotiating a new MOU that, in fact, representational rights would be something that could be negotiated and should be on the agenda of things to talk about. In fact, I have a mandate for our team to discuss the details of what that would look like. It is an important table for that work to happen. It will give the opportunity for the parties to go deeply into conversations about the impact of these concerns.

I can indicate that our government has not, at this time, considered a policy change only because the Yukon Medical Association and other medical associations across the country have statutory versions of representational rights, because it's not just the opportunity for the YMA to represent all physicians; it also has a component of membership and whether that be mandatory or whether individuals can opt out of mandatory membership in the YMA, and lastly, they're looking for dispute resolution options.

Legislation was the conversation that we had. There is — I don't have an act or sections that create that impediment; what I can do is mention — as I have recently in a meeting where the member opposite was in attendance as well as some other members from this Legislative Assembly — that the *Health Care Insurance Plan Act* would be one piece of legislation that could be adjusted to include the three priorities of the YMA: representational rights, membership, and dispute resolution.

So, that's the basis of that conversation, and I appreciate the opportunity to mention those things.

Mr. Cathers: I want to move on to the question of social assistance.

First of all, my first question would be if the minister can confirm my understanding that the social assistance costs as well as the statistics shared by government along with the budget are specific to clients who are directly paid by the Yukon government. My understanding is that it doesn't include social assistance clients paid by any other government — if the minister could just confirm that.

Next, as the minister noted in her remarks earlier, the government is asking for a \$3.5 million increase for social assistance costs. That, according to what officials indicated to us, brings the total cost of the program up to \$26.2 million, which surprised me — the size of that. It also — looking at that in comparison to what the previous budget would have been, then that would represent an increase of more than 15 percent in social assistance costs compared to the previous year. So, that also begs the question: If the economy is doing so well, as the government likes to suggest, why is there a 15 percent increase in social assistance costs? Could the minister provide a breakdown of the current number of social assistance clients of the Yukon government both for the Whitehorse area and for regional areas?

Last but not least, what efforts are being made by the Yukon government, whether through social assistance branch or any other department, to see those social assistance clients enter the workforce and be in a position where they are fully employed instead of depending on social assistance?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Deputy Chair, I note that the first part of the question was about whether social assistance costs included in the Yukon government's budget involve Yukon government only, and I take that to mean that it is the funding for recipients of Yukon government social assistance, not of other governments, meaning First Nation governments. It is in fact Yukon government's social assistance programs only. I can note that there has been a six-percent increase of individuals qualifying for social assistance in the last year. Also, social assistance has increased by 2.4 percent of the consumer price index, which it does annually. The number changes every year, but that has been the number in the last year. Also, part of the \$3.5 million increase is based on an individual's income and, of course, recognizing individuals' rental costs that will have been part of the calculations for increases.

I have numbers with respect to recipients, which I was asked about. From April 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024 — in 2024, there was an average of 957 social assistance cases or households, comprising an average of 1,361 recipients or individuals. This included 816 social assistance cases in Whitehorse and 141 social assistance cases in other communities per month. From April 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024, an average of 57.6 percent of social assistance cases or 531 households had at least one household member who also received a Yukon supplementary allowance per month among cases receiving regular social assistance benefits, and that amount, I believe, is \$250. I will get some confirmation of that, but I think that it is \$250 for the Yukon supplementary allowance per month.

In 2023-24, there was an average of 910 social assistance cases, comprising an average of 1,276 recipients. So, in that year, 2023-2024, an average of 60.8 percent of social assistance cases had at least one household member who received the supplementary allowance.

I can proceed to also note that every November, social assistance rates for shelter, food, fuel, utilities, and clothing are indexed to inflation — as I have said — using the consumer price index for Whitehorse. That increase often takes effect in November of each year. In November 2024, the consumer price index was 2.4 percent, and there was an increase of 6.4 percent to basic assistance rates back in November 2023, so those rates continue to be increased by CPI.

Financial assistance through the Yukon social assistance program varies by family size and residence location. As of November 2024, the amount of assistance provided to a single person in Whitehorse for food, clothing, and incidentals is \$496 a month, up from \$484 at the same time in November 2023. The maximum rate for shelter varies by family size. For a single person, the maximum monthly amount is based on 2024 shelter rates — \$692. The rate in 2023 was \$676. The maximum rate for fuel and utilities varies again, by season, family size, and location. For a single person living in Whitehorse, the maximum monthly rate in the winter — November through March — is \$618. There is also a provision of discretionary aid if somebody qualifies under the social assistance regulation, and part of the increases have been, of course — increase in all of those things — due to the cost of food, shelter, fuel, and rental housing costs.

The note I could also make and should make here is that, according to the Yukon Bureau of Statistics back in April 2024 — the Yukon rent survey — the Yukon median rent was \$1,440 for all building types. So, social assistance and the ability that we can help individual Yukoners survive and hopefully thrive and move on — as the member opposite said in the question — and have them make choices in their lives that will allow them to be supported by social assistance if need be but then move on from that — if that is also possible — continues to be a challenge because social assistance rates, while some of the highest in the country — or in the median in the country — still don't necessarily have the ability to meet monthly costs for individuals. That always continues to be a concern.

I hope that answers the questions, including the Whitehorse breakdown and regions.

Mr. Cathers: I want to move on to EMS, beginning first of all with rural EMS. We continue to hear concerns about coverage gaps in communities as well as thin coverage — by that I mean only a few volunteers, in some cases, who are going above and beyond to provide coverage in communities. According to the statistics that government posted online in relation to the budget that includes the number of EMS responders as of January 2025 for communities, it is noted as: Tagish only having four; Ross River having six; Mayo having only seven; and Beaver Creek having only six. I won't go through the rest of the list, but it is concerning to see those numbers continue to be low.

I would ask the minister if she could clarify what the government is doing for recruitment and training of EMS in rural Yukon as well as to address their equipment needs. I have heard the concern that there are some areas where volunteers believe that more equipment is necessary. An example was given of portable monitors for vital signs, like heart rate, oxygen, et cetera, which apparently many rural EMS crews do not currently have — if the minister could provide some information on any known gaps and what is being done to address them.

As well, with EMS call volumes overall, we were advised by officials at the briefing that the call volume for EMS has increased by 77 percent in the past five years. They provided figures for 2019 of 8,500 calls and, in 2024, 14,907. That is a very noticeable spike in that time period. In looking through the statistics — for the reference of Hansard, posted by government online in relation to the budget for this year — the EMS volume at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter appears to be a large portion of that increase. Again, comparing the numbers provided by officials, the total call increase in five years would be a little over 6,400.

In looking at the breakdown on the statistics for EMS calls or responses involving the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, it shows the figures for the 2023-24 fiscal year as actual call volume of 3,568 EMS responses at the shelter. That goes up to a forecast for the current fiscal year of that increasing to 3,924. According to the estimates for the 2025-26 fiscal year, that is projected to further increase to 4,316 just at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter.

So, again, going back to the actual numbers for the fiscal year ending last March, it shows a projected increase of 748 calls just at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter or a 21-percent increase.

So, I have a number of questions for the minister about that, including: Why are things getting worse and projected to get so much worse? What is the breakdown of the total cost of EMS services and EMS responses for the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter at 405 Alexander?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Deputy Chair, thank you for the question. It is a very important opportunity to talk about EMS here in the territory. I think that there was an initial part of the question that involved coverage and individuals employed in communities, so I will try to get to all of those numbers. There are 80.8 FTEs and 128 community responders who provide emergency medical services across the territory. Currently, operations include air ambulance operations and land ambulance operations, and they are fully staffed in Whitehorse.

Emergency Medical Services provide ground and air transport for patients in communities who require care in a hospital, and Emergency Medical Services continues to recruit — this was part of the question — and to increase the number of responders in Whitehorse and in all communities.

Yukon EMS has been supporting services with a float medics program out of Whitehorse since the start of 2024 to augment local community gaps, and community responders are provided non-operational pay of \$19.08 per hour to attend training and to have access to additional funding to attend

training programs outside of their home area. This includes an offset, of course, for meals and incidentals, tuition, books, and accommodation.

Emergency Medical Services provides operational pay ranging from \$21.20 to \$30.74 and \$35.02 to \$55.14 depending on the scope of service that is provided by an individual. Community responders receive honoraria for their commitment to deliver emergency medical services, providing on-call services, training, and all operational deployments. We have increased the on-call honorarium from \$3.71 to \$7.70 per hour — more than doubling.

In addition to this funding, community responders, on acquiring a training-level certification, receive a retention bonus of between \$288 up to \$1,000 based on the scope and upon completion of 250 hours of on-call duties.

Coverage in Yukon communities fluctuates based on the volunteer participation and the availability that's achieved when there are two personnel available to respond. In 2024, coverage was on average 70 percent across the communities, with the exception of Marsh Lake and Eagle Plains. That's because Marsh Lake is supported by two EMS stations in the community and Whitehorse operations, and Tagish is supported by Carcross and Whitehorse. Dawson and Watson Lake are not included in the percentage, because they have a hybrid model of both full-time employees and community responders.

I don't think I will have time to go through the list of percentage coverage, but as of January 2025, EMS coverage is supported as follows: Beaver Creek has six responders; Carcross has 12 community responders; Carmacks has 17 community responders; Dawson City has eight community and two full-time and four AOC employees; Destruction Bay has 10 community responders; Faro has eight community responders; Haines Junction has 16 community responders; Marsh Lake has 10 community responders, one onboarding — a new person; Mayo has seven community responders; Pelly Crossing has eight community responders; Ross River has seven community responders; Tagish has four community responders, and they are supported by Carcross, Whitehorse, and Marsh Lake; Teslin has 11 community responders; Watson Lake has five community responders, three full-time plus one full-time and three AOC — auxiliary-on-call employees — and one is just coming onboard; Whitehorse has 22 full-time, three part-time, 14 auxiliary-on-call, and six casual employees.

That's I guess the opportunity I have today to make sure that each and every one of those community responders and particularly volunteers know how much we all rely on them. Our thanks for that. They are such an integral part of safety and health in the Yukon.

There are 4.5 FTE paramedics, including two mobile paramedic specialists, at 405 Alexander. As of January 2025, there are 25 staff supporting the air ambulance program. This includes 12 FTEs, eight term positions, one full-time-equivalent float, and six auxiliary-on-call personnel. I think that it is important to note, with respect to the emergency medical services that have expanded as the paramedic specialist clinic hours at 405 Alexander, that we have emergency medical

service specialists operating at 405 Alexander for 20 hours each day. The clinic ensures that a paramedic is on-site, and we are working toward expanding this to 24 hours a day, seven days a week. When paramedics are not stationed on-site, emergency medical services are still available by calling 911.

The clinic has a spectrometer to test samples of drugs on-site. The spectrometer provides more accurate detection of certain drugs, including fentanyl and benzodiazepines. Emergency Medical Services support the mobile paramedic response unit at 405 Alexander, which is equipped to provide mobile drug testing services, harm-reduction supplies, and other health care services, including responding to emergencies. The paramedic response unit began in October of 2022 and operates 7.5 hours a day, seven days a week. The unit is designed to mitigate land ambulance calls and decrease transport to the emergency department at Whitehorse General Hospital.

The member opposite, in his question, notes the increase in the number of calls to the shelter. Those are calculated in the information that I have now with respect to any response that they are making at the shelter, so let's just deal with the number that we have, which is 3,568 calls, which I understand was in 2024 based on the question. Those are 3,568 responses to individuals. Those are saving lives. Those are keeping those individuals from having to be transported to the Whitehorse General Hospital or to the emergency room, in many cases. In some cases, they might have to still go there, but certainly, they are responding at 405 Alexander, making sure that people have access to health care through the emergency medical services who are responding there, able to help clients with complex needs.

They frequently utilize the 911 system, and they are requiring social services. That is an opportunity for real care for Yukoners.

Mr. Cathers: I'm certainly not taking issue with EMS supporting the health needs of clients at the shelter; I'm just trying to understand the drivers for the increase in the volume of calls for EMS, and it's notable. Again, we are relying on the information provided to us by officials that the call volume for 2019 was 8,500 calls; it spiked to 14,907 in 2024 in total, and that is representing an increase in five years of over 6,400 additional calls. It appears that the majority of that increased call volume is in direct association with the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. That is certainly notable and raises some other questions, including about the impacts of the policies at those shelters, but I don't have time this afternoon to delve into those questions.

I want to, however, touch on a few other issues related to programs downtown. Could the minister confirm my understanding from officials that, with the increase in funding being provided for the managed alcohol program, it brings the total cost of that program for O&M for one year to \$2 million, and could the minister tell us the number of clients who have been served at that program? Secondly, there is money in the budget for the operation of 408 Alexander by an NGO. Could the minister please confirm our understanding that the total cost

of that is \$1.5 million in O&M for 17 units of supported housing?

Next, moving back across the street to 405 Alexander Street, there is an additional \$708,000 included in this supplementary budget for programs at 405 Alexander as well as staffing pressures. Could the minister provide us with what the total costs are of operating 405 Alexander Street by Connective? Next, the issue of Connective's contracts, particularly in connection to the overdose deaths — the facility has come up on a number of occasions, including through a motion presented in this Assembly which passed regarding the review of their services there. Could the minister tell us what steps are being taken to monitor compliance by Connective to their contract?

With regard to the extension of that contract by three months, the Premier's comments and the minister's comments seem to be on slightly different pages regarding it, with the minister's comments to media seeming to suggest that the contract will be returned or further extended at the end of three months with Connective.

Can the minister confirm if that is correct? Are there any other options being considered, and if so, what might those options be?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The managed alcohol program is the first thing that I have been asked about — a \$2-million item in 2025-26. Again, this is about the supplementary, but I am happy to answer what is in the budget for 2025-26, because I look forward to us speaking about that in the days to come.

Just a note that the residential managed alcohol program has been developed and open since November 6, 2024, and this initiative will help protect one of Yukon's most vulnerable populations. It is a 10-bed residential facility located on Hoge Street in Whitehorse.

It is being well-received and it is important to make sure that individuals who are having these difficulties and require alcohol to manage their addictions and illnesses are supported in our community.

I think the question was to confirm if \$1.5 million is the operation and maintenance budget for the 17 units located at 408 Alexander. That is, in fact, the budget of Health and Social Services to provide supportive housing.

The programs at 405 Alexander — there has been a three-month extension for those programs into June 2025. Their budget includes \$1.36 million for 405 Alexander operations, bringing the total agreement for Connective to \$15.39 million over three years.

I'm not sure what the misunderstanding was. The work that we have been doing with Connective as a result of the eight recommendations that came from the jury last April after a coroner's inquest into the deaths of four young women at 405 Alexander — the tragic circumstances — all eight of those recommendations have been accepted by government and then implemented through work with Connective. The review that Connective has helped do of their own policies and procedures — we have overseen that work. We also have a committee that oversees, yet again, that work with partnerships with First Nations. We have worked with the families of those young

women individually as they wish. Not all families have taken part in that, but we remain open to that.

We plan a summit on April 11 where we will have a conversation with First Nation leadership and participants from the First Nations across the territory to determine shelter strategy work going forward. I can also indicate that those conversations will inform how we move forward with the shelter strategy and ultimately how we will continue to work and provide those kinds of services in this community that are so needed and really support individuals.

I think we are out of time, Deputy Chair. Thank you for the questions.

Seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

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

Motion agreed to

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Deputy Chair, 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, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:25 p.m.

The following documents were filed March 24, 2025:

35-1-306

Statistics of the 34th Yukon Legislative Assembly, letter re (dated March 24, 2025) from Hon. John Streicker, Government House Leader (Streicker)

35-1-307

Statistics of the 35th Yukon Legislative Assembly, letter re (dated March 24, 2025) from Hon. John Streicker, Government House Leader (Streicker)