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HANSARD

Monday, April 7, 2025 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2025 Spring Sitting

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

CABINET MINISTERS

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

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Monday, April 7, 2025 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of changes made to the Order Paper. The following motions have been removed from the Order Paper, as the actions requested have been completed in whole or in part: Motion No. 1207, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre; and Motion No. 1212, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge.

In addition, the following motions have been removed from the Order Paper, as they are outdated: Motion No. 1206 and Motion No. 1242, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge.

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 National Tourism Week

Hon. Mr. Streicker: It is National Tourism Week. From April 7 to 11, the Yukon is delighted to be united with Canadians in recognizing the importance of tourism. Led by the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, this week is aimed at celebrating the significance of the travel and tourism sector and highlighting the contributions that tourism businesses make to our economy, culture, and well-being.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of visitors come to the Yukon to experience our beautiful wilderness, rich history, and unique culture and to participate in sporting events. These visitors fly with our airlines, explore our communities, learn our stories, stay in our hotels, eat at our restaurants, attend our festivals and events, and purchase great Yukon swag at our local businesses.

Tourism contributes close to five percent of the Yukon's annual GDP and that is the highest for any province or territory in Canada. Tourism also plays a vital role in sharing our unique heritage. Many of the visitors who come to the Yukon are interested in learning about Yukon First Nation culture, tasting our local food and drink, and immersing themselves in our vibrant arts and music scene.

Of course, I must mention that another special draw is Yukoners themselves. Thank you to all of the authentic,

enthusiastic, hard-working individuals who show off the natural beauty and cultural diversity of our home. You made 2024 a great year.

As we navigate 2025, it is important to remember that there is power in how we choose to travel and where we visit.

This year, we suspect that some Canadians may choose to explore their own giant Canadian backyard, like the Yukon. We're excited to host folks and showcase our territory and we always look forward to welcoming our friends and neighbours from Alaska. I'm confident that this year we'll see continued favourable results.

A special shout-out to Chu Níkwän and the Yukon Convention Bureau, which are now beginning work in earnest on the Yukon Gathering Place. Being able to host international conferences, trade shows, and community events will put us on the map and bring folks north of 60. I'm excited for the opportunities that this presents for Kwanlin Dün, for Whitehorse, and for the whole of the Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, late last week, I learned that our cheeky winter tourism ad "The Yukon: It's a Little Bit Metal" has now been nominated for a Webby Award, so I encourage all Yukoners to get out there and vote for this great ad, "Cozy Fire".

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to tribute April 7 to 11 as National Tourism Week, themed: "Canada: Powered by Tourism" — the 15th anniversary.

A tourist is one who travels away from their home for relaxation and recreation while using the commercial provisions of the area. Tourism is the collective of showcasing destinations and culture so that it attracts that tourist. Since the introduction of bundling packages to make it easier to visit areas, tourism has been the economic force for many regions. If it is hot countries and beaches, tourism is there. The explosion of travel for sport, medical, cultural, eco-tourism, adventure, and the list goes on — all have a tremendous impact on the economy and ideals.

This week wants all to see the recognition that comes by having visitors and guests come to see the history and culture of Yukon. The local businesses prosper, and although Yukon's high season is short, tourism has a huge impact on us due to the influx of these visitors.

So, let's do our part for local tourism. Take time to do a day trip or a weekend trip to a rural community that you have not visited. There is a unique feature of each town or village and they would be delighted to welcome you and share their stories.

As a former tourism operator, I loved being in the business, as I learned so much about the world from my guests and, in turn, could share what we knew of the Yukon. Know that visitors ask for tips and good places to see, where the best camp spots or eating establishments are, and we would assist them as they travelled.

It was a win-win for businesses in the business. So, don't forget about those visitor centres, even for locals. They give you information for what's happening in real time as well as highway conditions or whatever you might be asking.

The push is on to stay in Canada and I couldn't agree more. There is so much to see — travel the back roads. It's amazing what one can find or who you will meet during these excursions. Take the opportunity to visit a province or territory that you always wanted to visit or a Yukon region that I'm sure is calling your name. Whether you're an adventurer, a wanderer, a discoverer, a tourist — so many things to do and see and accomplish. Make some memories and cherish the time spent in our amazing country, Canada.

Thank you to all of the operators, associations, and all who support tourism. Happy National Tourism Week.

Applause

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate 15 years of National Tourism Week. Tourism creates one in 10 jobs in Canada and adds \$100 billion in expenditure.

But it's about more than just dollars and cents. This year's theme is "Canada: Powered by Tourism". In the context of everything happening in the world right now, supporting Canadian tourism businesses feels more important than ever. It's the perfect time to get involved with some of the many local businesses that support tourism in Canada and here in the Yukon. They are small business owners operating in leisure, recreation, entertainment, transportation, accommodation, restaurants, attractions, venues, and more. They are the backbone of our economy; they are our friends and neighbours; they are the small businesses at the heart of our communities.

This year, we should all be embracing travel within our own borders, fuelling local economics, discovering diverse landscapes, attractions, and experiences, and renewing the deep emotional connection that we as Yukoners have with our territory and our country.

This week as we celebrate the tourism industry's contributions to the lives and livelihoods of the people in our local communities, let us remember that tourism strengthens our economy while enriching the quality of life for Yukoners. Tourism helps to sustain experiences in our communities such as museums and festivals. Travel and tourism impact our lives in many ways, whether that is discovering new places, experiencing new cultures, or learning and growing. It also allows us and others to experience and reflect on the diverse ideals of people and communities that form the heart of our land.

This week, take the time to think about what tourism means for the Yukon, plan a local trip, find an experience you have never tried but always wanted to, and support our communities by investing in one of our most important industries — tourism.

Mahsi' cho.

Applause

In recognition of Green Shirt Day

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to mark this touching occasion that has deeply resonated across Canada and inspired a movement that continues to save lives.

As we commemorate Green Shirt Day, we honour the legacy of Logan Boulet and reflect on the profound impact that the Humboldt Broncos' tragic bus accident has had on our national awareness of organ donation.

Logan Boulet was a 21-year-old Humboldt Broncos hockey player, who, following a tragic bus crash in 2018, became an organ donor. His decision saved lives — six lives — and inspired more than 150,000 Canadians to register almost immediately as donors in what is now widely known as the "Logan Boulet Effect". His story continues to touch lives across Canada and here in the Yukon, reminding us of the powerful impact that one individual can have.

Organ donation is one of the most profound and selfless gifts that a person can offer. It is a gift of time, of moments, of second chances. Every year, thousands of Canadians wait for a life-saving transplant. The need is granted, and the difference that one donor can make is extraordinary. Up to eight lives can be saved, and the lives of 75 more can be improved through tissue donation.

I encourage all Yukoners to consider registering their intent to become an organ or tissue donor. The process is quite simple and accessible. Yukoners can fill out a registration form available both online and in person at the Yukon Vital Statistics office. Once completed and submitted, a little heart symbol is added to your health care card indicating your commitment to donation.

This status can be updated or removed at any time, ensuring that Yukoners have control over their personal health decisions; however, registering is only the first part of the journey. We also urge Yukoners to talk to their families, like Logan did, and to their loved ones about their wishes. These conversations are absolutely essential. They provide clarity and comfort during the most difficult of times and help ensure that one's choices are honoured and understood.

Today, as we wear green to mark Green Shirt Day, we honour the generosity of organ donors and their families, and we extend our gratitude to the health care providers, volunteers, and transplant teams who make donation and transplant possible. Their work brings hope, healing, and second chances to so many. Together, through awareness, education, and compassion, we can honour Logan's legacy and continue to save lives through the gift of organ donation.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize April 7 as Green Shirt Day for organ donor awareness and registration. Every April, we stand to remember and celebrate the life of Logan Boulet, Humboldt Broncos defenceman, who tragically lost his life on April 7, 2018 after sustaining injuries in his team's bus crash the day before. Sixteen people lost their lives and 13 were injured from that horrific crash. We wear green today to

remember those victims and to celebrate an inspirational movement that came from this tragedy.

Logan Boulet had shared his wishes to donate before he lost his life. Logan saved six people with his organ and tissue donation and indirectly hundreds of thousands more, as Canadians continue to sign up for organ donation. The “Logan Boulet Effect”, as it was dubbed in the weeks following his death, saw nearly 150,000 individuals confirm their wishes to donate and many more in subsequent years.

We thank the family of Logan for honouring his wishes and sparking this movement. We would like to give a special thanks to Carmen Komish, Yukon chapter president of the Kidney Foundation, BC and Yukon and Green Shirt Day ambassador, for her dedication and work around organ donation awareness. We would also like to thank all those who have signed up to be an organ and tissue donor, and we would like to remind Yukoners that there is no time like the present to sign up.

Logan Boulet inspired Canada and his legacy lives on through all those who have agreed to help save lives in the future.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise today to pay tribute to Green Shirt Day. This day is a chance to honour those who lost their lives in the Humboldt tragedy. It is also an opportunity to remember the importance of organ donation and to express our gratitude to everyone who has helped others in this way. Green Shirt Day serves as a powerful reminder to become an organ donor if you can — you could save a life.

In the Yukon, we have an opt-in organ donation approach which can be accessed by filling out a form. While many Yukoners are not aware of this program, Green Shirt Day reminds us of the importance of organ donation and how we can improve our system by moving to an opt-out system. To those Yukoners who have taken the steps to become organ donors, we are grateful, and to all those who are mourning losses today, we offer our heartfelt condolences.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling today a document entitled “Comparison of the 33rd, 34th and 35th Yukon Legislative Assemblies.”

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling today a screenshot from Health and Social Services’ Facebook regarding vaccines and a screenshot from Health and Social Services’ Facebook regarding seniors. I have a letter that I wrote to the minister of health regarding abortion in June 2024. I have a letter from the minister about abortion in July 2024 and a letter from the minister about abortion from March 2025.

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

THAT this House thanks our neighbours in Skagway for hosting a national day-of-action “Hands Off!” event on Saturday, April 5, showing support and solidarity for the strong relationship between the Yukon and Alaska.

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

THAT this House congratulates Grandma Treesaw’s Bannock on her distribution deal with Loblaws Canada, supplying her product made using locally sourced flour from Hinterland Flour Mill to stores in British Columbia and Alberta.

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

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Crime in Yukon

Mr. Cathers: This morning, media reported that the number of calls to the safer communities and neighbourhoods office has increased dramatically, with drug trafficking and organized crime leading call volume. This comes on the heels of a report by RCMP showing that the Yukon’s illegal drug market is more expansive and lucrative than previously believed and organized crime networks are expanding drug lines. Less than a year ago, the RCMP issued a press release showing that property crime has been increasing and much of that activity is in the downtown core of Whitehorse.

This government’s response to all of this has been to launch yet another downtown safety planning exercise. This time, the Premier announced that government will work with the city and a number of other agencies to develop yet another multi-year action plan.

Does the Liberal government really think that Yukoners believe that yet another planning exercise is a substitute for taking real action to address rising crime in our community?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I take it from the information involved in that preamble to the question that the member opposite is not aware of the function or the process that is being undertaken in partnership with the City of Whitehorse. We look forward to the work that is being done, led by experts in the field and Indigenous services individuals who are focusing on a plan to integrate public safety into the downtown Whitehorse action plan. It is only one element — one element of the downtown safety action plan. The downtown safety action plan has many, many elements that have already been implemented or are in the process of being implemented. It is a process that is focused on downtown safety for visitors, for residents, for businesses there, and for all of us in the community who use downtown Whitehorse — and the

importance of making sure that there are a number of services — wraparound services — and items and work being done that focus, frankly, on the root causes of many of the crimes that we are seeing being committed — again, one part of that work.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, Yukoners have noticed a trend in this government's response to rising crime in our communities and, in particular, the downtown core of Whitehorse.

In the fall of 2023, the Premier held a press conference to announce what he called a “downtown Whitehorse safety response action plan” that was supposedly aimed at enhancing the safety, health, and overall well-being of downtown Whitehorse. A year later, in the fall of 2024, the Premier had another press conference. That time, the Premier said that he was really serious — that we were at a tipping point and needed to take action — so he was going to update the community safety plan. Then a few weeks ago, the Premier said that he was going to make a new plan. This time it would be called the “community safety and well-being plan” and it would be aimed at improving safety in the downtown core.

When will the Premier admit that his press conferences, photo ops, tough-talking statements, and promises to make plans aren't actually working and that crime in downtown Whitehorse is getting worse?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, again, I'm sorry that the member opposite doesn't really understand the work that's being done here in response to Yukoners' concerns about safety in the downtown Whitehorse area, which is, of course, very important and focused on providing community response.

The Government of Yukon continues to prioritize safer and stronger communities across the territory through funding to support our communities and, in particular, First Nations in their community and safety planning projects across the territory. As part of this initiative for the downtown safety response action plan, the Department of Justice and the City of Whitehorse will co-lead a Whitehorse community safety and well-being plan. This plan will be working with partner agencies, Yukon First Nations, the RCMP, and the community to address Whitehorse community safety objectives and implementation.

This process will lead to a strategic community safety plan aimed at addressing community safety challenges in Whitehorse. It is one part of the downtown safety response action plan, of which there are many. This particular project is an 18-month project and it will follow a detailed planning process led by a project team from the Department of Justice, the City of Whitehorse, the Canadian Centre for Safer Communities, and the Aboriginal Community Safety Planning Initiative.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, after all the press conferences and news releases, after all the times the Premier talks tough, says we're at a tipping point, or that enough is enough — after all of his promises to create a new plan or yet another strategy, the fact remains that crime is ravaging our communities and the downtown core has never been more unsafe.

The Premier made yet another performative announcement in February that his government would develop a new community safety and well-being plan for Whitehorse, but according to the *Yukon News* and now the minister herself, the process of developing the plan will take 18 months.

Yukoners saw a video of masked offenders on Main Street pulling guns in broad daylight, and people have had enough. Why is the Premier embarking on yet another performative planning exercise instead of taking real action to get tough on crime?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I think that real action is making sure that you have the resources in place to tackle the challenges that are in front of us. I think that's why we have a \$5.2 million increase to the *Territorial Police Service Agreement* in this budget, and that's why \$1.8 million of that will fund eight new RCMP positions. The question will be: There's tough talk from the Member for Lake Laberge, but will you actually support the tools that are required to continue to make sure that our streets are safe? My sense will be that he will not.

Again, great narrative, good in Question Period — but when you talk about the real investments that we need in our community, just like every other community across this country, he will vote against it.

Question re: Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and downtown core concerns

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, while crime in the downtown core has spread much further and wider over the past few years, the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter continues to be a hub of criminal activity. When one local business closed because of the criminal activity in the area, the Premier finally began to take action.

On October 3, 2023, the *Whitehorse Star* ran a story with the following headline: “Work being done to assist bakery, premier says”. “Premier ... says he is taking steps to address the situation at the Alpine Bakery, and acknowledges the government does bear some responsibility.”

The *Whitehorse Star* interviewed the owner of the bakery, who said that the Premier promised a lot of action and that he was going to use all the tools he had available to him to improve the situation to get the bakery open again.

Can the Premier please provide an update on that work?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, in those cases, there are a number of reasons — parts of the conversation — why there was a closure there as well. I am going to leave it to the owners to be able to speak to that.

I do want to challenge the member opposite, because the question said that the shelter is a hub for criminal activity.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Members of the Yukon Party across the way are saying that it is.

We know that there is criminal activity in our downtown core. We know that there is criminal activity in every downtown core. In question 2, if you could clearly delineate that for us — what does that exactly mean? — that there is criminal activity happening from that hub. First, it is just

individuals in the downtown core who do this. I think that has been part of the challenge around this conversation. Whether there is a shelter there or there is not a shelter there, I think we are going to be challenged with criminal activity, but again, I will leave it to the member opposite to connect those dots for us clearly.

Ms. Van Bibber: Another local business that was negatively affected by the operation of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter was Duffy's Pets store. According to the Land Titles Office, the property was purchased from the former business owners by the Premier's department, the Yukon Housing Corporation, for \$650,000.

Can the Premier confirm this, and can he tell us if there are plans to buy out any other businesses in the downtown core that have been affected by criminal activity?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I certainly support the Premier's statement and the heeding of individuals across the way from making a relationship between criminal activity and 405 Alexander, which is an operation and location for individuals to receive sometimes life-saving services. It is an appropriate and important care service for Yukoners, and our work to support individuals who are struggling with addictions or mental health issues and housing at that location is critically important for our community. I don't think the members of the Yukon Party think so, but it is.

With respect to the government and the challenges for downtown businesses and residents, we have worked diligently since the reference to the fall of 2023, which is a year and a half ago. There has been a lot of work done since that time. Most recently, the Yukon Housing Corporation has purchased the property at 407 Alexander. This is part of our commitment to implementing the downtown Whitehorse safety response action plan. We are committed to working with First Nation governments and all community partners to ensure that the property's future use meets the needs of the community.

Ms. Van Bibber: We've heard from a lot of businesses and residents in the surrounding area that have been negatively impacted by the emergency shelter and the ongoing issues it causes in the neighbourhood. Many of them will be curious to learn more about the process of how the government decided to buy out Duffy's and they will also wonder about the message that it sends.

What message does the Premier think it sends that his government would rather buy out local businesses in the surrounding area than make changes to the operating model of the emergency shelter?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I have implored members of the opposite side of this Legislative Assembly — certainly at every opportunity that I have had here to stand over these sessions — to give accurate information to Yukoners. This simply is not something that is their habit to do, and I think it is unfortunately unfair for Yukoners.

We are committed to continuing work with the downtown safety response action plan. We're committed to working with the First Nation governments and our community partners. We're committed to dealing with the properties such as the old

Duffy's store to make sure that we have appropriate spaces to provide community safety and security to our communities.

In December of 2023, our government released the downtown Whitehorse safety response action plan, and that document has been continuously updated. The plan aims to work alongside our partners to promote a safe, supportive, and thriving downtown Whitehorse. The plan is flexible and responsive, focusing on immediate and long-term solutions, such as increasing housing security, expanding support services, and increasing public safety.

The plan has four priorities: get more people into safe and secure housing; make it clear to Yukoners what support services are available and where; decentralize some services; and coordinate the approach between accountable partners. The members opposite —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Organ donation

MLA Tredger: In Canada, more than 4,000 people are currently waiting for life-saving organ transplants, and this number continues to grow each year. Tragically, hundreds of Canadians die while waiting for a transplant — on average, five Canadians every week.

One organ donor has the potential to save up to eight lives and improve the health of 75 others. Anyone over the age of 16 can become one, but despite the fact that more than 90 percent of the public supports organ donation, only one-third of Canadians are actually registered. This stems from the current opt-in approach where people have to find the website, fill out a form, sign it, print it, and mail it. This lengthy process deters many, even though the majority agree that organ donation is important.

Can the minister explain why we continue to have such a long registration process for organ donation?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I was very pleased to have the opportunity today to tribute Logan Boulet and the impact that he had in the decisions that he made about his life to increase the opportunities for other Canadians. Ultimately, when individuals in Canada found out about that, many, many of them signed up for what we now know as the "Logan Boulet Effect". It is important to recognize that here in Canada and here in the territory.

It is not a complicated process, Mr. Speaker, to decide — first of all, very serious decision for individuals to decide to make this decision to speak to their families about it and fill out the forms available online or in person here in the territory. I recall years ago when I was asked about it when I was renewing my driver's licence, and I still have the little heart on my driver's licence. We now put it on the medical cards here in the territory. We encourage all Yukoners to make this decision, if they are able to, to help individuals through organ and tissue donation, which can help many, many people if that decision is made by individuals.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, the UK, France, and Sweden have all implemented organ donation systems where everyone is considered a potential organ donor unless they explicitly opt out. This shift has significantly increased

donation rates, giving people the freedom to make their own decisions while making the process easier for everyone.

In 2021, Nova Scotia became the first jurisdiction in North America to change to an opt-out system for organ and tissue donation. The results were striking. Fewer than four percent of Nova Scotians opted out and there was a marked increase in both tissue and organ donations. New Brunswick is set to adopt this system this year and Québec is considering a similar change.

Will this government follow the example of Nova Scotia and switch to an opt-out organ donation system?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that some of the members opposite think that these are easy decisions to make, easy policy to develop. They are not. These are about important personal health decisions by individual Yukoners. We will continue to watch the trend in the provinces across Canada and the one now, Nova Scotia, who has done the opt-out process and we will see the support in New Brunswick.

We will continue to prioritize the very important array of health issues for the territory. This is certainly one that I would like to support, but the appropriate research and policy work is necessary in consideration of making it a priority for the territory. It is not currently on that list of priorities, but certainly, it is an important one for Canadians. We recognize it as such, and we hope that Yukoners will take the opportunity to opt in to this program of organ donation themselves and make the decision to support other Canadians through that great gift of life.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, since the minister isn't willing to prioritize this at this time, we have more ideas. Another reason that countries struggle to find enough organ donors is often due to a lack of education and awareness. Many people are unaware that they can change their mind at any time, that their age does not disqualify them, or that chronic illnesses do not necessarily prevent them from becoming donors. Without clear information and engagement by the government, these types of misconceptions contribute to the shortage of donors and the challenges faced in saving lives through organ donation.

What steps is this government taking to raise public awareness, address common misconceptions, and encourage more Yukoners to register as organ donors?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, awareness is certainly key. I had a conversation about this late last week. I had a conversation about it again earlier today in our preparation for this important awareness opportunity to have tributes here in the Legislative Assembly. We look forward to that opportunity when we can bring awareness of an important program like this one to Yukoners. We have certainly focused on many parts of our Health and Social Services opportunities, and education is a key focus of the communications that we do with the department, and our focus is on informing Yukoners of all sorts of opportunities, including the one for organ donation and support for fellow Yukoners with respect to making those personal health decisions.

Question re: Ministerial awareness of departmental activities

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, earlier in this Sitting, my colleague the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin asked about why the vaccine website was going to be down for two months. The minister of health stated — and I quote: “I will determine whether or not the information provided in the preamble to this question is accurate or not.”

While I agree that two months seems like an awfully long time for website maintenance, these are the facts as issued by the minister's own department on their social media over a week before the question was asked. I would like to point out that the NDP is not in the habit of presenting alternative facts, yet the minister seems determined to deny the accuracy of what we say even before she has checked it out.

Why was the minister unaware of the significant gap in service delivery within her own department?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, the vaccine program developed and delivered by the Yukon government is committed to supporting Yukoners to access services and expanding preventive treatments by offering and promoting vaccines. We have a clinic here in Whitehorse that is open for individuals to attend. Appointments can be made online, for the most part. What I can indicate is that, while the online booking system is being dealt with for maintenance, individuals can still telephone the clinic; they can still obtain vaccines at local pharmacies on a walk-in basis; they can still obtain vaccines at their community health centres.

The Yukon's online vaccine booking system is run through Panorama public health information system, and Panorama is an integrated public health information system that is designed for public health professionals. The system is adopted in other Canadian jurisdictions as well, and it is managed by British Columbia. The online vaccine system will be unavailable from March 28 to May 25 due to technical upgrades that are being undertaken by British Columbia, which manages the system in partnership with the Yukon Territory.

Ms. White: It sounds like the Yukon NDP were right in that case.

This was not the first time that the minister was unaware of what was going on in her department and refused to listen to us when we tried to tell her. Last fall, my colleague — the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin — raised a concern that low-income seniors' income support cheques had been shorted. The minister was emphatic that this was not the case and that seniors were, in fact, receiving an increase, despite what seniors' bank accounts were clearly demonstrating, and she said — and I quote: “... let's be clear: This government is not clawing back amounts that are available to seniors for the Yukon seniors income supplement payments ...”

However, eventually, her department issued a statement on their Facebook page admitting the error — and I quote: “We want to inform impacted community members about an issue affecting Yukon Seniors Income Supplement ... payments in October. Due to a data entry error, some seniors received less than they were eligible for.”

So, why, after multiple seniors came forward to share their story, did the minister refuse to believe them?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the personal comments.

My approach is always to determine the facts; my colleagues here will tell you the same thing. I'm always asking questions about what the situation is before we jump to any conclusions. The income supports for seniors was as a result of errors made by the federal government and our attempts to correct them. If they were not corrected initially, I certainly have apologized to seniors for that. I indicated at the time that I believed that we would look into the situation and determine what the situation was and rectify it so that Yukoners were not at a loss.

Ms. White: So, that's two for two.

This House, the press gallery, and Yukoners are familiar with a favourite phrase of the Minister of Health and Social Services: "The member opposite doesn't have the facts." Again and again, we are faced with situations where we bring up issues that Yukoners are experiencing in the health system and the minister refuses to believe that it's happening.

In March, I asked the minister about abortion medication access in rural Yukon, and the minister responded that it was only available in three communities. This came as a surprise to me, as in July 2024, the minister had written to me telling me that it was available in all Yukon communities. While the minister rejected my question in the House, she did apologize and correct her words in a letter she sent me on March 26.

So, what is being done to address the knowledge gap between the Minister of Health and Social Services and the on-the-ground reality of Yukoners trying to access health care?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I'm not sure that personal attacks are of some interest to Yukoners here. I think that we should be talking to them about the hard work that is being done by all of the parties here in the Legislative Assembly.

I noted that there was inaccurate information. I wouldn't agree that there is a knowledge gap. The information I had at the time was the information that I provided in the letter at the time, and when it was determined that the information was incorrect, I immediately wrote to the member opposite and apologized for the inaccurate information that had previously been provided to her. I corrected that information and have continued to work with community health centres here in the territory to make sure that access to abortion and the appropriate medication is properly supervised and is available in a safe way.

Question re: Ross River swimming pool

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, the last time the community of Ross River saw an operational swimming pool was in the summer of 2017. Since that time, we have had much discussion around why that is. In the spring of 2022, when asked what work had been done to get the pool open, the Minister of Community Services said this — and I quote: "I am happy to report that the pool in Ross River is ready to open. It's fully capable of handling visitors this summer..."

Mr. Speaker, that didn't happen, so I will ask again: When will Ross River have access to an operational swimming pool?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The 2024 structural and geotechnical evaluation of the Ross River pool by the Department of Highways and Public Works confirmed severe foundational and structural issues due to differential settlement and permafrost degradation at the pool, so Highways and Public Works and Community Services will reach out to the community of Ross River about the report's findings and discuss next steps. This 2024 review — so, that's what we're going to do, Mr. Speaker.

Highways and Public Works assessed the foundation of the property — found out that it was not structurally sound. I think that the member opposite would agree that it's not good to open a pool if the foundation isn't structurally sound for the people using it. We will currently work with Ross River going forward and find options for the community.

Mr. Hassard: It's unfortunate that the minister didn't believe me when I gave him that information in the Legislature.

Let's fast-forward to the spring of 2023 when we asked the minister if the swimming pool would open that summer. His response then was — quote: "I can confirm that, yes..." but again, this didn't happen. In the spring of 2024 when asked for an update, the minister was quoted as saying, "We are going to get the pool open as soon as possible..." He went on to say, "... I would personally hope to see that open in 2025."

Mr. Speaker, we have now heard that it won't happen this summer as well. Can the minister tell us when he expects that the pool in Ross River will be open?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: As I just said not moments ago, we have structural problems with the facility in Ross River. In the late 1980s, the Yukon government built pools across the territory. So now, 40 years later, these structures are coming to end of life and we're doing our best to keep them open.

The member opposite knows full well about the permafrost degradation happening in Ross River. We have a changing climate that is certainly contributing to that. We have a plan to deal with climate change; I haven't heard one from the members opposite on this very issue.

We've offered ministerial statements on a lot of community structure initiatives we have. The members opposite have turned down those ministerial statements as well. So, it's all fine and dandy for the member opposite to talk about the past. The reality is that we are working very hard to put good infrastructure in all of our communities, and we will certainly work with Highways and Public Works as a department — Community Services will work with Highways and Public Works and do our very best to make sure that all of our municipalities and communities have sound infrastructure, and we'll certainly work with Ross River on making sure that they have recreational facilities.

Mr. Hassard: Just for the minister's information, ministerial statements don't actually do anything for infrastructure or communities — but it has been eight years since the pool in Ross River was working, all under the watch of this Liberal government. So, they have nobody to blame but themselves, Mr. Speaker.

Community members are getting frustrated and looking for answers from this minister. So, will he agree to a public

meeting in Ross River to discuss options for the replacement of the swimming pool? If so, when will that first meeting take place?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite — the MLA for the region — for their advocacy. I'll certainly take it under advisement. I will say, Mr. Speaker, that this government has invested more in community infrastructure in the last nine years than they have seen since the 1980s, Mr. Speaker, and probably before that.

We have invested in Beaver Creek, in Carmacks, in Pelly Crossing, in Haines Junction, and in Watson Lake. Throughout the territory, we have done our very best to deliver absolutely community-changing infrastructure across the territory. We have done this because we know Yukoners need this. We do this because we care about rural Yukon and Yukoners in general, and we're going to continue that good work. I will certainly work with the community of Ross River to make sure that they have recreational opportunities going forward.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 47: *Act to amend the Income Tax Act (2025)* — Second Reading

Clerk: Second Reading, Bill No. 47, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver.

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

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

Hon. Mr. Silver: While there are several amendments included in this bill, for members, one of the most significant changes that we will be discussing today is the introduction of the refundable fertility and surrogacy tax credit. It will be available for Yukoners who undertake fertility treatment and surrogacy services. This measure marks an important step forward in ensuring that all Yukoners can pursue fertility treatments.

I am pleased to note that introducing this tax credit fulfills a mandate commitment to make access to fertility treatments more affordable for Yukoners. The Yukon's refundable fertility and surrogacy tax credit will cover 40 percent of the costs of fertility treatments or surrogacy services up to a maximum of \$10,000 per year per individual with no lifetime cap. This ensures that families and individuals seeking supports in becoming parents have access to the assistance that they need.

To offer some context, according to the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, one in six Canadian couples experience infertility, yet access to fertility treatments remains uneven across the country. Our government is excited to offer this generous support providing funding for an unlimited number of

treatments — an approach that stands unmatched compared to programs in neighbouring jurisdictions. We are also including support for a much broader array of procedures and services, including surrogacy services. We believe that prospective parents deserve options in how they choose to pursue their fertility journey.

Our government was also proud to announce medical travel support for fertility treatments during the Fall Sitting of the Legislative Assembly last year. This is particularly critical, as these services are not widely available in the Yukon. This is a significant investment and one that you do not see everywhere else.

We know that infertility and other barriers to parenthood impact many Yukoners. Our commitment is to reduce the financial obstacles to starting a family. Those services can be prohibitively expensive for those looking to start or grow a family. For many, the high cost represents not just a financial burden but a barrier to seeking the care that they need. Deciding whether to have a family should be a personal choice not dictated by financial concerns. The challenges of conception, compounded by this financial strain, can have a significant impact on prospective parents' well-being.

Mr. Speaker, this is why our government is very proud of Bill No. 47. As I mentioned, if approved, the legislation will offer an annual credit covering 40 percent of all eligible expenses up to a maximum of \$10,000. This support is in addition to the current available federal and territorial medical expenses tax credit worth up to 21.4 percent of eligible costs. This means that an individual or family would need to spend \$25,000 in eligible expenses to reach the maximum credit of \$10,000.

IVF treatment typically costs between \$10,000 and \$15,000. Assuming these costs, the Yukon's fertility tax credit would cover at least two IVF treatments each year. This number doubles to four treatments per year if a patient's partner pays for two of these treatments.

Studies have shown that most individuals undergoing IVF achieve a successful birth in either one or two attempts. I want to emphasize that our limit is annual. To a prospective family or parent using the credit for two IVF cycles in one year, they can still access the credit for additional treatments in a subsequent year.

If the legislation is approved, individuals will be able to apply for the tax credit for the first time on their 2025 tax returns for expenses incurred during the 2024 and 2025 calendar years.

We estimate that this credit will cost just over \$300,000 per year, with the first-year costs doubling that amount, as any expense after January 1, 2024 will be eligible for the credit.

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my points on the fertility and surrogacy tax credit with a quick comparison to supports that are provided in other provinces and territories. Of the 12 other jurisdictions in Canada, currently, five provide no support for fertility and surrogacy, although British Columbia has announced plans to pay for one IVF treatment per lifetime.

Almost all jurisdictions that provide support impose restrictions that the Yukon has not. These restrictions come in

the form of lifetime attempt limits, narrower limits on eligible procedures, restrictions on related travel costs in several jurisdictions, and limits on claiming the support to just one taxpayer, usually just the parent. In essence, the Yukon's credit is generous in providing significant financial supports to those seeking these services.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the fertility tax credit, the bill contains three other changes to the *Income Tax Act*. I will provide an overview now, but I will get into more of the details when we get into Committee of the Whole.

First, we are making a change to the Yukon child benefit. Recently, the Government of Canada updated administrative provisions related to the Canadian child benefit. The Yukon child benefit is a supplement or top-up to the Canada child benefit providing monthly payments to modest- and low-income households with children under 18 years old.

Until 2024, with the tragic event of a child death, a grieving parent was required to notify the Canada Revenue Agency within a month to stop payments of that benefit. The Canada Revenue Agency will commence collection activities for any payments made after the second month following the death of a child.

Canada has now extended the benefit for six months, a compassionate decision that we fully support and plan to adopt here in the Yukon as well. The cost of extending the timeline for ending these benefits after the loss of a child is minimal — approximately \$1,000 per year.

The next change in the bill is a technical amendment to the provisions related to the alternative minimum tax. The alternative minimum tax, or AMT as abbreviated, targets the Yukon's highest income individuals in very specific scenarios. Its purpose is to ensure that high earners can't disproportionately lower their tax liability through various advantages in the tax system. The AMT ensures that taxpayers with substantial income pay a minimum level of tax regardless of deductions, credits, and other tax benefits. It works alongside the regular income tax system, requiring taxpayers to calculate their tax liability under both systems and then pay the higher amount.

In its 2023 budget, the federal government announced its intention to reform the AMT to reduce the number of taxpayers affected while increasing the amount paid by the highest earners.

In years prior to 2023, approximately 30 to 50 individuals in the territory were subject to the AMT in any given year. We expect that the recent federal changes will reduce these numbers based on the new federal rules. I will explain a bit of that now.

Under these federal reforms, over 99 percent of AMT paid by individual Canadians will come from those earning more than \$300,000 a year, with about 80 percent paid by those earning over \$1 million annually. I won't go into further detail until second reading on the complexity of the AMT, but I will highlight the main changes that led to the technical amendment that we are discussing today. The Government of Canada expanded the tax base by reducing various deductions, exemptions, and tax credits available under the regular tax

rules. To balance this, for most taxpayers, the standard exemption was increased from \$40,000 to the second highest tax-bracket threshold, which is currently just over \$170,000.

Canada also adjusted the AMT flat rate, raising it from the first tax-bracket rate to the second tax-bracket rate. Every province and territory except for Québec calculates its AMT as a proportion of the federal AMT, meaning that they have an automatic increase in effective tax rates for AMT purposes. Québec calculates the AMT differently by way of reference to statutory tax rates. Québec has already amended their income tax to explicitly move from the first tax-bracket rate to the second tax-bracket rate for calculating the AMT; however, our formula — the formula that our act has — does not currently calculate this intended change properly.

This amendment to the Yukon *Income Tax Act* is necessary to correctly calculate to the second Yukon tax bracket. At Committee of the Whole, I will expand upon this process.

Finally, we are proposing a minor amendment to the definition of "cross-border transport equipment" to include "eligible Yukon mining asset". This amendment addresses a technical issue that was identified after creating the mining carbon rebate program. While there are no mining companies that currently possess cross-border equipment, these changes will ensure that they will receive the appropriate credit that they need should they acquire such assets in the future — a good thing.

Mr. Speaker, just to recap, while there are several sections of the bill being amended by Bill No. 47, the primary purpose of the bill is to provide support for those needing assistance in fulfilling their desire to have children. I am very appreciative of our ability to provide support at a level that is substantially above what is available in other parts of the country.

With that, I will conclude my remarks in second reading. I do look forward to further discussions and more detailed examinations of these proposed changes during Committee of the Whole. I invite questions and welcome debate with all members on this very important matter.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, we will be asking some questions at the Committee stage; however, we will be supporting it at second reading to allow the bill to get to that stage, and we will ask questions at that point.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague the Minister of Finance for presenting Bill No. 47, *Act to amend the Income Tax Act (2025)*.

I am, like many Yukoners, really excited to see this. The fertility and surrogacy tax credit is a really big deal for people. I don't think I realized just how important it was until, in 2021, we included it in the Yukon NDP election platform and people started to share stories with me about their journeys to have families. It became clearly visible to me then that this was something that we needed to do, so I appreciate the work that has been undertaken by the Department of Finance and the Department of Health and Social Services. I also acknowledge that in the confidence and supply agreement, I talked about a tax rebate of \$8,000 and it has been increased to \$10,000.

Although I was championing hard for \$16,000 to match Manitoba, which is where we originally took that idea from, I do appreciate that it has gone up from \$8,000 to \$10,000.

I think that this is really going to be life-changing for folks. I have heard from people throughout who were asking when it was going to be available and when they would see it. I look forward to the time when I actually get to meet some of those small humans who get to come into the world because of this support.

The other things, I know, are important in the *Income Tax Act* and I, of course, always appreciate the briefings from folks like Clarke LaPrairie, who always loves to talk tax and works our way through it. But I just really wanted to acknowledge the importance of what this means to Yukoners who are looking to start or grow families and how pleased I am to see it here. I look forward to questions in Committee of the Whole, but I am eternally grateful to see it today.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, our government is truly committed to supporting Yukoners in creating reproductive care plans and expanding access to sexual and reproductive health and gender-affirming care. We have been working hard to support Yukoners to access sexual and reproductive care and services, and we remain committed to implementing the action items from the 2021 LGBTQ2S+ *Inclusion Action Plan* and from *Putting People First*.

We recognize that fertility treatments are expensive and often out of the reach of many individuals. That is why we have taken steps to improve support for those who need to travel for these services.

Last fall, we made amendments to the travel for medical treatment regulations, which defined a list of fertility and surrogacy treatments eligible for travel coverage under the insured health services medical travel program. With the tax credit noted in the bill before the Legislature, individuals or families who spend \$25,000 on eligible expenses will receive a maximum refund of \$10,000 per year, with no lifetime limit, as the minister has said. This support is in addition to the currently available federal and territorial medical expense tax credits worth up to 21.4 percent of eligible costs.

Studies show that most individuals undergoing IVF achieve successful birth after either one or two attempts. This is good news for new Yukoners coming into the world. Of the 12 other jurisdictions in Canada, currently, five provide no support for fertility and surrogacy, although British Columbia, as the minister mentioned, has announced plans to pay for one IVF treatment per lifetime.

I note that we understand that some people need to travel outside of their home communities to receive medical services, and we are committed to supporting this necessary travel. In this context, the medical travel program provides support for insured health services that are defined under the *Health Care Insurance Plan Act*, which was the necessity for us to change that regulation last fall and to add this kind of medical care. The act and regulations define what programs and the kinds of services that are supported. Those services are defined, as well, as not being available in an individual's home community.

The program subsidy is to reduce the cost and the burden of travelling for medical purposes. It goes above and beyond what most Canadian jurisdictions provide. The current medical travel subsidy here in the territory is \$174 per day for overnight outpatient services and \$88 for same-day travel or for approved escorts.

In the case of surrogacy, almost always, an approved escort is available to support a patient. This amount is adjusted to inflation based on the consumer price index and is calculated on April 1 of each year, so we will see an increase that we expect soon.

I think it is important for Yukoners to know that the numbers that we have for the fiscal year 2024-25 for insured health medical travel — a couple of those numbers might be of interest. For in-territory medical travel cases or files — in-territory, so travelling from one community outside of Whitehorse likely to Whitehorse or Dawson or Watson, where there is a hospital or other medical care available — there were 3,942 cases in the fiscal year 2024-25. Actually, that was only until February 18, so there will be some additional numbers added to that when we have them to the end of March 2025. So, again, fiscal year 2024-25 out-of-territory medical travel cases numbered 3,797. As you can see, the support for medical travel here in the territory is incredibly important and it is also well-experienced by Yukoners.

Our government is committed to making fertility and surrogacy treatments more accessible and affordable for Yukoners who wish to start or grow their families. That is what the bill before the Legislative Assembly today is partly about. We recognize that fertility treatments are expensive and often out of the reach of many individuals, and that is why we have taken steps to support and improve the services available to travel for these services.

Last fall, as I noted, we made amendments to the travel for medical treatment regulations, which defined a list of fertility and surrogacy treatments eligible for coverage. We took those steps to recognize and support those using assisted reproduction and surrogacy through the proposed inclusive Yukon family act. It is still proposed, and this will be before the Legislative Assembly during this Sitting as well.

To further support Yukoners, the Government of Yukon is introducing a refundable fertility and surrogacy tax credit to help offset the costs of these services. We have heard about that from the minister.

I think that it is very important to emphasize that the coverage is for 40 percent of eligible expenses up to a maximum of \$10,000 per year with no lifetime cap, which means that it can be accessed as often as need be and be available to all Yukoners who undertake fertility treatment or surrogacy services. To really put this in perspective, we know that one in six Canadian couples experience infertility. That comes from the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. We have heard details about what will be available.

We will continue working to ensure that there is also equitable access to fertility and surrogacy treatments, including for those who are currently covered under the non-insured health benefits, the RCMP, Canadian Forces, and federal

employee health plans. Our government is committed to reducing the financial barriers and supporting Yukoners who dream of building their families in this way.

Insured health services travel for medical treatment program provides coverage, in addition to what we've been speaking about, for initial fertility consultations and diagnostic tests completed locally here in the territory. We recognize the high cost that might be determined to be part of the treatment after those initial tests. We have worked hard to make sure that the medical travel program addresses some of those issues, knowing that the subsidy is to assist Yukoners, not to pay for full costs of travel, although medical travel does include airfare when approved and so provides that kind of support for Yukoners to travel.

This amendment in the bill before us serves as a significant step forward, Mr. Speaker, toward making fertility and surrogacy treatment more accessible to Yukoners who need these services to start and grow their families, including members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

To further improve access to fertility and surrogacy treatments for Yukoners, the government has worked to develop the refundable tax credit that is administered by the Canadian Revenue Agency. The Department of Finance is introducing these amendments to the *Income Tax Act*, which will allow us to incorporate those into the actions that are taken here in the territory.

We will continue to explore options to address fertility-related and surrogacy services and medical travel equity for all Yukoners, including those who receive, as I've said, coverage under the non-insured health benefits — RCMP and Canadian Forces or as other federal employees — and we need to continue our work with the federal government to do that.

Thank you very much to all those on these ground-breaking steps to support access to fertility and surrogacy treatments. That includes the folks who work diligently at the Department of Finance, the Department of Health and Social Services, our colleagues with respect to the New Democratic Party, who included these issues, as did we, in the conversations with respect to the confidence and supply agreement, all of which resulted, I think, in good progress for Yukoners on this important issue.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Thank you to my colleagues who rose today to speak to Bill No. 47.

As folks know, this was something that both the NDP and the Liberals campaigned on. It has been very interesting watching other jurisdictions and watching Manitoba change their programs as we move along. I think that what we have here is very flexible and something that has more opportunities for parents and individuals who want to seek these treatments, whether it's for fertility or for surrogacy. So, I'm really excited about the fact that we finally get to debate this on the floor of the Legislative Assembly and hopefully get all parties' support

for something that's extremely important to a whole bunch of Yukoners from all of our communities.

I do appreciate the Leader of the Third Party giving a shout-out to Mr. LaPrairie, and I'll continue that as well to his whole team. They do fantastic work. They have a very technical job sometimes, and I've always remarked with wonder at how Clarke can change his technical jargon based upon the audience, whether he's speaking with very technically advanced people in tax circles or folks who just want to know the basics. He meets folks at their own level, and he actually does a very good job of explaining these things.

He's probably very embarrassed that we're going on about him in the Legislative Assembly as well, but that's half the point, really.

I do look forward to Committee of the Whole and getting into more technical aspects of the AMT and other questions from the members opposite.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 17 yeas, nil nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for second reading of Bill No. 47 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Bill No. 48, entitled *Early Learning and Child Care Act*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

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

Chair: The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Bill No. 48, *Early Learning and Child Care Act*.

Is there any further general debate?

Ms. White: I, of course, welcome back the officials for today's debate. When we left the floor the last time, I believe we were talking about investigators and inspectors. Sorry; I will get the right language. The reason why I wanted to talk about that is, for example, when we talk about inspectors for environmental health, they can look to see that you are meeting the requirements. In some cases, when we talk about early learning facilities, it has things like, for example: Are staples being used in posters above water fountains, and how do these things look? The reason why I was asking about program auditing and used the example of Partners for Children and their process was that I just wanted to understand how inspectors were going to help make sure that programs could elevate and meet the framework for early learning. That's where I remember ending off last time.

Hon. Ms. McLean: The qualifications of the childcare inspectors are outlined in job descriptions, not legislation or regulation. This was determined in collaboration with the Department of Education Human Resources and the Public Service Commission based on skills and competencies required to fill the job. Inspectors are hired through a competitive process based on qualifications related to early learning. In the past, this has included a diploma or degree in early childhood education or related education, such as experience working in the area of early learning childcare —

Chair: Order, please. The members are having difficulty hearing.

Hon. Ms. McLean: That's okay. I can start over again.

Just in terms of the qualifications and the process of childcare inspectors — the qualifications of childcare inspectors are outlined in job descriptions, not the legislation or regulation. This is determined in collaboration with the Department of Education Human Resources and the Public

Service Commission and based on the skills and competencies required to fulfill the job. Inspectors are hired through a competitive process based on qualifications related on early learning. In the past, this has included a diploma or degree in early childhood education or related education, experience working in the area of early learning and childcare or in an early learning environment, experience in administering, enforcing, and interpreting policies and legislation, experience overseeing and administering funding programs and the ability to complete basic financial tasks, and experience writing detailed and accurate reports. All inspectors are early childhood educators and they receive six months of training by an experienced inspector before they are fully designated as an inspector under the act. Following designation, they are mentored by the supervisor of early learning and childcare, who is also an early childhood educator. Inspectors are also certified playground inspectors.

Since inspections are done based on regulations, once new legislation and regulations come into force, there will also be changes to internal documents like inspection reports. Inspections are one important function of the ELCC branch. There are many other roles that support program operators in advancing quality inclusive, affordable, and accessible childcare.

Ms. White: How does the minister envision that those inspectors then will help early learning programs to elevate their programming to meet the framework? Does the inspector go in? The inspector is looking, for example, for health and safety issues, but how do they elevate the programming? How do they support the centre to elevate their learning and their teaching?

Hon. Ms. McLean: We are shifting a whole system approach, and one of the changes — and we have been working in this way since having the unit come over to Education. It is a supportive unit and everybody works together as a team, but in terms of changes that are being made within this legislation, under section 7, "Early learning framework" — going forward in programming — will have to provide an early learning base plan on the approved early learning framework and inclusion plan.

Again, this is outlined in section 7 under "Early learning framework". The Early Learning and Child Care branch manager of quality initiatives, along with three early learning specialists, will continue to provide quality programming through several initiatives, including direct support to programs and regular professional development that is offered free of charge. Other ongoing work that supports quality includes: a wage grid mandating the minimum wages that early learning educators have to receive; funding to the extended health benefits program — supports the retention of educators and consistency — and ongoing professional development opportunities for educators such as workshops and conferences; leadership development for providers and managerial staff; targeted programming support and mentorship provided by early learning specialists upon request from programs; quality enhancement funding, which includes bursaries to attract new early childhood educators to the field and to support ongoing

learning; ongoing partnership with the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate that supports culturally competent educators.

The early learning educators website provides resources, community contacts, and information about upcoming events — and ongoing partnership with Yukon University to offer early child education courses in rural communities and regular inspections to ensure programs are complying with regulatory standards.

So, it's much broader than was presented in the question. It goes right to the heart of the program and how we are wanting to shift to that quality so that it's more of a level playing field as well in terms of all of our centres that are licensed.

Ms. White: One thing that I have heard about from the Yukon Child Care Board was that it is currently hard to function with the seven people and that there are concerns that, if there were to just be five, there wouldn't be enough capacity to actually complete their reports and such. Was the Yukon Child Care Board consulted when the decision was made to change the number from seven to five as far as the minimum?

Hon. Ms. McLean: In terms of collaboration with the Yukon Child Care Board on this bill, the project team had several in-person meetings with the Yukon Child Care Board to hear their views. Additionally, a board member was at almost every in-person engagement session in Whitehorse. They have indicated an interest in wanting continued involvement as the work progresses. We've updated them as the work progressed.

In the annual report for 2023-24, the Yukon Child Care Board recognized the review of the *Child Care Act* and how they are honoured to be part of this work.

In terms of the proposed change, as the bill states, the board is composed of no fewer than five and not more than nine members. Having a provision to allow for a minimum and a maximum number of board members is used in other Government of Yukon boards currently.

The following boards explicitly have a provision setting both a minimum and a maximum number of members: Under Highways and Public Works, the standard Bid Challenge Committee is set up that way; and the Minister's Advisory Council on Women and Gender Equity has between four and 12 — and the workers' compensation board as well. Other boards and committees are not specific on a range but rather set either a minimum number of members or a maximum number of members. This provides the necessary flexibility to allow boards to continue to function for quorum purposes should vacancies arise while allowing the larger boards for broader representation as well.

At times, there have been issues with achieving quorum with the requirement of seven members as a minimum, and that is why the shift was made to provide for a range. As I spoke about this in the opening comments to Committee of the Whole, I talked about how this change would actually accommodate the current composition and the board members who are currently on this board, and we would always strive to have those seven members. I did receive a note from the Leader of the New Democratic Party — our staff, again — regarding this

particular issue that is being raised today, and certainly our team has had many discussions with the board along the way.

Ms. White: Do you have a letter of support from the Yukon Child Care Board in moving those requirements down from seven to five?

Hon. Ms. McLean: No, I don't.

Ms. White: I often get asked if I have letters of support when things are being done, so I think it's a fair question to ask, if there is support.

Again, I had reach-out from folks who are on the Child Care Board saying that taking the minimum down to five members is scary. The annual report alone is a lot of work to get done on the side for all of them, and the idea of having fewer people to do that work, in their words, was "scary". That is the reason why I highlight that.

Another thing that I heard was around the language of behaviour management. The reason why I bring this up is that I have been told that behaviour management — so section 24(e), the term "management" indicates that the educator is in charge of behaviour. So, this is not at all in line with best practice. The appropriate term would be "behaviour guidance."

Can the minister tell me how they decided on "behaviour management"? Again, "management" indicates that the educator is in charge of behaviours. How did they land on the term "behaviour management"?

Hon. Ms. McLean: This particular wording on section 24(e) refers to how educators guide and support children in their care. This language was carried over from the old act and would be defined in the regulations.

Ms. White: There has been a lot of talk about how the old act is outdated and doesn't reflect modern language. Are we adopting language from I think 1995 into 2025, when I have been told by professionals in the field that it's not best practice? I am just looking again and trying to understand the difference between "behaviour management" and "behaviour guidance". There are other words when we talk about — there are definitely different ways to talk about it, but if we recognize that the language or the intentions in the old act don't meet the current, why is that language being transferred over if that's no longer best practice?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I note that, during our consultation, this particular matter that is being discussed today was not flagged as problematic. Certainly, we would have looked at changing that term if it had been raised. Again, looking at other jurisdictional scans in terms of best practice, this was not something that was flagged as a concern. We have a lot of opportunity to define under the framework around the quality, and what will happen within programming within our centres will be further defined in regulations as well.

Ms. White: Again, the early childhood educators and those running the centres, were they shared the draft so they could see the language, or did they just see the language when it was tabled?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The legislation that we have before us, the bill, was shared with all of our partners and folks when it was tabled in the Legislature. Once the bill receives assent, we will engage again with Yukon First Nations early learning

and childcare partners to collaboratively develop Yukon-specific early learning framework. Our goal is to ensure that the framework reflects the needs and priorities of our communities. To do this thoughtfully and effectively, the process, of course, will take a bit of time. The early learning framework will include definitions of the principles on quality, inclusivity, accessibility, affordability. This is a more flexible and adaptable approach than defining terms that may evolve over time in legislation as well.

Certainly looking forward to working with all of our partners around this in terms of those further definitions, as we build this out and flesh it out, that will be a reflection of what Yukon's early learning and childcare system will look like and what we want it to be for our youngest Yukoners.

Ms. White: So, I appreciate that it wasn't necessarily brought up in the engagement, and I'm trying to figure out if there is a place in the "what we heard" early learning and childcare engagement where it talks about language or whether it talks about definitions.

Again, my understanding is that behaviour management involves addressing challenging behaviour through functional analysis and interventions, whereas behaviour guidance focuses on building an encouraging setting, helping children learn from their mistakes, and providing age-appropriate guidance.

I guess it really depends on what the minister's intention is. In section 24 of "Requirements", it says — quote: "A licensed provider must provide their licensed program in accordance with the regulations, including in relation to the following:" One of the following is "(e) behaviour management". I am just trying to get an understanding — and maybe the minister means addressing challenging behaviour through functional analysis and interventions, but if what the minister really means is helping children learn from mistakes and providing age-appropriate guidance, I think that they are two different things. I am just trying to understand. I heard that it came from the previous legislation, but I have heard that the previous legislation is outdated. I have heard that the previous legislation does not work, and so I am trying to understand why that language, which I am told is outdated, was brought into the new act. I just don't understand how definitions will be adapted as we go on if it is included in the legislation itself.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I think that I will just talk a little bit about the engagement. There were three engagements on early learning and childcare work conducted between 2018 and 2024. Participants in the engagements included Yukon First Nation governments, families, educators, licence holders, the Yukon Child Care Board, and others. The most recent engagement included written comments, an online survey directed at families, and in-person and virtual meetings. Some highlights from the 2024 engagement include the importance of including principles of quality, inclusivity, accessibility, and affordability, including an early learning framework, ensuring affordability for Yukon families, making updates so that the children registered in kindergarten are part the school-aged group to increase capacity in the system, increase in access to

professional development, and inclusion of First Nation culture and languages.

In the "what we heard" document on page 12, there is a graph that talks about other skills or education important for early childhood educators. There is a whole list there: knowledge of child development theory; aptitude for/experience working with children; health and safety, first aid, CPR; working with children with diverse needs — and there is one line there that is "Positive behaviour management/conflict resolution" — so it is sort of ranked in the middle of this graph. There is: trauma informed education/abuse recognition; inclusion training; and cultural diversity/understanding of Canada/Yukon culture. Then there was an "Other" section. Language skills, as well, were identified and continuous learning, outdoor education — so, that's found on page 12 of the "what we heard" report.

Ms. White: I'm going to guess that the minister doesn't want to talk about behaviour or the definitions right now of "behaviour management" versus "behaviour guidance". I will leave that, but I will flag that it was highlighted by professionals within the industry that the language is different.

I wanted to highlight a concern around 63(5). Section 63 is about complaints, and 63(5) reads: "The director may take steps to protect the identity of the complainant from the person who is the subject of the complaint and, if that person is employed or engaged as a volunteer in a licensed provider's licensed program, the licensed provider, if the director considers it necessary to prevent retaliation."

Something that was highlighted again is that it should be "may" take steps to protect the identity of the complainant, but it should say "must". They said that it is about building trust in making sure that people felt safe to come forward. It's not that your identity may be protected; it must be protected. It is going to be a lot harder, as a person working with a facility, to bring a complaint forward if they are not sure that their name won't be used — for example, with their employer — as that is being investigated.

Can the minister let me know why the language of "may" versus "must" was used?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Section 63 outlines a new formal complaint system. This is a new section of the legislation that was informed by legislation in the Northwest Territories and balances protecting the privacy of complainants against discouraging unnecessary or ill-intended complaints. So, any member of the public can register complaints if they believe a person has contravened a provision of the legislation or regulation. The director may then investigate, giving the person who is the subject of the complaint a summary of the allegations. The director may take steps to protect the identity of the complainant, which is something that will be taken seriously. This must be weighed with the due diligence required for the director to collect adequate information. So, that is what it was based on.

Ms. White: I was told that one thing that has been, in many cases, stopping people from reporting is the sense that the unit will walk over to the operator and tell them right away who came to complain. So, when it says "may" take the steps or

“must” take the steps — it’s quite a bit different. People feel that they are quite vulnerable if they are raising concerns — that they are named — and that is hindering people’s ability to raise those concerns, because they don’t feel like they are protected. I will leave that there.

I was hoping that we weren’t actually going to get here today, and it was because I sent the minister an e-mail earlier and I’m hoping that the minister saw it. I will read it into the record, and then hopefully the minister can help me understand.

The e-mail reads: “I was contacted by a number of families last week who highlighted the challenge of the ‘school aged children’ those who are over 5, and school closures.

“The new Early Learning and Child Care Act excludes child care that occurs for less than 12 weeks and is related to school closures.” So, that’s the same as the current act.

“They explained that school-aged children require child care when school is not in session at minimum from ages 5 to 11, which means spring break, summer and winter camps.

“These ARE child care. Like most jurisdictions in Canada, summer camps and other kids’ camps in the Yukon are not subject to quality or safety regulations. It’s up to the individual camps to decide what level of quality, inclusivity and safety they want to implement...”, and they note that these camps are very expensive.

They suggest that: “The Act needs to recognize that the school day and the work day do not align meaning school-aged children need childcare before and after school and during school closure, including winter break, spring break and summer break. It also needs to recognize that school-aged children have the same right to safety, quality and inclusivity that preschool aged children receive.”

They made a suggestion that section 17, which talks about a centre-based program, that the wording there could be changed to say “centre-based” or “school-based program” and that there could be language added in subsection (2) to say something along the lines of: “a program that provides child care during school closures, or for 2 consecutive weeks, or for more than 10 cumulative days in the calendar year.” Their thoughts were: “That should reasonably cover spring break, winter break and PD camp days.

“That way if folks want to do one-week camps, they wouldn’t need to apply for a license. This would include folks like Music Yukon, the Wildlife Preserve and others.”

The question I asked was: Had the department considered this during drafting? So, for school-aged children specifically, again, five to 11 years old — you don’t necessarily want kids on their own, but what happens to them during spring break, summer break, winter break, and PD days?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I think I’ll start here around the school-based programs. Within the act, the definition of “child” includes individuals under 13 years of age or an individual who is over 12 and under 17 who requires additional supports, as determined by the director. An example would be a teenager with autism who cannot be at home without supervision.

There are currently four licensed programs in the Yukon that provide exclusively before- and after-school care. There are also some existing licensed centre-based programs that

provide care before and after school and on schools breaks. This is in addition to full-time care for infants, toddlers, and pre-schoolers.

In the new legislation, anything that is not provided in a private dwelling is known as a “centre-based program”, including programs run at schools. Licensed programs provided in schools will continue under the new legislation as outlined in section 17. This means that licensed school-based programs would meet the same licensing requirements as any other centre. Once a centre is licensed, parents can benefit from fee reductions. The department can also support a portion of eligible operational expenses and provide wage enhancements for certified early childhood educators. We know that many before- and after-school programs choose not to be licensed in order to have more flexibility, which this legislation will continue to allow.

In terms of the other part of this, the “centre-based program” is defined as a program that is provided in a premise other than the provider’s residence.

We recognize that summer camps and childcare programming on school breaks can be expensive for families. Current legislation does not preclude programs from becoming licensed. Some licensed programs provide options for school-aged kids during school breaks, as I have already talked about. Section 17 allows summer camps to have a licence, but if they operate for less than 12 weeks, they are not required to, allowing flexibility for programs such as those, for example, run by the City of Whitehorse or Yukon University, who rely on employing high school and post-secondary students rather than qualified early learning childhood educators.

The same practice for summer camps is used in other jurisdictions. Examples of licensed programs that offer programming during school closures are included in, for example, the Heart of Riverdale, which operates a summer camp.

Expanding the scope of this legislation to include all programs that provide childcare during school closures would require all existing unlicensed programs to meet regulatory requirements and become licensed. This would represent a major change to those operators, including these types of programs under the definition of “centre-based program” — without maintaining the requirements to meet licensing standards would make them ineligible for early learning and childcare grants and wouldn’t reduce the costs to run those programs.

We know that there are key barriers to this implementation, most notably requirements around staff training and certification. Programs may struggle to recruit and retain enough educators or instructors to comply with the ratio requirements set out in the regulations. Other barriers we expect would be around infrastructure and space requirements. We expect this change would result in losing capacity in the territory to deliver programming for school breaks.

We didn’t hear extensive feedback on this issue during engagement. Further conversations with operators of these programs would be certainly advised before including changing requirements for programs that impact so many people. This

was not part of the scope of the legislation. We did hear that subsidies for summer camps were desired. Regulating summer camp programs could conceivably be dealt with in a separate legislation in the future or during — or other places.

So, I think, in terms of — if we made a shift to broaden school-aged programming, all instructors would then need to be ELCC-trained, meaning that students who are now hired to run work at school camps would not be eligible to work there without that specific background and training.

Most of the spaces in these camps are run out — would no longer qualify under the licensing and reporting. I guess that there are a lot of implications here, and when we — this would not be advised for — after having a discussion with our drafter, this was something that was not advised — to make this change.

Ms. White: I appreciate that answer from the minister. I did not doubt that there would be an answer to the e-mail from earlier today, so I thank her for that and recognize that is a can of worms that I am not interested in opening right now.

I am interested to know: Out of the four licensed before- and after-school care programs right now, how many of them are religious-based?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I will have to get that information for the member; we don't have it right at our fingertips today.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that. I'm just curious, and some of the concerns I had heard is that people don't want to disrupt the places where they are, but they don't appreciate the religious — necessarily the religious leanings, but there is no other option. When we talk about before- and after-school care, I recognize that it's an important gap to fill.

I did want to just go back to — on part 3, the Early Learning and Child Care Board — and ask if the minister was willing to get a letter of support from the Yukon Child Care Board in support of lowering that number to five before we pass that. I'm interested — signalling now that I'm interested in a stand-over clause just to hear from the Early Learning and Child Care Board themselves if they are satisfied with lowering that number to five or if their preference is keeping it at seven. I just wanted to know if the minister was open to that.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I certainly would be happy to have that conversation specifically with the board. I would be prepared to carry over that clause if we get to line-by-line debate.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. I will let everyone know. I have signalled and I will wait for direction from the Clerk as to what language I need to use to make that happen. I thank the minister for that. I am going to pass the floor back to my colleague. I am not promising that I won't have other questions based on his questions, but I thank the minister for her engagement today and I thank the officials, of course, for being here.

Mr. Dixon: I am pleased to rise again to discuss this bill further in Committee. Again, I will jump right in on a few issues. I know that my colleague from Takhini-Kopper King covered off a few of the things I was going to ask, so I will skip over those.

I will go back to the framework. Obviously, section 7 requires the establishment, implementation, and maintenance

of an early learning framework. I would like to just go back a little bit on this subject. I know that, in the past, the Yukon government had done work to develop a framework. I believe that, several years ago, the government had hired a contractor — I believe it was Kathleen Flanagan — to do some work on the development of an early learning framework for Yukon. I believe a draft was developed and considered by the EC community. Can the minister update us on what happened with that work? Did the early learning framework that was developed by that contractor go anywhere? If so, where is it today? Is it something that is being considered as a part of this bill?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I would be happy to look into some of that historic information. I believe that would have been during a time when early learning and daycare and the childcare act was under Health and Social Services. So, we've made that full shift over to Education and our intention would be to start — this would be a new early learning framework. I talked about it quite a bit during my opening comments both at second reading and Committee of the Whole about ensuring that we have that flexibility to work with Yukon First Nations and to really ensure as well that we are making this flexible enough so that the centres — and we have nine of them now that are owned and operated by Yukon First Nations — that we're able to ensure that they are able to incorporate Yukon First Nation ways of knowing, doing, and being and ensuring that this is foundational to their work.

So, the intent is to work from a new perspective and to ensure that we are flexible enough to be able to accommodate all those other cultural views and aspects of what we would want to see in the curriculum and programming within our early learning childcare centres.

Mr. Dixon: The minister is indeed correct; the work done by the contractor that I referenced had been done by the program before it moved over to Education. So, I can understand why the minister may not have it available to her today. But if, in the course of her work, she finds the opportunity to provide an update to us as to what happened with that framework that was developed for the Yukon government by that contractor, I would be curious to know what happened to it.

Does the minister envision a code of ethics being adopted as a part of the early learning framework?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thanks for the question. The early learning framework will include definitions of the principles of quality, inclusivity, accessibility, and affordability. This is a more flexible and adaptable approach than defining terms that may evolve over time in the legislation. I did want to note that the British Columbia early learning framework is currently being implemented across early learning and childcare programs. Of course, our K to 12 curriculum is based on BC, with a focus on primary years — K to 3. I wanted to make that point.

Section 22, "Early learning plan" — early learning plans are a new requirement requiring an early learning plan based on the approved early learning framework for each licensed program to ensure that programs meet the minimum

requirements for quality in programming. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development identifies the design and implementation of curriculum and learning standards as one of the five policy levers for creating a well-functioning, high-quality early learning and childcare system.

In terms of the code of ethics, we would be looking at all of those concepts while we are developing those frameworks.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate that answer from the minister.

Further to section 7, it includes clause 7(4), which is essentially an opt-out clause for a program to opt out of the early learning framework. It reads — quote: “The director may, in accordance with the regulations, if any, modify or waive the application of the early learning framework to an approved early learning plan.”

Can the minister describe when a situation might arise where a childcare facility or early learning program could opt out of the early learning framework as conceived under section 7(4)?

Hon. Ms. McLean: This provision allows the director to waive the requirement to follow the approved framework in developing an early learning plan. For example, a program may need more support to get the work completed, and creating that flexibility or — and I’ve talked about it already — a First Nation may want to develop their own framework. So, that provides that flexibility for the director to give the time needed to do the work that is required. Those may be rural communities or others where there may be different types of barriers for programs to get up to full capacity in terms of being able to deliver the curriculum that we want to see happening in all of our early learning childcare centres.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate that answer from the minister.

I’ll jump to section 23. That’s where the commitment to an inclusion policy is made. That section requires that a licensed provider have an inclusion policy. Does the minister envision every individual program having their own inclusion policy and having that submitted to the department, or will it be a single inclusion policy that will apply to all early learning and childcare programs across the territory?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, section 23 — respondents who completed the survey for their review of the *Child Care Act* noted the importance of inclusion in licensed programs and said that the government should be doing more to ensure that programs are inclusive. Additionally, the Yukon Child Care Board recommended that inclusion be adopted as a principle for early learning and childcare. Inclusive early learning and childcare systems respect and value diversity, including but not limited to children and families who are experiencing vulnerability and children with varying abilities.

Inclusive childcare is really about meeting the children’s needs and ensuring that all children have access to quality early learning and childcare programs that create environments where children feel a sense of belonging and achievement. Programs do this by effectively meeting the needs of diverse children in ways that are responsive, accepting, respectful, and supportive. So, the goal is that all children experiencing early learning and childcare — that they are all experiencing it equally with no barriers that limit their ability to achieve their

full potential. We will work with each of the centres, and there will be an overarching framework around what an inclusion policy should include, so there will be parameters around that.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the minister’s response to that question.

Last week, the minister noted that one of the new features of this act was that ECEs could access an appeal process to the board. I appreciated that piece of information, but I had trouble finding exactly where it lays that out. I’m wondering if the minister can describe what the process is for an ECE to apply to the Child Care Board. Can she point to which part of the act spells out that ECE appeal process and whether or not it’s in the act or will be set by regulation at a later date?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The appeal section is 66 and 67. The childcare act gives the director of the Early Learning and Child Care branch broad powers in the discretion to waive almost any requirement under the legislation. This discretion is in place to allow for programs, such as rural programs that may struggle with capacity, to continue to operate while being supported to meet the new standards of the act, such as developing the early learning plan that we just talked about and the inclusion policy.

The bill places limits on the powers of the director to waive certain requirements and ensures that all decisions made by the director can be appealed to the early learning and childcare board. This includes decisions affecting early childhood educators. Unlike the previous *Child Care Act*, which offered no appeal right to childcare workers, the new legislation grants early childhood educators the right to challenge decisions through an appeal process. New provisions outlined in section 66 allow individuals to ask the director to reconsider decisions without having to go to a formal review process. Additionally, the director of the Early Learning and Child Care branch is a public servant and, like all public servants, is expected to just discharge their duties in a responsible manner.

The new act retains the right to appeal to the childcare board. The process of appealing to the board remains largely the same as outlined in section 67. A notice of appeal must be submitted to the chair; then the chair provides the director with a copy of that notice. The director must provide all relevant information to the board within 10 business days. The only change is to allow the board sufficient time to hold an appeal, changing from 21 days to 30 days after receiving notice. This will allow more time for the collection of information, ensuring availability of all people involved, and to do due diligence.

The board can dismiss the appeal, revoke the decision, or vary a decision. The decisions will be binding. The legislation outlines areas that can be requested for reconsideration by the director or appealed to the board. They include licensing certification and subsidy.

It is worth noting that complaints and appeals can now be made by educators regarding their certification. This legislation will continue the practice of enabling parents to appeal decisions related to childcare subsidies and the ability for operators to appeal decisions related to their licence.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the minister’s explanation of that process. I think that the expansion of the appeal process to

allow ECEs to appeal is a good one, and I appreciate her outlining what that would look like.

The next note I had was already covered by my colleague, so I won't spend too much time on it, but I simply will make the note that, like the MLA for Takhini-Kopper King, I have heard concerns about section 24(e), that is, the term "behaviour management". The concerns that I had heard from the ECE community were that, while this act goes so far and spends so much time updating language and correcting previous approaches that were seen to be dated, this term sort of stands out as being a bit startling to a number of the ECE community that this would continue. I don't know what the right answer is in terms of what we would change it to necessarily, but I've heard that things like "social and emotional learning" or "coregulation" may be more appropriate.

I know my colleague the MLA for Takhini-Kopper King noted a few options as well. I won't dwell on it. I think the minister has already addressed this. I won't put it as a question to her now, but I'll simply note it, because it has been raised with me by a number of folks.

The near to last question I will have at general debate is about a single word in the purpose that is in the first section — part 1, section 1 — of the act, and that is the term "affordable". The purpose of the act lays out the general context of the bill, and it stood out to some folks in the ECE community that the term "affordable" was included here, because affordability isn't something we think of when we think of education. It's certainly not something we think of in K to 12 education. The move of this bill to shift the way we look at early learning and childcare to being part of the spectrum of education — to include the term "affordable" seemed to be incongruent with that move. We don't put affordability in the *Education Act* with regard to K to 12, so why are we putting affordability in early learning?

So, that was a question that was put to me, and so I will put it to the minister: Why was the term "affordable" used in the purpose of the act when the intent of this bill is to shift the focus of early learning to being a part of the spectrum of education and not simply about affordability?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Before I get into that particular question around affordability, I will just spend a moment on the behaviour management under section (e). I would be happy to do a hold-over on that particular clause as well since we are doing one on the board and have some more discussion about that. I would be happy to work with both leaders of the opposition parties around that.

Affordability — universal childcare programs may only charge monthly fees that are approved by the Department of Education Early Learning and Child Care branch. This practice will now be enshrined in legislation. I think that was really building a new system approach that was based on inclusivity, accessibility, and affordability. It was important to reflect that in the purpose of this bill and to enshrine that into the legislation.

Affordability measures will ensure control over the escalation of fees. The early learning and childcare subsidies are for lower income families and will continue, which means

many Yukoners will continue to receive free early learning and childcare services or will need to pay very little out of pocket. This includes lower income parents, young parents still attending high school, and, of course, grandparents with primary care-giving responsibility for grandchildren.

It was important to ensure that it was stated up front. Going back in time, as well, and how we got to be at this place with making the decision to move to universal childcare, even before we had an agreement with the federal government, we did a financial review within the Yukon.

Part of that review included a recommendation to review health and social services, and then we ended up with the report *Putting People First* as a result of that, so it does go back to the financial review that we did. So, making these investments in our youngest Yukoners in this way makes it affordable for families. This didn't exist. Many of us in this Legislative Assembly raised our children without that being considered and it would have made a huge difference for a lot of young parents, particularly women trying to re-enter education or the workforce.

This is a fundamental shift in early learning childcare not just in the Yukon but across Canada.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the minister's response.

I will move to my final question for general debate and that is in relation to the letter that was sent to the minister on March 31 by several childcare programs. When we discussed this bill last week, I asked about the wage grid and the commitment in a news release from the government to enshrine the wage grid as a part of the passage of the legislation and the regulations. I just wanted to highlight the concerns again and see if the minister can provide any further response to the childcare programs that have raised these concerns.

They have pointed out a structural problem with the program as it sits right now where they are limited in their ability to raise further funding from families vis-à-vis fee increases but face increased costs on the other side as minimum wage or other cost pressures increase their cost of operations. They find themselves in a precarious state. In the particular case of the letter, they note that — and I quote: "... we fear that the future of early learning and child care in the territory is in a precarious state." The concern that they have raised is around inflexibility of the program as it sits right now and the need for either more money from the government in terms of support or more flexibility on the other side to be able to adjust their fee structures.

Is the minister at all concerned about the observation from these childcare providers with regard to the program structure, and does the act of enshrining the wage grid and other principles of the program in its current form cause any concern vis-à-vis this letter?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The act talks about a wage grid that will be set out in regulation and, as I stated in Question Period and at other times, we are looking at the program and will definitely — I have not formally responded to those who have written the letter, but I will do that. That is underway right now.

During Question Period, I talked about the new agreement with Canada where we do have escalators built into the new

agreement, and that will bring new levels of funding. Certainly, we will be working with the operators as we review to make necessary adjustments if that is warranted.

We recognize, of course, that unforeseen high inflation levels have resulted in financial pressures for some program operators. The situation could not have been predicted when the funding model was created in 2021. We are committed to reviewing this. In the short term, the branch is also reviewing what operating expenses are deemed eligible for inclusion in the operational funding model in order to provide additional financial support to operators. So, that is something that we are working on. Again, we want the system to work for everyone.

I talked a little bit about this in Question Period, and I think that it's important to note just some of the differences with our agreement in the Yukon. One of the expectations is that the funding through our federal agreement is for not-for-profit centres, and Yukon is paying up in the range of 70 percent of the entire amount for early learning childcare. Yukon has 39 for-profit programs and 14 not-for-profit programs. We have 17 Yukon family day homes, including one First Nation-owned. We have nine Yukon First Nation government-owned and -operated. So, that makes up the 79 licensed facilities.

It was important to us to be able to support all of our programs to be able to actually have more ability to reach that goal of the \$10 a day childcare. So, I think that this is a uniqueness for the Yukon as well. There are jurisdictions that do not fund in the same way that we do in the Yukon, because we are covering, again, 70 percent of early learning childcare through the Government of Yukon. But as I've stated, we absolutely want to make sure the programs work for everyone and we're working with those providers to have those discussions.

Mr. Dixon: So, the minister mentioned that the new agreement with Canada includes escalators. Does it include escalators for the wage top-up for ECEs?

Hon. Ms. McLean: There are certain limitations with the federal funding that we have to comply with within our agreement. Those top-ups to wages — that's entirely the Yukon government's choice to fund in that way, but we will be able to offset other costs through the escalators so that we're continuing to ensure that early learning childcare educators are paid what they should be paid, and this was a huge shift for us. I know that we are among the highest paid early learning childcare educators in Canada, and this is how we will make our program serious and viable and where we will have our young people making choices to make this a career choice as well.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Bill No. 48, entitled *Early Learning and Child Care Act*?

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing clause-by-clause consideration of Bill No. 48, *Early Learning and Child Care Act*.

On Clause 1

Clause 1 agreed to

On Clause 2

Clause 2 agreed to

On Clause 3

Clause 3 agreed to

On Clause 4

Clause 4 agreed to

On Clause 5

Clause 5 agreed to

On Clause 6

Clause 6 agreed to

On Clause 7

Mr. Dixon: This is the area where we had talked about the possibility of reconsidering one aspect. The early learning framework, of course, was intended to be — the starting point for that was intended to be the BC early learning framework and then taken out to consultation by the department to communities, including First Nations, to Yukonize it — if that's an appropriate word. Can the minister confirm what the timing is for that process again?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The act will allow for the approval of an early learning framework that will be used by licensed programs to guide the preparation of an early learning plan. The Yukon Child Care Board has recommended that Yukon adopt an early learning framework. They have been recommending that for several years. During engagements over the past several years, the Department of Education heard how important it is to include an early learning framework in this work.

Early learning frameworks are the foundation of early learning and reflect the values, the learning standards, and the approach that support children's learning and well-being in early learning and childcare programs. The framework will also ensure space for integration of Yukon First Nation ways of knowing, being, and doing, but that will be flexible, of course — as I have talked about already today a few times — to be responsive to each First Nation's culture and values. This provision aligns with the national best practices and is one of the benchmarks of quality.

Most jurisdictions have adopted early learning frameworks and policy, and some have included the requirement in legislation, including this requirement in legislation in the Yukon — ensures that an early learning framework will guide all licensed early learning and childcare providers in the Yukon. The work is foundational for developing a quality early learning and childcare system and will be carried out in collaboration, again, with all of our partners but specifically Yukon First Nations. This work will, upon this act hopefully passing the House — as we are with the regulations — be an important part of the team's work, so it will start immediately. We will certainly be looking at best practices across the country as well.

Clause 7 agreed to
On Clause 8
Clause 8 agreed to
On Clause 9
Clause 9 agreed to
On Clause 10

Ms. White: Clause 10 is “Composition of board” and the minister has indicated that she will reach out to the Yukon Child Care Board to ask for their support in the recommendation of no fewer than five and not more than nine members. That being the case, I move that clause 10 be stood over.

MLA Tredger: It has been moved by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King that clause 10 be stood over.

Clause 10 stood over
On Clause 11
Clause 11 agreed to
On Clause 12
Clause 12 agreed to
On Clause 13

Ms. White: Clause 13 talks about the functions of the board and (b) says: “review any policy or program of the Department of Education that pertains to the provision of licensed programs”.

One of the questions that I had heard raised by both folks on the board and early childhood educators themselves was that they just wanted to know if it was a recommendation body or if they were actually able to make binding direction changes with the review of the policies or program.

Hon. Ms. McLean: The current legislation allows the board to make recommendations to the minister on any matter pertaining to childcare. The new act will limit this to licensed early learning and childcare programs.

This will provide clarity in the purpose and scope of the board activities. The board will continue to hear appeals, as we have talked about and as per current legislation. They will also continue to help shape early learning and childcare into the future. At this point, it would be advisory — bring it to the minister and we will work with them around the recommendations and incorporate where we can.

Clause 13 agreed to
On Clause 14

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem clauses 14 through 23 of Bill No. 48, entitled *Early Learning and Child Care Act*, read and agreed to.

Unanimous consent re deeming clauses 14 through 23 of Bill No. 48 read and agreed to

Deputy Chair: The Member for Takhini-Kopper King, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, has requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem clauses 14 through 23 of Bill No. 48, entitled *Early Learning and Child Care Act*, read and agreed to.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

Clause 14 through 23 deemed read and agreed to
On Clause 24

Ms. White: The minister showed a willingness to have this clause stood over and to come back with additional information on clause 24(e), which is behaviour management.

Seeing that, I move that clause 24 be stood over.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King that clause 24 be stood over.

Clause 24 stood over
On Clause 25

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem clauses 25 through 53 in Bill No. 48, entitled *Early Learning and Child Care Act*, read and agreed to.

Unanimous consent re deeming clauses 25 through 53 of Bill No. 48 agreed to

Deputy Chair: The Member for Takhini-Kopper King, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, has requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem clauses 25 through 53 of Bill No. 48, entitled *Early Learning and Child Care Act*, read and agreed to.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

Clauses 25 through 53 agreed to
On Clause 54

Ms. White: So, clause 54 is in part 8, “Enforcement”. Division 1 is “Inspections”. Clause 54 talks about inspectors.

I know the minister and I had an exchange in Committee of the Whole on the role of inspectors. Again, I’ll highlight that I think it’s important that inspectors — it’s not just inspecting, for example, health and safety, but it’s about elevating programs and making sure that those early learning programs are given the tools and the opportunities to elevate their learning. I would urge that a relationship, for example, with Partners for Children, who audit programs and make those recommendations, continue on.

If the minister has anything to add about inspectors, I would be delighted to hear it.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I did go over in some detail this area under part 8, under “Enforcement”, and the role of inspectors. I went through, today in debate, the types of qualifications and that these inspectors are early childhood educators who have training and background extensively and that there is also training that they will obtain and mentorship as well and that they’re part of an overall team who supports early learning childcare throughout the Yukon. They’re an important aspect of supporting programs for success but also ensuring that the health and safety of the centres are held to the standards that we expect for our youngest Yukoners.

I’m happy to have more conversations with folks as we work through the regulatory process and to ensure that this is well-defined in terms of the approach that the department is taking.

Clause 54 agreed to
On Clause 55

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem clauses 55 through 62 in Bill No. 48, entitled *Early Learning and Child Care Act*, read and agreed to.

Unanimous consent re deeming clauses 55 through 62 of Bill No. 48 read and agreed to

Deputy 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 clauses 55 through 62 of Bill No. 48, entitled *Early Learning and Child Care Act*, read and agreed to.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.
*Clauses 55 through 62 deemed read and agreed to
On Clause 63*

Ms. White: So, we are in division 2, “Complaints”, and 63 is the complaint process. Again, I highlight the concerns that I heard. In subsection (5), it currently reads: “The director may take steps...”, and folks felt that it should be “The director must take steps...” I know that the minister has told us the reasons why it says “may” and it’s about frivolous complaints, but again, in order to foster the belief that a person who is making a legitimate complaint will be protected, it is challenging with the language “may”. I would just highlight my concerns.

Clause 63 agreed to

On Clause 64

Ms. White: I apologize to my colleagues for slaughtering this process, but pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem clauses 64 through 85 of Bill No. 48, entitled *Early Learning and Child Care Act*, read and agreed to.

Unanimous consent re deeming clauses 64 through 85 of Bill No. 48 read and agreed to

Deputy 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 clauses 64 through 85 of Bill No. 48, entitled *Early Learning and Child Care Act*, read and agreed to.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.
Clauses 64 through 85 deemed read and agreed to

Hon. Ms. McLean: Since we have stood over provisions today, I move that the Chair report progress.

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

Motion agreed to

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is Vote 51, Department of Community Services, in Bill No. 217, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2025-26*.

Would members like to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 217: First Appropriation Act 2025-26

Deputy Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services, in Bill No. 217, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2025-26*.

Department of Community Services

Deputy Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Thank you, Deputy Chair; good afternoon, everybody. I would like to welcome my officials, Marie-Alexis in finance and, of course, our new Deputy Minister of Community Services, Damien Burns, to the House this afternoon.

I have very voluminous notes prepared for me with care and attention from the department, but I think, in light of the late hour this afternoon and the fact that so many of you on the other side of the House know government and know Community Services, I’m going to just forego the notes and get right into the debate. I’ll open up the floor to my good colleagues for the questions they have this afternoon.

Ms. McLeod: I thank the minister for that and, of course, I want to welcome the officials to our debate this afternoon.

On March 12 of this year, the minister issued a press release regarding new community sport and rec facilities in Whitehorse. Now, in that release, the minister committed to the sport community that the replacement for École Whitehorse Elementary School would include a large high school-sized gym inside the school facility.

Can the minister tell us what the status of that commitment is? Will the school need to be redesigned to accommodate this new space, and will the department consult with the sport community about this space at all? Will the budget for this new gym come from CS or will it be incorporated into the school budget through Education?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite for the questions this afternoon. It’s always great having our chats here in this Chamber with the Member for Watson Lake. I appreciate the questions. We are talking about the new sporting facility in the new École Whitehorse Elementary School which is slated to be built in the Takhini neighbourhood.

The answers to the questions are such: We have consulted with the sporting community. I have actually spoken quite a bit about the conversation that I had with Sport Yukon, while I was in Fort McMurray, about the need for new sport facilities in Whitehorse. We had discussions with Sport Yukon about how building appropriately sized usable gym space in our education facilities we’re building would be a great use of capital dollars, providing space not only for students during the day but for the

community at night in existing facilities, as opposed to stand-alone facilities that we have, such as our wonderful Canada Games Centre and the new gymnastic facility. All of which — these stand-alone facilities — do come with a large O&M cost, and having that O&M cost-baked into existing facilities that can be used all day long is a really good use of resources.

With Sport Yukon's blessing, we explored this, and I am happy to say that this new school in Takhini is one of the first that we are going to be employing this strategy in. Highways and Public Works, Education, and Community Services are working together on this project. We are all one government, and so the budget for this will be coming out of our capital allocation. We'll be working — being built by highways with Education, and so the budget will follow that process. CS has been working with the sporting community and consulting with the sporting community about what the needs would be, and that is how we arrived at the size of the gym through close consultation with Sport Yukon. I meet with them regularly, and this has been the approach that they wanted us to take — a Kelowna-sized gym or Kelowna-modelled gym — and so that is what we are putting in the school — after those talks with Sport Yukon, which represents about 17,000 people in the community if my memory serves — so that this facility will be going into the school. The school is still in the planning stages. The new capital construction with this gym will be worked into the planning as it proceeds.

Ms. McLeod: The minister mentioned that the project is being done through CS, Education, and HPW. While I can appreciate that the capital document contains a project, the money to fund this project surely must fall under someone's budget.

So, if the minister can just clear that up for me: Is that going to be divided up into all three budgets or divided up in some other fashion?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The budget for Education — if you go to page 13 of our five-year capital plan, it cites — it cites "École Whitehorse Elementary School replacement" — the budget sits with the Education department and that's where it sits. That's where the budget comes from.

Ms. McLeod: I appreciate that. We'll perhaps have some questions for the Department of Education on that.

So, in the same press release, there was a commitment to a new field in the Pepsi centre, a series of upgrades for Robert Service fields, and a new four-diamond field to be part of the school play yard.

So, what is the status of those projects? Is there a budget? Will that budget be part of the school construction budget or stand alone with CS?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The ball diamond that occupies — or ball diamonds — is part of the planning for the school. In the Takhini area, it will be part of the school planning when we're planning the grounds around the school, so those diamonds will be part of the school planning process. They will probably be included within the school budget.

As far as the ones on Robert Service, we are still working with Softball Yukon on finalizing those plans. Once those plans

are finalized, they will be budgeted through a Management Board process.

Ms. McLeod: I am having some trouble with the acoustics here, but I believe that the minister said that the four-diamond field will be part of the school construction project and budget. If the minister could just tell me again about the commitment for the new field at the Pepsi centre and upgrades to the Robert Service fields — could he just go over that again, please?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: What a pair we make, because I'm having the same problems. I had to clarify some of the details of the question with my officials. We will both endeavour to talk a little bit louder. I will do the same; I will project, and we will try to get through this with as little hearing difficulty as we possibly can.

Yes, the member is correct. The four-field complex will be built into the school. It will be part of the school grounds and part of the school budget. The Pepsi and Robert Service fields — we are still working with Softball Yukon on finalizing the plans there. That will be a Management Board submission that comes before Management Board once that is done, so it's still in the planning process with Softball Yukon. We have an agreement to actually go through with this work, but we are just finalizing the details. Once those details are finalized with Softball Yukon, they will come to Management Board and we will fund it through that process. I imagine that it will be Community Services bringing forward that submission, but the school submission on the four fields within the boundaries of the school will be part of the Education submission and planning process.

Ms. McLeod: Does the minister have any sort of timeline for when discussions with Sport Yukon will be done regarding those fields and when we might hear some additional information going forward?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite for the question. I share her excitement and enthusiasm for the project. I am not going to fortune-tell here or give any spoilers about how those negotiations are going. I will certainly inform the House and the people of the Yukon as soon as those negotiations are completed and we have inked the deal with Softball Yukon, and, of course, Sport Yukon is involved on the periphery of that one as well. But it is generally Softball Yukon that we are dealing with on those negotiations on their facilities at the Pepsi fields and on Robert Service. Once those are fully completed, I will certainly come forward, maybe with a ministerial statement, here in this House.

Ms. McLeod: The minister also committed to renovate the old Polarettes space at the St. Francis high school, so I have a few questions about that. What will that space be renovated into? What might the budget be, or has that been established? When will that work commence and has the government consulted with the sport community and/or the school community about those plans?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Once again, Deputy Chair, I do share the member's enthusiasm and excitement about this project. We have been working closely with Sport Yukon, as I said. I meet with them regularly — with the Sport Yukon folks — and

they are certainly very pleased that we have decided to go ahead and retain the old gymnastics facilities — public-facing, public approach, and public — as a public space. So, they are overjoyed with that.

Now, as to what is going into that facility, that is still — we are still talking with Sport Yukon and honing that plan down. Of course, we are — I know that Education has certainly been involved in this discussion, and we are still talking to the — I know that my colleague in Education is still talking to the school council about this, but the decision is going to retain — it will be a public space; it will be for usable sports groups. That is where our focus is for the future of this space. It was built as a public space; it's going to be retained as a public space, and what goes into that new sporting facility is still being decided with Sport Yukon.

Ms. McLeod: Can the minister tell us, then, whose budget we might find the commitment for the funds with? Will it be with Education or will it be with Community Services, and when would we find that allocated money — like, what budget document?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We are still in a planning process with Sport Yukon on what that space looks like. I know that it has been Highways and Public Works that has been leading the renovation of that space, but I haven't seen the — it will be a joint Management Board submission — I would imagine — between Highways and Public Works and CS, I would imagine, when that comes forward.

Again, we are still in a planning phase. I haven't seen the Management Board submission on that yet, so when that comes, that will decide a lot of those really, really detailed questions. As I said, we are still in a planning phase on this project, so it will be coming forward soon. The intention is that it will be another publicly available recreation space, because we need those in Whitehorse.

Ms. McLeod: Just one point, if the minister could clear this up for me, because the minister says that the planning and discussions are ongoing and then says that Highways and Public Works is managing the project, so if he could just clear that up. Whose job is this?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I know that Highways and Public Works has been looking at how to renovate this space. The decision had to come down to — because, you know, if you're building a recreation space, the standards that apply to that space are far different from if it is a school that children will be using; it changes the whole approach to the space.

Schools, of course, have standards that have to be in place when you're building these things. So, it's going to be a publicly available space. Highways and Public Works has started that process. Now that we've made a decision that it will be a public sporting facility, they are going to continue their work now and hone their renovation plans.

Of course, we're working with Sport Yukon on what the needs for the sporting community are in that space.

Ms. McLeod: I thank the minister for that.

So, I'm going to move on a bit here. I have some questions about the Heiland property in Whistle Bend. Now, we heard that the department had conducted an appraisal for that land. Is

the government in negotiations about the purchase of that property? If they are, what is the status of those negotiations?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite for the question. I hope she can hear me this afternoon on this question.

We have been in discussions, of course, with Mr. Heiland. It's quite a large parcel of land in the middle of a housing development, so it makes it quite appealing for us to have more land to develop within Whistle Bend. I think that's good.

We had to get the city to consider a rezoning application from Yukon government prior to seeking a negotiating mandate. I have been told that the city has processed the rezoning in and around that property, so now it is up to the department to seek a negotiating mandate with Mr. Heiland. I have not seen that yet.

Ms. McLeod: If I can kind of read between the lines a little bit there, the government is in negotiation about the purchase of that property and there is a rezoning process. The minister mentioned "in and around" that area. Is the rezoning process underway for that particular property?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Let me just correct. The rezoning around the Heiland property is necessary for — the next step for YG was to get that rezoned. It has been rezoned now around that property, so that has cleared council, I am told. We are not yet negotiating with Mr. Heiland. We did appraise the land, and now the next step will be for the Department of Community Services to actually come forward with a submission setting out the terms for seeking a negotiating mandate with the owners of that property.

Ms. McLeod: Does the minister have an idea of when those negotiations will be concluded?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I don't want the opposition to get too excited here. We have to start the negotiations with the person. We haven't started that. They haven't even sought a negotiating mandate yet, so I haven't seen that yet. We are not talking formally with the individual about the land. There was rezoning needed around the land and there may be work needed for YG to proceed around the land. I don't know what the status of that is yet, so I can find out on a subsequent question where we are with the land — with any work around the land that needs to be done.

I know that the city has rezoned the areas around the property. There is work yet to be done on this. All that I can say right now is that we are well aware of the property owner's desire to divest themselves of that property.

It's sitting right in the middle of the largest subdivision that Whitehorse has built in recent memory, so it makes sense to put more homes in that area. We just haven't seen that negotiating mandate yet. There were some steps with the city and the rezoning that had to be done. That work has been done, so now we are into the next steps on that. We are aware of the owner's desire to divest themselves of the property. It's in a good location. I still haven't seen any work from the department yet to say: How do we negotiate or what's our negotiating mandate? That will come at some point in the future.

Ms. McLeod: I thank the minister for that information.

Now, the five-year capital plan that accompanied the budget included a reference to the Frances Avenue lots in

Watson Lake. Can the minister confirm what the status of those lots is? Are they complete? Will they be put out to Yukoners this year?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Thank you very much to the Member for Watson Lake on the question. I was just checking the history. This is something that Watson Lake has wanted for decades — isn't it? This is something that has been needed in Watson Lake for decades, and I was elated to get work done and have the department tell me about the work with the First Nation to actually get this forward. Now it's coming to fruition. We are right on the cusp of something that has been talked about and desired by this community — your community — in Watson Lake for a very, very long time. It's exciting and I'm excited about it.

The 43-lot extension and lift station is expected to be completed this spring, is what I'm being told. I think that captures an area in the next eight weeks. So, what we're doing here — the lift station is being commissioned, so we are making sure that everything is working there. There is, like, the final — I don't know. How do you commission lift stations — with a bottle of champagne? I don't know how that's done, but we're going through the final motions of commissioning the lift station. Once we know that it's working as planned with the contractor, then that's great. Then we are also putting in the electrical with ATCO. That is scheduled and is in the process or will be done relatively soon, I'm told. With the utilities — that's the electrical and, of course, the Internet as well — and then we're going to pass it over to my good colleague in Energy, Mines and Resources, who will then work his magic to get the lots before the public.

So, our work here is nearly done, and it's very exciting. We will have a lot of lots. The First Nation will obtain some lots; the city will get a lot; the rest of them will be available to the general public, and that is going to be happening — you know, you can ask my good colleague when he's up on his budget — but our work will be done in the next — by this spring — within the next eight weeks at the latest.

Ms. McLeod: Of course, you know, we have seen documents that have stated that this project is, of course, finished — and same with Willow Acres in Haines Junction. Of course, you know, we know that was not quite accurate.

If we look at eight weeks to completion — and I'm guessing that is a rough estimate — and if we are being optimistic — let's say it's July before the work is done, because, well, you have to tell the minister that we're still under a ton of snow in Watson Lake. So, how long does it typically take EMR — and I know that I could — you know, we could wait and talk to EMR — but, you know, the minister already today made reference to a one-government approach, so perhaps he can give me some information on this.

How long will we have to wait to find out the pricing?

Now, back in March — March 12 — when we were looking at the supplementary budget documents, and I had asked about pricing, and the minister had said that he did not have that information but that he would have his officials — he was talking to officials, he would come up with that

information, and if he couldn't do it that day, he would certainly get that information to me, which I have not seen.

So, I'm wondering if the minister can give us some sort of information on when the pricing of those lots will be done. What's the process for the Town of Watson Lake accepting those lots, or do they have to? When can residents look to purchase a lot? Which, of course, makes one wonder what kind of lead time they need to actually build.

So, these are all very important questions to citizens who are interested in purchasing land.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We were having such a nice chat. I think that it's a bit thorny and I don't know why. We are signing off on decades of work to get here — decades of waiting. I can understand the member opposite's anticipation of this long decades-in-the-making event in Watson Lake and we are down to the final weeks. Then we get these barbs about Willow Acres, even. I mean, gee-willikers — what a situation.

All I can tell the member opposite is that we're about to commission the lift station. It is going to be signed off to the Town of Watson Lake, which will then take it. That is great news. That is really great news.

Then we also have 43 lots in Watson Lake — fantastic — and Willow Acres. I could go into Teslin. I mean, we are seeing record lot development in rural Yukon — record lot development — huge areas for rural Yukon to grow that they haven't seen in decades. It is fantastic. I could talk about this all afternoon.

As far as the prices of lots, we are working in tandem with the appraiser right now — I understand from my officials who are, as one government, working with Energy, Mines and Resources. The appraisals are happening in tandem. We are working to make sure that the commissioning of the infrastructure is done with the sign-off of the properties. The civil servants have absolutely been extraordinary on this. They have done such incredible work in the lands branch and I am sure in Energy, Mines and Resources, as well, as they are doing their appraisal on lots, making sure that the lots are as affordable as we can make it in this environment. As we all know, we have seen the rampant inflation in infrastructure and everything else. We are doing our darnedest to make sure that these lots are affordable for Yukoners. The team at Community Services in lands is doing such a tremendous job in making sure that these lots get before the citizens of Watson Lake as soon as possible, and they are working with Energy, Mines and Resources, which knows that there also is some expectation — some real excitement about this. We are working on this.

We will get it done as soon as humanly possible. I can give the member opposite that assurance because we know how important it is to rural Yukon — to Watson Lake — and Watson Lake is important to me. It is important to my colleagues on this side of the House, as are Haines Junction, Teslin, and Dawson. We are going to get that work done.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 48, entitled *Early Learning and Child Care Act*, and directed me to report progress.

Committee of the Whole has also considered Bill No. 217, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2025-26*, 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 5:28p.m.

The following documents were filed April 7, 2025:

35-1-319

Comparison of the 33rd, 34th and 35th Yukon Legislative Assemblies, letter re (dated April 7, 2025) from Hon. John Streicker, Government House Leader (Streicker)

35-1-320

Abortion access, letter re (dated June 24, 2024) from Kate White, Leader of the Third Party, to Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee, Minister of Health and Social Services (White)

35-1-321

Abortion access, letter re (dated July 26, 2024) from Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee, Minister of Health and Social Services, to Kate White, Leader of the Third Party (White)

35-1-322

Abortion access update, letter re (dated March 26, 2025) from Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee, Minister of Health and Social Services, to Kate White, Leader of the Third Party (White)