



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 250

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Thursday, April 24, 2025 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2025 Spring Sitting

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

CABINET MINISTERS

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

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
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Speaker: I will now call the House to order.
 We will proceed at this time with prayers.

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of a change made to the Notice Paper. Motion No. 1275 from the Hon. Premier, was not placed on today's Notice Paper, as it was out of order.

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 King Charles III Coronation Medal recipients

Hon. Mr. Pillai: It with great pride and deep respect that I rise in the House today to pay tribute to the Yukoners who received the King Charles III Coronation Medal. The Coronation Medal commemorates the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III, a historic moment that marked a new chapter in the story of our country and the Commonwealth. It is also the first Canadian Coronation Medal of its kind — a significant milestone in our national history.

Across the country, 30,000 Canadians have been awarded this medal. Each one of them has made a meaningful and lasting contribution either to Canada as a whole, to their province or territory, to their region or community, or even beyond our borders in ways that have brought honour or benefit to Canadians.

The Yukon is home to some of the most generous, resilient, and community-focused people I have ever had the privilege of meeting. They are leaders, mentors, innovators, and quiet change-makers who have helped shape a stronger, more inclusive Yukon. Recipients were nominated across a wide range of fields, including the arts, business, community service, education, health care, and sport.

Each one has given of themselves not for recognition but from a deep sense of purpose and service. Their work, whether seen or unseen, has helped to lift others up, tell important stories, build stronger systems, care for those in need, and bring people together. From artists and educators to public servants and health care providers to athletes and scientists, these Yukoners have made our communities better, more compassionate, and more vibrant places to live.

This tribute is about more than a medal; it's about acknowledging the profound impact that everyday leadership and dedicated service can have. It reminds us that it is often the humble, consistent efforts — those done quietly from the heart — that leave a lasting impact.

So, to the recipients of the King Charles III Coronation Medal and on behalf of a grateful territory, thank you. Thank you for your commitment, for your generosity, and for leading by example. You represent the best of the Yukon and your contributions will not be forgotten. Congratulations on this well-deserved honour.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the King Charles III Coronation Medal awardees.

The June 2, 1953 coronation of the young Queen Elizabeth, King Charles' mother, produced about 130,000 medals for her kingdom — total. So, those are some collector's items. On May 23, 2023, an announcement that the medals would be struck was made by Prime Minister Trudeau. A year later, on May 6, 2024, details of the program were released, and deserving Canadians were searched for and found. The Canadian Chancellery of Honours at Rideau Hall designed 30,000 medals to distribute to Canadians from coast to coast to coast to those who have made significant contributions to their country, their region, or their community, and I'm sure that there were some hard choices as, there were many well-deserving citizens.

The Canadian edition of the medal — a beautiful Coronation Medal — has the effigy of King Charles III on one side and, on the reverse: the Canadian Royal Cypher with 13 points representing 10 provinces and three territories; the date, "6.V.2023"; and the Latin words "VIVAT REX", meaning "Long Live The King".

I was unable to find the total distribution numbers of each area in Canada but do know that Senator Pat Duncan has been travelling to the communities to present them to amazing Yukoners.

I'm going to break protocol here — not slighting anyone else — but I would like to sing aloud and honour my nephew, Trevor Ellis, who is here and was presented with the medal from Senator Duncan. He is, His Worship, the current Mayor of Mayo. He was a councillor, I think, for 20 years. He is the fire chief in Mayo, he works for EMS, and he's an all-round event volunteer — oh yes, and throw in his day job as mining recorder. So, congratulations, Trevor; we're proud of you.

Commissioner Adeline Webber has awarded several, and Premier Ranj Pillai has recently awarded many well-deserving Yukoners. Being recognized for this award is an honour and we would like to congratulate all of the recipients. Thank you for all you do and have done for our home, Yukon.

Applause

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon NDP to congratulate the recipients of the King Charles III Coronation Medal. This year, so many

Yukoners were recognized with this national honour — 84 in total, I think. Medals were awarded by Commissioner Webber, Senator Duncan, and the Premier.

The King Charles III Coronation Medal is awarded to those exceptional people who demonstrate outstanding leadership, service, and dedication to their communities. So, today we celebrate those Yukoners who have made and continue to make lasting impacts on our territory.

From community leaders to dedicated volunteers, these wonderful people embody the spirit of service and commitment. Each one has gone above and beyond to make a positive difference in their community. They have uplifted those around them, fostered connections, and enriched the lives of countless Yukoners.

This medal serves as a reminder of the importance of community service and the lasting impact of dedicated people. By continuing to support and recognize those who contribute to improving our communities, we ensure that the spirit of service is held up where it belongs — front and centre.

As we celebrate the achievements of this year's recipients, let us express our heartfelt thanks and continue to support the values of community and service that they represent.

Applause

In recognition of White Pass & Yukon Route Railway 125th anniversary

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 125th anniversary of the completion of the White Pass & Yukon Route Railway.

In the late 19th century amid the fervor of the Klondike Gold Rush, the White Pass & Yukon Route Railway was conceived as a bold transportation solution into the Yukon along the trading routes of the coastal and Inland Tlingit peoples. The project began in 1898, overcoming extraordinary natural obstacles including deep snow, sheer cliffs, and steep mountains. Stretching from the tidewaters of Skagway, Alaska, through the rugged Coast Mountains, across the White Pass Summit, and into Carcross and Whitehorse, construction required immense resources: 450 tonnes of explosives, \$10 million in financing, and the labour of approximately 35,000 workers.

Thanks to the choice of a narrow gauge and some innovative engineering, including what was then the world's tallest cantilever bridge, the railway was punched through with astonishing speed. Climbing nearly 3,000 feet in just 20 miles — that's 32 kilometres — the summit was reached in February 1899, Lake Bennett that summer, and by July 1900, the final spike was driven in Carcross on the traditional territory of the Carcross/Tagish First Nation to complete the 110-mile route in just 27 months.

Initially built to serve gold seekers, the railway quickly became a vital freight carrier transporting ore, supplies, and people. During World War II, it played a key role in supporting the US army's construction of the Alaska Highway. Over time, the company grew into a full-fledged transportation enterprise operating everything from paddlewheelers to aircraft. By 1988, with its industrial role diminished, the rail line was reinvented

as a scenic heritage railway, preserving the stories and engineering marvels of the past.

Today, the White Pass & Yukon Route is recognized as an international historic civil-engineering landmark alongside global icons like the Panama Canal and the Eiffel Tower. With its incredible scenery, canyon depths, and tight twists and turns along wooden trestle bridges, its 110-mile route stands as a monument to human grit and ingenuity.

The White Pass & Yukon Route is also a beloved year-round staple for Yukoners. Last year, roughly 16,000 people took the Lake Bennett-to-Carcross service and 250 people rode the Canada Day special. As part of the commemoration of 125 years of connection, heritage, and momentum, the company will be hosting a celebration in Carcross on July 26 featuring performances, activities for kids, and rides along Bennett Lake aboard historic Engine No. 73. I encourage all Yukoners to get all aboard.

So, congratulations to the White Pass & Yukon Route Railway and all who have contributed to its storied legacy.

Applause

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the White Pass & Yukon Route. John F. Kennedy famously said, on his first trip to Canada as president — and I'll quote: "Geography has made us neighbours. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners. And necessity has made us allies."

This certainly is at the heart of the relationship between the Yukon and Alaska and what projects like the White Pass & Yukon Route Railway have meant to our two countries. The railroad between Whitehorse and Skagway began construction in May 1898 — 35,000 workers and just over two years to complete 172 kilometres of railway. On July 29, 1900, crews working from the south in Skagway and from the north in Whitehorse met in Carcross, driving a golden spike to mark the completion of the railroad.

Les McLaughlin told the tale of the last spike on *Yukon Nuggets*. To quote: "A real golden spike was placed on a wooden rail tie and many attempts were made to drive it in." He then told the tale of those numerous attempts, the wallops and the lady-like taps, with spirited cheers and alcoholic spirits alike. He went on to describe the situation from the diary of Samuel Graves, president of the White Pass company, who travelled from Skagway to be part of the spike-driving. I'll quote again: "Greatly to his credit, wrote Graves, he hit one of them a good wallop on the side, but he knocked it flat. After that the spike wouldn't stand straight and 'It was a pretty tired spike when it came to my turn to drive it home...'"

After its operation as a railway linkage between Skagway and Whitehorse for just over eight decades, the railway stopped operating to Whitehorse in 1982 due to an economic downturn in the mining operations and the completion of the south Klondike Highway. I was fortunate, as a grade 9 student, to ride the rail from Bennett to the Main Street in Whitehorse that fall after we had successfully completed the Chilkoot Trail.

The railway was later re-established as an excursion train between Skagway and the White Pass summit and later on to

Carcross and Bennett. It currently runs along a 108.6-kilometre track through Alaska, British Columbia, and the Yukon.

The rich history of the railway remains, and many Yukoners recall a life growing up with many family members having worked or still working for White Pass & Yukon Route over the years. Here in Whitehorse, the White Pass & Yukon Route depot, which was constructed in 1905 after a fire took the original, was designated a Canadian historic site for its historic and architectural values.

I hope Yukoners and visitors alike are able to ride the rails this summer and soak in the rich history of this incredible journey. Congratulations, White Pass, on the 125th anniversary of your golden spike.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate 125 years of the White Pass & Yukon Route Railway. It has been fascinating to learn today about the remarkable history and legacy and how it has shaped the Yukon that we know today. I appreciate all the facts and stories that my colleagues have shared.

For my part, I will just add three of the images that come to my mind when I think of the White Pass. The first is the image of the beautiful calendars that they make and that my mom used to collect. Each one has its own stunning picture of the train tracks and the train cars travelling along the breathtaking heights of its route through the mountains.

The second is a memory of being at the end of the Chilkoot Trail after days of hard hiking, camp cooking, and using boulders as chairs. I remember waiting there at Bennett hearing the trail whistle as it pulled up and climbing into the cars with their vintage luxury that felt utterly surreal.

One more memory: the Santa Train, that magical day of the year when Yukoners come out in droves to enjoy a free ride on the train up through the snowy mountains with the added bonus of meeting Santa on the way. For me, my favourite part is sharing snacks and treats with strangers, as everything from Christmas chocolate oranges to homemade cranberry bars get passed from seat to seat.

The White Pass has a long and storied history with a monumental legacy, but for me, I remember it most fondly for the charming, colourful, and profoundly Yukon moments and memories that it creates.

Congratulations on 125 years, and here's to many more.

Applause

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Speaker: Under Tabling Returns and Documents, the Chair has for tabling the 2024 annual report on political parties' revenues. In addition, the Chair has for tabling a letter dated April 23, 2025 to Michelle Grant, senior vice-president of PricewaterhouseCoopers, as well as the reply from counsel for PricewaterhouseCoopers, Peter Ruby, of Goodmans LLP, dated April 24, 2025.

Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Petitions.

PETITIONS

Petition No. 31 — response

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to respond to Petition No. 31. The Government of Yukon recognizes the seriousness of the heap leach failure that occurred at the Eagle Gold mine on June 24, 2024, and we continue to treat the response, reflecting the critical urgency of the situation.

Our government has committed to not license another new heap leach facility until the outcomes of an independent review are incorporated, as appropriate, into licensing and enforcement policies and practices. The independent review is underway to identify the causes of the heap leach failure. Highly qualified technical experts have been selected to be on the independent review board. The board has developed its own work plan to conduct this review in accordance with the terms of reference, its budget, and timeline. We respect the board's autonomy in this regard. The board's report and its recommendations will be publicly released after the review is completed this June.

Regarding the Yukon's mining regulation system, the approach that we take to review our regulatory systems will be informed by the findings of the independent review, so we will wait for the findings of the independent review before determining next steps.

Our shared work to develop new minerals legislation will also certainly take into consideration the outcomes of the independent review. PricewaterhouseCoopers, the court-appointed receiver, is in control of the mine site for the purpose of carrying out remediation of the failure and its impacts. The receiver is overseeing and facilitating the work with the input and support of the Yukon government and is responsible for implementing all directions issued by the Government of Yukon and federal regulators. The receiver is making good progress with remediation work on-site and we thank them for their work.

The Yukon government will continue to serve as the primary territorial regulator and enforcement body for the mine site. Technical experts representing the Yukon government and the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun government are meeting on a regular basis to inform remediation work. Our priorities are to ensure the health and well-being of Yukoners and to protect the environment. Our government also recognizes the importance of advancing regional land use planning.

I am happy to provide an update on the consequential work that is being done in collaboration with Yukon First Nations, communities, and stakeholders. We have provided our Yukon government response to the recommended Dawson regional land use plan, and I know that the Dawson Regional Planning Commission is now working toward a final recommended plan.

We are working with the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun to finalize a memorandum of understanding for planning on their traditional territory.

We are at the pre-planning stage with the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, Kluane First Nation, Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, and the Teslin Tlingit Council. We continue to work with First Nation partners to

collaboratively implement the north Yukon and Peel watershed regional land use plans.

Together with the Government of Canada and the Council of Yukon First Nations, we are reviewing the 2024 *Umbrella Final Agreement* funding to ensure that there is enough funding to develop and implement land use plans. We remain committed to the goals and priorities set out by the Yukon Forum regional land use planning working group to advance land use planning in a way that honours the final agreements.

I'm also happy to give an update on our work on new minerals legislation.

This work is being done in collaboration with Yukon First Nation governments and transboundary Indigenous groups. Successor legislation will improve our regulatory system, protect the environment, uphold aboriginal and treaty rights, and strengthen our economy.

The heap leach failure at the Eagle Gold mine has elevated the priority of the work to create new minerals legislation. Work is going on right now to develop a recommended framework for this legislation. While this is a government-to-government process, the steering committee has been engaging with industry and environmental non-governmental organizations. The committee has been meeting with these stakeholders to discuss components contemplated for the new regime.

The important insights and perspectives received from First Nation governments, industry representatives, environmental organizations, and the public is currently and will continue to inform the legislative development process for new minerals legislation.

Speaker: Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT the Yukon Legislative Assembly, pursuant to section 17(1) of the *Human Rights Act*, does reappoint Aja Mason to the Yukon Human Rights Commission for a term of three years effective May 24, 2025.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to introduce legislation to grant the Yukon River legal personhood as per the resolution of the Council of Yukon First Nations.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Watson Lake continuing care services

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, for years now, the community of Watson Lake has been calling for a long-term care facility. In response to this, in 2022, the minister's solution was to promise two beds at the hospital in Watson Lake that

could be used for long-term care. Then, in 2023, the minister reversed that decision and claimed that the Town of Watson Lake didn't want those beds for long-term care.

Then last year, she flipped back and announced that the beds would now be available for long-term care. When I asked about this last November, she said that the two beds in the hospital are now being used for long-term care.

Can the minister confirm that these two beds are still being used for long-term care in Watson Lake, and can she confirm that they are available year-round, including in the summer?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that I didn't reverse any decisions. Frankly, we have continued to work with the folks in Watson Lake. The information that we received from them initially, which led to a delay in the two hospital beds being used for access to long-term care, was as a result of information that came forward from the town folk of Watson Lake and, as a result, we have been continuing to work with them.

In response to their concerns, an aging in community Watson Lake steering committee has been established to oversee collaborative work between Health and Social Services and the Yukon Hospital Corporation. The steering committee will provide support and guidance to the aging in community Watson Lake working group. The aging in community working group includes Health and Social Services and Yukon Hospital Corporation staff working in partnership with representatives from the Liard First Nation, Daylu Dena Council, and Signpost Seniors Association. A community wellness coordinator from the health system strategy and implementation team has recently joined that committee to ensure that efforts are streamlined as community wellness plans and engagement work continues.

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, exactly one year ago today, the minister told CBC Yukon this — quote: "... her office is planning a scheduled visit to Watson Lake to speak with residents about the long-term care needs, and what the government will do about them."

I know that a lot of my constituents saw that article and were looking forward to the opportunity to meet with the minister to express their concerns. So, why hasn't the minister followed through on that promise to visit Watson Lake to speak with residents about the long-term care needs of my community?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, the officials from the Department of Health and Social Services have been working extensively with the individuals who have reached out and have concerns with respect to care for seniors in Watson Lake. As I have noted, an aging in community working group has been started.

On March 12, 2025, an aging in community working group met with the aging in community steering committee to provide ideas for some next steps that can be taken in the community to better document the community's needs, along with community resources and gaps in resources to meet the needs.

Some local activities have already begun as a result of the working group meeting, including a local walking group that has been started. With respect to current action items, the

Watson Lake physicians and the home care program in Watson Lake will consider using the Canadian frailty scale as a standardized tool to document the number of seniors and elders who are living with mild or moderate or severe frailty. Classifying overall needs with the Canadian standards is work that is ongoing. The Hospital Corporation supports patients who require an alternative level of care, such as respite care or palliative care.

Mr. Speaker, you can see that the work is continuing and is being focused on the levels of service for seniors in Watson Lake.

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, it has been about three and a half years since a petition circulated in Watson Lake and was tabled in the Legislative Assembly. That petition called for the minister to come to Watson Lake to meet with the community and hear more about the community's needs for a long-term care facility. As the minister will recall, that petition garnered over 500 signatures. At the time, the minister refused to come to Watson Lake and stated clearly that the Liberals had no intention of ever considering a long-term care facility in Watson Lake.

Can the minister confirm that her position still has not changed and that she is still not interested in coming to Watson Lake to hear from my constituents about the need for a long-term care facility in Watson Lake?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Again, I have asked the members opposite that, if they're going to quote me, they do so correctly. I have never refused to come to Watson Lake, and I have certainly spoken only positively about the work that we are doing with that community to support seniors, which is what this is about.

Since April 2024, up to two rooms at the Watson Lake Community Hospital have been designated to support patients who require an alternative level of care. Between April 2024 and February 3, 2025, the rooms have been occupied for 141 patient days. Information gained from the rooms' use will provide valuable data on the community's needs. The existing staffing complement meets the required needs to provide quality care to those who stay in those rooms.

The Yukon Home Care Program also provides services in Watson Lake. We continue to provide the services of a permanent registered nurse and home support supervisor, providing coordinated care, nursing, and home support for individuals to stay in their homes. We have continued to work with this community. We have a home care occupational and physical therapist who visits the community, and we have other support throughout Watson Lake.

We are working to support that community, in particular, to support the seniors in relation to this question, and seniors are critical to this program.

Question re: Continuing care

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, the territorial Liberal government is in their ninth year in power. When they were first elected, the Whistle Bend continuing care facility was being built, and 150 beds were in phase 1, with an additional 150 continuing care beds planned for a future phase 2.

The Liberals campaigned against building a second phase of that health care facility. In an October 2016 press release, the now Minister of Health and Social Services said, "Our plan is to keep the Whistle Bend Continuing Care development at 150 beds..." Nine years later, there is a growing wait-list for continuing care.

Can the minister tell us what, if anything, the government has done to open more continuing care beds in Whitehorse?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, in 2025-26, we have budgeted \$79.4 million toward ongoing operations of long-term care homes in the Yukon. Long-term care homes offer various levels of care and assistance to residents as part of our territory's continuum of care.

In an ongoing effort to increase and optimize long-term care and acute care capacity in the Yukon, we opened 18 long-term care rooms — eight new at Whistle Bend Place and vacated 10 rooms at the Thomson Centre, enabling an expansion of 10 additional acute care beds at the Whitehorse General Hospital. This is work that is critical to the expanding services of Yukon's health care system.

Continuing care has a robust quality and safety team who conduct ongoing assessment of all continuing care programs to ensure residents' needs are being met.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, there is now a wait-list for continuing care. That our territory has a growing seniors population is no surprise. Nine years ago, the Liberals didn't like the plan for a second phase of the Whistle Bend continuing care facility, and the current Minister of Health and Social Services announced that they were cutting the plan for Whistle Bend from 300 beds down to 150.

Ironically, in that same press release, she said, "... it is clear a lack of planning has resulted in poor decisions..." Those words have come back to haunt her. Last year, doctors, patients, and families criticized this government for its poor decision to squeeze more beds into a part of Whistle Bend that was designed for palliative care. As reported by CBC: "... the hospice facility was designed especially for end-of-life care, and so moving those residents somewhere else is a 'poor solution.'"

After cancelling the plan they inherited for more continuing care beds in Whitehorse, what alternative solutions has this government come up with?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to talk to Yukon seniors today about these important issues. I have provided some of the information that is now being asked for in the first answer, but in the first phase of our long-term care room optimization plan, something that did not exist when Whistle Bend was considered, planned, built, and opened with no O&M funding attached to it — seems to be something that the Yukon Party did on a regular basis: plan buildings with no plan to budget about how those operations would happen — we have a long-term care room optimization plan. We were able to simultaneously provide 10 new acute care beds for the Whitehorse General Hospital and 12 — two were net new long-term care rooms at Whistle Bend Place to accommodate the move of 10 residents from the Thomson Centre to open two new long-term care rooms in January of

2025; six new long-term care rooms at Whistle Bend Place were opened.

By optimizing existing spaces, Mr. Speaker, the Government of Yukon and the Yukon Hospital Corporation are addressing the growing needs of the Yukon's health care system, enhancing long-term care and acute care services with the growth of our aging population. This work is continuing in consideration of future needs.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, when the current health minister announced in October 2016 that the Liberals would cancel the plan to develop a second phase of the Whistle Bend continuing care facility, she promised that the Liberals would "... work with Yukoners, health professionals, and stakeholders to find alternative solutions...", but nine years later, they have failed to plan for alternative solutions to address the needs of a growing number of seniors in need of continuing care. This need was predictable. There was a plan, but the Liberals cancelled it. Then they broke their promise to plan "alternative solutions".

Will the minister or the Premier commit to either moving forward now with the addition of a second phase at the Whistle Bend continuing care facility or immediately begin planning another continuing care facility in Whitehorse?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: With the growth of our aging population, we are working with Highways and Public Works to explore options for increasing long-term care capacity and are actively preparing by developing functional programs and assessing sites for any potential new spaces.

What I can indicate is that perhaps the member opposite should speak to their colleagues about what kind of poor planning happened with respect to long-term care and the cancellation of the additional spaces. I also appreciate that the quotations are coming from 2016. What the members opposite don't seem to know is that things change, times change, our plans change, and as a result, we are responding to the needs of Yukoners at every step of the way with respect to long-term capacity — \$79.4 million toward the ongoing operations of long-term care homes in the Yukon in the 2025-26 budget. Let's hope they vote for it.

Question re: Health care infrastructure

MLA Tredger: We're four months into 2025, and this year, Whitehorse General Hospital has already faced three severe crises related to infrastructure and equipment. First, the hospital's sterilization system went down for months, cancelling and postponing surgeries. Next, there were water leaks in the sprinkler systems in one of the two main operating rooms. That meant cancelling and postponing even more surgeries on top of the obvious safety risks. Now, there has been a lab equipment breakdown causing delays for Yukoners waiting for diagnoses.

This is all critical health infrastructure that Yukoners rely on, and when it breaks down, it's Yukoners who are at risk. Why has this government allowed hospital infrastructure and equipment to get to such a state of disrepair that there have been three major failures in just four months?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the characterization of the situations, none of which are necessarily predictable, and also appreciate the political spin with respect to the serious issues that occur at the Whitehorse General Hospital.

The laboratory service disruption, the most recent of those noted, has been advertised and information has been put out by the Yukon Hospital Corporation as of yesterday. The primary analyzers used to complete the blood count testing — both are non-functional at the moment. The service from the vendor has been initiated and the estimated time of service arrival is this afternoon. Until services are restored, turnaround times are being affected and routine outpatient CBC testing is somewhat limited.

We truly appreciate the hard work of the staff who are putting a great effort in to minimize the impact of this disruption on patients, which again, Mr. Speaker, is what this all about — not the politics. What is the impact on patients, how can we make that minimal, how can the Hospital Corporation, which is working diligently to do so, be supported by our government?

MLA Tredger: Surgery wait times in the Yukon are already often years long. The continued plight of breakdowns over the last four months has people waiting even longer. For years, doctors and health care workers have been asking for modernized equipment and redundancies, but they have been ignored by this government. Doctors have left the territory due to concerns about our infrastructure, and we have heard of visiting surgeons being shocked by the age and low quality of our facilities and equipment. More doctors have talked about leaving if things don't improve soon.

What is this government doing to urgently respond to the infrastructure problems in our health care system and prevent future crises?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, what this government is doing is making plans with our partners — with the Yukon Medical Association and with the Yukon Hospital Corporation. We are providing more funding to the Yukon Hospital Corporation than has ever been considered before. Since 2018-19, we have increased the Yukon Hospital Corporation's O&M funding from \$68.2 million to \$135.3 million, which is an overall increase of 98.4 percent in less than six short years.

The work is continuing with our partners to make sure that they have the funding needed to provide support for patients in the Yukon. Health care is all about serving Yukoners. Our operations — our partnerships are strong. The opportunity to solve issues as they arise has been dedicated and targeted by the Yukon Hospital Corporation. As a result, I know that Yukoners have had impacts on their personal lives. Many of them understand the situations and support this government and the funding that is provided for that health care.

MLA Tredger: The ongoing crisis at Whitehorse General Hospital didn't appear overnight. Doctors have been trying to bring this government's attention to these equipment and infrastructure issues for years. Surgeons even went so far as to commission a report in 2019 that outlined exactly what

was needed for surgical services to keep pace with patient demand, but it was ignored and here we are.

Staff are working so hard to keep things afloat, but the entire hospital ecosystem is crumbling because this government hasn't done their part. We have fabulous health care teams, but we are at risk of losing them. Doctors and other health care providers are thinking about leaving because they simply can't take it anymore.

What is this government going to do to turn things around for the hospital and its staff before we lose even more health care workers?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, again, I note the political spin with respect to the approach taken in the question. Again —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: On a point of order, Third Party House Leader.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, this is the second time that the Member for Riverdale South has referred to “political spin”, as in misleading information, coming from this party, which I believe is against Standing Order 19(h).

Speaker: Government House Leader, on the point of order.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Standing Order 19(h) is about uttering a deliberate falsehood or accusing another member of uttering a deliberate falsehood. Using the word “spin” is talking about how it is being reflected; it's not about deliberate falsehoods.

Chair's ruling

Speaker: There is no point of order. It is a dispute between members.

Minister of Health and Social Services, please continue.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, what I can note about Yukon's health care system is that we have amazing individuals who work and provide service to Yukoners absolutely every day. We have achieved significant progress thanks to the staff and the teams in the health system who provide exceptional care to Yukoners.

We have also been making capital investments to accommodate MRI services and to improve our emergency department, ICU, and mental wellness services. In the summer of 2024, we opened the Old Crow health and wellness centre; we have opened the Constellation clinic in Whitehorse; in November 2022, the Whitehorse Walk-In Clinic; and the midwifery clinic. We have also optimized existing spaces such as the managed alcohol program, which opened in November 2024. We are working on all elements of care for Yukoners.

We have also continued to prioritize the work to expand capacity at the Whitehorse General Hospital and long-term care homes. I am very pleased to be able to speak to the importance of health care to Yukoners and provide that information today.

Question re: Health care specialist wait times

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, I have some questions about the health care wait times. Last year, the Yukon orthopaedic program stopped taking new consult referrals and informed Yukoners that they would now need to seek this important health service outside the territory. At the time, the surgeons who run the program cited a lack of resources and support from the Yukon government as key concerns. This has meant that those Yukoners seeking hip or knee surgeries would face even longer wait times.

Can the minister provide an update on the current wait time for both hip and knee surgeries? How many Yukoners are currently on the wait-list?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I'm keenly aware, as are all Yukoners, that having health care close to home is by far the most important opportunity for them. The idea of them being available for Yukoners to not have to travel is an important opportunity. We have expanded the orthopaedics program. We are, at the moment, looking for additional surgeons to support that program — a homegrown program, an opportunity for Yukoners to have hip and knee replacements here in the territory, which was frankly not available in the past.

The Yukon is currently supported by one resident orthopaedic surgeon and additional coverage is provided by locums. We're working with the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the resident orthopaedic surgeon — we completely support the program — to explore opportunities to ensure the success and stability of the program in the future.

We're closely reviewing a proposal that we received in February to see if we can reduce wait times and deal with individuals who are on a wait-list so that we can do the annual total joint target of 150 surgeries.

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear an answer.

We have also heard from a number of Yukoners who are facing significant wait times to receive hearing assessments, which are often needed for people who need hearing aids.

Can the minister please update Yukoners on the current wait-list time for audiologist services in Yukon as well as how many are on that wait-list?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Yukon hospitals have met and exceeded the joint replacement targets that were set in the 2021-22 and 2022-23 memorandum of understanding.

As of December 2024, 97 total joint replacement surgeries have been completed through the Yukon Hospital Corporation in 2024 and 2025. As of February 2025, seven joint replacement surgeries have been completed out-of-territory in 2024-25. In 2023-24, a total of 107 total joint replacements were completed in-territory — 55 total knee replacements and 42 total hip replacements — that being the year that we began hip replacements — and 25 joint replacements completed out-of-territory.

What I can note is that these orthopaedic surgeons who are here in the territory who must be supported to complete and support our program here — in addition to what I have noted with respect to the numbers that were asked for by the member opposite — also complete absolutely all emergency surgeries, either along with general surgeons or as orthopaedic surgeons

for orthopaedic issues, and emergency surgeries are incredibly important in their schedule as well.

Ms. Van Bibber: Well, I got a partial answer to question number 1; now I still have to wait on hearing aids and hearing assessments.

Now, another very important health care service is cardiology. Can the minister please provide an update on the wait times for cardiology in the Yukon and how many people are on that wait-list?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Again, cardiology is a specialty that is supported here by the Yukon hospital. These are very specific questions. If I don't have the numbers that the member opposite is looking for, I'm happy to provide them — appreciate that the idea of asking for specific numbers here in the Legislative Assembly is an exercise in me finding a number in hundreds of pages.

What I will say is that we completely support the cardiology program; we support the specialist program here in the territory, because it so important that we are supported by specialists who come here. Our government is committed to working in partnership with the Hospital Corporation and the Yukon Medical Association to ensure access to in-territory services and specialty programs.

What I can note is that the ability of a health care system to rapidly adapt and expand its capacity is absolutely paramount to effectively responding to increased demand and emergent situations. We support the Hospital Corporation's visiting specialist program, which enables Yukoners to access these specialty services without leaving the territory. They are supported — individuals are supported by medical travel to come to Whitehorse to meet with specialists. Opportunities abound for us to make sure that care is more accessible and supportive of Yukoners.

Question re: Health care specialist wait times

Ms. Clarke: Over the past number of years, the Yukon government has been considering hiring a third OB/GYN doctor to support the obstetrics and gynecology program. We understand that a third doctor has now been hired and will be starting this summer.

Can the minister please update us on the current wait times for OB/GYN services and whether or not there will be a decrease as a result of the new doctor being hired?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure why — I could hear "increase", so I apologize if I have misheard the question. There would not be an increase of wait times with respect to a new specialist arriving. I certainly am pleased that we have been able — the Yukon Department of Health and Social Services — has been able to advocate and hire a new doctor. We often hear here about exaggerations of doctors leaving the community, all things are bad, all things are terrible — not the case. We do have a new specialist arriving this summer, and we look forward to that doctor joining the team. We look forward to that team being able to continue to provide those kinds of services — the OB/GYN speciality services — right here at home.

Again, Yukoners who need such a service who are in Whitehorse — it is available. Yukoners who need to travel to Whitehorse for that purpose are supported by our medical travel program.

Ms. Clarke: Over the past few years, we have heard that annual and high-risk screening mammograms have fallen behind. Can the minister tell us what the current wait time is for both high-risk screening and routine screening mammograms, and will she agree to increase the number of mammograms being done here to shorten the wait-list?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, what I can say about that is that, perhaps not surprisingly to the members opposite, I don't have the pen, the decision-making, the authority to direct numbers of medical procedures. Those are clearly and precisely medical decisions, and they are directed by medical professionals. We fund the Yukon Hospital Corporation in the Department of Health and Social Services and all of our specialties for the purposes of providing those services to Yukoners. Those kinds of medical decisions are supported through the service provision.

We have an extraordinary budget that is before this Legislative Assembly with respect to providing service for the Yukon Hospital Corporation. Mammograms are an incredibly important tool for service to Yukoners.

The wait times I can provide in a legislative return. I don't have hours or days or weeks listed at my fingertips today, but I do support — absolutely — our expanded programs at the Yukon Hospital Corporation that serve Yukoners, including X-ray, MRIs, mammograms — all of the services that we provide here in the territory.

Ms. Clarke: One important procedure for testing the function of the heart is called an "echocardiogram" or, for short, an "echo". Despite the fact that we have the necessary technology and the technicians who are trained to conduct this procedure, we understand that there are hundreds of Yukoners sent down south each year to have this basic procedure done.

Has the minister considered conducting an audit on the number of echoes that are done per month and considered providing the resources to have these procedures done in the territory?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate these questions today, because it gives me an opportunity to talk to Yukoners about the real importance of our focus on health care. This government has taken the public statements that we have health care as a top priority for our government. Our budget reflects that. The Yukon government is committed to working in partnership with the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the Medical Association — something that, frankly, former governments just didn't do. That relationship and that tripartite relationship is key to our being able to move forward together.

In addition to that, we have put money toward health care and the hospital services and clinic services and different kinds of health care that Yukoners can access like never before. We continue to work with our partners and with physicians to address Yukoners' timely and appropriate access to specialty services closer to home and reduce the need for out-of-territory

medical travel or medical care Outside, because we know the stress that has for individuals and for families.

The ability of our health care system to rapidly adapt and expand its capacity is paramount to effective care for Yukoners and only as a result of the work that this government has been doing.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3 and notwithstanding Standing Order 27(1), I request the unanimous consent of the House to proceed with the motion that I gave notice of earlier today regarding appointments to the Yukon Human Rights Commission.

Unanimous consent to move without one clear day's notice Motion No. 1276

Speaker: The Minister of Justice has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3 and notwithstanding Standing Order 27(1), requested the unanimous consent of the House to proceed with the motion the minister gave notice of earlier today regarding appointments to the Yukon Human Rights Commission.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Unanimous consent has been granted.

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 1276

Clerk: Motion No. 1276, standing in the name of the Hon. Ms. McPhee.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice:

THAT the Yukon Legislative Assembly, pursuant to section 17(1) of the *Human Rights Act*, does reappoint Aja Mason to the Yukon Human Rights Commission for a term of three years effective May 24, 2025.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, the Yukon Human Rights Commission consists of five members. One of the current member's terms is expiring in May of this year. This vacancy was advertised and a few applications were received. The current member whose term is expiring did reapply and was supported by the chair and the management of the Yukon Human Rights Commission.

The all-party Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees reviewed all applications and recommended the reappointment of Aja Mason to the Yukon Human Rights Commission. Aja Mason has served one term on the Yukon Human Rights Commission and has gained a lot of experience in the work of this board.

During this term, Aja Mason has demonstrated professionalism, reliability, and skill. Aja Mason comes prepared and has keen attention to detail and a passion for the issues. I would like to thank Aja Mason for her interest in

continuing this work of the commission. I look forward to this reappointment.

I thank all those who put their names forward to serve on the Yukon Human Rights Commission. It is very important work. I also thank the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees for their recommendations and careful consideration of all the applicants.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members of this House to support this motion and the reappointment of Aja Mason to the Yukon Human Rights Commission.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, I'll be very brief. The Member for Porter Creek North and I are members of the standing committee that appointed Aja to this position. We would like to thank her for putting her name forward again and congratulate Aja Mason on this appointment.

MLA Tredger: I would like to just add congratulations on behalf of the Yukon NDP and thanks to Aja for her work both with the Human Rights Commission as well as throughout the rest of the Yukon. She has been a long-time advocate and has done some pretty empowering things, so we're really delighted to have her back.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Motion No. 1276 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, in Bill No. 217, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2025-26*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 217: First Appropriation Act 2025-26 — continued

Deputy Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, in Bill No. 217, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2025-26*.

Department of Tourism and Culture

Deputy Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, I'm going to happily welcome some folks to the Assembly. For the first time to the Assembly to assist us is Mr. Jean-Marc Champeval, who is our director of Corporate Services. And we can welcome back to the Assembly — third day running — Deputy Minister Sierra van der Meer — crowd goes wild.

I want to say just a few opening remarks and talk about what an incredible privilege it is for me to get to be the Minister of Tourism and Culture, and there are a couple of reasons for that. The first one is that Tourism has just been doing amazing things, and I'll say a few words about that in a moment. But when you get a department where the folks are doing amazing work — and it's not that we've upped the budgets; it's just that they're doing really good work with the budget that they have. It's really nice to get to be the minister — all credit to the department, really, for their great work. To get to be the minister responsible for arts and culture — we just had an announcement of the new permanent art collection. Mammoth teeth — they have been in the news again lately for the oldest mammoth tooth found, and it's changing what we think about the palaeontological history of this place. We just had a tribute today for White Pass. It really is an honour to get to be the minister who gets to represent that.

There are a few things that I wanted to talk about. First of all, just with respect to the tourism numbers, I have said a few times in this House — but it looks like the numbers are even improving from those that I was previously provided. But last year, we had more than half a million visitors come to the Yukon. It's quite something. The total spending in the Yukon was over \$400 million, and that's a 25-percent increase over the previous year. So, that's for the calendar year of 2024, and that's an increase in total spending by those visitors over 2023, making last year the record year. I think that we're already hitting our tourism development strategy targets years ahead of where we wanted to be, so it's really super impressive — again, a big shout-out to the industry. That doesn't mean, for example, that the people working in the industry are necessarily gaining more profit, but it does mean that they are generating more revenue for our economy.

In terms of the budget itself, the budget is relatively not too much different from where it was last year. One of the things that I will just point out is that we have about a \$200,000 increase in our O&M budget.

The way that is formed is that there is a \$350,000 — or just over \$350,000 — increase to the arts operating funds, which we just signed off on recently — thank you to all of the folks who work in the background to make those recommendations — so that has gone up. There was also an increase of a couple

hundred thousand dollars to funding our museums and our First Nation cultural centres. Really, we think of that as promoting culture, of course, but also promoting tourism, because that's what a lot of our visitors come to see.

We had a couple of time-limited funding ones, and so there was just over \$200,000 that was time-limited towards creative and cultural industries — that strategy — and so that went down a bit or came to a close in *Our Clean Future*, and the photography unit was another few hundred thousand dollars, which went down. The net is a couple hundred thousand dollars up, but I've described where that has gone.

I'm going to close out my opening remarks there. I'm totally looking forward to questions from members opposite. I will just say that the work of the Department of Tourism and Culture is deeply human. It encompasses the living and our past histories, creative expressions, and our pride of place — all of us here love the Yukon — and it's through the department's work that the natural beauty, the extraordinary heritage, and the unique voices and perspectives of those who called the Yukon home are supported, showcased, preserved, and enriched. I know how important tourism and our cultural assets are to our economy but also to the spirit and the lasting viability of the territory.

I just want to say thanks to all those who work in this sector and to the folks from the department, who I think are doing an amazing job with the resources that we have at hand. I look forward to answering questions today.

Ms. Van Bibber: I too would like to welcome the officials today. I'll just jump right into those questions that you're anticipating.

As we know, every time we turn on the TV, there is so much going on: border issues, tariffs, people crossing — it's just an unsettling time right now. The state of our Canadian dollar, of course, doesn't help, and I think that should be reason enough to keep Canadians in Canada, but I believe that we should be campaigning vigorously to try to keep Canadians within Canada and, of course, coming to Yukon.

Earlier this Sitting, I had asked the minister if the government was working on specific campaigns to attract those Canadians, especially western Canadians who are closer to us, to come to Yukon this summer. Has anything progressed on that front?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We have a \$4-million marketing budget. Over 60 percent of that goes to marketing within Canada. We tend to work through Destination Canada. There is a group there that works — and our marketing group here does a lot of work around how we think we should adjust that, and then we feed back in through Destination Canada to try to give more focus. One of the places that we tend to focus on generally — this is long before the disruptions with the current American administration — but we tend to focus on gateway cities to the Yukon — Vancouver, Victoria, Kelowna, Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa — because those are places where we get a lot of people — or folks who are coming up the Alaska Highway. So, that is definitely a focus.

What is different now — well, two things or several things that I could point to. The first one is that we now have a tourism

dashboard that is up. I encourage members of the Assembly to take a peek at that. It has been up for not that long, but it is really about making sure that we have immediate information and feedback loops about what is happening with tourism, and it provides us the ability to pivot and to go back to the marketing group and then go back to Destination Canada and make some adjustments.

Just as an example, the marketing group met last week, and then the next week, the Yukon Tourism Advisory Board is meeting, and this is one of their agenda items: to talk about the data and to talk about where marketing should focus. Then we go back to Destination Canada through that North Star program and we provide that feedback. One of the things, for example, that was recently made as a suggestion through that work was that we could get some additional focus on Manitoba and Saskatchewan. There is a mechanism whereby this is working.

The member opposite mentioned about the strength of the Canadian dollar — or the lack of the strength of the Canadian dollar — and that isn't necessarily a bad thing. In terms of Canadians, it doesn't change their interests in travelling here, and certainly, they are really focused on staying in Canada right now. The way we are worried about losing out here is if there were Canadians or Europeans who were thinking about getting to Alaska and were going to pick up the Yukon on the way and now maybe they don't do that trip. That's something that we are watching.

The other way that the dollar works is that the American dollar is high. Our American colleagues — the folks we work with, say, for example, at Air North or coming from Skagway — most of them don't even really know what the Canadian dollar is, so they are just happily surprised when they arrive here and their spending power is greater, so we happily help them to use that spending power when they are here.

Those are examples. Yes, we are making that focused approach.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you for that answer. That's what I meant by the weak dollar. Canadians are more likely to stay within Canada, so we should be marketing to those same people who are trying to stretch their dollars.

That said, earlier in this Sitting, I went back in Hansard and looked, and even I had a similar back-and-forth on campaigns and destination marketing. One of the other things the minister mentioned was targeting tourists who were planning to go to the US to redirect their travels to Canada, so I'm sure that this is in that Destination Canada marketing.

Lastly, the minister mentioned working with other tourism operators to ensure that we still welcome US visitors. Has this been communicated, because we have seen Alaska coming to us and saying: We still want you Canadians to come and we still care for you and love you — but I haven't seen it reciprocated from our side of the border.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: There are several ways that we have been working around this to be proactive. The first one is that we are working directly with our counterparts in Skagway, Haines, and Juneau, so those communities where we have this direct tourism industry-to-tourism industry relationship. So, we are working directly with them. We have been talking to our

visitor information centres about how we're going to greet people and work with visitors.

We've been talking with the tourism industry groups, like Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon, Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon, et cetera, to say about how we need to keep this in a positive space for our visitors and to stay out of the politics as much as possible. This issue is raised at the Yukon Tourism Advisory Board. I mentioned that, next week, the Yukon Tourism Advisory Board has a meeting. This is the other agenda item that they have — to talk about the relationship with the US and how we navigate.

It's not just for tourism visitors, because we have other visitors here, like folks in Skagway coming to see the dentist or coming to grocery shop. So, I don't think of them as tourists; I think of them as neighbours coming here from the US. So, through the Executive Council Office, there is a campaign that has been launched about being respectful and being kind, and they have done some posts on social media, and we will help to amplify those things through our work. So, there is an initiative underway to be specifically kind and respectful to visitors, to not get into these political conversations where we completely disagree with the American administration and where they are going, but that doesn't mean that we disagree with our neighbours or don't want to welcome them here.

Finally, part of our marketing fund goes to places that go internationally — so, everywhere outside of the US. That total spend is about 30 percent of our budget. That goes to Europe, Mexico, Japan, Australia, et cetera. With those campaigns, we are letting people know that, if they were thinking about going to Alaska, maybe they think about coming to the Yukon. Maybe some of them won't come at all, but that — this is — I don't know.

I said this on the radio the other day — sometimes we bump into people who come on a trip, they stop in the Yukon, they go on to Alaska, and they come back to Yukon and they go: Oh, this was what I thought Alaska was going to be like. Like, they really love the Yukon, and they're really impressed with this place. They didn't think — the Yukon wasn't really what motivated their travel in the first place, but they absolutely love this place and the warmth of the people here and the real connection to the land.

So, we will work to try to continue to help share those stories so that we can welcome people who might have wanted to go to Alaska previously, but now, maybe they come to the Yukon.

Ms. Van Bibber: The minister mentioned the tourism dashboard that was launched in early March. Maybe I can give the minister a chance to explain who this dashboard is targeting for it to be used and who is best served by the use of this application. I have checked the dashboard several times, and I haven't seen anything change on it, so I was just wondering, because I was told that it was in real time, so if the minister could explain.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The tourism indicators dashboard is made for our operators, really — the sector is who it is for. It is not meant — the public is welcome to take a look if you're geeky like me and you get interested in it. "Live" just means

that, as soon as we get the information, we update it. The typical indicators on there are — the information is coming in monthly, but sometimes it is more than that, and I don't think that it always lines up on the first of the month or anything like that. I just think that, as the information is provided, it gets updated. So, that is what we mean by "live".

It is at all times the most current information that we have. It really came out of a conversation with the industry associations and their interest in seeing what is currently happening with tourism, because they want to make decisions. They want to plan, and they want to know where they should invest or how they should focus or where they can take advantage of the opportunities that exist here in the Yukon. This is to get them the most current information available, but not just — it is for everyone then, because then they all have that same important information.

I think that, over time, we'll see some tweaks to it, because — as the Member for Porter Creek North noted just moments ago — this has been up for about a month; it's not long that it has been up there. We'll see how it works over time, and we'll get a sense of whether we can augment or improve it. I think that it's probably an important tool, but I'm sure that there is always room for improvement.

Ms. Van Bibber: I thank the minister.

Now, earlier, the minister said that the department was working on a local stay program and that there was work afoot, he said. So, I was wondering if the minister could give us a better idea of what that work was and if it's happening soon.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Deputy Chair, I missed the front part of the question. If the member could just repeat it, I would really appreciate it.

Ms. Van Bibber: It was on a local stay program. We had talked about keeping Yukoners within Yukon and being tourists within our territory.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Most of the focus that we've been putting on this has not been about Whitehorse; it has been about our communities and how to support Yukoners to support our communities. For example, our community tourism destination development fund — there have been 40-plus projects. In this fiscal year, we've received over 30 applications for tier 1 and another 20-plus for tier 2 for our communities. That funding is an example of how we're trying to support our communities to then attract Yukoners to get to them. Examples could be like the Dawson City Music Festival or things like that where they apply through us to try to get some support to go on to promote Yukoners to come to those events or to the communities.

We, of course, want to support Whitehorse as well, but right now, Whitehorse is generally full and we don't think that there is a need for us to help Whitehorse to promote from a Yukon perspective. We're happy to promote the Yukon, including Whitehorse, to other provinces and to welcome them here, but in terms of Yukoners, our focus is to help folks get to the communities and support our communities.

Ms. Van Bibber: That's what I wanted to hear. Thank you.

There are important festivals, such as Adäka, that have been incredibly successful in featuring First Nation culture and

heritage. I understand that, this year, the festival is one of many initiatives that were put on pause by the Yukon First Nations Culture and Tourism Association. Can the minister confirm whether there is any work being done with the First Nations Culture and Tourism Association to ensure that these long-standing events continue? Is it due to lack of funding or long-term sustainability that everything has been put on pause for this year of 2025?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The Yukon First Nations Culture and Tourism Association has been telling us where they want to go, and they have been regrouping. They are totally committed to the Adäka Festival, but they also recognize that they want to get it right. They have had, let's say, staffing and capacity challenges internally to the association. They let us know that what they want to do is to take the time to get that sorted. What we have said back to them is: We want to know how to support you best, so please let us know.

We are looking to follow their lead. We believe that Indigenous culture is one of the critical pillars of our future of tourism here in the Yukon, and that is identified in the tourism development strategy, so we think that this is very important. We are very supportive, but we also need to be respectful to support in the way that it is requested of us. That's the situation right now.

Ms. Van Bibber: I am going back to the minister's phrase, which I thought was very good — "pride of place" — so I am going to go on a bit of a rant here.

Pride of place — I think I bring up this issue every session, because I do travel the highways a fair bit —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Ms. Van Bibber: No, it's not outhouses first this time; it is signage.

My goodness, the signage that the government is responsible for is in really rough shape.

I know that my colleague the Member for Watson Lake recently wrote to the minister about the state of one area in her riding, but I've seen it in communities throughout. There are crooked signs and there are signs that have fallen down. Some of them are eventually removed and never replaced. There are fallen, broken signs, graffiti, gunshot signs, and torn flags.

Then, going to the roadside rest stops, yes, those outhouses have to be cleaned and it just seems such a simple fix to me, but I don't understand at all. So, road travel and tourism go hand in hand.

I just think that this particular government has always said that it's a one-government approach, so I don't know why highways, parks, and tourism cannot just fix these small problems that, if I can see, the tourists will see.

It's almost like we don't care anymore. Even the big sign going into Carmacks coming south — it's now on a big lean and tilted, and it's a government sign.

What can the government do to fix and replace these things? The season is here and I just feel like we're way behind in fixing some of these minor problems.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I certainly know what the member opposite is talking about; I totally get it. Whenever I go to my community meetings, it is often about dogs, dumps, and

ditches. The ditches really is about whether they are cleared and whether the signs are in good order. In many of the meetings, I know that the community advisors go through the list of what signs or — you know, it's not even vandalism; at times, it can just be that they have fallen over and things like that.

The first thing I will say is that I know that Highways and Public Works has a program around updating the signs. I know that we have a specific program around tourism-specific signs and also rest areas and outhouses, which I wish I could say is a simple problem, but I have found that it is not. I will just say that I feel like I have dealt with many wicked problems in my role here and in other roles, and I just say to the world that I wish it were simple, but — and I apologize to all of the folks in Carcross. Like, I don't know how many meetings I've had talking about facilities down in Carcross; it's a challenge.

I will also say that there are other things that we work on as well — for example, digital information and digital signage, and sometimes those things — like, as we move into that sort of new era, there are different ways in which people gather information about the place that they are travelling through. It isn't always just about the signs, but I so agree with the member opposite that it's important that those signs are looking good.

Now, I will also say — just to be a bit of a Yukoner for a second — that I don't mind the rustic look, right? Like, I kind of like — I love Keno. So, sometimes, that kind of weathered look is okay, but there is a difference between a sign that's falling over or has been graffitied and something that has been weathered. So, I get that difference too.

The last one, I'll just say because, if there are Yukoners listening, it helps us to know where the signs are that are of concern and a problem. So, when I go to community meetings, I'm trying to get a list and just share those back through whichever of these avenues is the right approach. To the member's comment, I'm not asking that people, you know, worry about whose responsibility the sign is; we'll deal with that side of it, but if they just tell us which signs they have identified as a problem, it is good; it does help us, and we'll do our best to try to address it.

Ms. Van Bibber: I thank the minister for that. I think that we have enough government workers on the highways driving back and forth for different meetings, even with the highways crews, et cetera, that it should be part of their job description maybe to check those signs. I will also — I think that I promised the minister of highways that I would send him some pictures, and I have still yet to do that — but thank you for that.

Now, another question on just pride of place and making us look like we know what we're doing: Who is responsible for replacing flags? The Canadian and Yukon flags — I'm not talking about the banners that go on poles — the big flags as you're coming into the Yukon or at a specific stop that has the flags flying. Who is responsible for taking care of replacing those?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The answer to the question really depends on which flag and where. So, there are flags that are the responsibility of the territorial government; there are flags that are the responsibility of our municipal governments; there

are flags that are the responsibility of businesses — like, for example, White Pass has a bunch of flags. There are flags that are the responsibility of the federal government, CBSA and our border crossing — that's their responsibility — but what I'll say is the same thing as the signs. Please, just let us know where they are. We'll try our best to get information to whoever it is, whether it's us or White Pass or the Town of Watson Lake or Canada Border Services Agency, and we'll do our best to try to help them to know, in case they don't, that there is a flag that is in poor repair and to encourage them to replace it.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you for that. We will again try to get a list of where we need those flags, but again, they are very visible, so I'm sure people will be able to see that they need replacing.

The Member from Kluane put a motion forward to protect the Canyon Creek bridge, and it passed this House. Has any thought gone into what will happen with this historic bridge in the near and distant future? I understand that there's going to be some form of remediation taking place, but what is being done to ensure it is protected and saved right at this moment?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will just read the bit that I have on this issue for colleagues. So, the Canyon Creek bridge across from the Aishihik River is a landmark along the Alaska Highway, but decay and significant safety concerns now necessitate some decisions and action. There was a 2023 engineering report where the bridge was deemed unsafe for pedestrians or other traffic, so signage has been put up to indicate that it's closed, and we put up some barriers to stop access to the bridge — it's from a safety perspective.

There was an engineering report that identifies some options, which include repair, replacement, partial demolition of the bridge, and a bunch in that range. And I think I tabled that when we were here in debate, so if colleagues look back — I never quite know which things I table make it there for others to get — so, if it's not available to folks, let me know, and I will make sure to make it available — or for the MLA; either way is great.

I guess it was about two months ago, late in February, that we hosted a meeting in Haines Junction to hear feedback from the community. Right now, where we are at is that the YESAB engagement process has closed, and we are just waiting to hear — one second, please, Deputy Chair.

We are just waiting to hear back from YESAB on their assessment. That will come and they will put that out publicly when that happens, and then it moves back over to us for next steps.

Ms. Van Bibber: Again, this is probably a highway-related issue, but it really affects our tourism and highway travellers. I think that there is a great need for reliable communications along our highway system, especially during high tourist season when we have the forest fires and the floods. The 511, once you are out of cellular coverage, is spotty and unpredictable. Can the minister work with the Minister of Highways and Public Works to utilize those large highway signs more frequently with travel advisories about situations — washouts or whatever — to be updated in real time?

I find that even a place like Dawson is not getting the communications they need to react when something happens in their area to react to or to help from their end as well as from the Whitehorse end. We have heard a lot about the lack of communication when issues are happening along the highway corridor.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, I will say that we are getting more emergencies, it seems to me. We anticipate this because of climate change, so it is going to be more frequent.

I know that HPW does do work around trying to keep information available either through the signs and/or through 511. There are always times when that information may be stale. We had an example last year where we worked with the Klondike Visitors Association, and they were talking about the fires and the road and access. We discussed how we could support by doing two things: (1) to make sure that information was available for visitors on a more regular basis so that they know whether or not they can travel the highway or how to do so safely; and (2) if there has been a disaster, what we can do to pivot to support those communities from a tourism perspective?

We set up some of those feedback loops. We sat down with HPW and made sure there were lines of communication to support them in keeping that information fresh. If we had either tourism operators or visitors give us a sense of something that was not up to date, we set up this liaison to work with HPW to get information to them so that signage could be made more current — or closer to live, I guess.

Another thing that we are doing — we have these new digital kiosks that are out there. They look like big phones. They are about human-sized and they are these kiosks. They have on them 511 and all that stuff, but they also have other information for tourists and we can update those all over. There now are about 20 of those kiosks around the Yukon and there are some just outside of the Yukon, for example, down in Skagway, and they have become very useful. Through those kiosks and through our visitor information centres, we are also trying to provide additional information for visitors so that they get whatever information we have to keep them as up to date as possible. There are always going to be some challenges with this, because lightning strikes and fires happen and you can't always predict what is going on and what is happening with that.

I think the other thing that we talk about is how we support our visitors — to just be friendly and warm and human with them with these challenges when they arise and to give them the best information that we can.

I remember the story from late last summer with the cruise ship having the folks up on the White Pass train and then the train went from Carcross to head back to Skagway and then a slide happened. They turned the train back, so they sent up several buses and vans to pick up those passengers and they started down the south Klondike and then another slide happened; they got turned back. Then, all these calls started happening to try to get support. Those calls were to the Canada Border Services Agency and trying to get a hold of US Customs and Border Protection and trying to get a small boat to Haines

to pick up these passengers. They got through the border at — I don't know; it was something like 2:00 in the morning.

In the end, even though it was a really harrowing experience for some of those visitors, they were so impressed by Yukon hospitality. I think that this is a really important part of this whole thing. You will never be able to always have the most up-to-date information for visitors and I think that it matters how we treat people. I think that this is an important part of the whole picture.

Ms. Van Bibber: This will be my last question, so I would like to thank the staff for being here to help the minister.

The VRCs are opening soon — I would imagine early May, but I am not sure of the dates.

I understand that the Northwest Territories visitor reception centre is closed. I would think that this would be more of a workload for our regular government centre. So, all the information, I'm sure, will shift over there and that will be kept up to date on the Dempster Highway information that is needed.

Change is happening all the time and I just wish we have a very good tourism season. Thank you again.

I'll turn it over to the Third Party.

Ms. White: Of course, I welcome the officials here today. I have the pleasure today of being a tourist within the Tourism and Culture department, which I'm delighted about. It has been a while. I think it was one of my critic areas a number of years ago, so I'm happy to be back.

I just wanted to start off with a hard truth. Sometimes, in the media — or you get shown something and you think: Man, that's going to really be awful.

I'll say that the schematic that I saw of the "Welcome to Yukon" signs — initially, I was not amused. I did not appreciate the colour scheme and I thought it was going to look weird, to be honest. I said that if, when I saw those signs, I was going to change my mind, I would say so. I just want to say how much I appreciate the "Welcome to Yukon" signs. I understand the complication. I, of course, have a strong feeling about "le" — the "Welcome to the Yukon". "The" was the only liked thing in the 2021 Yukon NDP platform when I talked about bringing back "the". I can understand that in the Yukon signs, if you say "the Yukon", you have to say "le Yukon" and then it gets a little weirder. So, I understand why it went to "Yukon".

But I just want to say right now that I appreciate the signs from the local manufacturing — I believe it was with HVAC Tech and Molly and her crew — just how resilient they are and how they are going to withstand the weather.

So, I will say right now publicly that I really like the "Welcome to Yukon" signs. I have had the pleasure of seeing a number of them, but I haven't seen all of them, because I have not driven the Dempster Highway. To watch the artists just be so excited in the communities and be so excited about the unveiling of that art on the signs alone I think was reason enough to celebrate.

So, the first thing I want to say is that I was wrong. I like the signs. So, I can be quoted back; it's in Hansard. I like the signs; I was wrong.

I also want to get into the absolute delight of the Travel Yukon website. It has been a number of years since I looked — go figure that I live here and I don't necessarily check out the website.

But I think that for folks who are trying to make decisions — and I appreciate the questions from my colleague from Porter Creek North — the reality is that when people are trying to decide where in Canada they are going to go and they're Googling things, when people pull up the Travel Yukon website, it is spectacular across the whole entire thing. I've been on it for the last kind of half hour and I haven't really gotten through things. I love that it promotes different tourism opportunities. Whether we're talking about dog sledding in Old Crow with Paul Josie and his family or we're talking about Eclipse Nordic Hot Springs, it has something for everyone. I'm going to start with those two things: I like the signs; I really like the website. So, I wanted to start off with those compliments.

One of the things that I think is really important when we talk about the visitor information centres is just how critical those are and how that is so much a presence for folks when they come. My understanding is that there have been some challenges. I would say that the gateway to the Yukon coming from the south is definitely Watson Lake. Watson Lake is a place that — I have dreams of supporting the community of Watson Lake. When you drive down that highway initially and it has some flags on the light poles and things, I think it's a real opportunity or could be a real opportunity for Yukon to be, like: You are here; you have arrived, and this is the first community.

Can the minister walk me through the visitor information centre in Watson Lake — kind of where we're at and where we're going?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I would like to say thanks to the member for talking about the "Welcome to Yukon" signs. By the way, it is "the" Yukon. It is clearly "le" Yukon; "the" Yukon. There is this challenge. I remember when the drawings for the new signs were given to me, the first thing I asked was: "Are they 3D?" — and yes, they showed me. Then I said, "Okay, then you need a little bit of space above and to the left of the word 'Yukon.'" I understood why it was "Yukon", but I asked that there be some of what I called "white space" there — even though it's a colour; it's not white — in case there was an opportunity for us to put "the" or "le" in the future, including maybe the Indigenous languages. I don't know what those languages do with "Yukon" and whether they even have definite articles, but I want to be respectful.

One of the whole points of this was to get signs that had a reflection of the different flavours of the Yukon around the territory. So, we know we have these entry points into the Yukon; there are eight road signs and the one at the airport, so we created committees for the southeast of the Yukon, the south of the Yukon, the west of the Yukon, and the north of the Yukon. Then we asked those committees to work through the artwork, and so I think that, over time, that artwork could change or maybe one time we go back to some of the old slogans — "Plus grand que Nature" or "Larger than Life" or "The Magic and the Mystery" — whatever. It's possible

because we could do artwork; we could do slogans. It's all possible.

By the way, we didn't want to lose the old signs completely, so one of the things that we're doing is trying to save a couple of the old signs, one for the Sign Post Forest in Watson Lake, because it is the gateway to the Yukon — I completely agree — and another to go to the Transportation Museum, because I think this is about transportation and our roads, so there was this effort to try to keep some of that history.

What is happening with the visitor information centre in Watson Lake, the gateway to the Yukon? Well, several years back, the old visitor information centre flooded. We had to move. We talked with the Town of Watson Lake, and they graciously let us relocate to the recreation centre there — terrific. But this year, they said to us: No, it has to move on from there. We said okay.

Where we are going is into the Northern Lights Centre. We are being relocated there, and there are some really great opportunities here, because, number one, that means our visitor information centre and Watson Lake's visitor information centre are going to be together, so that presents an opportunity. Another one is that is where the electric vehicle charging station is, so you kind of get a captive audience at that moment, because people are there to charge. Come on in and meet these great people and hear about the Yukon and the Town of Watson Lake.

Lastly, we also get access to that theatre, so I think there are some real chances for us to show some great films about the Yukon and showcase all of it and how this is the gateway into the rest of the territory. I know lately I have become a bit of a fan of "The Yukon: It's a Little Bit Metal", and I look forward to hearing that on some great speakers in a place like that. It still cracks me up every time I see it.

This year, that's where we will be. I know that change is always hard for folks, and we will work through the change, whether that is the signs or where the VIC is located, but generally speaking, I think there are lots of opportunities with Watson Lake.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. In the spirit of full disclosure today, I will say that the first time I went to the Northern Lights Centre in Watson Lake was actually at AYC a number of years ago. I was totally blown away by how cool it is. I had no idea in large part because it is on the other side of the road, and I never went to it. It's a big blue building, so maybe there is an opportunity there to zhuzh it up on the outside. But I have to say that, when I went to the Northern Lights Centre for AYC and I got to see the space — well, it might not be space, but there's space involved in it — and the northern lights film, I was blown away by how cool it was and what an incredible resource that is.

So, when I learned that there was a move happening from the community centre or the rec centre to the Northern Lights Centre building, I was really excited. I think this is a phenomenal opportunity, and I know that this is year 1; there are going to be a little bit of growing pains, but I see the opportunity for maybe windows in the lobby or maybe instead of zhuzhing on the outside of the building — because right now,

like I said, it is blue and it says “Northern Lights Centre” — I think there is an opportunity to really expand on that, but I think it is really exciting.

It is going to bring more people to this really cool facility that I don’t think gets enough attention in the Yukon. I think it is so incredible, so when I learned that was being relocated, I was excited to know that.

Another big thing, when we talk about visitor information centres, of course, is access to bathrooms, and my favourite bathroom access is, of course, in Carcross, so I wanted to know when the visitor information centre opens in Carcross and when the bathrooms open in Carcross.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, I appreciate the suggestions about Watson Lake and also to work on this theme of the “gateway to the Yukon” and what we could do to try to just sort of show it off and to entice visitors to see the other parts of the territory. Maybe some of that is the other “Welcome to the Yukon” signs or: Here’s where you can go find these other ones. We will do this work hand in hand with the Town of Watson Lake.

When is the visitor — VIC — opening in Carcross, and when is the much-needed washroom opening in Carcross? May 1.

Ms. White: Thank you, Deputy Chair, and I appreciate that, and my colleague Kevin Barr — the washroom access and early access to those washrooms was one of his pet projects, and it has definitely moved up from where it was initially when the building was built, so I appreciate that.

I was just thinking more along the lines of Watson Lake. Watson Lake to me is a totally under-rated community, and people don’t ever — it’s so much cooler than I ever thought until I spent more time in Watson Lake. You know, what would be very cool on the visitor information website is if there was a map of swimming holes in the Yukon. I will tell you, Watson Lake will have many of them, probably more than every other community — certainly more than Dawson City; they have no swimming holes — but Watson Lake has an incredible amount of — there’s a lot to celebrate there as far as the gateway.

There are beautiful campgrounds, there’s a beautiful lake, and the ski hill in the wintertime, but there are more things; like there’s the old church across the bridge in Two Mile where it has the most beautiful Kaska mother and child, which is this incredible statue. As a person who is not religious, I’m sure we’ve picked up on that, but the statue itself is beautiful. There is a lot to celebrate in Watson Lake, and I think it really has the opportunity, with this continued — this evolving relationship between Tourism and Culture and the Town of Watson Lake to really elevate it to that gateway. I think there’s a lot of potential and a lot of opportunity, and I look forward to seeing those changes in the future.

I believe that there was a pilot project last year about keeping the VIC open in Beaver Creek, and it was open quite a bit longer. I know that I was there in September — I want to say late September — and I was the only person I saw in Beaver Creek at that point in time who wasn’t just driving through. I believe that it was a pilot, and so I am wondering if it makes

sense to have it open a longer time or if there is going to be a different closing date.

I will also say that Sid van der Meer is definitely an asset there. In the day and a half that I was there, there were three separate cars outside of the visitor information centre, including my old 1954 Dodge Mayfair. Of course, that was important, but I just wanted to know if extending those hours or extending the opening made sense.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: In terms of Watson Lake again, I know that we have been hosting tourism cafes down there where our team goes down and tries to talk with locals about what we can do from a tourism perspective. I know that we have — a couple of the community tourism destination development funding projects have been in Watson Lake to help support it.

With respect to the visitor information centres, I just want to talk a second about our shoulder seasons. I don’t remember whether I tabled this document — the one that I’ve been sort of talking about today — but it’s called the *Lodging Alliance Spending Report: Tourism Industry Performance Data*. It came out earlier this year.

When I gave my opening remarks today for tourism, I talked about the overall spending and how it’s up. That’s impressive. What’s just as impressive or even more impressive is that we’re starting to push our shoulder seasons out. So, extending the time of the visitor information centres for us was an attempt to see if that would support our shoulder season stuff. It didn’t show it, honestly. When we looked at how the VICs were utilized last year, it wasn’t supported by the data or by the drop-ins other than Carcross, because I think that it is has its own clock or own calendar, I guess.

So, we’re going to continue to look for ways that we can support extending our shoulder seasons. I guess it’s possible that we revisit it over time, but at this moment, it doesn’t look like it had the impact that we wanted to see whether it would. So, we’re not planning to extend them this year generally, but we are looking for ways to increase our shoulder seasons.

Ms. White: Did having any of the VICs open for longer — understanding, of course, that Beaver Creek is the one that I used as an example, but were any of the others that had extended hours — did they make sense or not? It’s okay if they didn’t; I’m just curious.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The only one that we saw that showed any significant uptake was Carcross.

Ms. White: So, is the intention, then, to keep Carcross open longer if it made sense?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The answer is yes, but really, it’s just a little bit more subtle. What we’re doing is we’re going to line it up with the cruise ship schedule, because that’s really what drives that visitation.

I’m just trying to recall, but I think that there are 1.3 million visitors that are anticipated this year through Skagway. If it’s not in the top 10 ports visited, it’s in the top 20 internationally. It’s quite something. What we’ll do is line up the visitor information centre so that it lines up with that schedule.

Ms. White: Has the Government of Yukon taken out any advertising this year with the White Pass & Yukon Route?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: That's a great question; I don't know the answer. If I get that information, I'll get back to the member opposite.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that.

There has been talk, of course, in the Department of Economic Development about business support for businesses affected by the tariffs. Is there any kind of contingency plan for tourism businesses if there is a negative effect due to the ongoing fallout from tariffs and travel plans?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I got an answer to the earlier question: We are not advertising with White Pass. We have some advertising with Holland America, and we do have, of course, our kiosk down in Skagway, which is self-advertising.

At this point, our tourism numbers in the early moments here are up right now. So, there has not been a negative impact to date. We're not sure if there will be a negative impact. What we are prepping to do is — and this would be more led by Economic Development, because we do think that there can be some negative impacts to Yukon businesses as a result of the tariffs.

Economic Development is preparing in case there need to be supports for businesses. Of course, we will support the tourism businesses to avail themselves of those supports should we see that there are some specific impacts to parts of the tourism sector. We don't think it is as vulnerable as other sectors, but that doesn't mean that it's all uniform, so we will see.

If I could just say that today is Thursday and it seems like these things change every day, so we're prepared to continue to work at it. I mentioned earlier that the Yukon Tourism Advisory Board is meeting next week and this is one of their topics of conversation to provide advice back to the department and me. We are keeping a watchful eye, and so far, so good.

Ms. White: Can the minister just expand a bit on the advertising that happens with Holland America — what it looks like and the cost of it?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The team is working to get that specific information. I will just encourage us to keep going with questions, and as I get the response, I will just pop up and give it to the floor.

Ms. White: I am just going to pivot. We heard concerns from the arts community around the arts operating fund and how it feels like it is impossible for someone who hasn't already accessed the arts operating fund to access it and that it's oversubscribed before the opening even happens. Is the minister familiar with those concerns? Does he have any thoughts to share about the challenges that folks are finding with the arts operating fund?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: It is a timely conversation. First of all, we have heard these concerns. They have been raised with us and the department worked to try to find a way to address them. I did just sign yesterday the recommendations of the board that makes its recommendations, so I can't talk about names yet, because they haven't actually been informed. The letters will just be on their way right now.

The board that does these recommendations does a great job, so we just tried to work with them about how we could

adjust the system somewhat so that there was a balance between stability but also not limiting the opportunity for applicants to come into the system. We asked everyone to apply. There are some who will get multi-year agreements, but we are going to stagger those so that they feather over time.

What I can say is that what I signed yesterday — we had eight new applicants who were given funding. There were several of that group of new applicants who were not, but I thought that it is pretty impressive. It helped that we had increased the arts operating fund so that there were some additional dollars to go around, but that is a clear difference from where it has been. I just want to say thank you to everyone for applying and thank you to the board for its recommendations.

The last thing I will say is that this past year, we had — I'm forgetting the name of the group, but it was the group who comes from the national art gallery and their board, but that's not the name of it; it's something subtly different. They came here to the Yukon, and we had — we sat down and had a lunch with them, and someone asked the question about how much funding we give to our arts community here. We started checking around the country to see how that compared on a per capita basis, and I will say that the Yukon was topping out on that.

So, I think it — we have great artists here; we have a really fantastic community of artists, and I did not know where this was going to land, but it was interesting to hear that the funding that we got for our community was comparatively high, but I never want to give the impression — like, my sense is that means that we have many people who — no one gets rich as an artist is what I'm trying to say. So, those people who enter into the arts are usually subsidizing their work with many other avenues. This is about supporting a great community, and I was happy with the changes that just came through on the arts operating fund.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that there has been an increase, and I can see it, because you can see the allocation from 2012 until the 2023-24 season right now.

You know, I will point out that, in some cases, there are the same groups in each of those years. So, when, you know, someone in the arts community reaches out to say that it feels like it's already beyond bursting and there are no additional — like, new things added — I mean, when I look through the list — and I'm not going to go through it, because I think that they're all deserving. That's the thing: I think art and theatre and music are really important, and I think that it adds to the vibrancy of community, and it's something that I know the minister and I share a passion about, but it does seem very much like it's the same — there is a core group of groups, and it's not to say that any of them are undeserving, but at a certain point in time, it just means that there is not room for others.

I appreciate that the minister says that there is going to be maybe eight new ones when that gets released, and I also appreciate that it is not the minister's department that does that. I did just read about the group who goes through the applications and know that it is not the department directly, but a sense that I've gotten from people in the community is that

it's oversubscribed before it's even open. An application can take upward of 20 hours to get together, and if there is no chance of getting in, you're putting in 20 hours in hope. I just wanted to raise that as a concern, and it looks like the minister has additional information, so I will hear that before I go on.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: A few things. First of all, we did recognize that there was a lot of overhead or burden or red tape when it came to that application process. We asked to try to get it streamlined somewhat. I have not yet heard feedback from those folks who applied to get a sense about whether they thought it was better or not.

We did ask that all the groups reapply. Let me just say, in round numbers, returning applicants in this round, we had 19 who were awarded funding. Of those 19, four will have more than a year. Some of them will be a couple or three years; it depends, but that is multi-year funding for four of 19 returning or previous applicants. This year, we have added eight new applicants. Two of those eight will be multi-year, so that is a big difference.

The \$358,000 that has been added to the arts operating fund is up from — it was just over \$800,000 previously, so to add \$358,000 to \$800,000 is a big jump. That is good, and I hope that we are able to address some of the concerns, but one of the points is to try to provide some stability for some of these arts groups, because they are always hand to mouth in what they are doing.

I do think that we have to have the ability to allow new applications to come in and be judged and have a chance, but I also think that, for many of these organizations — it's not about taking away or diminishing the work of these other organizations who may have been funded over a longer period of time. They also have demonstrated need.

Lastly, I just also note that there are some folks who applied who were not successful. I really do not want to discourage their great work, so I always ask for follow-up on those folks who have not been successful but who clearly — I've seen within the community of practice and want to try to find ways to support.

I always wish that we could do more. I think the department has advocated to get more funding here, and I think that it is important, but I don't think that it is ever as much as the need is out there in the community itself.

Ms. White: I agree. There is always more need than there are dollars, which is just one of those hard truths.

I wanted to congratulate the minister and his department on securing the funding for the Yukon Gathering Place, the new convention centre. I think that we collectively — territory-wide — were quite surprised when that announcement was made and surprised in a good way. It was exciting to hear that the federal government has committed the funding required to have this go forward. For example, Chief Sean Smith of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation has said how tourism is a big aspect of what his community is looking toward with the purchase of, for example, Sky High Ranch. They are really working on that expansion.

Does the minister maybe want to share some information about next steps with the new convention centre?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I just want to note for colleagues that Kwanlin Dün — not only did they purchase Sky High and start operating it, but I was there with Chief Smith when he received — they were selected as the first group under this federal funding partnership — I'm trying to remember the name of it — but it got conferred in Ottawa this past December right after the House rose. I was pretty proud as a Yukoner that day to see Kwanlin Dün getting recognized that way.

So, Chu Níikwän was the first-ranked proponent. You know, we were not certain about getting the funding, and it really was at the eleventh hour when the funding was agreed to. I just want to say thank you to Canada, first of all. It was a big commitment.

When we had been talking with Canada earlier many, many months ago, they had indicated to us that they could commit to a smaller amount at first. We kept saying that we don't want to get half-baked; like, we didn't think that was going to help. So, we held off, encouraging that they commit to the larger amount, and I just want to start by saying thank you. I really appreciate that.

The \$75 million, of which three-quarters is coming from Canada and three-quarters is committed from us, has now been identified. The next step is to start working with the partners. The first obvious partnership that it will be is with Chu Níikwän and Kwanlin Dün First Nation and to look at their original proposal, because they have to now get it to the construction plans. That is the next step — working with them on that or supporting them to do that.

Another very important partnership will be with respect to the City of Whitehorse. I had a couple of calls with Mayor Cameron and we have set up a meeting for early May, I think, to sit down with council and senior management to talk through all the various pieces of that side of it. I am sure that the city is also meeting with Chu Níikwän or Kwanlin Dün or both to talk through that side of it. It is now beginning the planning in earnest now that we have the funding in place. I know that we have an overall timeline, but as this lead will be more on the side of the proponent, I will respectfully let them take that lead and we will support them through that, so I am not able to give an update on timelines to the House yet.

Ms. White: I appreciate the exchange.

I could probably talk for a lot longer about all the things that I think are impressive about tourism and why people should visit. Growing up as a kid, my dad always told me that you take nothing but pictures and leave nothing but tracks.

I think that tourism should be the economic driver of the future. I think that there are countless opportunities for us to go beyond what we are doing now, and every time that shoulder season gets shorter and we have more things that people are interested in doing, including the fact that people are coming here by fat bikes in February, is an exciting thing. It is not just dog sledding anymore.

I thank the minister for the exchange today and I am keen to get to Education.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I want to say thank you to colleagues for their questions and their insightful thoughts today. I am going to leave folks with a small story.

Maybe it was this past weekend — the long weekend, yes — I got a call out of the blue from someone I haven't seen since high school who is thinking about coming up to the Yukon. I was talking about: Well, you can go here and you can go here and you can go here. Then I sent some information to her and her husband — who I look forward to meeting — never met — and then I took one photo and said: Hey, this is what it looks like today. It really is a wonderful place that we live in, and I feel very lucky, as I'm sure that all of us here in this House do.

On top of that good luck, it's great to work with the crew at Tourism and Culture and with the industry, so my thanks to all of those folks who have been doing such a great job.

I looked up a statistic recently, and I think that probably in the range of five percent of our GDP is tourism and culture. But the thing that I found interesting is that it is higher than any other province or territory here in Canada. It is really this impressive piece, and I agree with the member opposite that we can do more, and I look forward to doing that with Yukoners.

Deputy Chair: Is there further general debate on Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture?

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

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, cleared or carried

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 all lines in Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$32,131,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$1,855,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$33,986,000 agreed to

Department of Tourism and Culture agreed to

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 217, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2025-26*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 217, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2025-26*.

Department of Education

Deputy Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you, Deputy Chair and colleagues. I am pleased to rise today to speak about the Department of Education's main budget for the 2025-26 fiscal year. Joining me today are Mary Cameron, Deputy Minister of Education, and Ashley Kayseas, the department's Assistant Deputy Minister of Corporate Services and Programs.

As the Minister of Education, I remain committed to ensuring that all Yukon learners have access to high-quality education that prepares them for success in life, work, and community. Education is a foundation of our society. It shapes the opportunities available to Yukoners and strengthens the future of our communities. Our government remains committed to building an education system that is strong, inclusive, and adaptable to meet the needs of all learners at all stages of their lives.

The 2025-26 main budget reflects this commitment, ensuring that we continue to invest in students, educators, apprentices, infrastructure, and early learning while maintaining responsible fiscal management.

Our work over the past years has laid the foundation for transformative change across Yukon's education system. With a clear vision for tomorrow, we're committed to ensuring that every Yukon student thrives in safe, modern, and inclusive schools.

I'm going to just give a brief overview of what is in the budget and not go into the detail, as I'm sure we will get there during the debate over today and tomorrow.

The total main budget for 2025-26, including operation and maintenance along with capital expenditures, is \$315,389,000. This represents an increase of \$33,149,000, or 11.74 percent, over the 2024-25 budget. This includes \$289,749,000 for operation and maintenance and \$25,640,000 for capital expenditures. This budget supports an education system that meets the needs of learners at every stage, from early learning education through to post-secondary and lifelong learning.

Today, I'm looking forward to the debate. As I've stated, I will not get into all of the details. I did give a very extensive speech at second reading, so I'm happy to just move forward into questions today.

Mr. Kent: Thank you very much, Deputy Chair, and I thank the minister for her opening remarks. I also take the time to welcome the officials and to thank them again for the briefing that they provided us on the mains earlier on in the Sitting. It was very helpful and informative and will help to form the basis of many of the questions that I will ask here today and into tomorrow.

The first question that I wanted to ask was about the Kêts'ádañ Kù School that is currently being built in Burwash Landing. According to the briefing notes that we were

provided, there is an increase of \$2.625 million for this year, bringing the total project cost for this fiscal year — is anticipated to be \$15.650 million.

I just wanted to check in with the minister on that number — and if the minister can provide a timeline for the completion of the school.

Hon. Ms. McLean: We are excited about the Kêts'ádañ Kù project. I am happy that it is progressing along. We did — on August 22, 2024, GenMec ACL Inc. was awarded the construction contract for \$26.9 million.

In terms of the specific question about the increase — the total cost for 2025-26 is anticipated to be \$15,650,000. The increase of \$2,625,000 is based on the project's estimated expenditures and timelines as we continue to work in collaboration with the Kluane First Nation to move this project forward. As the project moves forward, we adjust for those timelines. We are still on track for the completion of the school in 2026.

Mr. Kent: Earlier today, we heard from some members of the contracting community that there might be some delays — up to a year delay — in the construction of the school because of seismic issues. I'm not sure if those seismic issues are with the foundation or what is going on. So, I'm just wondering if the minister is aware of this. Again, these are issues that were brought forward to us from members of the contracting community. I'm just curious if the minister is aware of these potential delays and how that will affect the expenditure this year. I'm not sure if it's something that she can answer or if we should redirect to her colleague from Highways and Public Works, but what is the exposure for change orders as a result of these delays if they are indeed going to happen?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, the Kêts'ádañ Kù project construction started in late September 2024, and the preliminary schedule for completion is still in 2026. The contractor is preparing to remobilize the site on May 5, with groundwork scheduled to resume on May 12. The project is on track for the foundation to be delivered in early September, which is a key milestone in this project timeline.

Through ongoing collaboration with the contractor, we have identified and had to incorporate a required design change with respect to the building code. We're actively working with the contractor to determine the full scope of the design change and finalize the design. We expect to have a clear understanding of both the revised design and the updated timeline by the end of August. Again, we are still targeting the completion of this project in 2026.

What is notable as well is that we have an MOU with the Kluane First Nation; we meet with them regularly. Minister Clarke and I are planning a trip to the community in the near future. We met with them on — the last time we met with them was the third week in March. We discussed this very issue that is being asked about today, and we reaffirmed our commitment — on behalf of the Government of Yukon — to continue to prioritize this project. This is an important community project for the Kluane First Nation and for all of the residents of the Kluane school catchment area.

The school will accommodate students from kindergarten through grade 12, with a maximum capacity of up to 40 students, ensuring personalized attention and a close-knit learning environment. It will be a state-of-the-art facility spanning 1,290 square metres. The school's modern design includes a variety of specialized learning spaces tailored to the needs of the grade levels — comprehensive learning spaces. The school will feature: a fully equipped gymnasium for physical education; a versatile kitchen; life skills rooms for hands-on learning; dedicated STEM room for science, technology, engineering arts, and mathematics exploration; and classroom designs for primary, junior, and senior students.

Additionally, a collaborative learning circle will foster teamwork and interactive learning experiences. Again, this is a very important project. We are working closely — perhaps when Highways and Public Works is up in Committee of the Whole, they can ask other questions. This is the information that I have as of today.

Mr. Kent: I just wanted to confirm then that the minister has said that there are design changes required to the school, but the school is still on track to be completed in 2026, although a new timeline will be available at the end of August. I just want to make sure that I captured what she said correctly.

Hon. Ms. McLean: That summary is correct.

Mr. Kent: Deputy Chair, we will circle back with the contractors we talked to and share the minister's comments here today. If follow-up is needed, we will follow up going forward prior to the end of the Sitting next week.

I wanted to move over to an April 2, 2025 letter to the minister from the F.H. Collins Secondary School Council. It's in regard to a proposed pilot project that the school was looking at with respect to teachers on call. In the letter, they mention the number of days from September through February at the time when a substitute teacher was required — or number of classes; pardon me. It was 3,051 classes — going on to say that, of those classes, the school was only able to provide coverage for 2,158.

So, obviously, I'm assuming that, for that difference, there were EAs or LATs asked to sub-in or perhaps administrators asked to sub-in to cover those classes. It sounds to me, in correspondence with the minister since this date, that there was a misunderstanding that this proposal was presented to the department officials and was denied. I'm just curious — the school council is wondering about this as well — when will an answer be forthcoming to the council with respect to this proposed pilot project, or has the minister and the department made up their mind on whether or not they will support this pilot project to have full-time teachers come in to cover off classes that require substitutes?

Hon. Ms. McLean: In terms of the number that was given in the letter and what was quoted here today — about 3,051 classes requiring TOCs and that the coverage was provided for only 2,158 between September and February — as I understood, between the department and the school officials, the number of TOC hours quoted in their pilot project proposal was presented from a modelling exercise that was inclusive of

non-enrolling teaching absences — so teachers who are non-instructional.

So, we're looking into the modelling provided and the work that the school principal did to determine the hours presented. This is work that is happening right now with our human resource department, and they will continue to work with the school around that.

I did respond back to the school council thanking them for advocating for the school educators at F.H. Collins Secondary School and confirming that, yes, there was a misunderstanding with the superintendent regarding the project proposal and that they did not get denied but that rather the Department of Education is evaluating the proposal and needed to gather more information before a formal response is provided. This work is currently underway and will be evaluated against other staffing proposals.

We are receiving proposals throughout the education system from our schools and we are working through those to ensure that we are meeting the needs of all of our schools. We will endeavour to have that within the next six to eight weeks — that is my understanding — because it is not just simply the F.H. Collins proposal; there are many other proposals and needs that are being assessed right now.

Mr. Kent: That six- to eight-week time frame I'm sure is problematic for what F.H. Collins is planning to do here. Obviously, they would have to go out and recruit teachers. Those numbers could put the response well into June and possibly beyond to when school is in session. I'm curious: Can the minister tell us why she believes it will take so long for a response to the school? I'm sure that's a question that they will want an answer to when I send them the transcripts of our discussions here this afternoon.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, the Department of Education is evaluating the proposal along with many other proposals and going through a process. There is a process that we go through to determine these types of requests.

All staffing proposals must be assessed against the collective agreement between the Yukon government and the Yukon Association of Education Professionals. It is reviewed through the greater education ecosystem lens on how this could apply to all three school authorities: the First Nation School Board, the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon, and the Yukon Education authority. There is a process that we are going through, and we certainly are working with the F.H. Collins school team and will be continuing to do that work. Again, there are many requests that we are looking at throughout the entire education system.

Mr. Kent: I just wanted to make sure: Have the school community, the school council, and the those who initially submitted the pilot project been informed that there is up to another six to eight weeks required for the evaluation?

I have sort of a follow-up question to something the minister said as well. How many other proposals are they currently evaluating from schools with respect to staffing that would be similar to this request from F.H. Collins?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Our superintendent is working directly with the school administrator. I will confirm the

timeline question through our deputy minister to the superintendent.

Again, we are working with all of our schools within the Department of Education, and we are working directly with the First Nation School Board around their needs and with CSFY as well. We are looking at the needs of all schools, so these are all needs-based proposals and requests that are being presented. We are working through them, which is why we absolutely need a process to go through to evaluate and ensure the equity among schools.

Mr. Kent: I can appreciate that the minister may not have the number with her, but hopefully, if we get back into Education tomorrow, she will be able to provide the number of different proposals that are currently being reviewed and that are similar to the one at F.H. Collins. Then, if she is able to let us know tomorrow when this six- to eight-week time frame was communicated to either the administration at the school or school council, which I have been dealing with on this issue since it was initially raised, that would be helpful. As I said, I will share the brief exchange that we have had here this afternoon with them when the transcripts are ready and let them know about the discussion that we have had.

I did want to move on to an April 18 letter now — last week — from the Whistle Bend Elementary School Council. They have raised concerns — and we talked about it in Question Period earlier this week — with respect to capacity issues at the Whistle Bend school and staffing concerns that they have.

What they have said in this letter is that they have been hit with what they believe is unexpectedly high enrolment, with three full kindergarten and grade 1 classes currently operating and registered for the coming school year. This rapid growth has left little room for flexibility; the classrooms are small, they say. The general use areas are crowded, and the school is already feeling the pressure of trying to serve more students than it was designed to accommodate. They go on to mention a large apartment development that is going in across the street from the school and some additional concerns.

They are looking at the government's five-year capital plan and don't see any mention, obviously, of a second elementary school planned for the area, but they are very concerned with what is happening as far as population growth at the school. When I pulled up the Yukon public schools enrolment numbers from March, it looks like Whistle Bend Elementary School is currently at 231 students. Obviously, it's built for 450. So, I'm curious: Can the minister tell us when she expects the school — or what sort of analysis the department has done on when, given the population growth in that neighbourhood and given some of the issues identified by the school council, is it expected that Whistle Bend Elementary School will reach capacity if, in its first year, it's at 231 and then we see three kindergarten classes and three full grade 1 classes? And that will obviously transfer through the school going forward.

I am just curious about that — if any analysis has been done on when the department believes that the school will be full.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Whistle Bend Elementary School was built for 425 students. The numbers have changed a bit here and there. The number I had the other day was 227. The newest numbers are 230. So, that's the current number that I have.

I think that what's notable is that one of the ways that we work, of course, with all of our schools is school growth plans, which are an important way to focus on student success and the impact of school-level strategies to improve student learning and outcomes and engage. So, the school growth planning process is one way that the department seeks to identify and address any issues or projections. The school growth plans identify the school's educational goals and priorities and look at what the desired outcomes are as well. Capital is a big part of that.

We were very proud to open this new school. We know that Whistle Bend is growing, and we work within our five-year capital plan and will continue to do that. Folks know that we're really trying hard to build the school replacement for École Whitehorse Elementary and planning for that. There will be students who come from Whistle Bend to the École Whitehorse Elementary School; we know that.

I think what is also notable is that we do have two land reserves in Whistle Bend. One is earmarked for an elementary school and one for a secondary school. I've talked about those in previous debates — that those two educational land reserves exist in Whistle Bend.

So, we will continue to work within our five-year capital plan to ensure that we are working with the needs of our school community. We also did do the review and in-depth discussion with all of our partners and Yukoners around school planning for urban Whitehorse. There is a lot of great information in there that we draw from as well.

We will continue working with the tools that we have and with our school communities to plan for growth and to continue building the much-needed infrastructure in Whitehorse and continue building the infrastructure that is needed in our rural communities as well. I am very proud, as we just spoke about Kêts'ádañ Kù and that we are working to get that project completed. We are looking at those needs in rural Yukon as well and working very closely with the First Nation School Board around much of that planning.

Mr. Kent: With respect to students from Whistle Bend who are in the French immersion program, I would assume that they are already in that program at Whitehorse Elementary and wouldn't necessarily be taking pressure off of Whistle Bend Elementary School population regardless of the new WES or not. Obviously, French immersion is an extremely popular program, but the school also seems to be a very popular school given the population it has and where we are looking to get to.

One of the comments in this letter — and I should say that the letter was addressed to a Department of Education official and copied to myself as Education critic for the Yukon Party. One of the comments in here that stood out to me is — and I will quote from it: "Classrooms are small, general-use areas are crowded, and the school is already feeling the pressure of trying to serve more students than it was designed to accommodate."

I am curious what the minister thinks of that comment that is coming from parents — the school council at Whistle Bend. Does she believe that the current school is already feeling the pressure of trying to serve more students than it was designed to accommodate? And if not, perhaps she can tell us why she doesn't believe that.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Deputy Chair, when we're working to build a new school, we work with the school functional program. In 2018, the departments of Education and Highways and Public Works developed the Yukon schools functional program, a generic design framework for scaling school designs. The program established consistent, scalable standards for school design and construction based on factors such as school population, grade levels, and urban or rural context. The functional program serves as the foundation for the design and planning and was used — absolutely — for the Whistle Bend Elementary School and Kêts'ádañ Kù in Burwash Landing.

The Yukon schools functional program can be applied to school projects using either the design/build or design/bid/build procurement models. While the program provides a standardized framework, school designs are customized to meet the unique needs of each community. The Department of Highways and Public Works plans to update that program as we learn from our projects at Whistle Bend and Burwash Landing — Kêts'ádañ Kù.

Again, the Department of Education was thrilled to open this new elementary school — the first one in over 20 years — in the new and growing neighbourhood of Whistle Bend. It opened in August 2024. It was built for 425 students, and it is currently — based on the numbers that I have — at approximately 53-percent capacity. We are working toward — the letter was not sent to me, but that being said, I will be working with the department through our officials. We have department staff who work directly with school councils.

We also have folks who work within the capital and operation and maintenance. We will certainly go through all of the aspects of the letter that was received just last Friday — on Easter Friday — to address the concerns that they have laid out in that letter.

I have been very clear how we absolutely are grateful for the work that school councils do. They have an incredibly important role in the governance within our education system and we will continue to work with them.

Mr. Kent: Just to follow up on that previous question, the school council, in this letter to an Education official — the superintendent of schools — said that the school is already feeling the pressure of trying to serve more students than it was designed to accommodate. The minister mentioned that currently the school is at 53-percent capacity. Obviously, as that expands toward the capacity of 425 from where we are currently, the school will undoubtedly feel more pressure given what is occurring there now.

Obviously, for the Whistle Bend Elementary School Council, I believe that most if not all of the individuals who are on that council have children in the school. Like any other parent, they would be in and out of the school and around the

school on most days picking up their students or helping out in various classrooms if that is allowed as well.

Again, I just want to get a sense from the minister: Does she believe that the school was not designed to accommodate the 425 students? I think that it's something that, fundamentally, the school council will want to get an answer to, so I'm hoping that she can comment here this afternoon on that.

Hon. Ms. McLean: We will continue to work with the school council and work through the letter that they have sent to the Department of Education. We certainly will work through our superintendent and work to unpack the letter that was sent and have meaningful discussions about that.

I have talked today about how schools are designed through the school functional program. We are learning things, of course, always. We note that this school was designed for 425 students and is at 53 -percent capacity.

We will continue to work with the school council to address the concerns that they have raised.

Mr. Kent: I'm going to move on to some of the staffing concerns that were raised by the school council in this same letter.

The school council believes that Whistle Bend Elementary School has not been included in the CASA allocation and, as a result, their staffing numbers are significantly lower than those of nearby schools with comparable enrolments. I'm just curious if the minister can comment on that.

Does she believe that Whistle Bend school has been included in CASA-funded positions, which, of course, would be contrary to the position that is outlined by the school council in this letter?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, we will work with the school council through our superintendent to discuss all of the aspects of the letter that they sent. I get that the member would like me to answer all of these today, but I prefer to work with our partners and to work directly with them. I understand that this was copied to the member as the Official Opposition critic for Education. This letter was received last Friday. We are continuing to follow up on this.

I can note that school staffing allocations are done through a formula, and the school *Staffing Allocation Handbook* was developed to allocate teachers and other staff positions consistently and transparently. Enrolment, school size, grades taught, rural location, and programs of choice, like French immersion, are factors. To ensure equitable and standard service levels in all schools, each school receives a basic number of FTEs through the allocation formula regardless of how many students are enrolled at the school.

Other resources may be allocated to support specific initiatives, such as Yukon First Nation language teachers, religion programs, French programming, and intensive French and English language learners. These differentiated resource allocations — have their own allocation formulas or models. Additional FTEs may be provided to schools to support specific initiatives like literacy or numeracy or early kindergarten, for instance. So, that is how we work to allocate teaching staff and other staff.

In terms of the confidence and supply agreement and the additional positions that were added, those are certainly needs-based positions. They are support positions under educational assistants and learning assistance teachers. We have added 44 educational assistants and 20 learning assistance teachers. The wellness specialists are also available to every school community. We have allocated 10 and we have hired seven of those 10. These are positions that we have had to work to actually hire all of them. We have allocated six to the First Nation School Board and one to the Francophone School Board.

Those are all additional resources, with the exception of the wellness specialists, who are accessible to every school community. The educational assistants and learning assistance teachers are allocated based on need, so that's an area that we will work on with the Whistle Bend school council and the administrator of the school through our superintendent and through our liaison with the school council.

Mr. Kent: I guess an identified need that is in this letter that the Whistle Bend school council has put forward is that they currently serve 66 students who are English as a second language, or ESL, learners.

The minister has said that the CASA resources are needs-based outside of the wellness counsellor. This looks to me and has obviously been identified by the school community as a need. I am just wondering if the minister can tell us, then: Is there a wellness counsellor who is assigned to Whistle Bend school, and how many of the additional positions that were brought in as a result of the confidence and supply agreement with the NDP have been assigned to Whistle Bend school?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, going back to the allocation formula, English as a second language is certainly a consideration and will be considered as we look at the school needs for every school. This is going back to our early question asking about the proposal that was submitted from F.H. Collins. We are working through needs. We are working through complex needs. We are working through any changes in the needs of schools in terms of the supports that they require, but when we look at the allocation formula, those are taken into consideration.

Now, as we move forward, we will be allocating educational assistants and other resources based on the needs that are presented, and we will be continuing to allocate resources and working with those school communities to do that work. So, that is all of the work that is underway right now. So, when you ask about the timing — and when you do receive multiple requests, you have to go through them and ensure that we are doing all of our due diligence to make sure that we are assigning the resources that are needed. We will continue, through our superintendent, to do that work — not saying that in the next school year, some of these additional resources may be assigned to Whistle Bend based on the needs that they have in their school. We will continue to do that work in the way that I have described here today.

Mr. Kent: I apologize to the minister if she mentioned it, but is there a school wellness counsellor — or I think “specialist” is the new title for that position — who was identified in CASA? Is there a school wellness specialist assigned to Whistle Bend?

Before I move away from this topic, the school council has identified five different action items here that they would like the Department of Education to take action on. I won't go through them; they're in the letter. But I'm just curious — there are probably two school council meetings left — in May and June. Will the minister agree to attend one of those school council meetings in person to go through these concerns with the school council so that they can hear directly from the minister with respect to what the plans are regarding these concerns that have been raised in this letter by school council?

Hon. Ms. McLean: In terms of the wellness specialist, I apologize for not answering that question. As I stated, we have 10 of those positions allocated; seven are hired; we have two who are coming on for September; and Whistle Bend will be allocated along with another school.

So, they will have a shared wellness specialist starting in September, but they do have access to a wellness specialist if something arises or if they need that support.

In terms of the meetings for school council, certainly, we'll make best efforts to attend. If I am unable to attend, we definitely will have senior staff attend to go through in detail, as we work through — and there will certainly be a written response and correspondence as well. But definitely, if I'm unable to attend, a senior official will be there along with our school council coordinator.

Mr. Kent: I will share that with council members. I'm sure they will — or they may possibly send an invite out to the minister to attend one of their final two meetings of the school year so that they're set up to be successful for the fall and the start of the 2025-26 school year.

I wanted to move over to some questions on the new École Whitehorse Elementary School. Earlier this week — and I believe it was part of the traffic report that said that traffic concerns could be alleviated by having 90 percent of students ride the bus. The minister mentioned that currently 80 percent of students are riding the bus to École Whitehorse Elementary School — or registered for the bus; I guess that's different from the ridership. I'm curious, because I know that many families will register their children or their students to ride the bus, but then they won't actually ride the bus; they'll drop them at school.

The minister mentioned, I believe to the media or perhaps in the House, that there was the possibility of mandating students to ride the bus. I'm curious how exactly that would be enforced. I will leave it at that. How does the minister plan to enforce the 90 to 100 percent of students who attend École Whitehorse Elementary School in Takhini — how will the minister enforce them to ride the bus? It sounds like a very difficult task, so I'm curious what plans the minister has when she mentioned that earlier this week.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Just to be clear, right now, the school enrolment — and this may have varied a little bit over a

bit of time since I received these numbers — we have 453 enrolled in École Whitehorse Elementary School. The total number of students registered for the bus is 356. The total number of students not registered for the bus is 97. We have up in a range of 80 percent of the students riding that bus currently, so those are the current numbers.

When I talked about this last week, we talked about this as a possibility of making it a criterion that, to attend the new École Whitehorse Elementary School, busing be required. We would work with the school council and the school community. That is the other part of this that I said. We will not take any decision without working directly with the school council, including the variation of a different start and end time for that school. We will work with the school council and the school community around that.

We are still in the early stages. These are ideas and possible mitigations to alleviate traffic concerns. There are many others. We have also completed a traffic study that we will continue to update as we go through the phases of this project. Right now, there are a number of mitigations that are being proposed to help alleviate the traffic in this area.

I will go through that quickly. I can also provide — well, maybe I will; I'll just talk about some of the current — because I have talked about the number of students who are riding the bus right now to École Whitehorse Elementary. We have 41 from Riverdale; Hillcrest has 18; Takhini has 54 students; Copper Ridge has 97; Whistle Bend has 51; Porter Creek has 36. So, when we talk about — the demographics will change as well as we go through this. As they change — as students plan to attend École Whitehorse Elementary once we have a new school, then these numbers will change. McCrae has 15; downtown has three students; Hidden Valley has 17; Crestview has six; and outside of Whitehorse, there are 17. Right now, there are approximately 12 buses transporting students to École Whitehorse Elementary School.

One of the other things we have talked about is relooking at all of those bus routes so that it may be reduced in time in terms of as we adjust the bus routes for the demographic of the students who will be coming into the new École Whitehorse Elementary.

The traffic impact assessment found — we have already gone through all those details, but to improve safety, the traffic study recommends extended school zones on Range Road and University Drive, new bike lanes and pedestrian crosswalks across Range Road, a detailed parking plan to ensure safe drop-off and pickup areas, and a mini-roundabout at Range Road/Normandy Road and Range Road/University Drive to slow traffic and improve safety. Mini-roundabouts help slow down vehicle speeds while keeping traffic moving efficiently. They improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists and reduce the risk of violent collisions compared to traditional stop signs or traffic lights.

Stakeholder meetings, again, and public workshops are being organized to share results. We have done the first and will continue to work with the neighbourhood to ensure that all of the questions are answered and that we are continuing to work with the community as we continue to move forward.

I just will say that these mitigations will improve the neighbourhood of Takhini. So, when I talk about it being a win-win, these mitigations will improve that community neighbourhood substantially in terms of adding that infrastructure that is already needed in the community, but it will — as we add the school in, we will continue to work to mitigate and add other features and work with the school community to work toward other options, like the ones we talked about today around start and stop times, and criteria for busing. And there may be other ideas that will come forward, and we will continue working with the school community around those.

Mr. Kent: As we wind down time today, I'll get a final couple of questions in on this mandated bus issue — or mandated bus ridership issue — for École Whitehorse Elementary School.

The minister has mentioned that, of the 453 students, 356 are registered for the bus. I'm just wondering if she can comment on what the statistics are for actual ridership of the bus. Because as I have mentioned, I have talked to many families who attend that school who have their children registered for the bus, but they still drop them off in the morning or pick them up in the afternoon or both or some combination thereof. So, I'm just curious if the minister can provide us with statistics on ridership for students who are attending Whitehorse Elementary School.

Then, again — I'm not sure if I heard an answer in her previous response, but I'm just — you know, having floated that idea of mandating that children will have to ride the school bus, I'm just again curious — I'm assuming that there has been some thought given about how that would be enforced. Again, I'm just wondering if the minister can share the enforcement plans for that and share the ridership numbers for students who are attending École Whitehorse Elementary.

Hon. Ms. McLean: The current numbers are 78 to around 80 percent of ridership right now. I don't have all of the breakdown of statistics. I can certainly see if we have some of those in terms of how they may vary, but I talked about this as a possibility in terms of working with the school community. I haven't said that we are going to mandate this. It may become part of criteria, but we will work with the school community around that. We're still in the early planning stages, so there may be other ideas that come up that help us to move through the planning of this important new school infrastructure. And we will continue with the school community; we will work with the project advisory committee as well as we continue to plan for this very important infrastructure for the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary School.

Look forward to continuing to advance this project. I want to thank all of the officials, all of the folks who have worked on this project so far, and the project advisory committee for all of their great input and for the continued planning that is going into this very important project.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 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: 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 9:00 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

The following sessional paper was tabled April 24, 2025:

35-1-199

Annual Revenue Return On Political Party Revenues 2024 For the period January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024 — Office of the Chief Electoral Officer (Speaker Harper)

The following documents were filed April 24, 2025:

35-1-333

Requirement to Appear before the Yukon Legislative Assembly in Committee of the Whole, letter re (dated April 23, 2025) from Hon. Jeremy Harper, Speaker, to Michelle Grant, Senior Vice President, PricewaterhouseCoopers (Speaker Harper)

35-1-334

Receivership Proceedings of Victoria Gold Corp., Court File No. CV-24-00725681-00CL, Appearing before the Yukon Legislative Assembly in Committee of the Whole, letter re (dated April 24, 2025) from Peter Ruby, Goodmans LLP, to Hon. Jeremy Harper, Speaker (Speaker Harper)