



# Yukon Legislative Assembly

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Number 251

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35<sup>th</sup> Legislature

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## HANSARD

Friday, April 25, 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
<b>Hon. Ranj Pillai</b>	Porter Creek South	Premier Minister of the Executive Council Office; Economic Development; Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation
<b>Hon. Jeanie McLean</b>	Mountainview	Deputy Premier Minister of Education; Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate
<b>Hon. Nils Clarke</b>	Riverdale North	Minister of Environment; Highways and Public Works
<b>Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee</b>	Riverdale South	Minister of Health and Social Services; Justice
<b>Hon. Richard Mostyn</b>	Whitehorse West	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board
<b>Hon. John Streicker</b>	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
<b>Hon. Sandy Silver</b>	Klondike	Minister of Finance; Public Service Commission; Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission

### OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

#### Yukon Party

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

### THIRD PARTY

#### New Democratic Party

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

### LEGISLATIVE STAFF

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

**Yukon Legislative Assembly**  
**Whitehorse, Yukon**  
**Friday, April 25, 2025 — 9:00 a.m.**

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

*Prayers*

## DAILY ROUTINE

**Speaker:** Good morning to everyone. We will proceed at this time with the Order Paper.

## INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**Speaker:** Introduction of visitors.  
*Visitors introduced*

**Speaker:** Tributes.

## TRIBUTES

### In recognition of National Volunteer Week

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to National Volunteer Week, which occurs from April 27 to May 3 this year. I rise on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government. The social, sport, and cultural events that we have become so accustomed to enjoying throughout the year cannot happen without volunteers.

Equally important are the efforts of those who ensure our community safety and the groups that advocate for the interests and concerns of the people, locations, and organizations that they represent, such as lawyers, doctors, and other professionals. Much of what we cherish wouldn't be possible without individuals stepping up — for example, leaders of scouts and girl guides.

It is very easy to overlook the efforts of volunteers. Often, the hard work behind events like the Arctic Winter Games, the Dawson City Music Festival, the Blue Feather Music Festival, Yukon Rendezvous festival, Ride for Dad, and Canada Day festivals goes unnoticed during these celebrations.

Since 1943, National Volunteer Week has provided an opportunity to reflect on how volunteers connect us all to each other and to our community, making life in this wonderful territory truly special. This annual celebration is dedicated to expressing gratitude and acknowledging volunteers from coast to coast to coast. The theme for this year, “Volunteers Make Waves”, emphasizes the power, the impact, and the significance of both individual and collective volunteer efforts throughout Canada. Much like a wave, volunteers foster movement and growth. They all play a role in keeping the Yukon vibrant.

The beauty of volunteering lies in its rewards, which, while not monetary, are infinitely more gratifying and valuable. Volunteers are the heart and soul of our communities. Through their selfless dedication and tireless efforts, they weave the fabric that binds us together. Their work fosters connections, builds trust, and strengthens the bonds between neighbours. By giving their time and energy, volunteers make communities

vibrant, resilient, and compassionate places to live. Their contributions remind us that together we can achieve great things and make a positive impact on the world around us.

Mr. Speaker, as we head into National Volunteer Week, I would like to thank every volunteer who gives their time to an organization that they believe in and helps to make the world a better place. Please continue to do what you do. We are always looking for more volunteers. There are so many upcoming events that we need volunteers for, and it is true that many hands make light work and a stronger heart.

In closing, volunteers not only help us lighten the load but also enrich our lives and strengthen our communities. By coming together and offering our time and skills, we can make significant differences and create lasting positive impacts.

*Applause*

**Ms. McLeod:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize National Volunteer Week, which takes place between April 27 and May 3.

This is an easy tribute to give year after year because the volunteer spirit here in the Yukon is something that we appreciate. It's easy to speak highly of those who dedicate their time and energy and bring their passion to make things happen. We have volunteers who work in youth extracurricular activities, sports, health care, and animal care. They spend time with our seniors and make it possible to hold events and fundraisers of an incredible magnitude. So, thank you to all those who make it possible for sporting or community events to take place or for volunteer fire halls to run efficiently.

Mr. Speaker, many parents quickly learn the ropes of volunteerism when their children start school, and they learn the importance of volunteerism as those same kids transition into extracurricular sports, because those sports can come with many incredible opportunities that can be quite hard on the pocketbook. Volunteers can help keep those costs down.

Some people are born with a love for animals, and they get that fulfillment from taking long walks with the dogs at the Mae Bachur Shelter. Many enjoy the companionship and stories of the seniors in continuing care facilities and spend time volunteering in any capacity in which they may be required. Those more attuned to boards and committees may offer their skills and knowledge to help run the many societies and organizations that offer services to Yukoners.

Volunteering comes in all forms, and thankfully, so many are willing to give to their communities in some way.

We thank those who care enough to give. We encourage Yukoners to get involved. Our communities are better for it.

I would like to thank Volunteer Yukon for the work that they do in matching opportunities to volunteers and promoting all the great benefits of volunteering.

*Applause*

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon NDP to recognize National Volunteer Week. This week is a time to honour and celebrate the incredible contributions of volunteers across the Yukon.

Volunteers are the hearts and souls of our communities. They are the mainstay of every community gathering, every event, and every organization looking for ways to reach out and connect. We thank those countless hours put in by coaches, people who spend their valuable time encouraging kids with their love of sport. We thank those late-night hours put in by emergency response volunteers while we're safe in our beds, these volunteers who give their time to fire, EMS, and search and rescue, to name but a few. It's these volunteers who make sure that we're safe and secure in our communities.

We thank those special people who volunteer with hospice and at the hospital, giving comfort in times of greatest need.

We thank all of those volunteers who put their time and effort into sports, arts, and recreational pursuits from snowboarding to theatre performances, lawn bowling to community choirs, basketball to synchronized swimming, and every in between. We can't forget organizations or groups that embrace those who have fallen on tough times. From the volunteers at Whitehorse Connects or the food banks to church groups, our neighbours and volunteer organizations that tackle top social issues, these folks are a smile, a bowl of soup, or a hug in our time of greatest need.

We can't forget our friends and neighbours who shovel our driveways when we aren't able, bring us food when we're sick, offer us support in our times of need, or stop to help change tires on the side of the road — all of these actions are given freely and help to strengthen our communities.

There are far too many groups and individuals to list, but we feel their contributions to our communities each and every day. Johnnetta B. Cole said — and I quote: "The ultimate expression of generosity is not in giving of what you have, but in giving of who you are."

We couldn't agree more, Mr. Speaker. So, to all the volunteers, thank you for who you are and what you give each and every day.

*Applause*

### **In recognition of anniversaries of Yukon Art Society and Arts Underground**

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Yukon Art Society and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Arts Underground.

In April 1970, a group of artists came together with a shared goal: to grow public interest in the burgeoning art scene here in the Yukon, to make it easier for creatives to learn, share, and showcase their talents, and to enrich the territory's culture. Today, the society is the largest visual arts group in the Yukon and one of the territory's longest running non-profits.

For 55 years, they have stayed true to their mission: supporting and showcasing Yukon artists. Their efforts and partnerships have had a lasting impact with well-loved programs, classes, and events like: the First Friday art crawl; the annual *Points of View* exhibit; artist of the month; the annual art auction, which was really great this past year; Chu Níikwān artist residency with partner arts organizations; and Arts in the Park, the popular summer concert series at LePage Park. They oversee the artist in the school and the community

school touring programs, which bring hands-on, culturally rich programming to students across the Yukon. Thanks to the society, we also have Arts Underground, a creative hub celebrating 20 years now.

The Arts Underground story began when the Yukon Arts Centre approached the Hougen Group of Companies with a vision to create an accessible, multi-use arts and heritage facility. They then set out to find an arts group to administer the new space. With their years of experience running a gallery and artist workshops out of the cozy Captain Martin House, the Yukon Art Society quickly came onboard and moved into their current space on Main Street in 2005.

Since then, Arts Underground has become more than just a gallery; it's a space to create, connect, learn, and inspire. Over the years, it has hosted hundreds of peer-juried exhibitions by local emerging and established artists. Many artists cite the gallery as their first-ever solo exhibition, a key milestone in any visual artist's career.

It offers a members' gallery for local artists — providing a formal exhibiting opportunity and retail space for art sales — and another for heritage exhibits curated by the MacBride Museum and Friends of the Yukon Archives Society. It's also home to a host of workshops for all ages and media, such as painting, drawing, ceramics, sculpture, felting, textiles, print-making, jewellery, and more.

On behalf of the Government of Yukon, I want to thank everyone who has contributed to this amazing organization over the 55 years of the Yukon Art Society and the 20 years of Arts Underground. From founders to board members, mentors, artists, volunteers — especially during National Volunteer Week — and staff, we thank the Yukon Art Society and Arts Underground for decades of imagination, inspiration, and connection.

*Applause*

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize some special anniversaries in the art community this year. The Yukon Art Society was established in 1970 as a visual arts organization to foster the creativity and professional development of Yukon visual artists. In 2005, the Yukon Art Society opened their central hub for artists in the Hougen Centre's lower level, named "Arts Underground".

There is a beautiful story here. Rolf Hougen had closed his Hougen's hardware store and had about 4,500 square feet of space. Encouraged by his wife, Margaret, and his daughter-in-law, Mary-Jane Warshawski, Rolf agreed to turn the space into an arts space. Wheels in motion, they renovated to feature an art gallery, workshop, and gift shop at their own expense, and they waived the rent for 10 years so that it would be successful.

For their dedication to the arts, Rolf and the Hougen Group of Companies received an award, the Globe and Mail Business for the Arts Partnership Award, in 2011 for their creation of Arts Underground. Visitors and members can find workshops, showcase materials, art, and supplies for purchase. One can create and develop their skill with a large offering of classes and the ability to use the studio space. At the moment, until

April 26, check out Aurore Favier's *Cardboard Tales*. She loves to play with cardboard and creates amazing art, such as an unusual city made of cardboard buildings with iconic Yukon landmarks, familiar rooftops, and neighbourhoods.

The Yukon is home to an incredible community of visual artists, and it is wonderful to have an organization like the Yukon Art Society to support, inspire, advocate, and pass on the love of art. The Yukon Art Society will be holding a special anniversary members exhibition to view in the Focus and Edge galleries from July 4 to 26, and I encourage all to attend.

Congratulations to the Yukon Art Society on your anniversary, and thanks to the board of directors and staff at Arts Underground past and present. Here's to many, many more years of exhibits and sharing art with Yukoners.

*Applause*

**MLA Tredger:** I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate the Yukon Art Society's emerald anniversary — 55 years since its founding in April 1970. It is the Yukon's oldest visual arts organization and the largest. We also get to celebrate today the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Arts Underground.

The Art Society proudly points out that their history is the result of their inclusiveness policy. Any Yukon visual artist at any stage working in any medium is welcome to be a member. Membership in the society gives artists access to programs to help with their careers, multiple exhibition spaces, a bustling community studio, and the Yukon's largest selection of art supplies. I'll add that you don't actually have to be a member to go buy their art supplies. I am a little embarrassed to say that I only discovered you can buy art supplies there a few years ago, and now I wouldn't dream of going anywhere else, because the quality and the affordability is unmatched.

The Yukon Art Society opened Arts Underground 20 years ago, a central hub for artists and art lovers in Whitehorse. They offer workshops — I hear people rave about the pottery ones in particular, but I know that there are many more — a drop-in studio space, and retail. Arts Underground is a place for anyone to experience, enjoy, or purchase local art. It has become a stop on my family circuit whenever we have people visiting from outside of the territory and they always love the art that they can find there. It's a place to develop skills, learn from established artists, and find a space to exhibit and sell artwork.

Arts Underground is a touchstone of the Whitehorse visual arts community, and while we are here celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we have to thank not just the Yukon Art Society but their partners — the Yukon Arts Centre, Friends of the Yukon Archives Society, the MacBride Museum of Yukon History, and, of course, the Hougen Group of Companies that donates the space and utilities that hosts Arts Underground.

The 55-year anniversary is called the "emerald anniversary" because emeralds symbolize renewal, growth, and prosperity. I think that the success of Arts Underground, the partnerships that support the arts in the Yukon, and the vibrancy and diversity of its membership are proof that we are seeing that renewal, growth, and prosperity. We are so grateful that we have the Yukon Art Society and Arts Underground to support our wonderful thriving arts community.

Here's to another 55 years.

*Applause*

## TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

**Speaker:** Under Tabling Returns and Documents, the Chair has for tabling a letter from Alyssa Holland, counsel for the Yukon Legislative Assembly, to Peter Ruby, counsel for Michelle Grant of PricewaterhouseCoopers, regarding the law of parliamentary privilege and her duty to appear once summoned.

Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

Is there a statement by a minister?

This then brings us to Question Period.

## QUESTION PERIOD

### Question re: Shāw Kwā'ą Health and Wellness Yukon employee pension plan

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Yukon Employees' Union sent an e-mail to its members raising serious concerns about the impact of the proposed transition to the health authority on the pensions of its members.

The e-mail to affected employees said — and I quote: "With a looming Health Authority transition, your employer is looking to make massive changes to your pension.

"Unions have not been consulted, and you will hear from your employer about their plans soon."

Can the minister confirm that the Yukon government is considering forcing Yukon government employees to transfer their pensions to the Yukon Hospital Corporation's pension plan?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, standing up for Shāw Kwā'a is a long process and we are taking time to get it right. At this moment, we are still developing a health authority work plan and we do not expect staff transfers to start for several years. The transition to a new health authority is not a cost-savings or a work-reduction exercise. Our intention is to improve the care and experience for patients without sacrificing employee working conditions. The Yukon government continues to engage with the affected unions on a pension solution. We are in the early stages of that engagement now. We met with the affected unions yesterday. We will ensure that staff are engaged throughout the process and communication will occur as details are worked out. Transparency with employees is the top priority.

We are currently exploring the landscape of pension options for Shāw Kwā'ą, and that information, in a preliminary way, was given to the unions yesterday. We will continue our work with them as this process moves along.

**Mr. Dixon:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it may not be for a number of years. I know that the minister did indicate that pensions will be transferred. This is the update from the Yukon Employees' Union posted on their website yesterday — and I quote: "Today, the Employer advised the Unions that they are

strongly considering adopting the Yukon Hospital Corporation pension plan. Their plan would affect all Yukon Hospital Corporation (YHC) and Yukon government (YG) employees who would move to Shāw Kwā'ą.

Can the minister please clarify whether that indeed reflects the Liberal government's current position?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, Shāw Kwā'ą is a new health authority that will serve Yukoners well in respect to removing barriers and the opportunity to improve health care. We continue to engage with staff through the process of building Shāw Kwā'ą and will continue to share information directly with staff and unions as soon as it becomes available.

To operate, Shāw Kwā'ą requires a single pension plan that is fiscally sustainable, attractive to workers, supported by unions, and, most importantly, equitable for all transitioning staff. Shāw Kwā'ą will be a corporate entity that will operate independently from Yukon government, and for this reason, former Yukon government staff will no longer be considered public servants. The transition will impact two current employers — primarily the Government of Yukon and the Yukon Hospital Corporation — as well as Shāw Kwā'ą as a future third employer.

The Government of Yukon engaged legal and financial consultants to review various pension options. During that review, the Government of Canada informed the Government of Yukon that the public service pension plan cannot be utilized for Shāw Kwā'ą. That information was given to the unions yesterday.

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, since the Liberals' *Health Authority Act* was passed last year, there has been considerable concern among Yukon government employees who may be affected. I am sure that the concern is heightened by the minister's response.

According to the YEU, there could be as many as 700 employees of the Yukon Hospital Corporation and 1,400 employees of the Yukon government who will have their pensions directly affected. When the act passed last year, the Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission assured Yukon government employees that current employees would — and I quote: "... port their existing, negotiated collective agreements, along with their corresponding pension and comprehensive benefit packages — over to the new health authority..."

Does the minister stand by those comments, and does he think that the position being advanced by the government's negotiators is consistent with those comments?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I think it's incredibly important that this topic is available for conversation and understanding by Yukoners. The Government of Yukon engaged legal and financial consultants to review various pension options, and during that review, the Government of Canada informed the Government of Yukon that the public service pension plan cannot be utilized for Shāw Kwā'ą.

We're seeking to further explore the Hospital Corporation's pension plan as an option for Shāw Kwā'ą, and the Government of Yukon and the Yukon Hospital Corporation use comparable job classification systems, which will help

ensure fairness in how the positions are evaluated and aligned in a new authority. This work will be done with pensions in mind and with the unions that represent employees in each of those organizations.

Although a final decision on the pension plan for Shāw Kwā'ą has not yet been made, we will offer a similar level of pension benefits and stability. We completely understand that, for civil servants, this is an incredibly important part of the development of Shāw Kwā'ą. Public servants are a key and a top priority — that they have equitable pensions as we proceed to develop Shāw Kwā'ą to improve Yukon's health care system.

#### Question re: Veterinary services

**Mr. Cathers:** The Yukon is seeing an increase in the need for veterinary services for animals large and small but a lack of capacity to meet it. The Minister of Environment said in a recent letter to one of my constituents — quote: "... there is a shortage of private veterinary services in the territory's companion and livestock animal sector."

The shortage is impacting dogs, horses, cats, and other pets as well as livestock. It is also an issue that we've been raising with government for quite a while. In an e-mail that I sent to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources back in January 2023, I asked if any steps are being taken to work with local veterinary clinics on encouraging an expansion of their capacity or to convince more veterinarians to move to the Yukon.

The Minister of Environment replied, promising to — quote: "... work closely with local veterinary clinics to explore how the Government of Yukon can assist..."

Can the minister please tell me what the government has done about the vet-service shortage since then?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Mr. Speaker, I don't have a note in front of me, and I haven't talked with the department lately about this issue — really about how the new *Animal Protection and Control Act* implementation is unfolding. I'm happy to go back to the department and ask for an update.

I do know that the department has been working diligently on the new *Animal Protection and Control Act*. There are other things that I have been briefed on in that transition. I will make sure to try to get additional information for the member opposite.

I can say that the Agriculture branch's livestock health program and sustainable Canadian agriculture partnership — the sustainable CAP programs — provide support and funding for the care and management and overall health of livestock. This includes the veterinary services program, which is administered by the Animal Health unit with funding from sustainable CAP.

The Department of Environment and the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources will continue to work closely with Yukon First Nations and Yukon communities to ensure that animals across the territory are properly cared for and protected.

**Mr. Cathers:** Well, contrary to what the minister said, sustainable CAP doesn't cover horses right now.

It's getting tougher than ever before for Yukoners to actually get vet care for their animals. Ministers have heard many times from constituents of mine and other Yukoners about the problem. Last fall, one of the two vet clinics in Whitehorse announced that, due to a shortage of large animal vets, they would be reducing available care during business hours and after hours. Recently in an e-mail to clients, Alpine vet announced a further reduction — quote: "Going forward, we will not be able to offer large animal care during business hours or after hours." This is a serious problem for people who have horses or livestock that need vet care.

Will the government please tell us if they are doing anything about this sudden loss of vet services for large animals, and are they working with local vet clinics as the Minister of Environment said they were two years ago? And will they consider options such as revising the program criteria for the sustainable CAP fund to allow it to be used to help horse and livestock owners to access veterinary services?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question from the member opposite. As the member opposite did indicate, this is a developing issue. So, of course, we will be liaising with the private sector and the animal health community in order to try to meet this need — but certainly recognizing, to Yukoners who might be listening today, that it is a developing and recent issue.

The Animal Health unit safeguards the health and welfare of wild and domestic animals, supporting the One Health linkages between Yukoners, animals, and the environment. Animal Health unit staff monitor wildlife to detect emerging diseases and implement programs that protect wildlife health.

The Animal Health unit assists Yukon communities with animal welfare and dog control programs, including assistance to organize spay and neuter clinics and assisting communities to surrender dogs, which improves public safety. The unit also oversees core funding for the territory's registered humane societies that provide animal rehoming services.

Animal health veterinarians work closely with the agriculture community and oversee livestock meat inspection and support veterinary services for livestock, contributing to the production of high-quality Yukon-raised meat, eggs, and dairy products.

In collaboration with the chief medical officer of health, the Animal Health unit also provides advice on One Health issues and diseases shared between people and animals.

**Mr. Cathers:** Mr. Speaker, it is notable that, despite promises made over two years ago, this Liberal government hasn't done much about this issue.

Most Yukoners who have animals want to take good care of them, and access to vet services, especially in an emergency, is a very important part of caring for dogs, horses, cats, and other pets as well as livestock.

Over two years ago, the Minister of Environment acknowledged the — quote: "... growing demand and difficulty animal owners have in getting veterinary care."

He also promised to work closely with local veterinary clinics on a solution and indicated that — and I quote: "... incentive programs to retain practitioners..." were being

contemplated. Yukon students who want to become a vet have to compete for one seat shared with the other two territories at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine.

Will the government agree to consider options such as securing another seat at a vet college for Yukon students, and will they consider other options such as recruiting American-trained vets to practise here in the Yukon?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Mr. Speaker, because I don't have the most current note on what is going on with vets doesn't mean that the Agriculture branch isn't working closely with them. Whenever I have talked with the branch, they have had dialogue and conversation.

I know that the members opposite are looking to criticize me or us as a government, but it really comes across as criticism of the public service and I don't think that is fair.

The sustainable Canadian agricultural partnership program, which we renewed a couple of years ago, is \$9.25 million. I know that, over the last couple of years, we have put out \$2.4 million in funding for over 125 local agriculture projects. I will look to see where there are limits on that, but I am pretty sure that there is money that is supporting animal welfare broadly.

I will check in with the department on the specifics about vets. I concur with the members opposite that vets are super important for all of this, and I will make sure that we are working closely with vets and supporting however we can.

#### **Question re: Medical travel**

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, a core Canadian value is that no matter where you live in Canada, you should have free public health care, but that is not how it works in the Yukon.

A recent study found that Yukoners pay more out of pocket than in other parts of Canada for costs like medical travel. Compared to the rest of Canada, more Yukoners are skipping necessary health care because of the high cost. As a result, some Yukoners are forced to choose between getting essential medical care or affording other basic needs.

The minister has said that medical travel is an amazing opportunity for Yukoners, but I can assure her that it doesn't feel that amazing to have to choose between basic necessities and essential health care. How is this government going to reduce the financial burdens of medical care for Yukoners?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I would certainly appreciate it if the member opposite would provide the statistics on which she's relying. We understand that some people need to travel outside of their home communities to receive medical services, whether that be a smaller community in the Yukon or outside of Whitehorse, and we are committed to supporting this necessary travel.

The medical travel program provides support for insured health services as defined under the *Health Care Insurance Plan Act*. The current medical travel subsidy is actually probably more than this calculation. Let me see here.

As of April 1 each year, the consumer price index increases. We initially doubled medical travel when we came to government, and each year, a consumer price index increases that as of April 1 each year. April 1, 2025, the subsidy was

increased by an additional two percent, this bringing the subsidy rates to \$178 per day for overnight outpatient services and \$90 a day for same-day travel and for approved escorts.

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, the minister can talk about how great travel subsidies are and how lucky Yukoners are to have them, but the fact is that Yukon scored the lowest on health care equity among all Canadian jurisdictions last year and significantly below the international average.

In the past year, the Yukon NDP has assisted with no less than 15 different casework files, all related to the costs and inefficiency of this government's medical travel system. Improving equity in health care requires better affordability, and that means changing policies that deny essential services, like medical escorts. It means travel subsidies that are really realistic instead of just lip service, and it means setting up travel plans that reflect the advice of medical experts instead of forcing people to travel against their doctor's recommendations.

So, when will this government address health care inequities and unaffordability in the Yukon?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, there is nothing "lip service" about doubling the medical travel subsidy upon coming to government, about increasing it each and every year, about increasing the availability of it for gender-affirming care, about increasing the availability of it for individuals who are trying to grow their families and have medical care that is necessary outside of the territory, including those individuals in the medical travel program who previously were not included.

I agree that travel subsidy for medical travel, when we came to government, was woefully inadequate. We have doubled it and it has increased each and every year. It now sits at \$178 per day for overnight outpatient services and \$90 for same-day travel.

In 2024-25, there were 3,942 in-territory medical travel cases and 3,797 out-of-territory medical travel cases. That is real money in the pockets of real Yukoners to help with their medical concerns.

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, the minister lists all the improvements like the solutions all belong to the Liberals, but history will show differently.

Across Canada, we see effective solutions for managing medical travel and accommodation more efficiently. These solutions begin with collaborations with other jurisdictions to establish lodging and support services, shuttle services, medical travel navigators, and medical lodges.

This government has come up with a lot of reasons why they are unable to do things, but Yukoners are looking to this government to be creative and collaborative with other jurisdictions to act and make our health care system better. If, as an opposition member, I have been contacted by others looking to partner on a medical lodge, surely the minister has as well.

So, when will this government work with other jurisdictions to apply innovative solutions to medical travel?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, this government is all about innovative solutions. We started with a financial review; we started with *Putting People First*; we have grown a number

of climate change, MMIWG, and health human resources strategies. We have mapped out plans for Yukoners to be able to see where we are going — where this government is leading — and then hold us accountable in doing so. We have published more of those assessments and those plans that have had engagement and input with Yukoners than any previous government in the history of this territory.

The Department of Health and Social Services has been working to explore avenues to respond to recommendation 2.6 in *Putting People First*, suggesting the creation of medical residences. There are arrangements with certain hotels in Vancouver and in Victoria that I am aware of. We will be publishing opportunities for individuals to have stays at those hotels if they choose to do that. The medical travel subsidy does not require any individuals to stay at certain places. We have a great relationship with the cancer care services in Vancouver; the cancer lodge that is there is welcoming to Yukoners as they have to challenge their own medical situations and to —

**Speaker:** Order, please.

#### **Question re: Mining within municipal boundaries**

**Mr. Kent:** Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents in Copperbelt South are concerned about projects that are planned or occurring near their homes. Mineral exploration, the uncertain location of the new Yukon Energy diesel farm, and a timber harvest plan are among them. I want to start with a question about mining in municipalities.

Three years ago, the Liberals embarked on an engagement process regarding this issue; yukon.ca described the engagement as a way to — quote: "... prevent and resolve land use conflicts between mining operations and Yukon communities; improve coordination between community land use planning and mineral regulatory processes; and find ways for mining activities within Yukon communities to respect community values and interests."

I have asked about this before with no answers, so I am going to ask here again today: Where can we find a "what we heard" document on this engagement? When will the framework be completed, and how will it address the issues listed above?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I will take the opportunity to let the member opposite know that I did have a conversation recently with some of his constituents in Cowley Creek. We are arranging a time sometime in the coming weeks for me to go out and meet with them to hear their concerns directly. The issue around mining in municipalities — what it's looking to do is to establish decisions or opportunities for municipalities that wish to say that they would no longer like to see staking within their communities. It's not talking about existing claims. So, the claims that he is referring to and the ones that are of concern are actually already in place. Some of them, of course, in the Cowley area are actually outside of municipal boundaries, so that wouldn't be applicable in this case.

I have also recently had conversations with the Mayor of the City of Whitehorse. We have set up a meeting to talk about a range of issues. One of them is forestry, one of them is mining within the community, and one of them is not related to these



questions but is to do with tourism. I will happily get up and talk about more of these issues.

**Mr. Kent:** Mr. Speaker, for the minister, I am not referring to any specific claims; I am referring to the engagement process on the mining in municipalities framework.

There was much relief for many of my constituents when the minister told this House that the south Whitehorse diesel plant would be located along Robert Service Way; however, we found out this week that Nav Canada will not allow it to be placed there given the proximity of the airport runway.

I asked Yukon Energy Corporation officials this week what locations were being considered for this plant, and they were unable to tell me. They did say, however, that they were in negotiations with First Nations on a number of different sites.

My question for the minister is: Will he commit that the proposed location will be announced prior to the YESAB application going in, and how will feedback from residents be incorporated into the final decision?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Mr. Speaker, I was here when the member opposite asked those questions of the energy utility. My recollection of how it was responded to was that the first part of that planning was to be in dialogue with First Nations, which is what the utility said they're doing right now, and then they said that they will be talking with communities. I take that to mean with both residents and the municipality. In this case, it would be the City of Whitehorse.

Absolutely, we will talk with Yukoners. We want to find locations that are not creating the challenge of noise, and overall, that's why we want to move more to renewables. It's another reason why we believe that the path is renewables. You have to have thermal, meaning diesels or LNG, as a backup, but what you want to try to do is have those only when you have no other solution. So, we should be continuing to work toward renewables, and that's also what I heard from Yukon Energy.

So, absolutely, we will talk with folks in neighbourhoods about these projects before they become a reality.

**Mr. Kent:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for making that commitment.

Finally, there is a tremendous amount of concern over the Copper Haul Road timber harvest plan. Earlier this week, the minister identified this as one of four timber harvest projects in the *Whitehorse and Southern Lakes Forest Resources Management Plan*. I wanted to take the time to thank officials from the forestry branch and Wildland Fire Management for the open house that they hosted last evening about this project.

Of course, residents want to make sure that Whitehorse homes and properties are protected from wildfire. However, there are concerns being raised through YESAB and in other ways about other issues, such as ground- and surface-water impacts, impacts on wildlife, city zoning processes, proximity to private property and homes, and damage to trails.

Will the minister agree to pause this project and adjust the scope and scale of it to address the concerns of area residents? If not, will he ensure that no contracts are awarded prior to the election so the next government can make a decision on this?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Mr. Speaker, the Yukon Party just recently started coming and talking about schools — how we need schools — and yet all I hear about them doing is trying to push off the work that is being done on schools. This feels like another example to me.

There was a meeting last night. I think that there are concerns being raised. We are in a YESAB process right now. There will be concerns, and that process — the YESAB process, the input process — was extended to allow opportunities for residents to provide additional feedback, and once it comes through the YESAB process, it will move into a permitting process. This is about trying to find that balance — where we heat our homes with wood and where we make sure that our communities are safer. Yes, there are always challenges when change comes, but what we should not do is try to push every decision off. That is not healthy either, and so I don't agree with that approach. I do agree with listening to residents and I appreciate that there was an open house last night. I got a note this morning from the department about that. I think that in this case — because it is in front of YESAB — we should make sure that those concerns are heard and that we use our existing processes.

#### Question re: Mining industry support

**Mr. Hassard:** Mr. Speaker, I have some questions regarding mining projects here in the Yukon. As we face uncertain economic times, ensuring that we can approve projects in a timely manner is important for investment here in our territory. In August 2021, almost four years ago, Broden Mining was formed in partnership with the Ross River Dena Council to acquire mineral claims near the old Faro mine site. Unfortunately, we haven't seen this project move forward at all. The last time we heard, discussions were taking place between the Government of Canada and the Selkirk First Nation.

Can the minister update us on those discussions, and when does he expect this project to be able to move forward?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I feel like I am getting whiplash here. The members opposite were just saying to slow down on some of these projects. Now I am hearing them say to speed up. You know, come on — which is it? I mean, really.

In terms of work that we are doing on this project, yes, we continue to be in engagement with both Selkirk First Nation and Ross River First Nation and proponents, and we will continue to do that work and we have all along. I think that this is important work that is going on and it has been important government-to-government work.

**Mr. Hassard:** Mr. Speaker, so, the update is that there is no update.

There are currently over two dozen quartz mining projects active on the YESAB registry. While some of these applications were submitted this year, there are also many that go back months, with the earliest dating back to 2022.

Some of the historical applications have been submitted one year or more in advance of the expiration of their current permits; however, due to delays in the YESAB process, they are facing situations where their permits may expire this year.

What contingencies is the minister putting in place for those projects that are faced with having no permit in place this year through no fault of their own? Will they be able to continue to operate?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Mr. Speaker, I remember a few weeks ago when we were talking about the convention centre and the members opposite were asking us information about it. What I said at that time was that we are in government-to-government negotiations. Then, days later, we got the information that we had achieved the funding. So, yes, we are in government-to-government negotiations with Selkirk First Nation and Ross River First Nation, and we will continue to do that good work. It's not a non-answer; it is the work that is happening on behalf of Yukoners.

On to the question that is here in front of us right now: Are we working right now to move those decision documents through EMR as quickly as possible? Yes.

Are we looking at other possible solutions within our authority? Yes.

Are we working with the Yukon Water Board to work to make sure that they have capacity and are supported in order to do their side of this? Yes.

Yesterday, I reached out to the Klondike Placer Miners' Association to provide them with a similar update about the progress of the work within EMR. I will be heading to the gold show and will talk directly with placer miners there. We will do our best to make sure that we resolve this current situation.

**Mr. Hassard:** Mr. Speaker, the most important part of that last question was: Will they be able to continue to operate? There is no answer from this minister, so, no, you are not answering.

We look at the Michelle Creek project. It's the oldest one on the list, with a recommendation from YESAB sent in December 2022. The Yukon government subsequently took YESAB to court over their recommendation for the project not to proceed. In March of this year, the Yukon Supreme Court tossed out the case, essentially ruling against the Yukon government. This has left many wondering what the plans are for this project.

So, has consultation started on a decision document? Is the minister working on a compensation policy in case he has to buy out the claim holder, or are the Liberals purposely delaying this for political purposes until after the election?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Mr. Speaker, the delay until after the election is the request from the members opposite. Whether we are talking about Whitehorse Elementary School, whether we are talking about the Copper Haul Road — this seems to be their MO. No, that is not ours. We are working hard over here on behalf of Yukoners.

By the way, the one that they are talking about with Michelle Creek — we did go to the court. We did seek a judicial review. It was not thrown out. They came back and said: No, you are going to have to take the decision. That is what we are doing right now.

By the way, when it comes to class 4 placer claims, which require a water licence — no, I will not sit there and step in and say that the Water Board has no authority. I will respect the

systems that we have in place in this territory. I will work to support them so that they get decisions in a timely manner. Whether that is for relicensing of the Whitehorse dam or whether that is for placer claims, we will work to respect that.

I guess the Yukon Party doesn't respect those institutions.

**Speaker:** The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

**Some Hon. Member:** Question of privilege, Mr. Speaker.

### Question of privilege

**Speaker:** Official Opposition House Leader, on a question of privilege.

**Mr. Kent:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a question of privilege. I am doing so at the earliest opportunity since letters were tabled by you in this Legislature yesterday, sent from the Speaker to PwC lawyers and the response from PwC lawyers to you.

As members know, parliamentary privilege refers to the rights that are necessary for the Legislature as an institution and its members as representatives of the electorate to fulfill their functions.

According to the House of Commons publicly available information about parliamentary privilege, one of the listed collective rights of the House is to institute inquiries, demand papers, and call witnesses to appear.

Here is a direct quote from that document: "The House of Commons, as a collectivity, has the right to initiate inquiries. It can summon witnesses and compel their attendance. It can administer oaths to witnesses, take evidence and treat any misrepresentation of information as a contempt of Parliament. It can order and compel the production of documents, and it has the right to publish papers containing defamatory (or potentially defamatory) material. The rules of the House and its orders of reference empower its committees to exercise most of these collective rights."

As members will be aware, our Yukon Legislative Assembly members procedural handbook outlines the parliamentary privilege of Yukon MLAs. I will quote from that document: "In the modern context, parliamentary privilege has been described as 'the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively ... and by Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions, and which exceed those possessed by other bodies or individuals. Thus privilege, though part of the law of the land, is to a certain extent an exemption from the general law.'"

As the publicly available House of Commons introduction to parliamentary privilege notes — and I quote again: "The privileges enjoyed by the House and its members are part of the Constitution and are vital to the proper functioning of Parliament."

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am not going to read from the letters that were tabled yesterday at length. I understand, of course, that there was another letter tabled by you today from Yukon Legislative Assembly lawyers to lawyers representing PricewaterhouseCoopers, but those are available publicly since

they have been tabled in the Legislature — they are considered part of our working papers. I would simply note that, based on the letter that the Speaker received from the lawyers representing PwC, it is clear that they do not acknowledge or accept the collective right of this Assembly to call witnesses and demand papers. As such, I contend that this rejection of our authority is a breach of our collective rights as Members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

**Speaker:** Is there any debate on the question of privilege?

### Speaker's ruling re question of privilege

**Speaker:** Pursuant to Standing Order 7, it is the Chair's duty to rule on:

(1) whether there appears to be a prima facie case of breach of privilege; and

(2) whether the matter has been raised at the earliest opportunity.

On whether the matter has been raised at the earliest possible opportunity, I find that the Official Opposition House Leader has indeed brought this question of privilege to the House at the appropriate time.

On whether there appears to be a breach of privilege, I rule that there does indeed appear to be a prima facie case of breach of privilege. According to Standing Order 7(4), a member may now move a motion calling upon the Assembly to take action on this matter.

### Motion No. 1278

**Mr. Kent:** Mr. Speaker, I move:

THAT this House finds Michelle Grant, senior vice-president, PricewaterhouseCoopers, to be in contempt of this House.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Official Opposition House Leader:

THAT this House finds Michelle Grant, senior vice-president, PricewaterhouseCoopers, to be in contempt of this House.

**Some Hon. Members:** (Inaudible)

**Mr. Kent:** I know, for colleagues, that I did inform House Leaders prior to the Sitting today, not with very much time given the early start of our Sitting, that I would be moving this motion if a breach of privilege was ruled upon. With that, I will save my remarks for the closing, and I would welcome a colleague to move that we adjourn debate on this motion and bring it back at some point next week.

**Mr. Dixon:** As my colleague has indicated, I think that it is an important issue and members would benefit from further preparation, so I will propose that we adjourn debate and allow for preparation in advance of further debate next week.

### Motion to adjourn debate

**Mr. Dixon:** With that said, I move that debate be now adjourned.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Leader of the Official Opposition that debate be now adjourned.

*Motion to adjourn debate on Motion No. 1278 agreed to*

**Speaker:** We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### GOVERNMENT BILLS

#### Bill No. 50: *Inclusive Yukon Families Act* — Third Reading

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

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

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

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to present Bill No. 50, being a variety of amendments that respond directly and specifically to our mandate to modernize the *Vital Statistics Act* and to reflect Yukon families and ensure that Yukon legislation is inclusive.

This amending bill is a key component to the modernization of our family law, and it will bring significant changes to the parentage and naming legal frameworks, making Yukon laws more inclusive of diverse family arrangements and naming conventions. This amending bill also advances our government's broader commitment to reconciliation.

The bill represents a meaningful response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action 17, which urges all levels of government to enable Indigenous peoples to reclaim names changed by colonial systems.

At the same time, this work aligns with the goals set out in the LGBTQ2S+ *Inclusion Action Plan*, our government's road map to removing barriers, promoting inclusion, and ensuring equity for all Yukoners regardless of gender identity, expression, or sexual orientation.

Together, these commitments contribute to a shared vision, a Yukon where every family is recognized in law, every identity is respected and valued, and every person has the opportunity to feel included and be free from discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is a product of years of thoughtful work shaped by the lived experiences and hopes of Yukoners and their advocates and by shared commitment to making our legislation, policies, and practices more inclusive.

Along the way, we've heard about the barriers faced by Yukoners and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community who have used assisted reproduction to grow their families when their family formations are not reflected in the law. Through extensive research, public engagement, and the guidance of lived experience, we have built a stronger understanding of how to move forward in a way that reflects the full diversity of Yukon families.

This is not something that we could have achieved without contributions of many Yukoners, organizational partners of the Yukon government, and subject matter experts. I want to once again take the opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to all of those who have helped shape this legislation. To individuals with lived experience, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, families who have used assisted reproduction, gamete donation, or surrogacy, and to their allies and advocates, thank you for sharing your stories, for your advocacy, for your persistence, for your patience, and for your vision of a more inclusive Yukon.

To our Yukon First Nation partners and all those who have long championed the right to reclaim Indigenous culture, including names and languages, thank you for your leadership and your commitment to cultural resurgence, which continues to guide us all on our path to reconciliation.

To Queer Yukon, the Child and Youth Advocate Office, the Human Rights Commission, the Council of Yukon First Nation Health and Social Development Commission, Yukon government employees, and legal experts who showed support and contributed their time, skills, and dedication to the development of this bill, we thank you.

Making our laws more inclusive, Mr. Speaker, is a complex and colossal endeavour. While we recognize that this is a part of a broader ongoing journey to ensure equity, dignity, and recognition for all Yukoners, I am proud today to make this important step forward on modernizing our legal framework on parentage and naming and by enabling the ambitious goal of achieving a gender-neutral style across the Yukon statute book.

This is why I would like to once again highlight a few of the substantive amendments that are included here in Bill No. 50 which will provide the legislative tools to take the next steps on our path of reforming parentage and naming in the Yukon. This is an important moment. It is important to include this information in the debate of this bill at third reading and an important record for Yukoners, as we move forward, of our continued steps to make a more inclusive Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most significant achievements of this bill is the modernization of Yukon's parentage laws to reflect the full diversity of Yukon families. By using inclusive and gender-neutral language across the *Children's Law Act* and the *Vital Statistics Act*, the law will better reflect the lived realities of trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse parents and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. It will be more inclusive of all Yukoners regardless of their gender identity.

This bill will also allow more Yukoners to be legally recognized as parents from the moment that their child is born without unnecessary court processes, financial burden, or legal uncertainty. It introduces a comprehensive framework to recognize parentage of Yukoners using assisted reproduction, and this includes the presumption of parentage for a birth parent and their partners when assisted reproduction is used without surrogacy and a clear administrative path to register intended parents when surrogacy is used, provided that there is a valid agreement in place and all statutory requirements are met, including post-birth consent of the surrogate.

This bill also acknowledges that families come in many forms: single parents, same-sex couples, multi-parent families, and others who may have previously struggled to see themselves reflected in the law. It expands the concept of "parentage" beyond traditional legal definitions and allows for parentage agreements, offering a clear and accessible legal path when presumption of parentage does not apply.

These amendments will enable more Yukoners to affirm their intention to be parents, providing a clear and dignified path to legal recognition. These changes are also about protecting the rights of both children and parents. They create more stability, clarity, and fairness, ensuring that more children can have their legal parentage recognized at birth and have access to important personal information as they grow.

Mr. Speaker, another key achievement of this bill is the modernization of Yukon's naming laws to better reflect the diversity of Yukoners. A name is more than a label; it is a reflection of identity, heritage, and belonging. Amendments to the *Change of Name Act* and the *Vital Statistics Act* will enable the expansion of naming options available to Yukoners by allowing greater flexibility in how names are structured and written.

Continuing our journey toward reconciliation, these changes create space for Indigenous naming traditions, including Indigenous languages and naming conventions like single-name practices. Recognizing the rich makeup of our Yukon communities, this bill increases options for all Yukoners to choose names that honour their language, culture, and personal identity.

Importantly, this bill eliminates fees incurred for reclaiming an Indigenous name, responding directly to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action 17. This permanent change removes any financial barrier for those who seek to restore traditional names and supports the resurgence of Indigenous cultures and languages. Together, these changes bring us closer to a system that respects and values who Yukoners are and the diversity of their identities.

The final set of changes supported in this bill contributes to the long-term goal of modernizing Yukon's entire body of legislation with inclusive and gender-neutral language. This is not a simple task but a task that matters. These technical amendments will help ensure that Yukon laws reflect the diversity of all Yukoners and support equality for people of all gender identities and expressions. It is a significant step toward upholding key values and principles of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, including equality and non-discrimination, and I am proud of this important achievement on behalf of this government.

Going forward, we remain fully committed to continuing to work, as needed, to ensure that these changes become meaningful and accessible for all Yukoners. Our first focus will be on eliminating fees for Indigenous Yukoners reclaiming their traditional names, and this is a change that we expect to take effect in June 2025, just a few short months from now.

Further changes related to naming and parentage will require additional work, as we discussed during debate, including regulatory updates, system improvements, and cross-

governmental coordination to further engage with First Nations on Indigenous languages. These changes will come in phases to ensure that they are accessible, supported, and fully realized for Yukoners.

Again, we want to thank all those who worked so thoughtfully and diligently on this bill. The complicating factors were at first quite unimaginable but became clear as this work continued, and that is something that we should recognize in the realization of this bill.

I also want to express thanks to those who will continue on this journey with us toward inclusivity and reconciliation. I also would like to express thanks to the members of this Legislative Assembly for their support of this bill. This is very important work. It is ground-breaking; it is important for Yukoners; it is one further step in our commitment to making an entirely inclusive, welcoming, and supported Yukon.

This is really an achieving moment and something for which we are all very proud. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this again today.

**Mr. Dixon:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief in my comments today, as I feel that I have raised the points that I would like to raise in regard to this bill at second reading and in Committee, and I generally agree with the comments of my colleagues throughout that process as well.

I would note that this bill reflects the changing nature of how modern families in the Yukon are formed and grown and that the evolution and development of medical technology, procedures, and processes, including surrogacy, and developments in fertility treatment have necessitated those changes as well.

I think that the minister has noted that part of this bill reflects the recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and acts on that recommendation. As well, I note that, during debate, the minister indicated that the bill was developed with a child rights lens and that there was engagement with the Child and Youth Advocate Office. I appreciate that.

I would also like to thank the MLA for Whitehorse Centre for their interventions and for the debate and discussion that they brought forward throughout the course of Committee. I learned a few things throughout that process and benefited from those discussions.

We will be voting in favour of this bill today at third reading.

**MLA Tredger:** The legislation we have before us is very important. It will dramatically improve the outdated and discriminatory laws for registering names and births that are currently in place in the Yukon. For decades, Yukoners have been denied the ability to have their names legally registered when those names did not fit within the constraints of the Roman alphabet. For decades, Yukoners have been forced to go to court to adopt their own children. For decades, Yukoners have been navigating inaccurate and outdated forms as they register the birth of their children.

After nine years of Liberal government, after years of Yukon Party governments before that, after years of advocacy from families caught up in discriminatory laws, after human rights claims and threats of lawsuits, finally, the Liberals have made this a priority and brought forward this legislation.

While my heart breaks for the families who were left behind while they waited for this to come forward and for the ones who will continue to wait while this makes its way through the regulation process, it is a tremendous relief to see this act finally come forward. Finally, families will be able to register the birth of their children who are born with the help of a surrogate without going to court. Finally, people will be able to have their Indigenous names legally recognized and to reclaim those names without financial penalty. Finally, people will be able to do the paperwork for birth registrations and see words and titles that accurately identify them without forcing them into exclusionary gendered categories.

Mr. Speaker, it is a tremendous relief, as I said, to see this come forward, and we will be supporting this bill, but moving this bill forward comes at a price. I am referring to the part of this bill, clause 51, which, if this bill passes, will require all parents at the time of registering the birth of their children to disclose whether they contributed genetic reproductive material to the conception of their children. Said another way, every parent who registers a child will have to disclose their genetic relationship and the information about the conception of their children to this government to be permanently recorded.

This is an obvious government overreach. This is obviously invasive. It's hard to imagine — it's hard to describe how invasive it is that every parent is going to be asked to provide information about their child's conception in order to get a birth certificate. There is nothing like this anywhere else in Canada. No other jurisdiction in Canada requires parents to disclose this information to get birth certificates for their children.

I am not against being the first in Canada to do things, but you would think that, in the absence of examples of it having been done before, of examples of it being tested before, that we should be at least checking in with the people it would affect about some possible outcomes.

This House has been told that this provision of the bill is critical for ensuring that children have access to their genetic history and potentially to lineage rights, but this provision requiring parents to disclose this information will not do that. Knowing that your parents are not your genetic parents does not give you any information about medical conditions that you might have. It does not give you any ability to access lineage rights. All it tells you is that your parent is not your genetic parent; it does not give you any other information.

During the debate, the minister admitted that no one with lived experience had been consulted on this provision of the bill, and I would like to clarify what I mean by that, because conflicting information on this point has been put forward. It is true that, in the scoping process of this bill, at the beginning of the process, there were interviews and focus groups done with people with lived experience. During those interviews and focus groups, it did not come up. No one was asked if the

government should be able to demand information about their genetic connections to their children. I know this because I have talked to people who participated in this. A question about whether families should be forced to disclose this information was not part of that process.

The minister has pointed to the “what we heard” report and the survey that was done on this topic, and I would like to quote. This is a quote from the debate on whether this provision of the bill should be amended to make it optional for parents to disclose this information. This is a quote from the Minister of Justice — quote: “The rationale to including this requirement stems from responses to our engagement where: 65 percent of respondents felt strongly that children should have the right to know their biological background; 19 percent of respondents felt neutral to this sentiment; while only 16 percent of respondents disagreed.”

I was surprised, because I had read the “what we heard” document, and I didn’t remember seeing a question that asked: Should children have the right to know their biological background? Indeed, I did not find that in the “what we heard” document, but by matching up the numbers that the minister quoted to the numbers and responses to different questions, I think that I understand what she was referring to. There was a question that says: “When surrogacy (either traditional or gestational) is used, the genetic and/or gestational connection between the surrogate and the child should be recorded for informative purposes, regardless of whether they have legal status as a parent or not.”

So, not exactly the same question. This is a question about surrogacy, which is covered in a different piece of that clause. It is not a question about parents and their genetic relationships to their children.

So, I was surprised. I don’t believe that the minister would deliberately provide untrue information to this Legislature, so she must have misread that part of the “what we heard” document when she quoted it. It is deeply unfortunate that this error was only corrected now when it is too late to go back and correct the effects of that misquote on the vote on the amendment. It is too late now to fix that mistake, but I hope that, when she rises again, the minister can speak to her error and how she intends to correct the consequences of misquoting that document to the House.

So, that’s all the consultation that was done. To fill the glaring gap — the fact that no one took this provision to people whom it would affect and ask what they thought — I brought forward, during the debate, letters from people who have personal experience. I read these letters into the record during Committee of the Whole. Most of these letters were from members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. This is a community that will be disproportionately affected by this provision of the bill. They will not be the only ones affected, but they will be disproportionately affected.

I want to be really clear that I’m not presenting a unanimous consensus from the queer and trans community; there’s no such thing. It’s a community with many, many perspectives; but I am bringing forward all we have for consultation on that provision.

People, in their letters, told stories of their families, of the challenges they had faced in building those families, and their concerns for the future. They raised concerns about privacy, about discrimination, and about safety for their children. They spoke about feeling singled out by this provision, and they asked that the House reconsider. They talked about how important the bill was as a whole and they asked that the House reconsider that provision so that it could be a bill that we could all celebrate together.

Let me remind the House again that this was the only input this House has heard from people who will be affected on this provision of the bill. No feedback was brought forward by the Liberals, who sponsored the bill. None was brought forward by the Yukon Party, who voted against the amendment.

The failure to consult has left glaring gaps, and I have only been partially able to fill them. This will also affect many families dealing with infertility who conceive with the help of a sperm or egg donor. We have no idea what feedback we might get from them because no one has asked them. No one has brought that feedback forward. But to be honest, in the end, it probably would not have mattered if they had been consulted, because both the Liberals and the Yukon Party showed a complete disregard for the input they did get.

When I brought forward the amendment in Committee of the Whole to change this provision to be voluntary so that parents could voluntarily disclose their genetic relationships to their children but would not be forced to do so to get a birth certificate, both the Liberals and the Yukon Party voted against it.

As a result, when this bill passes and comes into force, every child conceived with the help of a donor — of a sperm or egg donor — will have that information recorded — potentially against the will of their parents — permanently by the government.

I also want to note that another part of the bill was amended — clause 60. This was an amendment that the Yukon NDP negotiated from the Liberals. The bill as originally written would have allowed people to be listed as donors on birth registrations without the consent or perhaps even the knowledge of the parents. It was clear that this couldn’t be supported, and I am relieved that an amendment was made to move it forward.

We will be voting for the bill as a whole today because there is so much in it that is so important. It’s so regrettable, because this could have been a bill that we all could have celebrated together. It could have been a bill that everyone could have happily supported. There is so much in it that is good, if long overdue. I really wish that we could be here cheering for it and celebrating it.

We will be voting for it; we can’t ask families to continue going to court to adopt their children; we can’t prevent Indigenous Yukoners from reclaiming their names — this is too important. But the debate and the decisions made by the Liberals and the Yukon Party when they voted on the amendments clearly show the nature of their commitment to inclusiveness. It is clear that this commitment is only on their

terms, not on the terms of the communities they are claiming to support.

In the Yukon government's 2SLGBTQ+ action plan for inclusion, there's a quote that says: "... the Yukon government has strived to follow the 'nothing about us, without us' approach." When the Liberals and the Yukon Party chose to ignore the input that they had from members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, it became clear that this slogan is just a slogan and will be and has been discarded whenever it is inconvenient. It is clear that consultation is only used by the Liberals to find information that already matches their agenda and is not considered when it asks them to change course.

To finish up, we will be supporting this bill and we will also be remembering the things that we have learned in this debate.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I wasn't intending to rise, but I think it's important to have the record reflect that some of the comments made by the Member for Whitehorse Centre in relation to this debate I think are a mischaracterization of the engagement that was done, of the careful research and extensive policy development that was done, and certainly of the engagement that was done in the — I think — 27-page "what we heard" document.

I think that it should be clear that this government did not disregard anything but, in fact, made a careful determination and weighed the rights of the child against the opportunity to remove a particular section that was designed to protect the personal health information of children.

We are certainly satisfied that there is a balance and a protection in Bill No. 50 for the rights of the children, equally as important as the other groundbreaking achievements that this Bill No. 50 makes. I look forward to it passing this Legislative Assembly.

**Speaker:** Are you prepared for the question?

**Some Hon. Members:** Division.

### Division

**Speaker:** Division has been called.

### Bells

**Speaker:** Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Agree.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Agree.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Agree.

**Mr. Dixon:** Agree.

**Mr. Kent:** Agree.

**Ms. Clarke:** Agree.

**Mr. Cathers:** Agree.

**Ms. McLeod:** Agree.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Agree.

**Mr. Hassard:** Agree.

**Ms. White:** Agree.

**MLA Tredger:** Agree.

**Ms. Blake:** Agree.

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

**Speaker:** The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

*Motion for third reading of Bill No. 50 agreed to*

**Speaker:** I declare that Bill No. 50 has passed this House.

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

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

*Motion agreed to*

### COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 217, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2025-2026*.

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 continuing general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 217, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2025-26*.

#### Department of Education — continued

**Deputy Chair:** Is there any further general debate?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I am happy to rise again today in Committee of the Whole to debate the Department of Education's main budget for 2025-26. Joining me again today are Mary Cameron, Deputy Minister of Education, and Ashley Kayseas, the department's Assistant Deputy Minister of Corporate Services and Programs.

I will move directly to questions, and hopefully we can get through our debate today.

**Mr. Kent:** I will take the opportunity to welcome the officials back as well and thank the minister for her brief remarks, and we'll just get back into questions.

Where we left off yesterday, we were talking about the École Whitehorse Elementary School replacement. We talked about the busing numbers and the ridership versus the registered numbers and that type of thing, but one of the other ideas that the minister has floated recently is adjusting the bell schedule. I recognize that this is something that the minister can do, but I'm more curious about what time frame she is considering. Is it a short amount of time, or is she looking upward of half an hour or more to alleviate some of the traffic concerns? I'm just trying to get a sense of what the minister has in mind with respect to changing the bell schedules.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Again, this project is currently in phase 2. We have done the initial traffic study; we will be updating that as the project proceeds. We certainly will continue always to work with the project advisory committee. There are members from the school council within that committee — but working directly with the school council and school community around any of those decisions. So, as we know more, we will then consider that option, but there may be other options that are considered as we move forward in the important planning phases of this project.

**Mr. Kent:** So, aside from perhaps mandating students who attend that school to ride the bus and switching up the bell schedule, what are some of the other options that the minister mentioned she could be considering for this?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Again, we're in the early stages, really, of the planning of the school.

There has been significant progress. However, as we move through, we will continue to work with our project advisory committee, the school council, and consider other options that may become available to us to mitigate any concerns or issues that the community may have or the school community itself.

So, there will be more to say about this as the project proceeds.

**Mr. Kent:** So, as the minister has mentioned, we're in phase 2, I believe, of this project. I'm just sort of curious of what phase or when we could expect consultations on the options to have mandatory school bus ridership, some sort of bell schedule changes, and then the other options. So, what phase of the project — just looking for an approximate timing so that members of the school community and residents in the Takhini neighbourhood can make sure that they're ready to engage with the minister and her department at the appropriate time.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Deputy Chair, again, we're in phase 2 of seven phases. These phases include: site analysis; test fit pre-design; conceptual design options; schematic design; detailed design and specifications; contractor procurement; and construction, administration, and warranty. So, as we move through these phases, there will be opportunity throughout all the phases to work with the school community, to work with the project advisory committee, and to have discussions about the options of criteria to attend the new École Whitehorse Elementary and some of the other mitigations that can be

considered. Again, I'm just saying that there may be others that come up during these phases that can be considered and discussed with the school community and the project advisory.

**Mr. Kent:** I just wanted to make sure — and I am sure it is available — can the minister confirm the seven phases and what is entailed with each phase? Is that information available publicly?

And then a subsequent question on the phases: When does the minister expect that phase 2 will be complete and we will move on to the next one?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** At the public meeting, the Whitehorse Elementary School replacement project next steps were shared. I will double-check to see if this is available online, but it basically talks about all of the phases, including the ones that we have already been through.

I will double-check to make sure that this is available online. If not, then we can certainly make that available.

**Mr. Kent:** Thank you very much; I appreciate that.

There were obviously some changes made to the design of the school as a result of an agreement with Sport Yukon and Softball Yukon. One of the changes to the building envelope is a larger gym, which obviously adds square footage to the building, I would assume. I am just wondering if the minister can tell us what the anticipated costs of the changes to the school design to incorporate a larger gym will be to the overall budget.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Again, as we move through these phases, we will continue to define the cost of this entire school. We do have this within our five-year capital plan.

As we move through those design phases, it also includes adjustments — as we have more details — to the cost of the build, and those phases come back through Cabinet at various times, and so those will continue to define the cost. This new gymnasium facility will be a part of the École Whitehorse Elementary School, and we will cost it as we go through the design phases.

**Mr. Kent:** Deputy Chair, are the costs for the changes to the building with the larger gym reflected in the current five-year capital plan? I believe that the agreement was reached at some point last fall, so I am just trying to get a sense for the entire budget for this project. Are those increased costs related to the larger gym incorporated in the five-year capital plan estimates?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** In terms of as we planned through this project — yesterday in Committee of the Whole, we talked about the school functional program and how we continue to plan for schools in their short-, medium-, and long-term facility needs.

The Department of Education and the Department of Highways and Public Works develop the Yukon schools functional program, which is a generic design framework for scaling school designs. This program establishes consistent scalable standards for school design and construction and for the school population, grade level, and urban-rural context. This was used with the planning of Whistle Bend Elementary and Kêts'ádañ Kù.



In adjusting this school to accommodate a large, state-of-the-art gymnasium as contemplated and working with Sport Yukon, this is something that we want to consider in our Yukon schools functional program, and we may consider adjustments to that, as I spoke about yesterday — that we can incorporate the needs of the community. In this case, we are talking about the needs of Whitehorse and the urban context.

When you look at the construction in Whistle Bend, there are two gymnasiums within that school, so it is not unreasonable to look at adjustments to the gymnasium for this facility. That is what we are working on now. As we go through the planning phases, we will be able to determine what the schematic designs will be as we go through all of the phases, as I have talked about today. The predesign, the conceptual design options, then the schematic designs, and then the detail design and specifications — those are all those phases. We are in the predesign phase now. We will be able to provide more information as that proceeds and we are already contemplating something likely similar to Whistle Bend — making this adjustment. There is already, for sure, a plan for gymnasium space in the school, which we have in every school within our school portfolio. We are pleased to be working with Sport Yukon around the recreational needs within the City of Whitehorse, and we will continue doing that.

**Mr. Kent:** I obviously agree with the fact that the larger gym is something that should be considered. I think that it's part of the agreement obviously reached between the government and Sport Yukon as far as moving forward with the project in this location, but there are a couple of other things outside of the building envelope itself that will cost money as a result of agreements signed with Softball Yukon. Then there is the recent traffic study, and some of the changes to Range Road and the traffic flow in that area are obviously a concern.

I am just wondering if the minister can tell us where we can find the budget for that. With Softball Yukon, I know that there are improvements to Takhini 3, full-sized fields built over on the Takhini complex, improvements to the Robert Service fields — so I am just wondering if that would be budgeted in Education, or would we find that in Community Services with their responsibility for sport?

When it comes to changes to the roadway, I know that there has been talk of bike lanes, mini-roundabouts, drop-off zones, and those types of things, so I'm just wondering who is expected to pay for that. Will that be money that the Yukon government will forward to the city for those improvements? Where will the money come from for those improvements?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** As we go through the phases, we are working with multiple departments in this case — that being on every school and every infrastructure project, we work with Highways and Public Works as the main — they handle the build of the infrastructure. We will work through our planning process through the five-year capital plan on other considerations, such as the findings of the traffic study. As we continue to update that traffic study, going through the phases, we will have more information and will continue to work within our five-year capital plan.

We do have this replacement school in our five-year capital plan now, and we will continue, as we go through the phases, to further define the cost, and we will work with my colleagues in Highways and Public Works and Community Services around some of the special considerations with the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary on the Takhini land reserve.

**Mr. Kent:** I appreciate that from the minister. Just so we know who to ask is I guess — that is what I am looking for — where will the budget lines for the Softball Yukon field improvements be, and where will the budget amounts for the traffic roundabouts and other traffic improvements be? Which department will we find those in? Will they be in Education as part of this broad École Whitehorse Elementary School funding envelope, or will they be parsed out in, as I mentioned, Community Services and perhaps — well, I will leave it at Community Services, since it would be money probably flowing to the City of Whitehorse and to the sport organization.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Again, this project is still in phase 2 of seven phases. We still have a lot of work to do around further defining the project. Right now, the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary is in the Education budget in the five-year capital plan. Highways and Public Works does the work. We will continue working in a one-government approach on any other aspects of the school.

We will be happy to flag to members of the opposition if there are aspects of this project that are in different places within the budget as we go forward. All opposition parties certainly are briefed. Technical briefings are given by the department and we will ensure that folks know if there is any adjustment to this budget as we define the other aspects around the Softball Yukon agreement and any mitigations that are identified in the traffic study — if there is any variation within the budget in terms of where that sits within our five-year capital plan.

Again, we work with Highways and Public Works around that five-year capital plan and we will continue doing that as we go forward and as we define this project.

**Mr. Kent:** I appreciate that from the minister, because I'm sure that — I know that I would appreciate a technical briefing on this project and I'm sure that my colleague the Member for Takhini-Kopper King, who is giving a thumbs-up, would also appreciate that. So, perhaps when we're done with the Sitting, we'll reach out. I'm sure that even the Deputy Chair, as the Member for Whitehorse Centre, may want to participate in that. We'll reach out to the minister and see if we can schedule a technical briefing on this project. That would be amazing.

I'm going to move on and I'm going to just flag one issue here. I'm not sure if the minister will have a response at her fingertips, but perhaps officials listening in can provide an answer before we conclude debate here today. It's with respect to the neurodiversity culture and programming at Hidden Valley Elementary School and the team that is involved. They were one of the fortunate recipients of a Premier's award back in June 2023. I'm just wondering — so this will be the question and whether the minister can answer now or not, that would be great.

I'm just wondering if that program is still functioning at Hidden Valley Elementary School and how much is in this year's budget for it to continue on into the 2025-26 school year.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Deputy Chair, I just want to clarify on the previous question. When I talked about technical briefings, what I was stating was that, prior to budget sittings or when we're doing supplementary budgets, we provide, through the department, a budget briefing. That is what I was referring to in terms of briefings that are provided to the opposition.

In terms of the Hidden Valley Elementary and the neurodiverse classroom, the Department of Education is working on a draft evaluation framework of the neurodiverse classroom, otherwise known to the school as the "Porcupine room". This will help the department evaluate successes, understand what is working, and outline what best practices are for the neurodiverse classrooms in the Yukon.

This has been a helpful project and one that has been highlighted. This new and creative programming approach is providing support in line with the recommendations of the final report of the review of inclusive and special education that was done by Dr. Nikki Yee. This is certainly an important program. I have been to the room myself and had the opportunity of the parents advisory committee walking through it with me.

When we are considering resources — I believe that is the other part of the question — schools are — it kind of goes into what we talked about yesterday. The Department of Education works with all three school authorities. In this case, this is a Department of Education school, and we look at staffing proposals and requests. Generally, they are requests, not proposals. At this time — and staffing requests from schools and school boards look at the needs across all areas, inclusive of — as we were talking about the ELL teachers, who are the language teachers — English language teachers, LATs, EAs, wellness specialists, TOCs, resident supervisors, teachers, psychologists, and shared resource room staff. Some schools have more than one request based on student population needs.

We note, of course, that this particular program was in response to a higher number of children with autism. We are looking to evaluate so that we can transfer the learning into other schools.

**Mr. Kent:** I know that I and my colleague from Takhini-Kopper King always appreciate the technical briefings that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources has provided. I will speak with her, but we will reach out to the minister to see if there is an opportunity to get a technical briefing given the complexities of the Whitehorse Elementary School project replacement and the different budget pools and changes in budgets. We will reach out and hopefully we will be able to schedule something for after the session is done.

Sorry, I just wanted to go back to the neurodiversity culture and programming at Hidden Valley Elementary School; I just want to make sure that I heard the minister correctly. Does that program need to apply for funding to carry on into the next school year, or have they already been approved for funding to carry on their operations into the next school year?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** This is part of the Hidden Valley Elementary School program. What I was referring to was just, you know — there were changes to the student population, then that is where they are flagged — around further requests — but this is a part of the Hidden Valley program.

When I talked about evaluation, it's just to really document what is working, what hasn't worked, and how the program has evolved to where it is today and how we can then apply that to other schools.

**Mr. Kent:** I wanted to jump over to some questions around staffing allocations and EA allocations. Prior to coming in yesterday — and perhaps the numbers have changed today — but I noticed that there are now 31 postings for teaching and educator positions on the Department of Education's service that they use for online postings. I am just wondering if the minister can let us know how many more job postings are expected as they come in from the department-run schools.

I believe that the First Nation School Board have their own recruiting system in place, but for the department schools, we were at 31, as I mentioned, yesterday, so how many more are we expecting between now and I guess the start of the next school year? How many other vacancies have been identified at this time that need to be filled?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** We are in that process now of reviewing requests, and as those are approved, you will see the numbers move, because sometimes maybe there is a teacher who is moving into another position or things start to move around this time. As we are approving requests and some of them are just brought over from the previous year, those numbers will continue to change, but we are in that process that we talked about over the last few days in QP and yesterday, as well, in terms of the process of allocation. I talked a bit about the allocation handbook that talks about the formula and how all of that work is done. That is work that is underway right now.

As of April 17, the Yukon Education authority schools were 98.61-percent staffed, and as I have stated, First Nation School Board is responsible for their HR services, including recruitment.

The department provided schools with their allocation projections and staffing allocations in March. Based on these projections and using the staffing allocation handbook, administrators worked with their superintendent to complete their schools' 2025-26 staffing plans.

I think notably, the department has made a significant investment of 81 new full-time positions. I think that is where I will stop.

**Mr. Kent:** I guess one of the things that we are hearing from a number of school communities is that they feel like the timing of the staffing allocations, which was just prior to the March break, and then further the timing of the EA allocations is putting Yukon schools somewhat behind the eight ball when it comes to recruiting. We are obviously competing with jurisdictions across the country for graduates of teaching programs and to recruit or retain teachers, so I'm just wondering if the minister has given — I know that the minister mentioned that we've talked about this in Question Period, and

I believe she responded to my colleague the Member for Porter Creek North in a written response and a legislative return.

What work is being done right now so that we can get some of those positions out perhaps a little bit earlier to cover off things like retirements or parental leave? Is there a way that we can get out in front of some of these other jurisdictions? I understand that we won't be able to get out in front of them for all of the positions, but just for some of those ones we know we could get out perhaps before Christmas instead of before March break for some of those positions.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** For the 2025 school year, a staffing allocation committee was formed with the department leaders from Performance and Analytics, Student Support Services, the office of the superintendents, Finance, HR, and the Staffing Allocation Advisory Committee. Work is focused on providing teacher allocation numbers for Education authority schools. The committee reviews the teacher allocation for the upcoming school year and the staffing allocation handbook. The superintendents generally send the teacher allocation for the upcoming school year to school administrators by mid-February. This year, there was a delay due to changes in recruitment platform from the YGE recruitment system to apply to education platforms; so, that was a change, and then the committee required confirmation of the allocated teacher FTEs for the upcoming school year.

So, teacher allocations were sent out on March 6 for Yukon Education school authorities; the First Nation School Board and CSFY receive their teacher allocations from the Department of Education and distribute the information to their schools in line with their own processes.

Right now, the deputy minister is talking to me about how we're reviewing those processes to ensure that there will be earlier communication. I've already defined why there was a slight delay this year, but in terms of recruitment, the ongoing — there is an ongoing national shortage, and that is still a thing from post-COVID, and it does impact staffing recruitment.

For the 2025 school year, the Department of Education is taking many strategic recruitment actions. Advertising was placed on all platforms: YuWIN, Employment Central, LinkedIn, Facebook, Google, YouTube, and through Canadian universities. The Department of Education officials attended many career fairs: Simon Fraser, Lakehead, Laurentian, University of Alberta, University of British Columbia bachelor's degree of education and master's degree, job search fair at Acadia, Cape Breton University, Mount St. Vincent, St. Francis Xavier, and the list goes on — University of Regina and Moncton. Many virtual information sessions, as well, were attended. The Department of Education's human resource team will attend an outdoor education job fair and conference in Banff, Alberta in May. These steps support our recruitment efforts.

The Department of Education works to find staff with the best combination of qualifications, experience, and suitability. In November 2024, the department launched a recruitment video that specifically highlights French language education programming across the Yukon. That was a great project. In April 2025, the department will launch two recruitment videos

that highlight Yukon education programming across Yukon. These videos will be used as part of our recruitment marketing efforts to promote educators' opportunities and talk about how great the Yukon is and how students see themselves in the Yukon.

As part of the confidence and supply agreement, an additional \$1 million was committed over three years to enhance recruitment and retention of rural education professionals across the Yukon.

Part of what I want to say is thank you to the team at the Department of Education and to all of our partners whom we work with. We do work with the First Nation School Board as well in collaboration around all of these recruitment efforts. As I have stated, yes, we are working on evaluating those processes so that we can get the recruitment started sooner.

These areas that I had identified already are not expected to be issues in the next school year.

**Mr. Kent:** I am interested, then, in the evaluation of the current system and how we can improve it. The minister mentioned a number of job fairs. I think it would be helpful if department staff who are attending these job fairs have specific job postings that they can point to for the next school year. I am hoping that the minister will take that as a positive piece of advice — it's something that we are hearing from school communities — and perhaps work with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals on what we can do next year. The minister rightly mentioned — and I mentioned it as well — that we are competing against every jurisdiction in Canada for the same limited number of teachers, so the earlier we can get out and the more nimble that we can be, the better.

I wanted to move over to the EA allocation piece. When I looked through the 31 job postings yesterday, I didn't notice that there were any for educational assistants. I know that the EA allocation lags behind the staffing allocation somewhat, so I am just curious if the minister has any information around the timing of when we can see the EAs posted for next year. I know that initial EA allocations are subject to change once the school year starts and the needs of the students are identified, but I am just curious about when we may see some educational assistant job postings on the department website.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** The 2025-26 educational assistant allocation process is underway for all three school authorities — the First Nation School Board, the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon, and the Yukon Education authority. The allocation of educational assistants in schools across the territory takes into account several factors, including student need, school community context, and number of full-time equivalents available for allocation. All partners play a valuable role in ensuring that students receive supports to learn and be included. There is a range of student supports available, and providing an additional educational assistant is one of the most intensive options. As I have stated, we are in the process now and anticipate that we will start to see those postings in mid-May.

**Mr. Kent:** I have just a couple more questions. Well, I have dozens of questions, but I am going to ask a couple more

and then, being mindful of time, turn it over to my colleague the Member for Takhini-Kopper King after a potential break.

I have asked the minister this before, but I am just looking for a little bit of follow-up. The process to become a school that is governed by the First Nation School Board was quite clear; it was that either you required a resolution of the school council at the time or a petition to be signed by a number of members in that attendance area. What isn't so clear is: What is the process if a school community no longer wants to be a part of the First Nation School Board system?

Obviously, there is no longer a school council in place that could submit a resolution, but is there a petition threshold that communities could follow that would be submitted to the minister and then a referendum called from there if a school community no longer wanted to be a part of the First Nation School Board?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** The Government of Yukon is always committing to enhancing community involvement in school governance.

The department provides information about all of the processes. It is contained within the *Education Act* in terms of how you join a school board. I will go through that a little bit first. The Education officials worked on this example — the First Nation School Board and Elections Yukon — to establish a process for schools to consider joining the school board after it has been in existence for at least one year, as allowed for in the *Education Act*. Under the act, a new existing school board can be substituted for an existing school council when the school council — or 20 percent of electors in the attendance area — requests that a referendum be held.

In terms of leaving a school board, should a school community wish to withdraw from a school board or join a different school board, it is within the minister's authority under the *Education Act* to approve or not approve. A fair process would need to be followed, such as a referendum with a clear majority, for the minister to proceed with such a decision. The minister would then establish a different attendance area for the school, which would allow for a school council to be established for the school as a Yukon Education authority school.

**Mr. Kent:** I appreciate that. This is going to be my final topic that I wanted to ask about today, so I just want to thank the officials for coming and thank the minister for her responses here today.

This one is with respect to the Teslin school. The Mayor of Teslin I believe sent a letter to the minister and perhaps the Minister of Highways and Public Works — perhaps both — a number of weeks ago. My colleague the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin, who is the MLA representing the Teslin area, asked some questions about it. There are a number of structural issues that the school is facing now. I'm just wondering if there is money in this budget to go and fix those structural deficiencies that have been identified by the mayor and others. Has anyone from the Department of Education or perhaps the Department of Highways and Public Works or both been to Teslin to assess the situation and get some sort of cost estimate on what repairs will cost down there?

## Chair's statement

**Deputy Chair:** Before we continue, could I remind members to speak in a clear voice so that everyone in the Legislature can hear them.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Again, we've had a bit of a discussion over this spring session around the Khàtinas.àxh Teslin school.

Highways and Public Works leases the school from the Teslin Tlingit Council and they are currently working to finalize the upcoming five-year lease, as the current one expires this summer. We work with the Teslin Tlingit Council to identify maintenance issues with the school and address them as quickly as practical, recognizing the health, safety, and well-being of students as a top priority.

That work and discussions are underway and the discussions are working through our process within government. There is certainly more to say about this in the near future. It may not be fully during this session, but I can assure you that this is a priority and we are working with the Teslin Tlingit Council around this important matter in terms of addressing the immediate needs but also talking to them about their priorities as we move into future planning with the Teslin Tlingit Council. I am very much looking forward to those discussions progressing.

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

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

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

## Recess

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

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

Is there any further general debate?

**Ms. White:** I welcome back the officials and the minister for another day of debate on the Department of Education.

I want to start off with a question as to whether or not the Department of Education funds the Yukon Catholic Education Association. Does the Department of Education supply funding to the Yukon Catholic Education Association?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I think that just in terms of governance overall, we work with a number of partners. We work with a number of associations. The department collaborates with the Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees and the Catholic Education Association of Yukon and a number of other partners in education around governance.

I am always very thankful to those folks who put their names forward for school councils, for school boards, and for all of the various associations that we work with. We do provide funding to the Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees and the 13 school councils. And, of course,

through the First Nation School Board, there is a whole structure there for how community input and parents and others are helping to guide the work of that board and the francophone school board, and the Catholic Education Association of Yukon represents three school councils and we do have a TPA. I was hoping to get the amount and further detail. If I get it during debate, I will speak to it then.

**Ms. White:** I hope that through the magic of connectivity through the Internet, the minister is able to get that.

There is a *Yukon News* article from May 25, 2016 that says — and I’m quoting: “... the government also funds the Catholic Education Association of Yukon to the tune of \$28,700.” The reason why I want to know how much money the Government of Yukon funds the Catholic Education Association of Yukon — and if there is funding — is that I want to know, if it’s funded through the Department of Education, if they are captured under the sexual orientation and gender identity policy. Does the Catholic Education Association of Yukon, getting funding from the Yukon government, have to follow the policies of the Department of Education?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Anyone working with our school system — and we do have a TPA with the association. I am just working to get some of those details. Of course, the Yukon legislation and policies would be applied to all of the associations that we work with. It is a bit of a different situation for the associations that we work with in comparison to school councils or other entities that fall directly under the *Education Act*.

So, there is a distinct difference there. I am happy to bring more information to you, and if I can’t provide it today in this debate, I will work to bring it back in a legislative return around some of those comparisons and some of the deeper details of that in terms of the differences between a school council and an association, but there are, of course, expectations of following our law in the Yukon and the policies of the Department of Education.

The 2024-2025 transfer payment agreement with the Catholic Education Association of Yukon is \$28,731.

**Ms. White:** The minister said that the Catholic Education Association of Yukon represents three school councils. Again, I am trying to understand. If they represent three school councils and they are getting a transfer payment of \$28,721 — and I imagine that this is probably funding the website — does the Catholic Education Association of Yukon, which is collecting government money, representing three school councils, need to abide by Department of Education policies?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I would have to check on the details around that, because I note that we have a TPA with them. We would have to look at the scope of that and if there are potentially other funds that are being received by — I don’t have all that information in terms of the funding for that association in totality and other agreements that they may have.

The other association — just for comparison, the Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees is a non-profit representing school councils. We

have a TPA with them as well. It’s \$85,235. That’s the total TPA for that association for the 2024-2025 year.

**Ms. White:** I appreciate that, but I can assure the minister that if I go on the website that they have, they don’t have information or education links, for example, to “*Male and Female He Created Them*” with excerpts, for example — and I’m quoting from page 11 in section 19: “Gender theory (especially in its most radical forms) speaks of a gradual process of denaturalisation, that is a move away from *nature* and towards an absolute option for the decision of the feelings of the human subject. In this understanding of things, the view of both sexuality identity and the family become subject to the same ‘liquidity’ and ‘fluidity’ that characterize other aspects of post-modern culture, often founded on nothing more than a confused concept of freedom in the realm of feelings and wants, or momentary desires provoked by emotional impulses and the will of the individual, as opposed to anything based on the truths of existence.”

This is one document of many that are listed here. I’m not even going to read excerpts from the pastoral letter to young persons with same-sex attraction, because it’s hard to read, to be perfectly honest.

The other parts that I have singled out in this document here, which is the “*Male and Female He Created Them*” — *Towards A Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education*.

So, if the Department of Education is funding the Catholic Education Association of Yukon even a dollar — to be clear, even a dollar — and this is the information that is under the heading of “Catholic Education Links” under “Resources” — I have concerns. At the Holy Family Elementary School Council meeting that I went to, there were people actually talking about how this organization, the Catholic Education Association of Yukon, should not be funded by the Government of Yukon and that it should be self-funded and shouldn’t have government money.

Does the minister have a comment to make to that? So, there are folks in the Catholic system right now saying that the Catholic Education Association of Yukon should not be funded with public money.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** The Government of Yukon does have a transfer payment agreement with the Catholic Education Association of Yukon. I would have to look at the scope of that agreement to be able to comment.

Thank you very much for bringing forward your comments today.

I certainly will be asking the Department of Education to review and look further into this whole matter. It is hard for me to comment on it on the floor of the Legislature today in this particular debate, but I will be looking into it — looking at the scope of that transfer payment agreement — and will have more to say about that when I have an opportunity to look deeper into that.

**Ms. White:** I appreciate the minister’s response. Will she commit to a legislative return prior to the House rising next Thursday on this issue?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I will make best efforts to do that. However, if we are not able to have that information prior to the end of this spring session, I will certainly provide it in writing to the member and potentially also through the legislative Clerk.

**Ms. White:** I thank the minister for that commitment.

When was a memorandum of understanding signed with — not “new” anymore — but Bishop Vila? When was that memorandum signed with Bishop Vila?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** By way of an update in terms of the work that we’re doing, between the last debate that we had and the one that is happening here today, I have met with the bishop. I have met with the Catholic association, and since then, our deputy minister has also met with the bishop and their team.

The protocols that we have been working on — the one that is complete is the one around communication. I will just share with the member today that I planned to update once we were a little bit closer to a more fulsome plan. We are working toward an overarching MOU with the bishop. It will run — as we work through each of the protocols, those will become addendums to an MOU with the bishop, so that work is underway. It is something that I’ve asked — that the overarching MOU be done relatively quickly. As we work through the protocol agreements on different topic areas, those will become addendums to that MOU so that there is clarity around how we work together, and we work through any areas where there are questions. That is direct work that we’ve committed to do together. It is certainly a high priority — prepared to work to ensure that the resources are there as well to get this work done in a timely manner.

**Ms. White:** Can the minister let me know what current agreements exist between the Department of Education and the diocese?

I note again, from the 2016 news article in the *Yukon News*, it says — and I quote: “The memorandum of agreement signed between the department and the diocese was to be reviewed in order to clarify what powers the bishop had, especially about hiring, officials said at the time.”

So, what currently exists between the Catholic diocese and the Department of Education?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Looking back at history and looking at all of the work that has been done previously, I can confirm that there was never a MOU signed between the previous government and the Catholic Episcopal Corporation.

The one protocol that is signed off is the communication protocol. The one that’s closer, that has some real focus right now around the protocol, is around staffing. This is now in consultation with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals, so that work is underway.

Again, I have given direction with some urgency to get an MOU in place that is overarching with the Catholic Episcopal Corporation. As these agreements are completed, they will become addendums to that MOU, and so I think that there needs to be clarity and there needs to be a clear path.

One of the things that I will just share is that this whole debate — and that historic look back at all of the work that has happened or, in this case, didn’t happen is really important, and

I have very much turned my attention to ensuring that, while I am Minister of Education, this work will get done and that we will have a clear path and fewer questions about areas that may have caused grey areas that I don’t think should exist. I think that we should be clear about how we work together and what our commitments are to each other as we continue in this relationship around Catholic education.

I can compare a little bit — it is not the same, but we are working on protocol agreements with the First Nation School Board, for instance, and I know that it is not the same, but it really provides clarity around the areas that — and what the relationship is with the Department of Education. That work is well underway. We are still working on some of those specific agreements, but as they come into place, it really helps so that there is a clear path for the next person who is in this position so that they are not starting over or there isn’t a question about how we work together and what the responsibilities are on both sides.

**Ms. White:** I will highlight that the Yukon Liberals, the Yukon Liberal Party, has been government since 2016. So, it is fine to go back and say that the Yukon Party didn’t have a memorandum of understanding signed with the Catholic diocese, but for nine years — for nine years — this government has not had a signed MOU. So, I have lots of concerns, and I appreciate that it is being sorted out right now, but to point to the past and say: Well, they didn’t do it — is not acceptable to me when currently it hasn’t been done. It is going to be done — I appreciate that — but it has not been done since 2016, and that is a concern.

I appreciate that the minister said that protocol agreements with the First Nation School Board are different from the protocol agreements currently being developed with the Catholic diocese. They are different, because the First Nation School Board has not harmed people in the same way and they are not sharing information that is harmful which is being paid for by the Yukon government. That is a huge difference.

So, the last time we were up, the minister said that her department was able to go back as far as 2006 to find out when religious education started to be paid for by the Yukon government. It has been a number of weeks since that point. Can the minister tell me how far back it has gone since the Yukon government started paying for religious education?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** The work is still happening within the department, but I will just share a bit of more information about what we know.

The Department of Education believes that Government of Yukon recovered amounts to offset these costs. This is really hard, because there was a retention of records that factors in here. Under the administration record classification system for financial records related to revenue and assets — are retained in office for two years and off-site for five years. Given these retention policies, older records are not available to us.

We’re still working on it, but we have gone back up until the 2000-01 fiscal year, but the department is unable to confirm exactly when government stopped recovering due to that reason. Also, classification of recovery — so payments from the Catholic Episcopal Corporation were not recorded as

recoveries. Instead, the Department of Education invoiced specific costs — FTEs for religious instruction and religious materials — and credited it against related expenses within the department.

Because these payments were invoiced rather than recorded as direct recoveries, they do not appear on the Public Accounts — that's the other part of this — making it difficult to track the total amounts received. Timing of payments as well — it is believed that the Department of Education invoiced the Catholic Episcopal Corporation up until that year; however, due to the way that these payments were recorded and the lack of accessible historic records, the department cannot confirm with certainty around some of this information under the administration records classification system and for some of these other reasons why they may not have been recorded and retained.

That's the information I have right now. We're still investigating and reviewing and looking at the records. I think that it's important to give this — to go back and look at the story of how we have come to where we are today, continuing, of course, to uphold the spirit and intent of the 1962 agreement. We're certainly continuing to dig into this and to understand how we came to be where we are today. I think that it's going back to working toward a MOU, ensuring that remains a priority and that work gets done. I am committed to doing that and continuing to work toward completion of those protocols.

Again, I have given strong direction around this, and the department is working to make that happen.

**Ms. White:** I am just going to look for clarification. Does that mean that, up until the early 2000s, the minister believes that the Catholic diocese was invoiced so that they were paying for Catholic education and textbooks and the rest of it? So, the Catholic church was paying for those things; can the minister confirm if I understood that correctly?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** It's very difficult to verify given the records. We do have a bit of documentation that goes back to 1995 that we are digging into right now. We may or may not be able to — but there was a conversation going on back in 1995. Again, we are continuing to work on this, but it is very hard to verify the questions that are being asked here today. The work is still underway. I am trying to give as much as I can. If I could say more, I certainly would.

I think that it is important work that the department has undertaken to have a deeper look at the history and how we came to where we are today. Looking back and looking at where we are today and looking to the future, I think that is where — the actions that we are taking to ensure that we have clarity around our agreement, which is why I have asked the department to prioritize the establishment of an MOU with the Catholic Episcopal Corporation and to complete the protocols that are required to then become addendums to that agreement.

**Ms. White:** Deputy Chair, I thank the minister for that clarification.

If we are talking about prior to the early 2000s — and interestingly enough, I had a conversation with folks within the Catholic stream who figured that it was probably 1997 when it started to happen, when government started to pay. I just want

to know, if we can't go back that far because the records aren't easily accessible, does the minister have an idea of when religious education coordinator positions did start to get included in the staffing protocol? When did Yukon government start paying for religious education?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Again, because of the lack of records retention and because of the reasons that I have already stated here today, it is hard to go back further — but definitely up until 2000-01 but likely earlier than that.

**Ms. White:** I thank the minister for that. Can the minister tell me how much money has been paid by the Department of Education at this point to teach Catholic education in Yukon schools?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Again, I don't have the full numbers going all the way back, but what I did ask the department to do was to give me the actuals and some comparisons to other schools. This is based on today — 2023-24 actuals. This is for all of the resources in the school from the principal and, in the Catholic schools, the religious coordinator, programs and material, field trips, paraprofessional salaries, teachers on call, kitchen assistants, utilities, libraries, and all of the other operational costs of a school.

The total for Christ the King Elementary School is \$5,994,133. Christ the King Elementary School has a religious coordinator for \$63,026. This particular school had Bibles that were included — \$1,600. St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Secondary School's total cost — all of those operational areas that are covered. For that school, they have \$103,933 for a religious coordinator and no materials identified. It is at \$6,998,270. The third school, Holy Family Elementary School, has a religious coordinator at \$43,950. Their total school cost is \$3,922,097.

These are actual costs. They can vary from school to school with several factors outside of enrolment, including the oversize of the school and its grade configurations. There are different funding levels for different grades. Utility costs vary. These are things that change and have changed a lot in the last while, influenced by the size and age of the school and vacancies in non-instructional positions.

Some of the comparisons — I asked to just compare them to other schools. Selkirk Elementary School seemed to be similar size — enrolment. So, Christ the King comes in at \$5,994,133 and Selkirk comes in at \$6,428,000. St. Francis of Assisi comes in at \$6,998,000.

We compare it to Porter Creek Senior Secondary, which comes in at \$8,633,000. Holy Family comes in at \$3,922,000 and Hidden Valley Elementary School comes in at \$3,797,000. So, those were three of the comparisons that we did just to show the comparison to other schools.

One last note that I will note with the Catholic schools is that two chaplains are provided by the Catholic diocese to support religious education and offer spiritual guidance. All associated costs for the chaplains are fully covered by the diocese.

**Ms. White:** Well, I'm relieved to know that the chaplains are covered by the diocese and not the Department of Education. But just looking at those numbers — \$63,000,

\$103,000, \$43,000 — that’s for religious education, which is directly in contravention of the 1962 agreement that we have talked about a lot.

I’m going to move on to textbooks. So, last year, a homophobic textbook was pulled out of the high school — the St. Francis of Assisi high school. I’m looking at a *Yukon News* article from July 12, 2024. The headline is “‘Homophobic’ textbook permanently pulled from Yukon Catholic school after review”. I wanted to know: Does the Department of Education pay for textbooks at the Catholic high school, including religious study textbooks?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** The Department of Education has been providing Catholic schools with resources to support the teaching of K to 12 curricula, including specific materials for the Catholic program. For example, the department has provided resources to support an approved locally developed course that includes Catholic context. The Department of Education has guidelines and procedures for developing locally developed courses. A school board authority and the minister or delegate must approve locally developed courses as per the *Education Act*. The department has also provided a textbook to support teaching of the Catholic elementary curriculum as requested by the school administrators and teachers.

The curriculum materials budget for each school is determined based on the number of students, with allocation varying by grade level. An additional funding adjustment is provided for dual-track programs, such as religious or language programs, for Catholic schools. This adjustment includes a \$2-per-student allocation specifically for purchase of certain materials. I have already stated that there was one purchase in 2023-24 for the purchase of Bibles. The purchase of Bibles came from the curriculum material credit allocation, or the CMCA. This budget is managed by the coordinator of resource services, but spending is authorized by the school administrators.

Again, going back to the 2024 textbook conflict, in March of 2024, the Department of Education heard concerns by way of an anonymous letter that a textbook being used by St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Secondary did not align with the department’s sexual orientation and gender identity policy. After a thorough review with St. Francis staff members and a curriculum consultant from the department, the textbook that was mentioned in the anonymous letter, *Called to Happiness — Guiding Ethical Principles*, was not recommended, as some language conflicted with the department’s sexual orientation and gender orientation policy.

A new textbook was selected for classroom use in the grade 12 morals and ethics course at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic school. The new textbook, *In Search of the Good*, is published by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops — so, that’s some of the history there. That’s it, I think.

**Ms. White:** I appreciate that from the minister. Can the minister let me know what kind of overview the Department of Education had in the decision of selecting that new textbook for grade 12, *In Search of the Good: A Catholic Understanding of Moral Living*?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I think, through all schools — from time to time, there are resources that are supplemented into curriculum throughout the education system. In terms of this review and selection of a new textbook for this particular course, a committee was put together. It included the curriculum team at the Department of Education. We certainly learned a lot from this particular matter that we had to address, so it has caused a tightening of any supplementary materials that are being considered to be incorporated into any curriculum. So, there has been a tightening up of that.

This is managed through the curriculum team and will continue, and that has been communicated very clearly throughout the school system so that it’s not just the Catholic schools but all schools.

**Ms. White:** So, I’ll note that on [resourceservices.yukonschools.ca](http://resourceservices.yukonschools.ca), the *Catalogue of Curriculum Materials 2024-25*, under “Religious Education”, “Religious Education Grade 12”, it talks about “We are strong ... grade 12: in search of the good”. So, that textbook costs \$39.95, and the teacher manual is \$54.95.

I’m going to go to — so, chapter 6 of that textbook is called “Building a civilization of love”; it starts on page 305. I’m going to go to page 312, chapter 16. It says: “Marriage matters”. I’m just going to quote from this textbook.

So, this is now an approved textbook by the Department of Education. There are guiding questions on the bottom, so let me start with the guiding questions: “1. Identify the essential elements of marriage. 2. What is implied by ‘an intimate partnership of life and love’? 3. Why does a marriage include an openness to receive children? 4. Irina marries Hassan only to discover a few months later that Hassan has an addiction to heroin. When she confronts him about this, he admits that he has been struggling with his heroin addiction for years. He had hoped that in marrying Irina he would finally beat it. He chose not to inform her, telling himself that if he was beating the habit he would not have to own up. Did Irina consent to this marriage? Discuss.”

So, unless — I mean, 4 is iffy, but I’m going to quote from this page. So, page 312, chapter 16, “Marriage matters” — I’m going to read from “c”. I’m quoting from “c”: “Consent also implies that one is able to assume the essential obligations of marriage. There may be all sorts of psychological reasons why one or the other partner is unable to do so. Sometimes someone is psychologically unable to enter into a partnership and communion of their whole life. Similarly, a homosexual cannot marry if he or she is incapable of entering into a heterosexual relationship. What a person cannot do, he or she cannot consent to. Hence also those who suffer from psychosis, neurosis, psychopathology or sociopathology cannot validly marry...”, which sounds to me like we’re saying that, if you are gay, you can’t get married. That is in a textbook right now in a school?

I am going to go to page 318 — quote: “Secular society and homosexual partners ... For Catholics the term ‘marriage’ describes a permanent and exclusive union between a man and a woman. But this meaning has become the subject of an intense debate in many Western societies. The secular perspective of marriage does not take into account the



revelation of sacred Scripture or Catholic tradition or the perspective of other religions. Most considerations of marriage in society are social and anthropological. Thus the debate in the context of a secular society is reduced exclusively to that of legal rights. One consequence of this is that people who are attracted to the same sex and cohabit have demanded the legal right of marriage. But the meaning and celebration of marriage has a historical and constitutive impact on the fibre of Western society. In a letter of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops dated September 10, 2003, the bishops state:

“The marriage of a man and a woman is not just one form of association or institutional model among others. It is the institution on which society is founded. The relationship created by marriage between a woman and a man is a fundamental human reality which is at the basis of the social community.

“Marriage needs to be preserved as an institution uniting two members of the opposite sex. For the common good of society, it must be protected ... We reject the attempt of the State to reduce all intimate personal relationships to the same level, leading to the disappearance of the civil institution of marriage as understood in all human societies since time immemorial. Because of the recognized contributions that the institution of marriage brings to the stability of the family and to the future of society, legislators have the duty of preserving the distinction between marriage and other forms of relationship involving two persons.”

Based on my reading, this doesn't meet the sexual orientation and gender identity policy of the Department of Education, but maybe the minister can correct me. Right now, this is a textbook that has been paid for by the Department of Education. It replaced the previous homophobic textbook with one that might be considered a homophobic textbook, which says that marriage is only between a man and a woman. These are just two of the sections.

I guess I am logging this as a formal complaint that this textbook currently exists in a Department of Education school. Does the minister have any comments about this textbook that replaced the previous homophobic textbook?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I just wanted to clarify with the member. Can the member clarify which textbook is being discussed?

**Ms. White:** It is *In Search of the Good: A Catholic Understanding of Moral Living*. It is found in the Department of Education's curriculum. It's the textbook that the minister mentioned. It is the one that exists currently.

Page 311 also has some doozies about marriage, but I am not going to get into those ones. This is currently the textbook that the Department of Education replaced with the previous textbook. This is the replacement textbook, and I just want to understand: Does this meet the requirements of the sexual orientation and gender identity policy?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** There were specific criteria that were gone through when they did the review of this textbook. It was done through a committee approach. It included a number of folks, including our curriculum team. I will go back to the team and look at some of the specific questions that have

been raised here today. I will bring back more information either through legislative return or through — as per the other question — direct correspondence with the member or through the Clerk.

**Ms. White:** I appreciate that. My hope is that this is not what the Department of Education sees as a good, modern, inclusive, SOGI-honouring textbook as an alternative to the last homophobic textbook. If that is the case, then my expectation is that it gets pulled from the school. I would just like to be updated on that.

Again, it's 380 pages long. It is long.

I'm going to move on, because no one, including me, wants to keep going on this. There are lots of issues. I have lots of concerns about the fact that the Yukon government is paying for Catholic education, but I think that I have highlighted those.

On March 31, the minister was sent a letter from the Selkirk Elementary School Council entitled: “School calendar considerations and minimum instructional hours”. It goes on to say, “On behalf of École Selkirk Elementary School Council, we are writing to express our concerns regarding the current school calendar and its satisfying only the legislated minimum instructional hours. At a recent school council meeting we reviewed the proposed 2025/26 calendar in advance of its finalization on or before March 31, 2025. We are concerned to see that the calendar includes exactly 950 hours of instructional time. This is the minimum number of hours required under s.46 of the *Education Act*.”

They go on to say: “Risks of designing to the minimum”. It says: “There are significant risks to designing a school calendar that only meets the bare minimum. Looking back to September 2022, the Government of Yukon announced that they would be observing the national day upon the passing of Queen Elizabeth II. This created an unanticipated loss of an instructional day. Because school calendars have been designed to meet the bare minimums, the school day was extended by two minutes for the remainder of the year to make up for lost instructional time. This adjustment simply met the legal minimum.”

They go on to say that simply identifying these lost hours as being for non-instructional purposes specified by the school council is just not a feasible alternative. Their concerns are that there's no wiggle room within a school calendar and that adding two extra minutes a day doesn't meet the instructional requirements. They actually want to be able to teach students.

Has the minister had a chance to review that and has the department responded to that letter?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** We are still working on the response to Selkirk on this. Significant planning and preparation go into establishing a school calendar. I know that everyone can appreciate that there are a lot of considerations. The department is working with school councils, school boards, and school administrators to create a multi-year calendar of school dates to help school communities and families plan around key dates of the school year. The department publishes school calendar key dates and a summary of the individual school calendars on [www.yukon.ca](http://www.yukon.ca) when they are finalized or changed.

There are considerations, for sure. I mean, these are legislative and collective agreement obligations with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals that must be adhered to when determining school calendars, so there certainly are a lot of considerations. That being said, we are happy to have conversations with those school partners and talk about what the options are as we go forward. I will note that we work with other school authorities around variations, the start of the school year, and all of those different considerations that we have to have when we are determining the school calendars.

Notably, this next year, we have extended the March break, for instance. We have worked with folks around the school calendar for 2026 to accommodate the Arctic Winter Games, for instance. That is a good example of that to ensure that we have full participation.

We're still working to respond to that letter and we'll continue working with all of our school communities.

**Ms. White:** I can understand the urgency from the Selkirk school council as they try to map out the next year, similar to the F.H. Collins school council, which made the suggestion about supply teachers — not that they used the word “supply teacher”, but it's a word or a term that I've used often here — where I think that there is a real opportunity to look into supply teachers and how that can really support a school community. I hope that the minister is able to respond sooner or later to F.H. Collins about that.

One of the things that the minister had mentioned, I believe, yesterday in debate with my colleague from Copperbelt South was the ability to change start times of schools. We were talking specifically around École Whitehorse Elementary School and Takhini Elementary, I think, at the time. The reality is that I can't imagine that a parent would want to find before-school childcare for a young child, but it does bring a real question and the opportunity, for example, to high schools if we look at the traffic congestion at F.H. Collins, Mercier, and St. Francis.

Can the minister tell me how a conversation has to be triggered around start times? If any of the Whitehorse high schools were interested in changing the start times, how would that conversation start?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I think there would be a number of ways that the conversation could happen. It could start, of course, at the school council level, working with the administrator through also the superintendent, and we would absolutely always want to work with the school community and those who would be impacted. Then, if a decision was made for a change, then we would want to incorporate a good lead time into that.

**Ms. White:** Has any consideration been given to, for example, a pilot for the next school calendar, for 2025-26? For example, when we are looking at congestion in Riverdale or even the congestion after school at Porter Creek, I think that this is definitely an idea to explore. Has there been any consideration about doing a pilot project for this?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** We haven't had any specific discussions about that or a pilot. We would want to make sure that we have — conversations would need to start. There would

need to be enough lead time to ensure that we are having all of the conversations that would need to be had. We haven't had any of those discussions about something like that, but we certainly will if that is something of interest to folks in those school communities. We would be happy to start those conversations.

**Ms. White:** I appreciate that and hope that, for Riverdale's sake, maybe you will hear from F.H. Collins or CSSC Mercier or St. Francis, for that matter.

I am going to move to — we talked a bit about this when we were talking about the *Early Learning and Child Care Act*. I highlighted the importance of being able to audit or elevate programs for early learning. Yukon's Partners for Children were awarded federal funding to develop curriculum specifically for early learning. They actually developed a really incredible resource. It is online and it is easily accessible by early learning educators. It is five-minute blocks. I just wanted to know if the Minister of Education had any follow-up with Partners for Children about their early learning tool that they developed.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Quality Roots is a program currently funded by the Government of Canada and provided by Partners for Children, a local not-for-profit that works with licensed early learning and childcare programs to support quality programming. Their funding from Canada ran until March 2025 on that project. The Early Learning and Child Care director meets regularly with a coordinator from the program. Recently, conversations have focused on sustainability of the program and possibilities of funding from Early Learning and Child Care.

There are other initiatives that we work with. For instance, on April 5, 2023, the department signed a three-year funding agreement valued at \$925,802 with the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate and the early years program to offer a First Nation-designed understanding the early years course. Once successfully completed, participants receive a level 1 early childhood educator certificate. The course is rich in Yukon First Nation culture and history and supports the development of culturally competent early childhood educators. That's one example.

The department continues to fund Yukon University to provide enhanced course offerings as well in rural Yukon communities.

The department is also providing education bursaries for post-secondary study as well as an enhanced bursary up to \$500 for educators to access other learning and development opportunities.

**Ms. White:** I have full intentions of clearing this just before the end of the day today, but I would encourage the minister and her department to continue conversations with Partners for Children about Quality Roots. Again, they were awarded \$1.3 million from the federal government, and what they came up with is incredible — the fact that there is a person who goes into the facilities, is able to identify areas for improvement, gives them compliments about what is working well, and gives them suggestions on how to improve and there is the ability to go through five-minute videos to help improve

— it's an incredible resource. It was designed specifically for the Yukon and I cannot say enough good things about that.

I appreciate our time here today. I look forward to getting the information back from the minister around Catholic education. I especially look forward to hearing that the textbook has been pulled, but I thank the minister and her officials for their time today.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I thank the members opposite for the debate today in Committee of the Whole. I certainly will make those returns as quickly as we possibly can. I would like to thank our officials for being here today to assist in this debate and all of those behind the scenes who are doing incredible work to advance education in the Yukon.

**Deputy Chair:** Is there any further general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education?

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 3, Department of Education, cleared or carried, as required.

### **Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 3, Department of Education, 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 3, Department of Education, cleared or carried, as required.

**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 \$289,749,000 agreed to***

***On Capital Expenditures***

***Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$25,640,000 agreed to***

***Total Expenditures in the amount \$315,389,000 agreed to***

***Department of Education agreed to***

**Mr. Kent:** I move that the Chair report progress.

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

*Motion agreed to*

**Mr. Kent:** I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

**Deputy Chair:** It has been moved by the Member for Copperbelt South 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.

### **Speaker's statement re filed document**

**Speaker:** I have for tabling a letter from PricewaterhouseCoopers' lawyer.

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

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

*Motion agreed to*

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

*The House adjourned at 1:26 p.m.*

### **The following documents were filed April 25, 2025:**

35-1-335

Attendance of Michelle Grant Before Committee of the Whole of the Yukon Legislative Assembly, letter re (dated April 25, 2025) from Alyssa Holland, legal counsel, to Peter Ruby, Goodmans LLP (Speaker Harper)

35-1-336

Attendance of Michelle Grant Before Committee of the Whole of the Yukon Legislative Assembly, letter re (dated April 25, 2025) from Peter Ruby, Goodmans LLP, to Alyssa Holland, legal counsel (Speaker Harper)