



# Yukon Legislative Assembly

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## HANSARD

Monday, March 7, 2022 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

# YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

## 2022 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 — Emily Tredger, MLA, Whitehorse Centre**

### CABINET MINISTERS

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

### 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>Emily Tredger</b>	Third Party House Leader Whitehorse Centre
<b>Annie Blake</b>	Vuntut Gwitchin

### LEGISLATIVE STAFF

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

**Yukon Legislative Assembly  
Whitehorse, Yukon  
Monday, March 7, 2022 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

*Prayers*

**Speaker's statement in recognition of artwork in the  
Legislative Assembly**

**Speaker:** Before we proceed to the Daily Routine, the Chair would like to inform the members of the new artwork being displayed in the Assembly, beginning to my right and moving counter-clockwise around the room.

First, we have beaver mitts made by Pearl Keenan in 2012. Pearl Keenan was a respected Tlingit elder of the Daklaweidi clan. Her Tlingit name was T'aakú Tláa, which means "Mother of the Taku River". She made these hand-sewn mitts in 2012 from beaver fur and moosehide that she tanned herself using the methods taught to her by her mother. They feature embroideries on the wrists in traditional Tlingit designs that are not often seen today.

Pearl created many kinds of sewing, using traditional patterns and techniques passed down to her from the women in her family. She was dedicated to the continuation and the sharing of these techniques for younger generations.

Pearl sat on many boards and committees, including the Yukon First Nations elders council, First Nations Education Commission, Skookum Jim Friendship Centre, and the Yukon College elders advisory council, and she was the vice-president of First Nation programs and services.

Second, we have the *Landscapes of Gold* bowl from 2019 by Monika Käte Steputh. This ceramic bowl was created by Haines Junction-based artist Monika Steputh. Originally from Germany, she has made the Yukon her home since 2013. Monika forms her pieces intuitively and applies glazes to represent the layers and formations of landscapes and weather phenomena as seen on this bowl. Touches of gold represent awareness and connections between people and nature in the land or in the sky as stars. Monika finds constant inspiration in the open spaces of the north and loves to create ceramic works based on the impressions of her journeys through majestic landscapes. Her work reflects her aesthetic of simplicity and elegance and a philosophy of interconnectedness between people and the land.

Third, we have *Hunter with Shape Shifter* by Alex Dickson from 2005. Alex Dickson was a respected and prolific Tlingit artist, working in wood and many other materials. This mask was carved from red alder. The features of the face are accentuated with paint in red, black, and a light turquoise wash, as well as abalone inlays in the eyes. Animal imagery is incorporated into the eyebrows, and horsehair adorns the top. In addition to masks, Alex created paddles, headdresses, totem poles, mammoth ivory sculptures, pendants, and rings. His carvings were made in the Tlingit tradition that was passed down to him. He created designs based on this tradition and

developed with his own unique style, inspired by stories he was told during his childhood. He was also recognized for his knowledge of traditional medicines and outdoor skills.

Fourth, we have *@totokaelo* by Alannah Whachell from 2017. Alannah Whachell is a Whitehorse-based artist who creates sculptures in a range of materials, including concrete, plaster, resin, beaded cloth, glitter, cardboard, and ceramics. In this piece, the composition of beads recreates a pixelated screenshot of a luxury online clothing store's Instagram account, created from a pattern generator. The grid that anchors the beadwork references minimalism in its repetition of simple forms. Through her carefully constructed works, Alannah seeks to instill everyday materials with intimacy. Her practice explores relationships between surfaces and form, desire and capitalism, fashion, semiotics, time, and uncertainty.

Finally, we have *Arrival of the Dog Team* from 2017 by Shirley Adamson. Shirley Adamson is an elder of the Tagish Nation and belongs to the Wolf clan. She created this intricately beaded dog blanket for the Yukon First Nation dog blanket project in 2017. It is one of a set of 10 traditional blankets that were created to be showcased at the Yukon Quest that year and were worn by a ceremonial dog team for the start of the race. Shirley is an artist, language teacher, and storyteller and honours the history of her ancestors through the sharing of traditional stories and revitalization of language. She learned to sew and bead from her grandmother and now also creates photography, paintings, textiles, and sculptures using natural and found materials.

Artwork is an important part of Yukon's heritage, and I congratulate all of the artists in the placement of these important works.

## DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

## INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** I would ask my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly to help me recognize some folks here who are joining us for the Indigenous Community Safety Partnership program tribute. We have Vikram Govindasamy with us; we have Chantal Genier, MJ Donald, Lana Selby — I think that's it; no, that's not it. We also have the legendary Gina Nagano with us as well.

*Applause*

**Ms. White:** It's a pleasure to be able to introduce a very special person in the gallery today — not only the parent of one Olympian, but the parent of two Olympians. So, we have Joan Stanton joining us today to celebrate the accomplishments of one of her children.

*Applause*

**Speaker:** Tributes.

## TRIBUTES

### In recognition of 2022 Olympics Yukon representatives Dahria Beattie, Graham Nishikawa, and Wayne Vallevand

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we pay tribute to three exceptional Yukoners: Dahria Beattie, Graham Nishikawa, and Wayne Vallevand. This February, Dahria Beattie represented Canada in cross-country skiing at the 2022 Olympic Winter Games in Beijing. Dahria exemplifies the Yukon spirit of determination. For years, she has consistently achieved top-20 results in international and World Cup competitions. In 2018, she made her Olympic debut in PyeongChang, South Korea. At the Beijing Olympics, she added to her list of accomplishments. Dahria competed in six events and achieved a personal best in the individual 10-kilometre classic ski race. Congratulations, Dahria.

On March 4, the 2022 Paralympics began in Beijing, and our own Graham Nishikawa is there. Graham is an amazing cross-country skier in his own right. He has also achieved international success as a guide for Brian McKeever. Brian McKeever is a visually impaired skier who has won 17 gold medals over his distinguished career, and Graham has been there alongside him for many of those. When competing, Graham leads Brian around the race course, managing corners, lines, and tactics on the track. I understand that this will be Brian McKeever's last Paralympics, and I know that all Yukoners are excited to see what Graham and Brian will achieve in Beijing.

Last but definitely not least, I am incredibly proud to stand here today to honour Wayne Vallevand. Wayne was also at the Beijing Olympics this year; however, he wasn't speeding down a bobsledding track or getting big air while freestyle skiing — at least as far as I know. Instead, he represented the Yukon as a camera operator for CBC Sports. For about three weeks, Wayne was based there where all the skiing and snow sports were held. He was also selected to be part of CBC's team for the Tokyo summer games. At both of these games, Wayne made it possible for Canadian athletes to share their stories with Canadians back home. Wayne did an amazing job of not only the camera work but also making the athletes feel welcome to share their stories.

Mr. Speaker, I am so proud of these three Yukoners — each of them representing our small but mighty territory, sharing their passion and dedication with the world. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

*Applause*

**Ms. McLeod:** I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to two of Yukon's finest cross-country skiing talents, Dahria Beatty and Graham Nishikawa. It's an incredible achievement in any sport to represent your country on a world scale. Lately, it appears that cross-country skiing has been where we shine here in the Yukon — a testament to the outstanding training and world-class trails at the Whitehorse Cross Country Ski Club.

We have seen a lot of action lately in a number of international competitions, including the Winter Olympics —

homegrown talent straight from the Whitehorse ski trails racing against the world's best. Dahria joins Team Yukon again this year, representing our country in Beijing, China for cross-country skiing. She bested previous scores from the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang and we were excited to cheer her along from her hometown. Dahria ranks among the top skiers in the country and certainly shone with grace, endurance, and skill in each of the events.

Graham is once again representing Team Canada as a guide for Canadian Paralympian Brian McKeever, who received a gold medal for the 10- and 20-kilometre races and bronze in the 4- by 2.5-kilometre relay in PyeongChang with Graham as his guide. Graham will be one of two guides accompanying Brian on his quest for gold at the 2022 Paralympics.

We would like to congratulate Dahria on some pretty spectacular skiing and offer our best wishes to Brian, Graham, and also to Russell Kennedy, who is Brian's second guide. We understand that Brian has already received a gold medal in men's long-distance classic, so congratulations to Brian and Russell on their first triumph yesterday.

Dahria and Graham, your dedication to your sport has brought you to a place that many athletes dream of. Thank you for bringing a little bit of Yukon to the Olympics, for giving Yukoners some excitement back home, and for giving our young skiers an incredible goal to aspire to.

*Applause*

**Ms. White:** It is a great pleasure to rise again on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to Yukon athletes Dahria Beatty and Graham Nishikawa. It is not the first time that we have had this privilege to recognize Yukoners who have represented Canada at the Olympics, and it is not Dahria's first Olympics, nor Graham's first time at the Paralympics. Dahria has had an amazing season, both at the Olympics and continued on to Europe to participate in the World Cup events. She had some of her personal best times in China, along with her teammates. Not stopping there, Dahria continued on to participate in the World Cup events. Now she is just waiting to compete in the nationals later this month, and hopefully then she will get a well-deserved rest.

Graham, meanwhile, is in China as one of the guides, as we heard, for cross-country skier Brian McKeever. The two of them have skied together at three Paralympics so far. In 2014 at the Sochi Paralympics, Graham guided Brian to a gold in the sprints, and in 2018, Graham was the guide for two golds and a bronze race in PyeongChang. Last night, Brian won his 14<sup>th</sup> Paralympics gold while being guided by his other guide, Russell Kennedy, and we can expect to see Graham in the upcoming race later this week. Just to note that, when guiding Brian to a medal win, the guide who comes across the finish line also wins a medal, so Graham has quite the collection, and here's hoping for more from these games.

Yukoners are proud of these amazing athletes, and a big thanks to them, to their coaches, and especially to their friends and families who support them along the way.

*Applause*

### In recognition of Arctic Inspiration Prize winners

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** It is my pleasure to rise today and pay tribute the Indigenous Community Safety Partnership program, which was awarded an Arctic Inspiration Prize. The virtual award ceremony took place on Friday evening. The Arctic Inspiration Prize, as you know, is the largest award program in the country dedicated to the Arctic and Canada's north.

This year was the prize's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. More than \$3 million was awarded to eight organizations across the north, and this year, the Government of Yukon has contributed \$50,000 toward the Arctic Inspiration Prize as well.

The prize is designated to enable breakthrough northern initiatives, and I could not be more proud of this year's laureates, including the winning groups from Yukon.

In the Yukon, the Indigenous Community Safety Partnership program was awarded a \$500,000 prize. The program offers a transformative approach to community safety, emergency preparedness, and justice through the revitalization of traditional law. It is a first-of-its-kind indigenous-led training, certification, and mentorship program designed to help Yukon First Nations address the root causes of intergenerational trauma, violence, and vulnerability. This program helps First Nation governments own, implement, and sustain community safety, emergency preparedness, and justice initiatives.

I want to congratulate everyone who is involved in this incredible program, including team leader Gina Nagano.

I also want to take this time to congratulate the Indigenous Youth River Guide Training program, which was awarded a \$100,000 prize in the youth category. This project will teach Yukon and Northwest Territories youth to remove barriers and create opportunities to learn land-based skills, improve self-esteem, leadership, and self-determination, and expose them to potential career opportunities while centering in indigenous languages, knowledge, and bodies.

I would also like to recognize the Collective Action for Nature-based Active Play and Youth Empowerment — CANAPY — project, which was a Yukon finalist for the \$1-million category.

Congratulations to all of the 2022 prizewinners and also the finalists. A big thank you to all of the organizers and the partners for all that they've done to support and celebrate northern achievements. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

*Applause*

**Ms. Van Bibber:** I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to an organization that's very dear to me, the Arctic Inspiration Prize, as it celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

From its inception, the AIP has been increasingly successful in helping communities and groups across northern Canada. By providing seed money for new projects that solve challenges identified by northerners, the prize gives communities pride and hope.

Prior to the Rideau Hall Foundation taking the award under its wing under the leadership of Governor General David Johnston, I was part of the selection committee for four

years, and I had an amazing experience with the founders — Arnold Witzig and Sima Sharifi — and the team learning how to make their dream come true.

Since year one, the projects have given insights into the magnitude of our north and the possibilities — endless. This year, eight teams were awarded a total of \$3 million. Kudos to all who submitted entries and the effort to champion various projects for their regions.

Canadians were able to watch on CBC and APTN from coast to coast to coast. The ceremonies showcase talent, art, and, of course, the AIP recipients. \$500,000 was awarded to Yukon's Indigenous Community Safety Partnership program. The program is for certification and mentoring designed to help Yukon First Nations address root causes of intergenerational trauma, violence, and vulnerability. Indigenous Youth River Guide Training was awarded \$100,000 to teach Yukon and Northwest Territories youth land-based skills along flat and whitewater canoeing and learn about wilderness medicines and rescue skills. I too would like to send a special shout-out to the CANAPY project, or the Collective Action for Nature-based Active Play and Youth Empowerment, from Whitehorse. As an ambassador, I was proud to sponsor this submission and it made it to the finalist list. Well done.

It's exciting to see the interest and continuing growth of this prize. So, Yukoners, get your thinking hats on and figure out a project from a variety of themes. Check out the webpage for all the specifics on how to enter. My final words: Become part of the solution, become part of a team, and work toward the prize of the north and the Arctic Inspiration Prize.

*Applause*

**Ms. White:** It is wonderful to be able to honour the recipients of this year's Arctic Inspiration Prize on behalf of the Yukon NDP. For 10 years, this organization has provided nearly \$20 million to 50 different organizations across the Canadian Arctic. Those are 50 different organizations making a difference in their communities and improving the lives of those involved. A special congratulations goes out to the team and team leader Gina Nagano of Yukon's Indigenous Community Safety Partnership program. Congratulations also to Bobbi Rose and her team for the Indigenous Youth River Guide Training and the Treaty Talks team for their application.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that these two organizations are just two of many that are changing the face of Canadians' north. We thank them for their dedication and forward thinking, because without organizations like this, we would just be stuck in the past, so we look forward to seeing what they do.

*Applause*

**Speaker:** Are there returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions?

Are there any bills to be presented?

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

### Bill No. 12: *Income Tax Amendments Act, (2022)* — Introduction and First Reading

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** I move that Bill No. 12, entitled *Income Tax Amendments Act, (2022)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Hon. Premier that Bill No. 12, entitled *Income Tax Amendment Act, (2022)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

*Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 12 agreed to*

### Bill No. 302: *Act to Amend the Civil Emergency Measures Act (2022)* — Introduction and first reading

**Mr. Cathers:** I move that a bill entitled *Act to Amend the Civil Emergency Measures Act (2022)* be now introduced and read a first time.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Member for Lake Laberge that a bill entitled *Act to Amend the Civil Emergency Measures Act (2022)* be now introduced and read a first time.

*Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 302 agreed to*

**Speaker:** Are there any further bills to be introduced?  
Are there any notices of motions?

## NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to assist teachers in becoming clinical counsellors by:

- (1) allowing up to three years' leave for teachers pursuing a master's degree in clinical counselling;
- (2) developing a grant for Yukon teachers pursuing a post-secondary degree in clinical counselling; and
- (3) providing financial support to teachers currently enrolled in clinical counselling degrees up to five years retroactively.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to ensure that every Yukon school employs at least one full-time clinical counsellor.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to expand access to mental health supports in response to the ongoing substance use emergency by:

- (1) providing clinical counselling, including grief counselling, in communities across the Yukon;
- (2) hiring clinical counsellors for Yukon schools; and
- (3) subsidizing the cost of private mental health services for non-insured individuals.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to complete the regulations for online sales and delivery of cannabis.

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

THAT this House:

(1) commends the City of Whitehorse for its work on a request for proposals for a master plan to develop the tank farm property; and

(2) supports a partnership between the Government of Yukon, the City of Whitehorse, and the private sector to develop this property in order to increase the amount of housing available in the capital city.

**Speaker:** Is there a statement by a minister?

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Coffee Gold project

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I rise today to speak about the Coffee Gold project as it continues to move forward.

The Government of Yukon and the Government of Canada have recently come to a joint decision to accept the recommendation of the executive committee of the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board that the Coffee Gold project be allowed to proceed. The Coffee Gold project, proposed by Newmont Corporation, will consist of four open-pit gold mines located about 130 kilometres south of Dawson City. The project is expected to have a construction period of 30 months, followed by a 10-year operation phase and an 11-year closure phase. I can inform this House that this project is expected to provide upwards of 700 jobs for Yukoners over its life cycle.

This is an example of the effectiveness of the Yukon's environmental and socio-economic assessment process that upholds responsible development in the territory. Our government supports responsible mineral resource development and remains committed to finding efficiencies in the assessment and regulatory review of projects.

The Government of Yukon engaged closely with the federal decision bodies — Natural Resources Canada and Transport Canada — to ensure a timely decision-making process. Prior to issuing a decision, the Government of Yukon consulted with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in government, Selkirk First Nation, White River First Nation, and the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun. We recognize that Newmont has entered into impacts and benefits agreements with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in government and the White River First Nation to ensure a cooperative, collaborative, and mutually beneficial relationship between the company and First Nations. Our government supports Newmont's approach to develop the Coffee project in collaboration with First Nations and Newmont's commitment to address concerns and ensure that opportunities and benefits reach Yukon's communities.

One of the next steps will be for the company to apply for a quartz mining licence. That application will include a series of management plans for the mine's operations, including

reclamation and closure. The Yukon government will then review these plans and consult with affected First Nations before it makes a decision to issue a licence. The company will also need to obtain a water licence from the Yukon Water Board, along with required federal approvals.

We look forward to further engagement and consultation with First Nation governments as regulatory approvals related to the project are considered. We are also committed to working with First Nations to develop approaches to addressing cumulative effects that go beyond the scope of the Coffee project.

As the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, I would like to acknowledge the work of the department to carefully assess the merits of this project and for fulfilling our obligation to consult. We are committed to ensuring that this project is carried out in an environmentally responsible way, addressing socio-economic impacts while providing benefits to Yukoners.

**Mr. Istchenko:** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak to this very good news. As we all know, the mining and exploration industry plays a crucial role in our economy and is the biggest private-sector driver of the economy.

As important as it is to have operating mines, it's also important to have a healthy project pipeline that contains the next big projects. The Coffee project has been in the pipeline for some time, and many Yukoners are familiar with it. The announcement last week of the acceptance of the YESAB executive committee's recommendation that Coffee Gold be allowed to proceed is good news for the future of the Yukon.

As the Premier noted, this concludes the environmental and socio-economic assessment of the project under YESAA. I would like to begin by congratulating the team that has worked on the Coffee project over the past number of years. Obviously, there has been considerable turnover in the corporate ownership of Coffee, from Kaminak to Gold Corporation and now Newmont. For the most part, there has been a steady team at the helm of this project that has done an exceptional job at advancing it. Of course, we would be remiss if we didn't recognize Shawn Ryan who was named 2009 Prospector of the Year by the British Columbia mineral industry, in part due to his role in the discovery.

On behalf of the Yukon Party, I want to offer our sincere congratulations to the team at Coffee Gold — now that this successful step is the result of a lot of hard work and perseverance. It's also great news for the Yukon mining industry and our economy. The jobs and economic activity that a project like Coffee create will be a great boost to our private sector. I would like to add my congratulations to the First Nation governments that have been involved in this process and thank them for their contributions.

While this joint decision was made within the regulatory timeline period, it is important to point out that this is an exception to a troubling trend that the industry has begun to notice and raise concerns about. Over the course of the week at Roundup, my colleagues and I had several meetings with businesses and organizations that are active in our mining industry. These groups watch our assessment process very

closely. They noted to us their concern about the trend of the Yukon government ignoring legislative timelines and, more specifically, the timelines for decision documents under the YESAA process. BMC's Kudz Ze Kayah project is an unfortunate example of this. That project is approaching the one-year anniversary of the legislative timeline for issuance of a decision document and, from what we can tell, the government has not said when we can accept a resolution.

While we are happy that the Coffee project has advanced, we are concerned about the overall trend of this Liberal government ignoring its legislative obligations regarding timelines. Nevertheless, I do want to conclude by thanking all those involved, and I do look forward to seeing this project advance to the next stages in permitting and hope to see this project come to development and eventually production in the near future.

**Ms. White:** I consider myself an optimist, and I will use my rose-coloured glasses to respond to today's ministerial statement.

We agree that mining is essential to a renewable future, but we also believe that we can't continue making the mistakes of the past. Yukoners have been told, over and over again, about the benefits of mining in job creation. We have seen the hype before, and we will see the hype again.

Yukoners have also seen what happens when things go wrong: communities left with contaminated water wells or an abandoned mine that will be on Yukon's books for the foreseeable future.

One thing the minister failed to highlight in his statement was that, through all of the consultations with affected First Nations, each of them raised concerns related to cumulative impacts, the northern access road, and how all of this will have impacts on asserted or established aboriginal treaty rights. The YESAB decision document lists a number of terms and conditions to try to address these concerns. Heap leaching and the risks to water continue to be of concern in the territory. Water is a precious resource, and Yukoners expect that it should be valued as such by their government.

Although the Yukon government has been slow to change, that hasn't been the case with mining companies. I believe that Newmont will continue to honour the relationships that they have built, will learn from the mistakes and successes of others and help plot a new course for mining in the territory. We look forward to watching how this government will ensure that this project is carried out in an environmentally responsible way while protecting Yukon waters, all the while addressing socio-economic impacts and providing real benefits to Yukoners.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** To begin, I would like to thank the members opposite for their comments. I certainly will pass on their thanks to the department and to our fellow governments and to the industry. I would also like to thank the Third Party for acknowledging the importance of mining in making our transition to a sustainable future.

The Yukon government is working closely with the federal government, Yukon First Nations, and stakeholders across the

territory to increase responsible mining opportunities in the Yukon that will create jobs for Yukoners and grow our economy responsibly.

Under our leadership, mining in the Yukon is flourishing and creating benefits and opportunities for communities across the territory. In 2015, the Yukon was in a recession. We had one mine operating in the territory. Since taking government in 2016, we have been able to make the Yukon home to three operating mines, with many more, such as Coffee Gold, beginning to develop.

Mineral production in the Yukon is expected to increase to more than \$1.1 billion this year — a record high — while staying above \$1 billion each year through to 2026. This is all at the same time that we have been accelerating land use planning.

Our goal is to build a mining industry in the Yukon that supports responsible mining practices, champions First Nations and community relationships, and respects our environment.

I did acknowledge the work that we will continue to do on cumulative effects. I thank the member opposite for her point on that issue.

In 2019, in partnership with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, our government restarted the Dawson Regional Land Use Planning Commission that has developed a draft plan to protect key protected and conservation areas and balances land, water, and wildlife with cultural and economic interests in the region. The planning process seeks to set out how responsible mining in the area can proceed in a way that achieves a healthy balance between our environment and economic interests. The commission is continuing their work in 2022 and is on track to release their recommended plan this year.

I am glad that the Member for Kluane has brought up the Kudz Ze Kayah mine project. The Yukon government is still actively working with the Kaska First Nation and the federal government to reach a decision on this project as soon as possible. Our goal with this project is to ensure that we reach a decision that is in line with our work to build strong relationships with First Nations in the territory.

I want to once again thank our First Nation governments, the Government of Canada, and the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources for actively working on the Coffee Gold project. Thanks to Newmont for their commitment to seeing this project through in a responsible way that champions environmental stewardship while continuing to make the Yukon a leader in mining in the country. I look forward to seeing this project advance to the next phase in the coming months.

**Speaker:** This then brings us to Question Period.

## QUESTION PERIOD

### Question re: Cost of living

**Mr. Istchenko:** The rising cost of living is quickly making life unaffordable for many Yukoners. One clear example of this is the skyrocketing price of gas. In Whitehorse, the cost is about \$1.80, and it is even higher in our communities.

The Yukon government has a range of policies, taxes, and regulatory tools that affect the price of gas.

Is the government doing anything to deal with the record-breaking high gas prices?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Yes, of course. I think that the Premier, when he tabled the budget on Thursday, talked about \$80 million which is going toward *Our Clean Future*. The whole purpose of *Our Clean Future* is to work on the transition away from a dependency on fossil fuels. I have quite a list. I can certainly go into the list, but one of the things that I will say that we are not doing is building a diesel plant. We disagree with that direction. In fact, as anyone has noticed and as the member opposite noted, the price of gas is going up, including diesel, so we want to work to transition away from fossil fuels, and we have a whole strategy that is developed around that, and I look forward to further questions on this subject.

**Mr. Istchenko:** The question that I asked was about policy — whether it is tax or regulatory tools that affect the prices. I didn't get an answer.

Another part of the territory's inflation crisis is the soaring price of food. One of the main things impacting the price of food here is the actual cost of trucking. The Liberals have ruined relationships with the trucking industry and made their businesses more expensive. Despite this, the Yukon government does have a range of measures at their disposal that could reduce the cost of trucking and therefore the price of food.

What measures are in the Liberals' budget that will help reduce the rising cost of food?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** First of all, I think that on Thursday, as the House opened, we had that ability to recognize one of our local entrepreneurs and Farmer of the Year. What a great example of government teaming up with a local entrepreneur to create, first of all, local food sources. I think that most Yukoners know that, as we move forward, it is going to be very important to not just rely on a supply chain that comes into the Yukon but to be growing our food here. We have seen the growth in our agriculture sector — a very significant growth — over the last number of years and, of course, we continue to support that.

I think that it is also important to note that, when we talk about policy points and taxation, in the Yukon, we actually have the lowest gas tax in the entire country. As well, when you look at inflation across the country right now, the Yukon again is positioned — we have, up to date, the lowest growth in inflation. We know that this is a global problem. We know that this is going to be an ongoing conversation throughout the Sitting. We are welcoming that debate, and, again, I think that the Yukon is well-positioned — and, of course, our programs have well supported the private sector to be in a good position as we move out of COVID.

**Mr. Istchenko:** I was just looking for some measures in the Liberals' budget that would help reduce the cost of food.

Another thing is that the inflation crisis is hitting Yukoners in their wallets and in their bank accounts. Life has quickly become unaffordable for many. This winter, many Yukoners were shocked by extremely high electricity bills. It has become



clear to many that the Liberal government's energy choices and policies have had consequences for Yukoners.

Does the Liberals' budget contain any single measure to reduce the soaring cost of electricity bills?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to rise again. Of course, it is important that we keep our electricity rates low, and that's what we're doing. We're investing in a renewable future. For example, we're investing in a grid battery project that will eliminate the need for four diesel gensets. That's what we're doing.

The previous government built an LNG plant and then didn't put it to rate. So, what that did — and the way that my colleague has referred to it — is that it ran up the credit card. You do have to pay that off at some point.

I sat down with the chamber of commerce recently and they said, "Please don't do what happened in the past." So, what's going on is we're looking to make our rates smooth because we're working to break our dependence on fossil fuels. That would be the wrong direction to go. Building a diesel plant here in the Yukon would commit us to a fossil-fuel future, which we do not want. That would be the mistake.

#### **Question re: Affordable housing**

**Ms. Clarke:** While Yukoners have certainly realized that housing has become unaffordable for many, the budget document tabled by the Liberals last week laid the issue here bare. To quote directly from the budget package, the increasing prices have made owning a single detached home out of reach for many Yukoners. That is directly from the budget — an acknowledgement that, over the last several years under the Liberals, housing has become unaffordable for many Yukoners.

So, having acknowledged this massive problem, what specific steps is the government taking to tackle housing affordability in Yukon this year?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I think it's important to correct the record and to take a look at the history of the activity at Yukon Housing. First and foremost, the member opposite would know and should have a good discussion with her colleagues sitting next to her and talk about where we got into a deficit on affordable housing. That really goes back to a transfer agreement of millions and millions — tens of millions of dollars — that was going to lead to affordable housing options that were cancelled at the last minute for political reasons.

Why is that important? It's important because, if you trend out the population growth over the last half a decade, what you will see is — over at least the last five years — that our population growth was at about 12.1 percent, and the residential unit growth was at 12.9 percent. Although opposition members don't like us to go back into history, it's very important to dig in and do the due diligence to find out where the challenge was. First, we had these programs cancelled, and secondly, there was a bit of back-and-forth on who would take on lot development in the city, and it ended up where we missed the season, really, of lot development. So, those are the two key things.

Going forward, we are seeing record-breaking investment in affordable housing. I just had our team at Yukon Housing

pull some data. We are going to talk about this a lot in session. What we are going to see is that, under the Yukon Party, they were spending more on O&M than capital, and we are investing in affordable housing.

**Ms. Clarke:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the history lesson. Yukoners need an answer to this massive problem.

The average price of a home at the end of last year was \$657,000, to quote directly from the Liberals' budget. As of the third quarter of 2021, a household would need to earn 2.3 times more than the average Yukon worker to responsibly finance the mortgage on a \$657,000 home at the posted five-year fixed mortgage rate. The Liberals can point to money that they are investing in land development, but that can take years, and under their government, we have seen that these investments have not kept pace with demand and are often delayed.

Can the Liberals point to a single thing they are doing that will help those who can no longer afford a mortgage for the average home?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Yes, this is a long-term approach. We have short-term measures, which are announcements on lots that are available here in the Yukon. We will continue to make sure that we work with the private sector to increase the opportunity for lots. What we are hearing from subject matter experts across the country is that "supply, supply, supply" is key. This is, again, not a unique problem. Anybody who is watching the conversations that are happening from coast to coast to coast will know that there has been a challenge in the fact that housing prices have gone up. The things that we are doing are a multitude. We are excited to discuss our budget at Yukon Housing as well as other initiatives.

In the interim, again — a big investment into affordable housing, our Canada-Yukon housing benefit, which no longer has a wait-list. There are just over 200 people receiving that. Again, we are giving them that opportunity to have a safe home while they can put money in their pocket for investment into housing options.

Again, speaking with people out in our communities, they ask that we increase the amount of money available for them to leverage to build in our communities because of the extra costs. That is something that we have committed to and that we are providing.

Again, I am looking forward to a number of conversations on this subject over the next two months.

**Ms. Clarke:** I appreciate that the Liberal government has a lot to say about housing supply, but their own budget clearly states that what they are doing is not working. In fact, the budget makes it clear that things have been getting worse under the Liberals. The following is a quote directly from their own budget documents tabled last week — and I quote: "The demand for new housing outstripped new building for several years prior to 2020 resulting in the current housing shortage." It is clear that more of the same won't work.

What new programs or policies does the Liberal government have in this budget to address this? Please and thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Again, this is a complex conversation. Over the last five years, we have seen record growth in the Yukon and, of course, that puts on pressure. What I hear at the doorstep and from my constituents is that they want their families to come home. It is expensive. We need to have more lots. We are investing in it, but what we don't want to have is a recession where those young individuals who have gone off to university or received their post-secondary here have no future here because there are no opportunities.

What we saw was a commitment to the economy. We see one of the strongest economies in the country. We see some of the strongest growth in the G7, which many people would think is a positive measure. Again, what we are going to do is continue to invest in supply. We are going to continue to look at innovative ways, such as our land trust, working with development corporations, and working with the private sector on things like the tank farm.

Again, there are other announcements that we are going to be talking about in the next couple of weeks. We are looking at a basket of tools to help with this particular challenge. I think that we want to be in a strong economic position, and that gives us another set of tools that we can use and an incentive for the private sector to invest. That is why we have seen record-breaking building permits announced almost every month over the last year.

#### Question re: Electricity rates

**Ms. Tredger:** This winter, Yukoners opened their bills to find record-high charges for electricity. Where is that money going? The Yukon Utilities Board allows ATCO Electric to earn a nine-percent profit in exchange for providing electricity to our homes and businesses, but the thing is, since 2016, they have been making far more than that. Since 2016, ATCO has exceeded their allowed profits by more than \$7 million and then by more than \$2 million in 2020 alone. Those are millions of dollars above and beyond the nine-percent profits that they are allowed to make, and those millions of dollars came straight from Yukoners' electricity bills.

Why has the minister allowed ATCO to earn millions of dollars in excess profits for years while Yukoners struggle with their bills?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I will certainly pass the member's comments across to the Yukon Utilities Board, which is the board that reviews all rate applications and considers them. I am happy to do that.

What I will say is that we haven't had a rate increase over this winter. There was an issue that I saw, from speaking with ATCO, where they adjusted their billing period and it ended up happening right at the same time that we had people home for the holidays and a very deep cold here for the territory, so bills were higher.

What I can say is that the rates have not increased, and what I have already stood and said today — and will continue to say — is that we continue to invest in ways here in the territory to reduce our dependency on fossil fuels so that we can make sure our future is sustainable — whether that is Atlin, whether that is the battery project, whether that is Old Crow

solar, or whether that is solar up in Dawson. We are working on many, many projects here in the territory, and we will do that in order to make sure that our future is more sustainable because, ultimately, the great thing about renewables is that the cost of the energy is cheap once you have invested in the renewable.

**Ms. Tredger:** As the minister knows, the Utilities Board does set the rates, but only the government can force ATCO to come back for a rate review. Electricity bills are on the rise in the Yukon, and the government can change that. The minister could order ATCO to do a rate review, which would mean fairer electricity bills for Yukoners.

Will the minister commit to making electricity bills fairer for everyone by ordering ATCO to review their rates?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** When I was speaking earlier, I mentioned that I had been in conversation with the chamber of commerce, and they came and proposed the same suggestion. The Minister of Justice and I sat down with them and promised to get back to them, so I will make that same promise to the member opposite here — that we took that question and we are looking into it.

What I will say is that we continue to look for ways in which to make sure that the territory has a sustainable energy future. I mentioned last week that our grid is an islanded grid — it's not connected outside — so it's really important that we invest in our energy infrastructure here, that we do our best to protect ratepayers, and that we have a way to break our dependence on fossil fuels.

So, that's our overall goal. I would like to thank both Yukon Energy and ATCO and all of the First Nation governments and other partners that are working to invest in renewables right now, because it's making a more sustainable future for our energy here in the territory.

**Ms. Tredger:** I'm glad that the minister mentioned sustainable energy, because this whole situation is a bit of a puzzle. Yukoners are paying ever-higher power bills and yet Yukon Energy struggles to find funding for green energy projects. So, where is all that money going? How can we have record high power bills and still not have the money to fund green projects? Well, the answer is: All that money is disappearing into profits for ATCO — a Province of Alberta corporation — off the backs of Yukoners, and they will keep doing it until the government orders them to review their rates.

So, I want to know: When? When is the government going to start protecting Yukoners? When will this government order a new general rate application for ATCO?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** It's my understanding that we have the lowest energy rates in the north. I would be careful — I will not disparage a company that is working to supply our electricity around the territory. I did say that the Minister of Justice and I have taken this question under advisement. I thank the member opposite for posing the question.

We just tabled a budget, and in that budget is an investment in the Atlin hydro project because, that way, we don't put it on ratepayers. What we do then is bring it as a piece of infrastructure. In fact, I hope to bring forward a ministerial statement about that here in the Legislative Assembly.

What I'm saying is: We worked to shield our ratepayers — the folks who pay the electricity bills — to try to invest like we invest in roads, for example — to make sure that we have a sustainable future. Yes, it is expensive to provide electricity across the territory, but we're happy to make that investment. I will take the question from the member opposite to consider it. I would like to thank ATCO for their work here in the north.

**Question re: Mine closure security**

**Ms. White:** So, history has a way of repeating itself. A mine operation goes bankrupt and abandons the site, and the federal government picks up the tab. But that changed with devolution, and since then, it is Yukoners who will be spending the tens of millions of dollars to take over abandoned mines.

Recently, Yukoners were given the unsurprising news that they are now on the hook for the Wolverine mine. Now that we get to keep that mess all to ourselves, it is Yukoners who will be spending the money on the maintenance and remediation.

What is the projected cost to Yukoners to maintain the abandoned Wolverine mine this year, and how many more years can Yukoners be expecting to pay this bill?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I will look up the specific number for the member opposite, but I will begin by saying that the Wolverine mine is our responsibility, and we will take on that responsibility. The site does need long-term remedial planning. We did attempt to see if there was an interest among the private sector to purchase the mine; there was not. So, we are in discussions with PriceWaterhouseCoopers on the future transfer of care and maintenance responsibilities to us over the coming months.

I will say that Wolverine is a clear example of what we should not be doing. Unfortunately, as a government, we took over in a situation where the previous government had not retained appropriate security for the mine. Then, when the mine went into receivership, the Yukon public is left on the hook. The member opposite is correct; it is going to cost Yukoners money, and it is not how we wish to do mining in the future. It is an example of what we do not want to do. I am happy to say that I have had this very conversation with our security assessment, and I am happy to answer further questions today.

**Ms. White:** So, maintaining the environmental safety of a mine site for years and years costs a lot of money. Just to help out the minister, this budget alone projects almost \$12 million this year, and that is just to keep the contamination from spreading. When we talk about remediation, the situation becomes much more bleak.

At this time last year, the minister anticipated the sale of the Wolverine mine and didn't want to — and I'm quoting: "... speculate on what happens should the mine not sell..." Well, Mr. Speaker, here we are.

Will the minister tell Yukoners what his plan is, moving forward, for the remediation and closure of the Wolverine mine?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I thank the member opposite for the question. As she notes, the anticipated expenditures in this fiscal year are \$11.9 million. I am happy to give a breakdown if the House wishes.

I think I just answered in my previous response that what we are doing right is working on the long-term remedial planning.

We are working with PriceWaterhouseCoopers — the receivers who were brought in place to take over the responsibility and to work through what it is going to cost to remediate the mine, the site. It is important that we protect our environment. It is important for all Yukoners that we do the right thing here and, yes, it is going to cost money. Unfortunately, the reason that we are in this situation is because we did not — and this is under the previous government — collect the appropriate amount of security, even when it was understood that we needed to collect that security.

So, that is the challenge, Mr. Speaker, and we are going to take the high road on this and do the appropriate work to make sure that Wolverine is cleaned up over time.

**Ms. White:** I don't actually think that it is the high road; I actually think that it is the only road.

So, although mining is essential to a renewable future, it is just one piece of Yukon's economy; again, it is just one piece of that economy.

Currently, the government promotes the Yukon as an ideal place to mine, but it is also the government's responsibility to ensure that the Yukon we love is still here for many generations to come. The minister is right: We need to learn from past mistakes. So, when will this government recognize that they can't be both the promoter and the regulator of an industry?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I will answer the question in two ways. The first way was that we decided that Economic Development would do the work about promoting mining and that the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources would do the regulatory work. So, that is where we made that division.

We are also doing a host of work in order to improve the environmental, socio-economic, and governance models of mining. Every time we sit down with a mine, we talk to them about the way of the future. I will give you one example and that is successor legislation. So, we have taken the initiative to say that it is time to modernize our legislation so that our mining industry is working in concert with our final agreements, with the way we believe *Our Clean Future* needs to work, and with moving to a sustainable future.

So, all of these are the ways in which we are working. We agree that the way of the past was not appropriate — I completely agree with the member opposite — and we are working diligently to allow mining to flourish here in the territory in a way in which it is responsible — environmentally and socio-economically and in respect of our communities and First Nations.

**Question re: Property crime in Whitehorse**

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Over the past several months, there has been a wave of crime throughout Whitehorse. Small businesses have been particularly hard hit and have faced break-ins, theft, property crime, and vandalism.

In some cases, businesses have been targeted multiple times and have faced multiple break-ins. Small businesses are getting frustrated and want to see increased action to stop

criminal activity and ensure that they can operate their businesses safely.

What steps is the government taking to ensure that businesses have the safety and security they need to operate and that the RCMP has the resources they need to combat crime?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** It is my pleasure to rise today to address this really important issue for the community — I see that the question is aimed at the community of Whitehorse in particular. I can indicate that the Department of Justice has in the past met with not only the RCMP, but with businesses and associations representing those businesses in downtown Whitehorse to speak about these issues.

I can also indicate that the policing priorities set by the Police Council and the Department of Justice that proceed from the Minister of Justice's office to the RCMP indicate that these kinds of community relations are incredibly important and a priority for our work going forward.

I can also indicate that, in the budget tabled by the Premier on Thursday, there are additional funds designated toward the RCMP and the priorities set, as well as the opportunity to meet with the chambers of commerce and other community organizations, including the City of Whitehorse, to indicate that this is a priority for our community and should be for the RCMP as well.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Crime has been on the rise for the past three years, and this increased criminal activity is becoming more and more problematic for our capital city. While there have been many impacts from this, one has seen the pall that has been cast over small businesses that are already suffering. Some businesses are looking to relocate and some are even considering closing down altogether. If we want our downtown to be a safe and secure place to live, let alone operate a business, we need to see some change.

Will the Government of Yukon make dealing with property crime that has become commonplace in Whitehorse the top priority in their annual issuance of policing authorities to the RCMP?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Justice works to ensure the provision of a professional, accountable, and appropriately funded territorial police service here in the territory that is responsive to the priorities of Yukon citizens and worthy of the public trust.

Our government funds significant and ongoing investments in police resources through the *Territorial Police Service Agreement* with the RCMP, and the Yukon has one of the highest police:capita ratios in Canada, averaging approximately one RCMP officer for every 337 residents here in the territory. The RCMP forecasts its anticipated human resources operational funding and capital investment needs to the Government of Yukon through an annual financial planning process, and that financial planning process has been built into our Yukon government budgeting process, as noted in the budget that was presented by the Premier on Thursday.

These issues raised by the member opposite are incredibly important for the RCMP, for the community of the City of Whitehorse, and for individuals running businesses and their

homes and the safety therein and are a policing priority for the RCMP and the Department of Justice together.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Combatting crime has become a key priority for the business community in Whitehorse. If we have not addressed this growing issue of crime in the community by the time tourism returns to full swing, this will have a negative impact on our economy. Whitehorse prides itself on being a welcoming place for tourism, and growing amounts of property crime could unfortunately tarnish this image if not addressed soon.

How will the minister include the voice of small business and the tourism community in the setting of Yukon's policing priorities for the RCMP?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I think I have addressed that question already. Again, I recognize that it is a very important issue that has been brought forward by the member opposite, but it is in fact a priority for the RCMP with respect to their priority setting — with the work that is done by the Yukon Police Council, the RCMP, and the Department of Justice to recommend and to set RCMP policing priorities and with respect to the work and the relationships that the RCMP builds here in our community, particularly in downtown Whitehorse.

I appreciate and recognize that it is an issue — that it is a priority for the RCMP. I don't want to speak on their behalf, but I can speak about how we set those priorities together and those are reflective of the community and the community's wishes.

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

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

#### Unanimous consent to move without one clear day's notice Motion No. 294

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of the House to move, without one clear day's notice, Motion No. 294.

**Speaker:** The Government House Leader has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of the House to move, without one clear day's notice, Motion No. 294.

**Speaker:** Is there unanimous consent?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Speaker:** Unanimous consent has been granted.

#### Motion No. 294

**Clerk:** Motion No. 294, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT, for the duration of the 2022 Spring Sitting, any Member of the Legislative Assembly who is unable to attend sittings of the House in person due to COVID-19 symptoms, illness or protocols may participate in the sittings of the House

by video conference, notwithstanding Standing Order 8 or any other Standing Order, and by video conference shall:

(1) be recognized to speak in debate, notwithstanding Standing Order 17;

(2) be permitted to vote, notwithstanding Standing Order 25;

(3) be permitted to participate in counts in Committee of the Whole, notwithstanding Standing Order 44 and Standing Order 44.1;

(4) contribute to constituting quorum in the Legislative Assembly, under Standing Order 3 and the *Yukon Act*; and

(5) be considered to have attended the sitting of the Legislative Assembly, with no deduction of indemnity required under subsection 39(5) of the *Legislative Assembly Act*.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be very, very brief. This motion and the following two are the motions that we have done at the start of each of our last several Sittings, and they are to help us with making sure that the House can continue to do its business during the pandemic

I note that this is just subtly different from the previous forms of this motion where we are allowing members to participate in a count in Committee of the Whole if they are not here but are participating remotely. I am looking forward to debate on the motion.

**Mr. Cathers:** I would just note that, as the Government House Leader noted, this motion is very similar to ones that have been in place at the start of every session since the COVID pandemic emerged. We do not have any concerns with it and will be supporting it.

**Ms. Tredger:** We are happy to support this motion as we have in the past and want to add our congratulations to the Legislative Assembly Office for upgrading to video conferencing so that we have that change in place for this Sitting.

**Speaker:** Are you prepared for the question?  
*Motion No. 294 agreed to*

#### **Unanimous consent to move without one clear day's notice Motion No. 295**

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of the House to move, without one clear day's notice, Motion No. 295.

**Speaker:** The Government House Leader has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of the House to move, without one clear day's notice, Motion No. 295.

Is there unanimous consent?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Speaker:** Unanimous consent has been granted.

#### **Motion No. 295**

**Clerk:** Motion No. 295, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT, for the duration of the 2022 Spring Sitting, if the Legislative Assembly stands adjourned for an indefinite period of time, the Government House Leader and at least one of the other House Leaders together may request that the Legislative Assembly meet virtually by video conference, with all the Members of the Legislative Assembly being able to participate remotely, notwithstanding any current Standing Orders regarding members' physical presence in the Chamber.

Are you prepared for the question?

*Motion No. 295 agreed to*

#### **Unanimous consent to move without one clear day's notice Motion No. 296**

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of the House to move, without one clear day's notice, Motion No. 296.

**Speaker:** The Government House Leader has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of the House to move, without one clear day's notice, Motion No. 296.

Is there unanimous consent?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Speaker:** Unanimous consent has been granted.

#### **Motion No. 296**

**Clerk:** Motion No. 296, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT, for the duration of the 2022 Spring Sitting:

(1) the Clerk shall keep a daily list of paired members, in which any member of the Government and any member of an opposition party may have their names entered together by noon on that date to indicate that they will not take part in any recorded division in the Legislative Assembly held on that date; and

(2) following each such division held, the names of any members entered on the list of paired members for that date shall be printed in Hansard and in the Votes and Proceedings.

Are you prepared for the question?

*Motion 296 agreed to*

#### **GOVERNMENT BILLS**

##### **Bill No. 204: First Appropriation Act 2022-23 — Second Reading — adjourned debate**

**Clerk:** Second reading, Bill No. 204, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver; adjourned debate, Mr. Dixon.

**Mr. Dixon:** It is a pleasure to rise today at second reading to address this year's 2022-23 budget.

Of course, as those listening and members will realize, this is the first time that a budget has been fully debated since the last election and for this particular Legislature.

It's also the first time that a budget will be fully debated throughout a full Spring Sitting since back in 2019. That's

something that I think is worth noting, of course, for Yukoners — that over the last two springs, the Legislature has either been interrupted or caused to adjourn for various reasons, and the result of that has been that the budget has gone without what I believe to be a sufficient amount of scrutiny and oversight in the Legislature.

In 2019, that was the last time the budget was fully debated. In 2022, of course, there was the interruption of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, of course, disrupted the Legislature's proceedings and then remained out of the Chamber until quite some time later.

Then, of course, last year, the budget was tabled by the government and then, just a few days later, the Legislature was interrupted by an election call, which, of course, was something that was contrary to the fixed election date that the government had just passed in the Sitting before. So, this is an important time for legislators to do their work as it's the first time that this has happened in several years.

I'm optimistic about the proceeding of this budget through the Legislature in terms of debate and discussion. I think that the SCREP — the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges — has agreed to a number of changes that will affect the way that we debate this budget as well, and I'm happy to see some of those come forward. I think that the shortened response time for ministers and opposition members to make their points, ask their questions, and provide their responses will certainly facilitate an improved cadence of debate in the Legislature, so I think that's a very positive step forward. I think that, once we get into Committee, we'll really notice that improved system.

It is also important for me, Mr. Speaker, of course, as this is my first opportunity for a full Spring Sitting as the Leader of the Official Opposition. It's a role that I take with a great deal of pride and take very seriously and one that I hope to discharge on behalf of not only my constituents but all Yukoners. As the Official Opposition, of course, we have a duty to Yukoners to scrutinize the budget, to dig into it, to ask questions about it, and to raise the concerns of our constituents across the territory.

That is to say that we necessarily have to ask a variety of questions across the departments that we will review. Sometimes it puts us in the position of having to ask questions about issues that we perhaps already support or don't have issues with, but because questions are put to us by constituents, by organizations, or by other Yukoners, we have a duty to bring those forward and to raise them on behalf of Yukoners. That is an important step, Mr. Speaker, because it underpins sort of the foundational role that we have as legislators, which is to provide scrutiny on the role and the functioning of the executive.

The Premier and his ministers, of course, have a job to play as well, but here in the Legislature, our job as opposition is to provide that scrutiny, and it is something that we take very seriously and it something that I look forward to over the next few weeks and months.

Before I dig into my discussion about the budget itself, I did want to note that, having been a minister in the past, I know how much work goes into the development of a budget, so I

wanted to begin by acknowledging and thanking those officials from the various departments who have put this budget together. While we disagree sometimes at the political level about certain decisions, we always try to recognize the hard work of government officials in putting these documents together. I don't think that anybody can look at the stack of budget documents and not acknowledge the fact that a great deal of work has gone into this budget. So, whether those officials are in the Department of Finance or any of the respective finance branches in the departments, I am certainly aware of the great effort that goes into this package of documents and certainly appreciate the work that has been done.

This particular budget is obviously a very large one. We are just shy of \$2 billion. I remember back when Premier Fentie tabled the first \$1-billion budget and that doesn't seem like that long ago, but, of course, times have changed fairly rapidly and the state of the territory's finances have changed with that time as well. Now we are on the precipice of a \$2-billion budget, which I think, based on the rate of increase from the federal transfers, we will certainly eclipse in next year's budget, if not before — that as a result of supplementary spending later this year.

So, having recognized the staff who have put their time and effort into the budget, I also wanted to note a few changes for the record in the Office of the Official Opposition. Of course, this is the first Sitting of the Legislature with our new chief of staff, Danny Macdonald, who took over just a few months ago. This is the first time that Mr. Macdonald is taking on the role of chief of staff, so we are very excited to see him fill that role. Danny is a long-time friend of mine. We both began in the Cabinet offices upstairs under Premier Fentie. It's nice to see Danny take the next step there. Of course, both Tim Kucharuk and Robin Boss continue to provide support in our office as well. When we look at the proceedings of the Legislature on a daily basis, we see their fingerprints on just about everything that comes out of the mouths of the eight Yukon Party MLAs.

This will be the first Spring Sitting without Ted Laking as a member of our staff formally. Mr. Laking was elected last year to Whitehorse City Council and is now pursuing a range of other opportunities, but being the political animal that he is, he remains involved in our office, and we rely on him continuously for support in a variety of ways as well.

There will be plenty of opportunity for us to get into the details of the budget, and that is what we are very much looking forward to. At second reading, I think that it is worthwhile to make a few observations about the larger picture of the budget. I will leave some of my more specific questions, criticisms, and thoughts about the budget to those debates in Committee.

There are, however, a number of broader themes that I would like to discuss. When I was preparing for the Legislature over the past number of weeks, the way I approached the creation of my thinking on the budget was around a number of particular themes that I thought were important for Yukon in the current moment.

The first thing that I was interested in when thinking about what I wanted to see in the budget was the general issue of

affordability that faces so many Yukoners. There isn't a Yukoner out there who hasn't been affected by the rising cost of just about everything as a result of inflation and the resulting changes in price and cost of living here in the territory. We have seen that across a range of areas.

Of course, earlier today in Question Period, we discussed some of those things, whether it's questions that we have around measures that the government is taking with regard to the price of gasoline and diesel at the pumps around the Yukon — I think, for many Yukoners, looking at the gas price here in Whitehorse at around \$1.80 — and in rural Yukon, much higher, and, in some cases, \$2 — it is certainly very shocking for a lot of Yukoners. That really creates a lot of challenges for not just individual Yukoners but businesses, organizations, and many Yukoners of a variety of backgrounds and places.

The impact of that — I don't think it can be underestimated. As my colleague, the Member for Kluane, raised in Question Period today, the government of course has a range of policy tools with which they can take action and affect the price of gas in the territory. There are policies; there are tax rates; there is a range of measures that influence that. My colleague asked a question about that as well.

Beyond gas, of course, we've seen ever-increasing prices with regard to the food that comes into the territory. When my colleague, the Member for Kluane, asked about that earlier today, the Minister of Economic Development noted that we've seen an increase in local food production. I certainly am happy to see that and very much appreciate the local food production, but last time I checked, the local food production amounted to just about one percent of Yukon's total food consumption. So, what that means is that around 99 percent — and I could be off on the exact number, but it's in that neighbourhood of 98.5 to 99 percent — of the food that's consumed in the Yukon comes up the highway by way of truck, normally. Of course, therefore, the price of trucking influences greatly the cost of food. Now, the cost of food increasing is not an issue that's unique to the Yukon; we've seen that across the country as inflation pushes the price of food up across Canada; however, as we all know, the Yukon, given its geographical position, is particularly vulnerable to price increases in food because of the transportation networks that provide that food to us. So, we've seen the impacts of government policy on the trucking industry influence food pricing here as well.

Electricity prices are up as well. I think that's clearly the case when you see the reaction of Yukoners to their most recent power bills over the winter. My colleague from Haines Junction as well as colleagues from the NDP have raised this as well today. Then, of course, I would be remiss if I didn't note the considerable increase in the cost of housing here in the Yukon as well.

When it comes to housing, I found it quite remarkable — the discussion on the affordability issue related to housing in the budget documents themselves, in particular in the economic forecast for the territory, which I thought really laid out well the challenge of housing affordability for the territory. To quote from that document — it's on page 15 of the "Fiscal and Economic Outlook". It notes that, of course, first of all:

"Consecutive records for the price of a single detached house in Whitehorse were reported for the second and third quarters of 2021, with an average sale price in the third quarter of nearly \$657,000, up almost \$88,000 from the third quarter of 2020."

So, that makes it very clear, Mr. Speaker, that the price of housing is increasing dramatically here in the Yukon. That, of course, plays a role in the ability of Yukoners to stay in the territory or new Yukoners to come to the territory. As my colleague, the Member for Porter Creek Centre, noted in her question, a direct quote from the economic outlook as well was that — and I quote: "As of the third quarter of 2021, a household would need to earn 2.3 times more than the average Yukon worker to responsibly finance the mortgage on a \$657,000 home at the posted five-year fixed mortgage rate."

So, what that means, Mr. Speaker, is that the rate of income for many Yukoners does not match the ability to buy a house and get into the housing market. That's truly unfortunate, and it's a real challenge that I think that the government needs to take very seriously.

The budget documents also note that this is not a new issue and it has been happening for the last two or three years. So, that's where the acknowledgement, I think, needs to come with regard to the need for some change.

Looking across the board — whether it's gas, whether it's food, whether it's electricity or housing — it is pretty clear to me that affordability remains a considerable issue for a lot of Yukoners.

It was a bit surprising to see that not more fully addressed in the budget itself — in the budget speech, certainly — or in any of the government priorities that we have seen. That was something I was looking for in this budget, and I was surprised to not see it.

The second piece that I was looking for in this budget, Mr. Speaker, was the response to what many in the small business community feel to be an attack on the private sector. We have seen the economy ebb and flow over the years, but over the last several years since COVID has been in place, we have seen our private sector — particularly our small businesses — struggle mightily throughout the last two years.

I think, for many of us when we look at the planned removal of the remaining COVID-19 public health restrictions, there is reason for optimism around our economy and the outlook for small businesses. I believe, truly, that more needs to be done. I think one of the organizations that put it very well was the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Shortly after the tabling of the budget, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business put out a release with regard to the budget. The headline of that release was "Yukon budget provides little relief for struggling small businesses". To quote from that release — and I quote: "The Yukon budget provides little for small businesses hoping to see measures to reduce costs and help with recovery, says the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

"CFIB appreciates the Yukon government did not introduce new tax increases or additional costs. However, small businesses are still feeling the impact of two years of pandemic

restrictions along with cost increases due to inflation, supply chain disruptions, and rising payroll costs.

“Many small businesses are still in survival mode,” said Kathleen Cook, CFIB director for Yukon. “We are coming up to two years of the pandemic and only 34% of Canadian small businesses are back to normal sales. Consumer confidence remains low even as restrictions are being lifted, and businesses are carrying an average of \$158,000 in pandemic-related debt. The budget was a missed opportunity to help businesses through the current and ongoing crisis with cost relief measures and a plan to help them recover in the long term.”

Mr. Speaker, as you see, I think the business community would generally agree that there was an opportunity here to chart a new path to allow our business community to renew and grow, coming out of the COVID pandemic, but that appears to be — at least in the view of some businesses and the business community — a missed opportunity.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has also noted in their response to the budget — and I will quote again: “CFIB remains very concerned the government may mandate permanent employer-paid sick leave later this year when the Yukon Paid Sick Leave Rebate program expires. ‘This would be a significant additional cost for small businesses at a time when they can least afford it,’ said Cook. ‘Measures to offset these costs and provide pandemic recovery assistance were absent from today’s budget.’”

To that point, Mr. Speaker, I really think that this is a missed opportunity.

While we focus on the impacts of COVID — I think that those are certainly apparent and important to recognize, but I also think that they have been — the impacts of COVID have been compounded by government policy as well. I think that the imposition of a number of the policies and programs by the government in recent years, while well-intentioned, have unfortunately degraded the overall business climate and created a situation where businesses are really feeling under attack. Earlier this year, on February 3, the Yukon Chamber of Commerce took the opportunity to write a letter to the Yukon government, specifically to the Premier, and noted what they felt was a perfect storm in terms of the business climate. I will quote from that letter: “We are writing you to lodge concern with the ‘perfect storm’ that is being experienced by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the Yukon with a focus on the actions, policies, and proposals by the Government of Yukon (YG) that are crippling business at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has already eroded sales and evaporated profits for many SMEs in Yukon.”

“At a time when support, austerity and common sense is required from our government, we are experiencing actions that are completely insensitive to businesses and the economy.”

The letter then proceeds to list a range of policies and programs that the government is either considering or has underway that the chamber feels is negatively impacting the business community. Those policies include, as I mentioned, the proposed paid sick leave program, which was of course the result of some work done under the confidence and supply agreement between the Liberal Party and the NDP. As I

understand it, it is now on the desk of Cabinet as they consider the recommendations from the Making Work Safe Panel, which provided recommendations for a program of this nature. The release of those recommendations provoked a fairly stern reaction from the business community. I don’t know about other members, but I certainly received a number of unsolicited responses to that from the business community. I heard from businesses that I haven’t heard from before, actually, so we certainly know that the business community is paying attention and is deeply concerned about proposals that will make life less affordable for these businesses and will impact their ability to continue to operate.

The second issue that the Yukon Chamber of Commerce raised in their letter is one that I am very much concerned about as well, and that is the growth of the public sector. I think that the growth of the Yukon government’s public service has been unchecked for quite some time now. It certainly started as early as the first and second Fentie governments. It carried on certainly in our time in office under the Pasloski government, but really what we have seen over the past few years is that the growth has eclipsed anything from before. We have seen fairly unprecedented growth of the public service over the past number of years. That has negative implications for the territory.

While it is always easy to hire new public servants to do some sort of new program, I think that is oftentimes the first answer and it is not always the best answer. What we are seeing now, at least according to the Yukon Chamber of Commerce, are negative implications of unchecked government growth over the years. To that end, I had hoped that the government might provide some path forward for the territory that did not include a massive increase in the public sector and would instead look to the private sector to provide growth and opportunities for Yukoners.

Another issue that was raised by the Chamber of Commerce was the minimum wage increase that occurred last year as a result of the confidence and supply agreement. That’s fairly self-evident. They also noted a number of policies related to the Yukon Liquor Corporation and the cannabis corporation which have, in their view, been holding back the hospitality sector. Among the list, of course, is electricity rates. This was something that came up in Question Period earlier today, as the Yukon Chamber of Commerce suggests — and I quote: “The current rate application and Yukon Utilities Board governance model has enabled over-earning by utilities and lack of predictability in costs for SMEs.”

While I may not agree entirely with the end goal taken by the NDP in Question Period today, I think it’s certainly an issue that deserves discussion and debate, and according to the Yukon Chamber of Commerce, it’s certainly something that is impacting the ability of our business community to remain viable.

The chamber also notes a range of impacts from federal legislation. I won’t go into those today, Mr. Speaker, because that’s not in the purview of the Yukon Legislative Assembly. But I do think it’s worth noting that the business community does feel under siege from a number of federal angles as well.



So, when you combine the impacts of COVID-19 and the public health restrictions, when you combine the impacts of Yukon government's policies and measures that have been deleterious to the business community, and then layer on of course federal impacts, we can understand increasingly why the Chamber of Commerce and the business community feel targeted.

I'll quote from the summary of the letter, because it certainly sums up the issue quite well: "SMEs in Yukon who are already facing lost revenues, struggling to stay open, with many facing bankruptcy, are feeling under siege from their government."

I think that's a fairly good summation of the viewpoint of the business community these days with regard to how they view the government. They feel under siege from their government, according to the Yukon chamber. That is truly unfortunate. I had hoped that the Premier would use the budget — either the Budget Address, the budget document itself, or any of the policy measures and programs that are created by the budget — to begin to address some of the significant challenges that are faced by our private sector here in Yukon.

I think that we all know that the private sector will be absolutely critical to the recovery of the Yukon Territory following the pandemic and we need to put the growth of the private sector at the top of our list in terms of priorities with regard to the next year and beyond.

I touched on the issue related to the growth of government. I think that, while we often get fixated on the number of government employees, oftentimes the growth of the government is more complex than that. The growth of government can include the imposition of red tape — of policies and procedures that inhibit the opportunity and growth for small businesses — and I think that what is needed at this time is a real clear plan to reduce red tape and get the government out of the way of the business community to allow them to thrive.

The last theme that I had identified as something that I wanted to see in this budget was a general sense of leadership. I had hoped to see leadership from the government with regard to emerging from the pandemic, leadership with regard to the issuance and communication of its priorities. Unfortunately, that is not what I took away from either the budget speech or the budget itself. We know that, over the last number of months, as a number of COVID-related public health restriction issues have swirled around, we have seen a real lack of leadership from the Liberal government, in my view.

As public health restrictions were imposed throughout the winter, often we would hear from the businesses, groups, or individuals who felt that the restrictions were imposed without proper consultation and without proper communication. I think that is very much true. Over the last few months, the Yukon Party caucus has begun to try to target some of those specific areas. While it is easy enough for groups out there to say that public health restrictions are getting in the way, it was more useful for us, as the Official Opposition, to raise specific concerns that we had with particular areas. I would note the areas of sport and recreation, the imposition on faith-based

organizations, and the imposition of public health restrictions on the hospitality industry, which, overall on the whole, felt fairly incoherent, poorly explained, and certainly poorly understood by Yukoners.

I remember the day that some of the new sport restrictions had been imposed, and the executive director for Sport Yukon was on the radio raising some concerns, and shortly after that, the Minister of Health and Social Services appeared on the show just a few minutes or hours afterwards and was generally unable to answer any of the questions that were raised by Sport Yukon. The minister went on to commit to a technical briefing which she wasn't sure would happen later that day or the next day. Well, it actually turned out to be over a week or two before that technical briefing actually happened. When it did, the sports organizations that attended felt that they left the briefing with more questions than they went into it with. I think it is really unfortunate that these groups were faced with government decision-making that did not take into account the impacts on those groups at all.

It is fair enough for groups to just disagree with the imposition of certain rules, but I think that it is entirely unacceptable that the government imposed these rules and is not able to even explain them. That was particularly difficult for a lot of the sports organizations. Likewise was the case for the hospitality industry. The hospitality industry felt particularly targeted by this government in the imposition of public health restrictions. Some of the more incoherent public health restrictions related to the ban on barstools — which apparently were more dangerous than regular stools — the imposition of a curfew of 10:00 p.m. — which apparently was intended to protect patrons from COVID that would be higher at 10:01 p.m. than at 9:59 p.m. — and a range of other measures that the industry felt were unfair and incoherent.

I think that a lot of them could have been assuaged if they had a proper explanation of what those measures were meant to achieve. Unfortunately, government ministers were unable to provide such an explanation and businesses, groups, and others were left wondering, feeling frustrated, and left ignored.

There was also the issue of faith-based organizations. My colleague, the Member for Lake Laberge, raised the impacts of restrictions on faith-based organizations as a particular issue that was impacting Yukoners. It seemed to us and to the faith community that Yukon had by far the most strict imposition of restrictions on faith-based organizations in the entire country, which didn't seem to fit with the profile of the transmission of the virus here in the Yukon. Again, that left many Yukoners in the faith community feeling that they were being targeted for some reason, and because of the poor communication out of the Cabinet office, that feeling persists.

When you look at that poor communication over the last number of months, I think that speaks to a failure of leadership. So, again, I would hope to see an improvement in that communicated in the budget.

Furthermore, an important part of leadership is responsibility and accountability. That is something we have talked about a lot over the past few months, as we have contemplated the reaction of government to the incidents at the

Hidden Valley school and the response of the government to the Rogers report, which outlined government's entirely inadequate response to that issue. We will have time to dig more into that over the course of the Legislature, but the unwillingness of the current government to accept responsibility, accept accountability, and offer anything in the way of responsibility or accountability to Yukoners for that, I think, is fairly appalling. To my mind, it is certainly an example of poor leadership.

Those three issues — affordability, the attack on small businesses, and the lack of leadership — were some of the concerns that I had going into the budget being tabled. Unfortunately, I don't believe that the government was able to respond to any of those, so I remain concerned with the government. As we all know, the vote on the budget is a confidence motion and an expression of confidence in the government. I think it goes without saying that, because we do not have confidence in this government, we won't be supporting the budget. That is an important function, I think, of non-government members of the Legislature to consider — their confidence in the government.

All that being said, I do think it is worth noting that the budget is filled with a number of projects that we do indeed support. It is heartening to see the focus put on recreational infrastructure and the investments made in a number of what I think are really excellent projects here in the Yukon in the recreation field. I note the improvements at Mount Sima, the improvements to the biathlon facility, and, of course, the gymnastics gym which will be contained in this budget and will hopefully begin construction this summer. These are all part of an investment in recreation infrastructure that I think is really important and I am happy to see.

I am also pleased to see that the budget includes funding for the Whistle Bend school. I know that this will be the first new elementary school constructed in Whitehorse in a significant number of years. I don't remember the actual number, but it has been quite some time since we have seen the construction of a new elementary school. It is very much needed and very deserved by the community. I am pleased to see that development happen. I should note that these investments in recreation infrastructure — or many of them — as well as the school were features of our party's platform in the last election, so they certainly have our support.

I won't go through in detail and list the projects that we do support or don't support or anything like that. I think it is important for us to get into the debate in Committee of the Whole and proceed department by department to discuss these issues in more detail, but I do want to note the simple fact that, while we won't be supporting the budget for the reasons that I have outlined — most specifically, that we don't have confidence in the current government — it doesn't mean that we don't support a number of the projects that are in this budget. Whether they are in Community Services, Highways and Public Works, Education, or any of the other departments, there is a lot of good in the budget and there are a lot of investments that are sound, but en masse, I don't feel that the budget addresses the sort of leadership that we need at this time

and doesn't address the issues that, as I have mentioned, are top of mind for me and what I believe are top of mind for Yukoners.

With that, I will conclude my remarks today. I am sure that each minister will be using their time to outline the priorities in the budget for each of their respective portfolios and departments. I look forward to hearing more about some of the things that have been announced in this budget. I do have a lot of questions about a number of measures that are in the budget, so I do look forward to breaking into Committee of the Whole to discuss those in greater detail.

I also look forward to hearing from my colleagues on this side of the House to understand a few of their perspectives on the budget and, of course, I am interested as always in hearing from the NDP caucus about their views on the budget.

Oftentimes, I find myself disagreeing with some of the policy direction of the NDP, but I certainly appreciate their perspectives and their thoughts. I do enjoy hearing them raised in the Legislature as I think it's an important function for government to consider views from all sides of the spectrum. Of course, as we know, the confidence and supply agreement commitments feature prominently in this budget as well, and so I look forward to hearing from my colleagues in the Third Party about whether they feel that the commitments made in the CASA document itself are truly met by the investments made in this budget and whether the amounts allocated to those specific projects, policies, and programs are sufficient to meet what was intended in the CASA. In particular, I note that the dental program is one that I have some interest in and look forward to hearing further debate about that particular line item. The amount of \$1.8 million doesn't sound like enough to fulfill the commitment that I saw in the CASA, but it's not a document to which I am a party, so I certainly have no say in that.

With that, again, I look forward to debate. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to the budget now at second reading and look forward to hearing from my colleagues.

**Ms. White:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the time today.

I was sitting here and was thinking about the first time that I responded to a budget back in 2011. You know, as we heard my colleague say — the Leader of the Yukon Party — he talked about how it was just about \$1.2 billion. Of course, at that point in time, he was a Cabinet minister, and, I tell you, I could go back in Hansard and bring back some doozies, but today my Hansard research is in another directions.

I want to start by thanking the folks in the riding of Takhini-Kopper King — actually, the folks in the entire territory in the same breath. I feel really fortunate to live where I do. As we talk about affordability issues and challenges in the territory more so — it's just a reminder that I'm very, very fortunate. In recent years, my neighbourhood has ballooned; it has grown. The infill is something else. In the Budget Address, the Premier mentioned that Normandy Manor was within walking distance of McIntyre Creek, and he said it with conviction, like that was going to be something — well, I would say that Normandy Manor is within walking distance of

McIntyre Creek like the Thomson Centre is within walking distance of the Canada Games Centre. I think it depends on your level of fitness.

In the case of Normandy Manor, you would have to walk up a road that doesn't have a designated walking track until you could get one, and then you would go down a dirt road, and you would need to go down a hill — anyway, it is not exactly quite as close as that. But, again, there has been lots of infill in my riding and more development in Raven's Ridge, more awkward development down the Fish Lake Road and lots of changes, but I think that is what we are seeing across the territory.

I can say that, in my riding, folks who rent are relieved about the rent cap that is in place. For the first time in many, many years, people in mobile homes are able to anticipate what is coming forward. We have seen the transition from Yukon College to Yukon University and that has been incredible — seeing that growth and change there. So, just like the rest of the territory, there have been changes in my neighbourhood.

One of the things that I wanted to do today is that — when you are here long enough, you start to hear repetition, and sometimes it's a fun game to play "Who said this when?" So, I thought I would bring out some quotes. I have this quote: "Under the leadership of our government, mining is flourishing in the Yukon..." That is a quote, and for anyone who is listening, that is in the recent Budget Address, so from this year. Here is another quote: "With three operating mines, the current mineral production value is estimated to be approximately \$420 million." That is from March 15, 2012 in a Budget Address when the budget was tabled. I am going to go on to quote from the same document: "Yukon now has three operating mines..." Does it sound familiar, Mr. Speaker? It should; it should sound familiar. The mines are different, though: "... Capstone's Minto mine, Alexco's Keno Hill Mines properties and Yukon Zinc's Wolverine mine."

Sometimes there is familiarity, because I can go down and I can look in the recent budget that was just tabled — and I quote: "Our territory now has three operating mines with a number of others under development." And it goes on. This is something that I don't think anyone in this Chamber is surprised about. It is called a "boom and bust economy". It is something that happens when you are dependent on mineral prices.

It is actually a bit shocking to know right now that, with Russia invading Ukraine, gold prices have gone over \$2,000 an ounce — gold has gone over \$2,000 an ounce — and it is because people are liquidating their funds and putting it into a resource like gold because they feel like it is safer. In the territory, we still collect 37.5 cents an ounce when the production now is being sold for \$2,000, so Yukon gets good return on our money there.

When we talk about mining, it's something that comes and goes, always.

Here is one. I am going to quote, and we can guess when it's from. I am quoting: "...bringing us a spirited defence of the status quo, a commitment to sit back and relax while commodities boom and a generous federal government does the work." If anyone is guessing along, that was from March 26,

2013, and that was our current Premier. The rest of the quote: "Instead, the same old Yukon Party is bringing us a spirited defence of the status quo..."

We talk about the commodities boom; we talk about a generous federal government transfer. It's interesting, because it goes on. This is another quote: "We need a budget that reduces our dependence on Ottawa. After 10 years in power, this government has doubled its dependence on the federal money. When the government came to power, approximately 80 percent of the expenses were paid by federal transfers. Now, Mr. Speaker, almost 87 percent of our expenses are paid with federal money.

"On behalf of Yukoners, I am calling on this government to plan to achieve a more dependable and less dependent source of revenue. While the government likes to brag about good financial management, the fact remains that Yukoners get more of our budget as a percentage from Ottawa than we did 10 years ago."

In case anyone is curious, that again is from March 26, 2013, and that was the Premier in response to the budget that had been tabled by the Yukon Party. It is super interesting, because, you know, we went from a budget that was just about \$1.2 billion, and in the 11 years I have been here, we are now at almost \$1.9 billion. Today, when I was at the Finance briefing, I asked — because, being around the table with a bunch of math-elites, or people who spend a lot of time and money — I asked them what percentage of our resources come from the federal government transfer. They said it was about 85 percent at this point — 85 percent — so that's from 2013 when the now Premier was saying that 87 percent was too high and that we needed to move off that dependency. When I was doing the back-of-the-napkin calculations, I thought we were at about 86.6 percent that is federal transfer money. Our population grows, more money comes, and that is something.

In the same breath, the Premier said that a budget is about priorities and putting money where you think the priorities are.

It is fascinating to me that we are still talking about the Dempster fibre optic line. I can't wait until it is actually completed and not included anymore. It was being thrown around here in 2014, but it's still in the budget. One noticeable absence in this budget compared to recent ones from the Liberal Party is that there is no mention of midwifery — no mention of midwifery. Its absence is notable, because when regulations — you know, as of April 15, 2021, we no longer had access to a midwife in the territory because regulations were going to come into place. We are just over a month away from the anniversary of a year since women and families don't have access to a midwife. Maybe that's why it wasn't included in this Budget Address as being successful.

We look at things like the government just declaring a substance use emergency. We see \$400,000 for mental health supports for schools — \$400,000. How does that get distributed through schools? How many bodies is that? There is a reason why today I put in a motion about clinical counsellors in schools. We need people with the professional background and understanding of how to deal with what is happening right now and the struggles people are going through. A while back, the

government declared a substance use crisis. We waited — Yukoners waited to see what that meant.

I made a comparison last week that wasn't well-received by the government. I made a comparison that, last summer, we had a flooding emergency and it was declared an emergency. We didn't hold a summit about it. We didn't have professionals come in and tell us that there was flooding happening, so here are some things we could do. We didn't wait. We acted on it right away. The minister told me that we were sparking conversation. I can say that in Mayo they are wanting more than conversations; they want support. I can tell you that in Faro they don't want any more conversations; they are looking for that support.

When we talk about budgets and we talk about them being priorities, I have to say that there was a point when I was sitting here on Thursday like everyone else, trying to follow along, and I was just waiting for the big excitement — “This is the vision”. Between 2016 and 2021, I told the government: “Stop blaming it on the past. Stop talking about the Yukon Party. You had one year of that and now you have to take responsibility. The path forward is yours. You get to choose. You get to choose how we go forward.”

I listen to my colleague and I can listen to his points and I think — well, you can talk about affordability and then disagree with increasing minimum wage and that's why we're different. There are a lot of differences between the NDP and the Yukon Party, which I don't think is a surprise.

When I look at this budget, I see the differences between the NDP and the Liberals. There is a reason why we are not a coalition government. There is a reason why I'm on this side of the room and the Liberals are on that side of the room so I can say what I think. I will vote in support of the budget because I made that commitment. I made that commitment for protection on rent increases. I made that commitment for the work on the successor resource legislation for an increase of minimum wage and for the research that was done for paid sick leave. You know, it's interesting. I can listen to my colleague from the Yukon Party talk about how this is what businesses are saying. I remember when they didn't want the holiday or vacation pay. I remember when — I can read; I don't remember; I wasn't old enough or around at that point — but we can go back to universal health care in Canada and we can see when doctors said that it was going to — people weren't going to be doctors because of it. But you adapt and you find ways to work it in and then it becomes part of the fabric of who you are.

If anything, we should have learned in the last two years how people deserve to be able to be sick. We should have learned that — I hope we've learned — that it's more important for an employee to recover from an illness than it is for them to go and make everyone around them unwell. That's what that report came out in saying. It said that paid sick days are important; it's the compassionate and empathetic way to deal with the people around you.

It's interesting because I was an employer. Mr. Speaker, you might not know this, but I owned a coffee shop for three years. I owned a coffee shop for three years, and when people were sick, we covered for each other. I covered a lot of shifts

when I needed to. But it was more important to me that my staff be able to work as opposed to the entire staff going off. I have to say, one time I went away — I wanted to do a snowbird trip for five days and the flu went around my shop, and let me tell you, the entire staff went down. That was a good example of why people needed to take the time off. It would have been better for us to just shut it down for that time. Honestly, it would have been better.

So, when I look at this budget and I think about what some of the goals are and some of the efforts, it's one of those things — it's great to know that the Whistle Bend school is going to start. Then I look at things like Takhini Elementary. This is an incredible school that does trauma-informed education. They said things like: “It would be really great if we could just like get a coat of paint on the inside, if we could just freshen it up”.

I think about the “new new” F.H. Collins, which is unfortunate, because really, the Liberal government inherited that from the Yukon Party government. I call it the “new new F.H. Collins” because there was the first promise, then that one was put aside, and then the new school came out. What we see next to it is this beautiful example of what education can look like, built under the Liberal government, so I am hopeful for the Whistle Bend school. I hope it's that leading and that forward thinking.

Then I think about places around the territory. I think about the Ross River School and the community. It goes a long time back — Tutlini. That was not where the community was. The community was across the river on a sunny corner. It got moved when everyone was out hunting. It was horrible story; it is a horrible story. The community want to move up the hill toward the sun and the first place they want to start with is the school. They want a new school in the sun. Imagine that. Imagine that change from the shadows into the sun.

When we look at education and we look around the territory, we know that there are needs. There are absolutely needs. We have Grey Mountain Primary, which is a school that has been in a temporary building for 50 years. I don't know at what point in time it stops being temporary, but it is not connected. It is not like a standard school because it was supposed to be temporary when it started.

I am relieved to see that there is money for housing for justice-involved women. In my first Budget Address ever in 2011, I had just come out of Corrections. I worked there for two years with women. The first thing I said is that we really need to make sure that there is a place for women to go when they leave the correctional facility. That's good to know. It has been 11 years, but sometimes I think we should have moved faster. I have questions about what that empty building is doing on the correctional property up there. It is the building that I worked in. It is the one with the funny roof. It had Takhini Haven as a group home for a number of years and then it stopped. It has been empty ever since. We are in the middle of a housing crisis and we have a five-bedroom building that has been empty for I think almost two years now. Which department owns that now? Is it Justice? Is it Health and Social Services? Is it under Property Management? Who knows? We will try to figure that out.

When we talk about this, a lot of things you will hear in our questions — we have written a lot of letters — I think about how different services are rendered in different communities. I will leave it to my colleague to talk more about it, but I think about the struggles in a community with water delivery in the Yukon. In Old Crow, I think about how that community deserves more certainty around their water — more certainty than they have — and it's not through any fault of the community. They work really hard and do the best they can, but they are understaffed and under-resourced. We talk about it over and over and over again, and it is still the same people doing all the work.

We can talk about the climate emergency that is declared in 2019. We can talk about how that could have been a whole new path forward. When I think about active transportation, I have to say that I am embarrassed to say that, after 10 years of working in this building, I finally started riding my actual bike to work and I think I didn't before because I was intimidated by Two Mile Hill. The good news is that it only takes me six more minutes to get up the hill than it does for me to get to work, so it is not a big deal, but I think about active transportation and I think about my other colleague sending letters to the Minister of Highways and Public Works, saying: "Hey, you know when it snows and you plow the highway and you fill up the separated paved path on the other side, it is really hard to pass." The response was kind of lacklustre and it said: "Well, we have to plow." No one disagrees, but if you are committed to climate action and you are committed to active transportation, then certainly we can work with the City of Whitehorse to figure that out.

In that same vein, I think about how — if anyone in this room has ever experienced this — trying to go on a bicycle, for example, across the Alaska Highway. There are times that there are berms higher than my waist that you have to go up and over. So, you have to go up a berm to get down to the highway surface and you cross the highway and then you have to go up a berm to get to the paved path on the other side. When you hear that folks are riding their bike from up there, then that is a commitment when they have to cross the Alaska Highway — or it is a commitment when they go down that path on the side of the highway when it has just been plowed because it is almost impassable.

Then I think about things like — it was brought to our attention that active transportation isn't just an environmental thing. It is a poverty thing and an addictions thing, because sometimes people can't afford to drive and sometimes people aren't able to drive. So, how do we make sure that it is inclusive of them?

Then I think about things like — you know, we did this amazing thing. We said hormone replacement therapy would be covered under Yukon Health for trans folks and then it took months and months and months and months for the Yukon government to let pharmacies and doctors know that. So, that entire time, doctors and pharmacies didn't mean to be a barrier to people, but they were a barrier because they were trying to follow the rules because no one had told them they had changed. They wonder how that was possible. How is it

possible that such an important change was made but we didn't communicate it outward? I think that, again, is another reflection of the last two years.

I mean, I'm going to say it in a different way than my colleague, but the one takeaway — no, there are lots of "one takeaways". Another takeaway from the last two years has been the value and the importance of communication in making sure it's clear and understandable. I have to say that this is reflected in all things. How do we make sure that we're saying what we mean and mean what we say and it's easy to understand?

Sometimes, going through — even just going through the budget document and trying to figure out what this means, what this looks like, what the future is becomes challenging.

In 2016, I told this government that this was their opportunity to lay out their vision for the future. It is, it was, it still is, and I look at this budget and I think — okay, well, these are the things that are missing and there's more. There are more things that are missing, and we'll talk about it in a department-by-department way. But when we look at a budget, we need to ask ourselves: How is this going to affect or benefit the people around us? How does this make things better? So, it's not about big, flashy line items; it's about the small things. It's about getting a social worker in a community or it's about having access to a mental health worker. It's about making sure that the partnerships that have been built continue to be expanded so there is more access to housing, and it's about making sure that we direct ATCO to a rate review, because there are actions that we can take.

When we talk about our own decisions and how they affect those around us, there are lots of questions about how we go forward. There are great things in the budget; there are. There are good things in the budget, but then there are the things that leave me wanting. Again, the reason why we're not a coalition government is because I can say these things. It's interesting. The take from the member for the Yukon Party is — he's new to the opposition, but typically, you just vote against. That's what you do in the opposition; you vote against the budget as a whole. There might be things you like in them, but you vote against it as a whole. The difference, of course, since last spring is that I now vote in favour of budgets. I have to remind myself occasionally because I don't want to fall back into old patterns and it's a bit stressful. There are things within the budget that we like, but there are things in the budget that leave me looking for more.

So, I look forward to hearing from my colleagues. I want to know the solutions to the problems that exist, because I think they do exist. I'm convinced that, in this Chamber, we have lots of people who care deeply and lots of people who can direct things in a different way. So, with that, Speaker, I will take my leave.

**Mr. Istchenko:** I would like to take this opportunity again to stand in the House and thank my family for all their support — and my friends and the constituents of the great riding of Kluane for their support.

It has been a busy winter. I have heard from many constituents across Kluane on a number of issues. Many of

those concerns I look forward to raising in the Legislature during this Sitting. As we move through 2022, I look forward to connecting with you, continuing to raise issues, and hopefully finding solutions to your concerns — and hopefully in person now that the restrictions are being lifted and we are heading back to some measure of normal.

I continue to hear from Yukoners about their concerns around the way the government has made decisions and imposed restrictions. Many feel that their concerns have not been heard by this government. Others feel that the government is not paying enough attention to areas that matter: affordability, housing, the shortage of teachers, highway maintenance, and the shortage of doctors.

The Official Opposition has continued to press the government on their plan to recruit more family doctors to the territory. We have continued to urge the government to work with the Yukon Medical Association to improve recruitment and make it more attractive for doctors to move to the Yukon. In addition, we have requested that the government reinstate the dedicated physician recruitment website that they cancelled several years ago. Family doctors do remain in short supply, and the Yukon government has failed to do enough to encourage doctors to move to the Yukon. We have seen the effects of this doctor shortage in Kluane. We still do not have a resident family doctor in the area, and I will continue to advocate for permanent physician services for our riding.

Mr. Speaker, as you may be aware, the Yukon Party Official Opposition has been advocating for a number of years — many years — to the territorial, federal, and US governments to have funding reinstated to continue work on the Shakwak portion of the Alaska Highway, which runs from the Alaska Highway border at Beaver Creek to Haines Junction and from Haines Junction to Haines, Alaska. Last November, in 2021, the government passed the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, which authorizes funding for the reconstruction of the Shakwak portion of the highway — the Yukon portion. The Yukon government really needs to get working with their counterparts in Canada and the Alaska government to understand what steps need to be taken in order to get an agreement with the US and secure funding. It is noticeable in the road conditions on the north Alaska Highway. Since the 2016 election, there have been zero capital dollars invested, and you can sure see that.

Northwestel's three-year community project will see Internet upgrades to communities across the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. I am very, very happy and supportive of Northwestel for all the work that they are doing. I look forward to what this will mean for the residents across the riding and I look forward to this work commencing, coming up here in the spring. I have inquired, on behalf of residents of the Pine Lake agriculture subdivision and in Mendenhall, and it looks like Pine Lake is included in the scope of the project, and Northwestel has submitted a change request that Mendenhall be included. I am thankful for the relationship that I have with Northwestel.

I was pleased to take part recently, finally, in a Zoom meeting on the new Kluane Lake school, for which planning

was initiated back in 2015-16 by the previous government. We have seen budget dollars every year for it but not much done. I am disappointed that the project will not be completed until 2026. I am sure that many residents are also. I will continue to advocate for this timeline to be moved up and for construction to begin as soon as possible.

As many of you are also aware, the government is currently in the process of closing the Silver City landfill among a number of others across the territory. I will continue to push the government on behalf of the residents to create a regional agreement that works for the residents of this area to ensure that they are not left without access to solid-waste services.

I wrote to the Minister of Community Services in February to follow up on a review of the Yukon fire marshal's fire suppression and rescue resources distribution, and I am going to continue to advocate on behalf of constituents to ensure that the government moves forward with recommendations that emphasize meaningful consultations. I think that goes back to our regional landfills too. You can't go to a community and tell them what you're doing; you have to go to the community, Mr. Speaker, and you have to listen. You have to listen to those people and alleviate the ongoing issues.

So, the Yukon has experienced above-average snowfalls across the territory this winter and an increase in dangerous driving conditions between the communities. My colleagues and I have heard numerous concerns from constituents about the length of time between snow clearing on many highways and suggestions that maintenance was delayed due to the staffing shortages that were brought on by the vaccination mandate put in place by the government. I understand that the operational staff had a heavy workload and I would like to thank them for all the work that they do.

Yukoners have seen a sharp increase in prices across the territory. I have asked the question as fuel prices continue to rise. Prices at the pump and for home-heating fuel are at an all-time high, as well as the cost for electricity and for firewood. I am sure that we will have much more to say, whether it be in Question Period or when it comes to debate with the individual ministers.

The government doesn't seem to have any plans in place to deal with these increases, and there is no end in sight. I don't see anything in the budget. That's why I asked that question in Question Period today.

I don't believe that the Liberal government really understands how devastating the pandemic has been on our businesses in the Kluane riding, especially those in the tourism industry. It's going to take a few years for many of these businesses to rebound. I really want to recognize those businesses throughout the riding that have gone to great lengths to deliver these services to residents and travellers. I have had conversations throughout the winter about some of the programs. The programs are appreciated, but the late delivery on a lot of the programs is a huge issue with them. The increased costs — I asked in Question Period today — some of the businesses up and down the highway — if the tourism industry doesn't rebound, they are looking at maybe just shutting down for the winter. If we don't have a gas station in

a community, that's horrible. It has to be affordable for them to stay open.

I will switch gears a little bit to land development and land prices. That has turned out to be a huge issue here in the last little while. We have spoken about it and we have heard about it and we have read it in the Premier's budget. Even his budget says that everything costs too much. Lot prices have skyrocketed. I have written the minister. We have lots away from the community, seven- to 10-acre lots that were selling for \$35,000. Actually, I think one sold for \$35,000 this year. Right after that, the other seven applicants got a letter saying to accept \$130,000 to \$180,000 for these lots or you can appeal it. How did they go up that much with no explanation? That's not affordable for anyone. You get this lot, but you still have to figure out where you are going to get your water from and where you are going to get your sewer from. You have to hire someone to build a road in there. You have to connect to the grid. It's not affordable for anyone.

There is a shortage of lots — we have heard this across the Yukon, but in my riding too, there's a shortage of subdivisions. Our municipality and our First Nation governments are working hard to see this growth and availability through our official community plans and moving forward.

I could go on and on about the budget. I am sure we will have plenty of opportunity. Some of the issues are in my critic role in Environment, whether it be with rate-change proposals, whether it be with the cost of camping fees going up. People can barely afford the gas to go camping and then their fees are going up, and seniors are getting picked on too. They're not happy.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I did take the time to read through the Premier's budget in detail over the weekend, and I was showing it to a few of my constituents. One of my constituents said, "I thought they did that. I thought they did that." And I'm like, "No, it's just a reannouncement of another reannouncement." There's not much vision in this for the future of the Yukon. There's a lot of money being promised, but the question is: Will anything get done?

There are always good things in budgets — absolutely. The Leader of the Third Party said that. I won't be supporting this budget, but there are some good things in there.

I would just like to end with this: The Yukon is becoming a place where families cannot really afford to live. In this budget, I don't see any plans to address affordability. That's a major disappointment for those in my riding and across the territory.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak here today, Mr. Speaker, as I always do. I look forward to the rest of the Sitting when we can get into the budget more in detail and really address some of the concerns brought forward by Yukoners. So, I will not be supporting this budget, like I said earlier.

**Ms. Blake:** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to stand up to speak about the 2022-23 budget. As critic for Health and Social Services for the Yukon NDP, I will be speaking to this department's budget today.

Just recently, I spent my time in my riding of Old Crow. While I was there, I heard many stories about the needs of our citizens, from programming for youth to ongoing independent living supports for elders and seniors to affording the rising cost of living in a small, isolated community. There is no shortage of gaps in the Yukon government's services. Since I came into this role, I have heard countless experiences each day about Yukoners who are not getting the services they need. They have expressed their concerns directly to me and to this government, but their concerns and experiences are not reflected in this budget. As we come out of the pandemic, Yukoners' needs have grown — in support for their mental health, in accessing treatment on the land and restoring family relationships, and in maintaining their general health.

This budget does not show clear goals that would help Yukoners. Our young people in the territory are at an even greater risk of facing complex struggles with overcoming the adverse challenges that are unique to youth in the territory. It is something that many of us in this Chamber may struggle to understand.

At a time when the Yukon is facing multiple emergencies, this government is cutting funding in essential areas of health and is not making any serious investments in the future of health care in the territory.

The first step of addressing crises like the substance use emergency is making sure people don't fall through the cracks of the health care system. There are so many ways that this government could have reached and supported Yukoners who use substances, but they are instead choosing to ignore the problem.

There are still thousands of Yukoners who do not have a family doctor. The territory's only public walk-in clinic closed last year, which means that the only place many Yukoners can get health care is at the Whitehorse General Hospital emergency department. This has a huge cost to hospital workers, to the hospital, and most of all to the people who have to wait for hours at the ER just for basic care. There is no clear strategy or new money in this budget to increase access to family doctors, nurse practitioners, or other health care practitioners.

We all know that equitable access to primary care physicians is the social determinant of health for Yukoners, especially for our new babies and the aging population. The *Putting People First* report said that primary care should follow Yukoners from birth until death, but this government is telling Yukoners they should give up on ever getting primary care.

There is no money devoted to the ongoing lack of midwifery in the territory. Right now, Yukoners who give birth are not able to access the services of midwives in the Yukon and there is no plan in place in this budget to close that gap. Yukoners want to give birth in the territory, close to their family and support systems. Expectant parents and matriarchs in our communities can only dream of their babies' first cry at birth to be within our traditional territories. This will not be possible for expecting parents who want a home delivery until midwifery becomes prioritized in the Yukon.

The aging population is also growing in the Yukon. This budget shows no plan to support our seniors and elders. Home care is losing almost \$850,000 and continuing care is losing a total of \$1.9 million compared to the 2021-22 budget. How will these cuts support aging in place, safe long-term care homes, and other elder supports?

After two years of isolation, high risk to COVID, and completely full long-term care homes, why is this government taking money away from seniors and elder care? If you live in the communities, support for seniors becomes even more limited, which is something we have been hearing directly from Yukon seniors and elders. Our seniors and elders deserve high-quality care that empowers them to live independently and in their traditional territory, should they choose to.

A major theme of this budget is the Yukon's communities losing out on health care. Community nursing is losing \$757,000 compared to last year's forecast. Community health services is losing \$200,000 compared to last year. These massive cuts will only make difficult situations in communities worse.

We know that nurses are the first responders to so many kinds of health issues in Yukon communities. They work long hours and often have very little support. Burnout is at an all-time high, after two years of the pandemic, especially for nurses in the communities. On top of more doctors, RNs, LPNs, nurse practitioners, and other health care workers are needed now more than ever at community health centres, but this year, they are going to lose out.

How will this government fill vacant positions if it is cutting funds and making a tough job even harder for front-line health workers? On top of this, many Yukoners who live in the communities continue to have to take trips down to Whitehorse for all extended health care. From optometry to dentistry to physiotherapy, folks who do not live in Whitehorse are forced to cram medical appointments, grocery shopping, and sometimes vet appointments all into one or two days of travel each month.

I represent the only fly-in community in the territory. Access to services is even more limited, as citizens and residents have to access services in Whitehorse. All forms of travel from Old Crow require planned coordination of securing house sitters, finding childcare, securing an escort to travel when required, filing leave from work, pet sitting, and securing extra funds for travel and for more. That's just the preparation. Once citizens are in Whitehorse, they have to rush from appointment to appointment, attend dental appointments with no vision from having their pupils dilated just an hour before, grocery shop while half their face is numb, and rushing to fill all the prescriptions they need before returning home.

There was a real opportunity for this government to invest in sending optometrists, dentists, physiotherapists, and more to the communities for regular checkups. Instead, the government is keeping important health care centralized in Whitehorse and is taking \$1 million away from medical travel subsidies.

In drafting this budget, the government had so many wonderful examples to look to for inspiration and ideas that work. Many Yukon First Nations have taken health care into

their own hands to fill the gap and health care services that the Yukon government won't address. For example, after years of the Yukon government stalling, the Kwanlin Dün First Nation responded to the addictions crisis and is now creating their own managed alcohol program. This government has known about the need for an alcohol treatment program for many years. So many Yukoners who have accessed the limited space and low support at the Sarah Steele Building have told this government directly what needs to change. This need will only continue to grow if the government does not create a managed alcohol program. Instead of applying for funding for programs like this, the budget shows that the Yukon is going to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars for substance use and addictions programming from the federal government. Why didn't this government apply for this important funding, especially during a substance use emergency?

This government has told Yukoners that they have devoted a big chunk of money toward the substance use emergency, but how much of that money is new? Why did it take so many years and such a crisis to act? By itself, the amount of money for this emergency looks great, but in practice and in the budget, it is business as usual. With cuts across important health care services and an increase in mental wellness and substance use that is less than even \$1 million, how does this government expect to truly help Yukoners? We are facing a real emergency. Lives are being lost and this government is not doing enough. The only major budget changes we are seeing are cuts in vital health care services and a few small increases here and there. It is unclear what this promised money will include. Given that nothing has really changed since the government declared the emergency, how is this budget any different from previous years?

Another responsibility that this government continues to ignore is the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. The shelter is nowhere in this budget. Workers at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter are burned out and overworked. Shelter clients often talk about not feeling safe and not feeling supported. Many of them are struggling with complex grief from substance use and mental health concerns, but the government is making no major investments to support vulnerable Yukoners who access the shelter. This government has to accept that the shelter is their responsibility. By avoiding investing in this space and these critical services, Yukoners who need the most help will continue to struggle without support.

I continue to hear from Yukoners throughout the territory about the lack of support that they feel when they reach out for help. It is time that this government listens and truly hears what Yukoners are asking for.

I want to close by reminding the members opposite that health care should not be political. It is unfortunate that the government will not make the important decisions and investments to keep Yukoners healthy until they face so much political pressure that they have no choice but to respond. This was the case with dental care. It was the case with the supervised consumption site. It was, and still is, the case with safe supply. It is the case with the drug poisoning crisis and it



is the case with mental health. This government has not responded to Yukoners' needs for right now and for the future.

We are at a pivotal point in time where we can implement change that enhances the quality of life for all Yukoners by improving access to services and supports and shaping service delivery to meet people where they are at. Yukoners want to feel heard, they want to feel listened to, and they want to feel supported, no matter where they live in the Yukon.

When we work to meet the immediate and long-term needs of the people and uphold commitments, great change happens.

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

## INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**Speaker:** Member for Pelly-Nisutlin.

**Mr. Hassard:** This is outside of the normal timeline for introducing visitors and guests in the Legislature. I will ask all members to join me in welcoming someone who certainly wasn't a stranger to this Assembly — Elaine Taylor. With her today is her son, Will. I would like to ask everyone to thank them.

*Applause*

## Speaker's statement

**Speaker:** For future points of order, I would ask that members please just pass me a note and then I will make an announcement.

We'll continue proceeding with the Minister of Community Services.

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Today I rise to talk about our government's 2022-23 budget. Mr. Speaker, remarks in this Legislature do not roll off the tongue in a vacuum. They are shaped by our environment, by our joys, our triumphs, and what ails us. It's not surprising that these remarks have undergone dramatic changes since the first draft 10 days or so ago. I am, of course, incredibly moved by the stoicism and selflessness of my constituents over the last couple of years. They have sacrificed so much for their friends and neighbours and their families and, at considerable effort, allowed the Yukon to weather the pandemic better than most places in the country. I thank them for that from the bottom of my heart. I am forever grateful for their support.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the historic times we seem to be living through are not done with us yet. If you thought we would become inured to change over the last couple of years, think again. Yes, our way of life was uprooted in the face of the COVID-19 virus in early 2020. Happily, we are transitioning into a new era where most of us can resume our social life, work, and travels with good sense and caution instead of inconvenience, trepidation, and, for many, fear. I believe that confidence and our resumption of a social society will grow as we move into the summer. Remarkably, the whole world-altering affair can now be summarized in very few words. COVID-19 snuck up on societies in the way that global disease does and started killing people exponentially in a frightening way that forced us to fundamentally change our way of life. Scientists set about decoding and understanding this new threat.

Society developed countermeasures and safety processes. Most of us found the discipline to wear masks and follow the century-old practice of quarantine or keeping our distance with an eye toward protecting those of us most vulnerable to the disease and its effects.

We waited for the arrival of wondrous new medicine, which, thanks to science, technology, and the exhaustive efforts of medical professionals and scientists, showed up in record time.

As survivors, we are now moving into a new era. As joyful as this is, it is also bittersweet. Yesterday, Johns Hopkins University announced that the global death toll from COVID-19 has now eclipsed six million people. It behooves us to remember those who are not here sharing this moment with us.

As spring races toward us and communities around the western world shift to a resumption of social society, relief is palpable — or it was. As I have said many times during the pandemic, the only certainty these days is uncertainty. Vladimir Putin's sick, unprovoked, illegal, and world-altering invasion of Ukraine on February 24 sent us careening down a new path of anger, pain, fear, and loathing. My thoughts are with the people of Ukraine and its courageous president as war, once again, kindles in Europe.

I visited Odessa and Yalta in 1999, and I am heartsick at the possibility of the destruction of those remarkable cities that were so full of history, but, even more so, I am thinking of the residents I met there who were so full of optimism, hope, and energy in the early days of their nation's independence. Their lives have been turned upside-down by an unconscionable act of aggression that cannot be tolerated.

Surprisingly, in the face of a growing list of war crimes in the Ukraine, I find myself reflecting on some of the good that has come from the pandemic. We have seen the face of real tyranny. I believe that, in the face of that and also having come through the pandemic, we have all become more resilient, more appreciative of our family, our friends, our neighbours, and the free society that we have forged together.

I believe we are more willing to stand up for our collective values. That's going to be important in the coming weeks and months.

Navigating a pandemic, a battered supply chain, the fallout from war in Europe, and resulting unprecedented economic measures during a time of unprecedented territorial growth and infrastructure investment isn't going to be easy. It will require firm, consistent, and decisive leadership. Our government's mettle has been tested over the last couple of years. Through it all, we have learned some things, and that hard-won experience lies at the foundation of this budget.

The document that we're discussing this afternoon is about strengthening Yukon society. It is about supporting and widening our recovery as we shuck off the vestiges of this latest pandemic surge. It is about lessening our dependence on carbon fuels in the face of worsening global climate change.

Now, that's interesting, Mr. Speaker, because, just recently, we heard from the Leader of the Official Opposition. He started talking about actually subsidizing fuel prices,

echoing the sentiment of Alberta, which they hold in high esteem. I want to know: Is the Leader of the Official Opposition withdrawing his support for carbon pricing, a support he stated in the last election? I think it's an important question. Does he support carbon pricing or not?

We know that he wants to tie the territory to diesel through a new power plant for the next 30 years or more, at untold millions of dollars, and inhibit our ability to move to a green economy. So, we see again the Leader of the Official Opposition saying things — he supports the carbon pricing, but he also supports subsidizing gas prices. He can't have it both ways. Leadership requires making tough choices, doing what you say you're going to do. We're not seeing that. I would like to know where the Yukon Party stands on this. Now it's sort of in doubt, and I look forward to that explanation sometime in the future.

So, this budget is about lessening our dependence on carbon fuels in the face of worsening global climate change. It's also about building homes for Yukoners in the face of unprecedented population growth and economic expansion. It's about improving public health services for all Yukoners.

The goal is a brighter, greener, and more equitable future for all. We have avoided the worst economic and health impacts of COVID-19 when compared to other G7 countries. Our economic support is unprecedented in the country. We led the country, in terms of our support for small business, and we heard today that business feels under siege, and we certainly understand that. We have heard the same thing, and we're working very closely with our business community to make sure that we can navigate these waters, because there is lots of change happening.

We have had the most robust supports for small business, for Yukon businesses, throughout the pandemic. We spent tens of millions of dollars making sure that they will survive this unprecedented global crisis. We have provided more money per business than any other place in the country, and we are proud of that. We know how important small business is to this territory. We have also lowered business taxes and kept them low, as the Leader of the Official Opposition noted in his remarks. We have no intention of changing them.

Mr. Speaker, under our leadership, we have seen 12-percent growth in the territory, leading not only the nation but most of the G7 countries. That is because of the strong stewardship of our Finance minister and of the team here on these benches. We have made historic investments in infrastructure that supports small businesses — roads and bridges. We paved the Dawson airport. Not only that, we actually have invested in and expanded the number of registered airports in the territory. In this budget, there is a \$100-million investment in Whitehorse International Airport so that it actually serves the territory's business interests and its people better. That is unprecedented investment in air travel.

In technology and redundant fibre — fibre to the home — we worked very hard to make sure that we had coverage for satellite Internet throughout rural Yukon as well. We are not ignoring any of these things. We are working very, very hard to make sure that we serve Yukoners' interests.

We are also making investments in tourism, which is an industry that has been totally ravaged by the pandemic. I think that, with Condor coming back and seeing Air North flying to Toronto, we are starting to see green shoots in that industry as well. We hope it continues.

We have avoided the worst economic and health impacts of COVID-19 when compared to other territories, provinces, states, and actually G7 countries. As I said, our economic supports during the pandemic were the most generous in the country and were accessed by 500 Yukon businesses and organizations. I know that my colleague, the Minister of Economic Development, will be able to expand on that exponentially. That cutting-edge support, leading the country again — another thing that the territory is leading in — has kept us in the game. In 2020, as noted, we had the strongest GDP growth in the country. We have the lowest unemployment rate. Tourism businesses have been affected around the world, as I noted. Ours have been sheltered and are set to ride the coming recovery. Northern Vision has enough confidence in the future that it is building the first Hyatt hotel in northern Canada.

Condor, as I said, is flying to the Yukon again from Germany, and it is going to do so eventually on a brand new runway that will be much more capable of handling jets and that will actually require less money to maintain over the long run. This isn't a stop-gap measure; this isn't kicking problems back down the street; this is tackling the hard problems that the territory faces and making our territory much more resilient and much less expensive to operate.

Of course, we know that we are not quite out of woods yet, despite the daylight cresting the horizon. Tourism will gradually improve, but it won't be an immediate return to pre-pandemic levels. It will take some time, and we are here to support industry as it makes that transition.

We continue to follow the advice of our health care professionals as we have done throughout the pandemic. I am sure that all members of this House are aware that the conservative Leader of the Opposition puts the opinions and conspiracies of the trucker freedom convoy ahead of the scientific medical advice of our chief medical officer of health and her resolute staff. We have heard it again and again — Question Period last week. His party and supporters have also backed a constitutional challenge to the state of emergency that kept Yukoners safe. That court challenge has cost the territory \$3 million so far, Mr. Speaker — money that could have been put to far better use during this crisis.

In line with the erratic “open, closed, open, closed” divisive approach taken by his fellow conservatives in Alberta, the opposition leader has recently demanded that we unilaterally lift all health protections and simply pretend that the pandemic is over, even as more Yukoners die from the virus. Well, we are not going to do that. We have adopted a very measured, methodical approach to implementing the restrictions, and we are now using a very measured and methodical approach to removing the restrictions that we have had in place. We have adopted a more rational and planned implementation withdrawal of the measures in the territory that have kept Yukoners safe. We are continuing that measured

approach as we move toward lifting all pandemic restrictions in the coming weeks. We will do so according to the advice of those who have spent their careers in health care. Should further difficulties arise, we have shown ourselves ready to take hard, decisive moves to protect Yukoners from the worst effects of the global pandemic, because that is the leadership that we have chosen to provide and we are going to continue to provide that leadership.

That approach has proven effective in protecting Yukoners and their businesses. The Yukon's record growth through the pandemic puts us miles ahead of the rest of the country. Strategic investments within this budget will help keep it that way, as will our partnerships with many Yukon First Nations and our productive relationship with the federal government.

Replacement of the Nisutlin Bay bridge in Teslin comes to mind, for example. It's an enormous project that has been long hoped for. It was delayed many, many years ago because the partnerships, the collaboration — the consultation just wasn't there. Today it's underway. We have worked with the First Nation in the community. We are optimistic that we'll get that project in place.

Overall, our government is building a stronger future for the territory by investing in resilient infrastructure to meet the needs of Yukon communities while moving forward toward our climate change action targets, which are measurable and reportable. We're making the most substantial investments in renewable energy in the Yukon in more than a decade. That's vision, Mr. Speaker — looking ahead to the future of energy. I would be remiss if I did not thank the Government of Canada for its Investing in Canada infrastructure program, which has funded many vital infrastructure and green energy projects.

I would also like to thank Yukon's past MP Larry Bagnell and current MP, Dr. Brendan Hanley, for continuing to lobby the government for such funding as well as for flexibility in its application. It has been absolutely critical in making up for the deficit in infrastructure that we've seen in the territory.

This budget contains funding for more solar projects, which will help smaller communities reduce the amount of diesel that they use for power generation. Our dark winters, of course, will limit solar during that season, but reducing diesel generation for the summer and some of the fall and spring is a worthy goal. Everything we can do to lessen our dependence on fossil fuels is essential for the territory going forward. It helps limit the impacts of inflation from these fossil fuels, which are a roller coaster of prices. I mean, if you just look to two years ago, they were about \$4 a barrel; now they're up to \$130 a barrel, and it's just going to continue to oscillate that way, so we have to protect ourselves from those oscillations and that's what this government is doing. That's the vision, the leadership, that we're providing. It's actually moving the entire Yukon economy away from diesel and making our already predominantly green grid more so. We are in a climate emergency, and every action to reduce fossil fuel helps, Mr. Speaker.

Before moving on, I would like to acknowledge the splendid work of Solvest, a local company at the forefront of

new solar technology and a key player in our fight against man-made climate change.

It is great to see innovators like this take root in our territory, and it's our collective shift toward green fuel sources that is opening up opportunities for these companies in the future. What makes their technology, such as biomass or solar, more economical for people? It's higher prices for fossil fuels brought about by carbon pricing. You can't have one — you can't have the innovation without the other.

Again, we're seeing increases in fossil fuel prices. The oscillation that I talked about this time is a part of the fallout from the war in Europe. The work we're doing to shift away from fossil fuels is essential to protect ourselves from the ravages of inflation. It is part of the elegance of the carbon tax that has finally been endorsed by the Yukon Party, the Conservative Party of Canada, and indeed all federal parties — or at least I had thought it had. Today I have questions; I would like to see answers.

The most important part of our current green energy investments is the Atlin hydro project, which will add enough clean energy to power thousands of homes. We're fully aware that this is not a silver bullet and many other green energy projects are needed, but it's a critical investment and key to the implementation of *Our Clean Future*.

I'm sure that my colleague, the Minister responsible for Yukon Energy Corporation, will delve into more of the green energy generation projects they have coming, but this government is also pushing a green agenda in many other ways, all of which are outlined in *Our Clean Future*, which can be found online.

I encourage everyone to have a look at this document, which is another Yukon initiative. It is an acknowledged leader in the country. Once again, we're seeing the Yukon lead the country in the work we're doing here. It's absolutely extraordinary what this tiny little territory, from reconciliation to green energy, housing, childcare — this territory is leading the nation. It led the nation in terms of this vaccination program, something we should be proud of.

So, I encourage everyone to have a look at this document, which, as I said, is another Yukon initiative that is an acknowledged leader in the country. You will notice a focus on transitioning our internal combustion vehicles to electric vehicles, and, true to form, we're in the process of transitioning Yukon government's fleet as we speak. We have also just put electric charging stations in place along the Klondike Highway to facilitate further private sector adoption of this quickly evolving technology.

Over time, we will add more charging stations to the mix. The goal is electrifying all of our highways throughout the territory and hoping that our neighbours in BC and the NWT will do likewise, thus linking us to the rest of the country.

We also have obtained universal support for the better building program among Yukon municipalities. The low-interest home and commercial property renovation program that has been talked about for years will now come into being shortly after the needed tax amendment passes this House during this Sitting. This program, which is another critical

component of *Our Clean Future*, will make it cheaper for Yukoners to run their homes and commercial buildings and will lessen the pressure on our hydro grid, free up green energy, and actually make Yukoners less susceptible to inflation from high fuel prices.

It offers low-interest loans of up \$50,000 for private residences and \$100,000 for commercial properties. I committed to work through the implementation challenges with municipal governments and have done so over the past few months. Last weekend, the Association of Yukon Communities endorsed our approach. I am very grateful for the work that they did on this with me. The collaboration has been very fruitful, and I really appreciate all of the work that the committee did in coming to an arrangement with us. Our hope is that we will be able to launch that program later in 2022. We were hoping to get it done sooner, but we will get there. I am really happy with the progress we have made.

Some of the effects of climate change that we are witnessing in the Yukon will unfortunately have a negative impact on this budget and others for years to come. There is the problem of melting permafrost playing havoc with our highways and buildings. Last year's unprecedented flooding, and the largest flood mitigation in the territory's history that I launched to deal with it, was expensive. As I have said throughout my years as a minister in this government, man-made climate global warming is real, and it has real costs, and I have the receipts to prove it. These costs are still ticking up as we continue our flood recovery and mitigation efforts with affected communities. We don't yet know the full cost of the recovery and mitigation effort, but we do know that the 2022-23 budget will be affected.

There is also the very real possibility that we will see some flooding again this year. While initial estimates suggest that it will not reach last year's level, we stand prepared to respond to protect Yukoners and property —

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

### Speaker's statement

**Speaker:** Order, please.

The member is making a statement. Please be respectful and mindful when a member is speaking and has the floor. Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I was saying, there is also the very real possibility that we will see some flooding again this year. While initial estimates suggest it will not reach last year's levels, that could change, of course, and we stand prepared to respond to protect Yukoners and property, much as we did last year so successfully.

I will also note that the Government of Yukon is preparing a request for financial assistance from Canada's disaster financial assistance arrangement, which we hope will offset some of the costs of responding to this natural disaster.

We also have the threat of wildfires, which we have seen ravage the Pacific Northwest over the last few years, exacerbated by changes wrought by man-made global

warming. Devastating fires have, so far, bypassed the Yukon, but we need only look slightly south of the border to Telegraph Creek, in 2018, for a reminder of what can happen. As the global temperature ticks upward, so do the odds of having a destructive fire. Luckily, the incredibly capable team of civil servants at the Protective Services branch are ready to deploy quickly to any flood or fire disaster we face.

We also have a freshly signed agreement with Yukon First Nations Wildfire that adds to our capacity to respond to natural disasters. This new agreement with all 14 Yukon First Nations — a first for the territory — provides certainty for both the Yukon government and Yukon First Nations Wildfire for guaranteed work, unit crew availability, structure around the services provided, and commitments for training. I am sure that all elected members of this House would agree that we owe the folks in Protective Services, as well as Yukon First Nations Wildfire, a debt of gratitude for their work.

I was especially concerned by the floods last year, because we are in the grips of a housing crisis. The territory can't afford to lose any housing to natural disasters. Fortunately, our quick action and the incredible support received from the Canadian Armed Forces and other jurisdictions, combined with the stupendous efforts of local volunteers, prevented catastrophe. We didn't lose a single home.

I just met with Brigadier-General Godbout last week. We were discussing the situation this year. The communication lines are open, so we are ready to have those conversations, if and when we need them.

When it comes to housing, we committed to building more lots for future housing. Since 2016, we have averaged about 100 lots a year. Last year, our residential construction hit \$267 million, shattering the previous record, set in 2020, of \$200 million. That's a lot, but with our economy growing at record levels and our population growth pegged at 12.1 percent, we must do even better. In the coming five years, we are on track to build an average of 150 lots every year. Over that time, we will spend \$255 million on housing development.

We are about to put 77 lots out to market in the next couple of weeks. This release of lots includes 38 single-family and 32 townhouse lots in Whistle Bend. It also includes four single-family infill lots in Logan subdivision and three residential lots in Mayo. Releasing these lots will allow the new owners to advance work on properties in the 2022 building season. When complete, Whistle Bend will be home to up to 10,000 people. In the coming year, we will build 97 lots in Whistle Bend, and we are proceeding with lots in rural Yukon as well. In total, we are spending more than \$30 million on lot development in the Yukon this year. About \$27 million will be spent by the Yukon government, split evenly between Whitehorse and rural communities. We are also supporting development of the Kwanlin Dün expansion in Copper Ridge with more than \$11 million.

We are moving ahead with Yukon's bid to host the 2027 Canada Winter Games, along with our partner, the City of Whitehorse. These games will provide an opportunity to further add to our housing development and to expand our recreational

facilities to meet the increased demand that we are seeing across the board.

A committee has been struck, chaired by former Yukon Premier Piers McDonald, and is currently exploring the housing and venue needs for the games. They are doing a remarkable job, and I really want to thank Piers and his team for all the work that they have done on this so far.

There will be costs required for the bid development of the 2022-23 budget, but the amount is still being worked on and refined. It is up to the Bid Committee to develop and propose a budget. We are looking to dramatically improve the city's recreational facilities through this event, setting the territory up to be even better equipped for active living than it is now. This is going to be an exciting event for the Yukon, and the legacy of the facilities and housing that it brings to the territory will be felt for decades to come. Having the eyes of Canada on Yukon and thousands of people to shop at our local businesses and to eat at our restaurants is an opportunity for our growing territory.

Over the last five years, we have earned a reputation as a national leader in reconciliation, education, green energy, land use planning, and technological innovation. The games will provide the draw that will let us showcase all of the incredible things that we are doing to the rest of the country.

We are advancing our waste management modernization plan for our communities, which includes the user-pay model and supervised, controlled waste management facilities throughout the territory. Once regional landfill facilities are in place, we will continue to work with residents within the affected catchment area to make the transition to find ways to support this change.

Waste-generation rates in Canada and the Yukon are among the highest in the world. Waste-generation rates have climbed to roughly 900 kilograms for every person in the Yukon — 900 kilograms per person. As well, methane from landfills is a potent greenhouse gas that can be reduced by separating and composting organics properly. For example, according to its latest emission inventory, the City of Whitehorse landfill emissions are estimated to be greater than all of the city's corporate fossil fuel emissions combined. So, modernizing and improving the way we do our landfills is absolutely critical for the territory. We're going to close the loopholes so that people can't just go dumping their garbage in landfills without any supervision, and that's critical for the whole plan to work. So, despite calls from the opposition for government to back off and allow this environmental damage to continue, Yukoners can rest assured that we have no intention of doing so.

We're going to continue to provide the leadership that we have had over the last five years, and we're going to continue to do it in the future. We do what we say we're going to do. We do that because we owe it to ourselves and to our children to make the tough but necessary decisions for the benefit of the territory and its citizens.

So, I'm going to turn now quickly to the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board to highlight its work. A safe and healthy workplace is vital to a healthy society in general, and the recent rewriting of the workers' compensation

legislation during the Fall Sitting will go a long way toward strengthening protections for our working population. New legislation ranks among the most progressive workplace health and compensation legislation in the country — again, another example of the territory leading the country. It not only clarifies the roles of business and labour in workplace safety, but it also corrects some historic inconsistencies between compensation and occupational health and safety roles of the board and, by doing so, makes things clearer for workers and business, reducing some of the administrative burden and also improving services to injured workers.

I want to thank the board president and civil servants for developing this new legislation and for the work they do, every day, to ensure that Yukoners are safe on the job and that they're safely protected.

Before closing, I want to briefly acknowledge what many have referred to as the "shadow pandemic". The substance use health emergency has claimed far too many lives, and it is not something we can afford to shy away from. We need to work together to address substance use and make our communities healthy and safer. Our government has taken the most progressive steps toward substance use harm reduction in the history of the Yukon.

We are increasing the hours that Emergency Medical Services serves at Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. That initiative has increased responsiveness to those in need and reduced call volume from the bases, so improving the service in the face of the substance use health emergency made total sense.

We are also training and deploying Emergency Medical Services staff to check individuals' drugs where they are using to determine if they are laced with fentanyl and other dangerous additives. Staff will not seize the drugs. This isn't enforcement; this is really just a handout, help to make sure that people are using safely and that they know what they're getting into. This service will better inform addicts about what is in the drugs that they are using and try to encourage them to use them in the company of people who can help them if they overdose — to make good choices in the face of their addictions. This new service layers on our safe supply efforts, our safe injection site, and our recovery and mental health programs that are expanding to deal with this emergency. These programs were listed in *Putting People First* when we launched it in 2018. The former Health and Social Services minister worked very, very hard to get a safe injection site in place and actually had the place rented long before the last election. We are happy to be providing that service to Yukoners. It is part of many that we are doing to make sure that we change — to lead. Once again, we are leading the country in this regard, and we are continuing to provide services that keep Yukoners safe, which is a position that we have taken from the very beginning of the pandemic.

Our work will not stop there. We all can and must do more. I have every confidence in my colleague's — Minister McPhee's — expanding efforts to address this tragic situation we find ourselves in. With that, I will take my seat and thank everybody for their indulgence this afternoon.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** It is an absolute honour today to have an opportunity to address the Assembly. Before I delve into some of the key points addressing this year's 2022-23 budget, I would like to just reflect on a couple of current events that are happening and to share that with the Legislative Assembly.

First, I think it would be appropriate to thank the departments that I have responsibility for. We have asked a lot of the Department of Economic Development, the Department of Tourism and Culture, the Yukon Housing Corporation, as well as the Yukon Liquor Corporation — which has responsibilities as well for cannabis — and the Yukon Lottery Corporation — and just really thinking about the tremendous work that they've done preparing for this budget — but as a part of a team, how we've tried to work tirelessly to support Yukoners and Yukon businesses.

As well, as my colleague just touched on, I think it is important to recognize the current situation in Ukraine but moreover the impact on the Ukrainian diaspora here and what they're going through. I will just leave the Assembly with a little tale from our story from Friday night. We were at the Yukon Forum on Friday, and then I came into Whitehorse with the Deputy Minister of Economic Development, and there was a meeting that was called together with the Ukrainian community as well as a number of NGOs, including Yukon Cares and I'AFY. The idea was to give an update to the community concerning supports that we were working to put in place and to give an update on the current information that we were receiving from the Government of Canada concerning processes for refugees. What occurred, and was not planned, was that Chief Smith from the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, Chief Doris Bill from Kwanlin Dün First Nation, renowned Elder Judy Gingell, as well as Grand Chief Peter Johnston stopped into that meeting. In a very moving display of support, Chief Smith said a prayer and then made a commitment from Champagne and Aishihik First Nations that they would be giving \$5,000 to the Red Cross in support of humanitarian efforts.

Then Chief Doris Bill reflected on the long history between the Ukrainian people and the First Nation people — not just here in the Yukon but across Canada — and also reflected on what many would call the “granny hanky” and how that came to be, and it was something that came from Ukrainian culture, and in an extremely moving show of support, the Grand Chief and Elder Gingell, on her way to speak with the Ukrainian diaspora, purchased granny hankies for each one of the community and walked around and handed off to each individual and spoke about that connection. In the story, as well, Elder Gingell was wearing a jacket that has built into it her mother's favourite granny hanky, and she spoke about that connection. I don't know of many other days that I could have been prouder to be a Yukoner and to see that, knowing that our First Nation communities are going through lots of challenges, trials, and tribulations, but again, to open up their communities with open arms and to show that support was extremely moving. I just want to thank them for attending and for sending that message. I could tell by the emotion from the individuals in the Ukrainian community just how much that meant. There

was also a commitment that was made at the Yukon Forum from almost every First Nation leader who was there that they would be going back to their chief and council and looking at ways to support.

It's an honour to rise here in the Yukon Legislative Assembly again on the traditional territory of the Ta'an Kwäch'an Council and the Kwanlin Dün First Nation as the Member for Porter Creek South. I'm thankful for the ongoing conversations with residents who provide insight into the issues that we must address here in the Yukon. There are many people from the riding deserving recognition for their efforts and contributions to the territory — first, Mr. Dave Mossop, who was the 2021 recipient of the Order of Yukon for his work in the area of conservation and environment in the Yukon, which led to the recovery of the peregrine falcon in this territory.

I would also like to say thank you to Mr. Harris Cox, who has been grooming winter trails around Whitehorse and contributing to the Braeburn Summer Camp for well over 20 years. I would also like to recognize Mr. Akhil Mohan, who received a letter of appreciation for his quick actions to save a man's life when he fell into the Yukon River and was recognized this past year.

Again, the Porter Creek Community Association board members — Taelor Mason, Susan Guatto, Randi Lopushinsky, Sarah Hougén, Julie Clarke, and Zara Soukoroff — who dedicate many hours to making our community a wonderful place.

Again, the Friends of McIntyre Creek board members, with the leadership of Dorothy Bradley, as they continue to tirelessly work for the important wildlife corridor here in our city.

The pandemic brought about unprecedented pressures for people, businesses, health care systems, and governments here in the Yukon, our country, and around the world. Despite the trials and tribulations spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, these individuals have made a difference, and they have forged ahead, just as our Liberal government has. Through the pandemic, we have monitored and adapted our supports to meet Yukoners' changing needs from immediate relief to adaptation and investment.

The actions that we have taken have guided our territory through the pandemic and kept our economy going. The Yukon is leading the nation as we witness unprecedented growth of our territory's population and economy. As the public health measures continue to lift, our government is turning its attention to recovery.

The \$1.97-billion budget outlines our government's plans to guide the next year of spending and contemplates our current realities and pressures. Of the budget, \$546 million is allocated to capital expenditures — a 26-percent increase over the 2020-21 budget. Here in the Yukon, we have seen extremely strong growth across the board. With population growth over the last five years at 12.1 percent, this is not only the highest in the country, but also the highest of all the G7 countries.

At the same time, our government has been investing at record levels in lot development. In this year's budget, we have included \$30 million to help meet the increasing demand for

residential lots. We are seeing the impact of our previous investments in lot development with the record-breaking residential building over the past two years, with \$200 million in residential building permits in 2020 and \$267 million in 2021.

Despite these record residential investments, the supply of housing in the territory has been playing catch-up. On a quarterly basis, the sales:new listings ratio — a measure of resale market tightness — has been above 60 since the second quarter of 2016. This is an indicator of the sellers' market, where homes are sold quickly after listing. The increase in price has made affordability a major concern for those looking to purchase, and we know that there is more to be done in order to meet the housing needs of Yukoners across the housing continuum. The solutions lie across multiple departments and through partnerships with First Nations, municipal and federal governments, NGOs, and the private sector.

We also know that these solutions need to be innovative. The team with Yukon Housing Corporation has been working extremely hard to implement the mandate items, as laid out by the Premier. This year, we will see a number of projects reach completion. Triplexes in Whitehorse, Mayo, and Watson Lake will see nine homes reach tenancy later this spring. In Whitehorse, the 47-unit mixed-use housing project at Fourth Avenue and Jeckell Street, and the Challenge Disability Resource Group's 45-unit Cornerstone development, are all set to welcome residents home this summer. The 84-unit Normandy seniors assisted-living facility is expected to reach completion this fall. Another 87 units will welcome people through the Boreal Commons development. In fact, tenants have begun to move into the first of three buildings. These projects are in addition to a number of other projects that have already come online over the past year, including Da Daghay Development Corporation's River Bend development. I would like to thank everyone involved in turning these projects into homes for Yukoners.

As we look ahead to the upcoming fiscal year, the Yukon Housing Corporation budget is almost \$67 million, almost \$46.8 million of which is capital. The capital expenditures will go to a number of loan and grant programs, construction projects, and renovations. The money will make life more affordable for Yukoners in need of support. It will help fill the gaps in the housing continuum. It will support communities across our territory through new housing developments, retrofits, and renovations of existing infrastructure. It will assist those who find themselves in need during extraordinary times, requiring emergency repairs.

New to this year's budget is \$2 million for the flood relief program, which will support those impacted by the unprecedented flooding last summer. A multi-department flood recovery working group has been working to identify the needs and develop a flood relief program for implementation. I think that there has also been over 50 site visits and analyses done, as we prepare to roll out that funding. This team has also been preparing for potential flooding into the future, because we know that the likelihood of these events is becoming more common as a result of climate change.

Our government declared a climate change emergency in the fall of 2019. Just under a year later, we launched *Our Clean Future — A Yukon strategy for climate change, energy and a green economy*. In the spring of 2021, we accelerated our commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent to 45 percent by 2030. I believe that this is true leadership. We have put plans and strategies together. We have spoken to Yukoners at the grassroots level, municipalities, and First Nation governments. We have taken all of that information together, we've put it into a strong blueprint and plan, and now we're funding it. So, I would argue the fact that there is not a vision from this budget. This is another step in making that plan a reality, and this is one of the key challenges and issues of our time.

The Yukon Housing Corporation is continuing to invest in community housing stock retrofits to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Combined over 2019-20 and 2020-21, the project has resulted in a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 52.7 tonnes and 42.61 percent in 24 units — significantly higher than the original 30-percent targeted reduction.

We are nearing completion on 10 more energy retrofits in the 2021-22 fiscal year and are targeting energy upgrades for an additional 10 units in 2022-23 and 2023-24. This year, we have allocated just over \$2.1 million to do this work. In addition, we are continuing to work with Yukon First Nations to support the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions through \$1.6 million for the First Nation energy efficiency program. Since the program's inception, six First Nations have accessed this program. Renovations of existing Yukon housing stock is an ongoing process, as is the replacement of aged-out units. Combined, the Yukon Housing Corporation has set aside \$6.8 million to do this work. So, I think for anybody who is listening today, they will understand that this is a significant investment in housing and counters the narrative that is being brought forward by the opposition.

This is important work in ensuring our housing supply is kept updated and continues to be available, whether it be for those needing affordable housing or for employees in our communities. It is essential to support our communities through staff housing to ensure the essential services offered through the Yukon government continue to be available.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that, over the last year, I have made a point of meeting with development corporations and municipalities and the private sector throughout our communities and have offered up our support of the Yukon Housing Corporation to ensure that we can de-risk the financing of more housing stock — and whether that be to support professionals from Yukon government in those communities, staff who may be needed for First Nation governments or municipalities — so, these are the offers. We are looking at more partners, and we have more partners than the Housing Corporation has ever had.

That's why the work we are doing to incentivize the private sector investment in rural housing is necessary. A number of loan and grant programs are available to support the development of new rental and home ownership options in all communities.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the work that is being done in each community.

In Old Crow, work is set to begin on our Old Crow mixed-housing use housing project, which will see 10 homes become available in late 2022. A community housing needs assessment was completed in Dawson City in 2021. This assessment highlighted the need for rental housing. It identified a shortage of home ownership opportunities and showed the need for housing for vulnerable individuals. We set aside money in this year's budget to construct a duplex and to complete design work on a multi-family building on the old Korbo site, with the goal of beginning construction in the next fiscal year.

We are also supporting Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation in the construction of a men's shelter and a transition housing project with construction completion expected this year. In addition to the triplex previously mentioned in Mayo, which will be coming online this year, the Yukon Housing Corporation has provided funding to Yukon Soaps Company through the housing initiatives fund for the construction of two affordable homes. These units are also nearing completion. I can say that we have also reached out to the entrepreneur who has completed that project and have asked to begin conversations on the next projects that the group would like to undertake.

A duplex previously damaged as a result of a fire is also slated for replacement this fiscal year.

As part of the five-year capital plan, we will begin work with Selkirk First Nation to plan for the construction of a duplex in Pelly next year. Over the last three years, we have supported Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation to build three new fourplexes, and we are set to replace a duplex, which has reached its end of life this year.

We also have demolition of units slated for Faro and Ross River, with replacements planned for this year and the following year in the respective communities. Again, we are looking for partnership with the private sector and First Nation development corporations.

The Champagne and Aishihik First Nations have taken on a number of projects over the last several years to ensure citizens are housed, with 18 homes completed and another six homes nearing completion, and there is an agreement in place to build an additional 20 homes, 10 of which will be affordable. Planning work will begin this year for a sixplex in Carcross and Teslin, with construction targeted for next year.

In Watson Lake, we have been engaged with the Town of Watson Lake and Liard First Nation on a supportive housing project. We are planning to begin construction this year on the old Lakeview Apartments site. These projects will provide a range of options across the housing continuum, and the Yukon Housing Corporation has been placing emphasis on the need to increase affordable housing for Yukoners.

While building new homes is part of the solution, we also recognize that the current availability is not meeting the need. That is why programs like the Canada-Yukon Housing benefit are so important. Since the program first launched in 2020, we have helped over 200 households, and as of December 2021, we are supporting 193 Yukon households in market rental

housing. As of January, there are no clients on our wait-list. Again, this program is supported through a cost-matching partnership with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation for the fiscal year, and we are increasing the program funding by \$369,000 to just over \$1 million.

We continue to incentivize the building of affordable housing, and we have increased the funds available for the developer-build loan program, created the community housing development program, and we will continue to support projects through an increase to the amount available through the housing initiatives fund. Through these funds, we will support Kwanlin Dün First Nation to realize their goals and to build on their land. This will see over 180 lots in Copper Ridge development, and I would like to thank the team at Kwanlin Dün for the work that they have been able to do with us. Of course, right now, what we are looking at is we are investing with them into horizontal services. This will offset some of the capital costs on phase 1 and phase 2, with the opportunity of up to 180 lots.

We will also release Fifth and Rogers, and the Macaulay Lodge properties, in the near term for development. Again, Fifth and Rogers has the opportunity for over 300 units that can be brought to market.

There is a substantial amount of work being done by the team at Yukon Housing Corporation, and these strategic investments and partnerships will ensure that we have stable and affordable housing to support our territory's growing population now and into the future.

I look forward to the budget debate on this, because what I have been able to reflect on and illustrate is that some of the largest, if not the largest, investment in Yukon history in capital projects is the Yukon Housing Corporation. We are seeing fantastic lot development coming out of Community Services and Energy, Mines and Resources, but also now Yukon Housing Corporation. We are asking for more from the folks there, and they are delivering, as illustrated here again, on more projects and in partnerships that will help us deal with the immense growth that we are realizing.

As we emerge from the latest wave of COVID-19 and restrictions lift, we can begin to look ahead to recovery.

When we reflect on the past two years, I must take a moment again to recognize the immense efforts of the teams of the Department of Economic Development and Tourism and Culture. The programs delivered through these departments have supported our local businesses and our economy through unprecedented times.

Earlier today, we had some comments again from the opposition, and they reflected on — I think they were quoting the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Of course, within a political debate, each party picks comments, I would say, that support their position.

I would ask the support of the House to take a second to also quote the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, when we think about the work of this government. It's a letter we also received a short while ago. The Federation of Independent Business appreciates the Yukon government again in this work — did not introduce any new tax increases or



additional costs, however, we're seeing the impact from the pandemic, again, over the last two years. Of course, the reason I bring that up is because, when we talk about taxation and policy measures, it's important for folks to realize — when we talk about small tax or small business tax, we eliminate — we completely eliminated the small business tax in the previous mandate. So, again, you know, some of the strongest items that you can bring in to help, when it comes to the work of these folks.

Again, there were some comments that were made earlier by the opposition that spoke to some of the work that was done by the chamber. I would like to touch on that — again, you know, talked about the fact that our budget was predictable, and I think that is something that's strong and the Yukon chamber touched on that. They talked about the fact that our COVID supports for business and health care — almost \$10 million of COVID contingency — which, of course, if you go back to some of the comments made from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business — they must have missed that. These are key items for us that we have in place. Again, we're monitoring and adapting. So, we're looking to see where things are, and we can deploy this \$10 million again for health or for the business sector again, if needed.

They speak to the \$10-million COVID contingency that carries on this government's support programs for businesses that have not only led the country but, more importantly, have provided a lifeline for many Yukon businesses whose doors would have closed without the support — and remain in the budget as well.

Then the next line talks about how the budget, again — we have sustained our funding for the Economic Development department and the Tourism department — again, how important that was.

The next point from the Yukon chamber talked about moving the immigration unit to Economic Development, maintaining its budget, and carrying on. I just want to set the record straight: The Yukon chamber thanked us for that a couple of years ago when we did it. What we just did was move the labour market. We moved the labour market because we had been sitting and listening to what we heard from the business sector around ensuring that they have the capacity coming out of recovery. I have worked with my colleague, Minister McLean, and we have come up with a strategy where, on one side, we have the supply side still —

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

### Point of order

**Speaker:** Member for Lake Laberge, on a point of order.

**Mr. Cathers:** Mr. Speaker, the Member for Porter Creek South just contravened the Standing Orders by referring to one of his colleagues by name, instead of by title or riding. I would ask you to remind him of the Standing Orders.

### Speaker's ruling

**Speaker:** It is not a Standing Order, but for members to refer to other members by last name is not a common practice in the House.

Please continue.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Member for Lake Laberge, because that gave me time to pull up another letter of endorsement for our actions, which I will read in a second.

Again, this particular industry remains extremely concerned about government employment and growth and government competition for jobs. As we said, that was part of the reason that we ensured that we brought the labour market into the Department of Economic Development. We will be able to debate that later on in this session.

As I stated, I will pull up another letter from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business that wasn't reflected earlier. Again, I will just quote: "Dear Premier Silver,

"On behalf of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) and our members in the Yukon, we are writing to formally introduce ourselves..." Of course, this is the CFIB director, Kathleen Cook, who was quoted earlier.

And then, next paragraph: "We are pleased to see that the Yukon Government has recognized the recent challenges small business owners have been facing over the course of the pandemic by introducing supports such as the Regional Relief Loan Program (RRLP); the Yukon Emergency Relief Program; the Paid Sick Leave Rebate program; the Vaccine Verification Rebate; retail liquor discounts..." which, of course, we heard some comments earlier about some of the challenges. Of course, that liquor discount was in place as an emergency measure, and then we went back and then reduced, permanently, the cost of liquor, in a dialogue.

And I will say yes, there are some businesses that wanted the cost of liquor to be less. Again, over here, we're balancing our social lens on this particular issue, and I think we all know that we're spending time — all three parties — talking about challenges around substance use, and, of course, we believe that this is a good balance.

Again, within that go: "... supports for the tourism sector through the Tourism Relief and Recovery Plan; and the reduction of the small business tax to zero. Not only do these actions demonstrate your government's commitment to supporting small businesses, but they will go a long way to help business owners navigate the pandemic. As you know, small businesses will have a crucial role to play in the Yukon's economic recovery. CFIB shares your government's vision to help small businesses pave a way forward towards greater prosperity, innovation, and diversity."

So, with that, that paragraph was left out in some of the dialogue earlier, and once again, that shows that one of the most critical groups sometimes to the government in this country certainly shared some very kind words with us.

When we talk about our business climate, I think it's important to talk about where we are right now. As a group, we always have to listen and learn from the private sector.

Just a couple of weeks ago, the Premier and I sat with leaders from across a number of communities, and we talked about the challenges they were having. We talked about the things that they felt we needed to work on. They talked about

some of the concerns they have. I think we've demonstrated that, when we talk about housing, this is something we've invested in. When we talk about the capacity that's required, those are the steps that we're taking when you look at our labour market. I will touch on the sick-leave provisions.

As you saw, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business was applauding us for the interim measures that are in place until September of this year around sick leave.

I just want to set the record straight again. I commend the work that was done around a concept for having this safety net in place in perpetuity, but I think it is important to touch on the fact that we have had a number of business leaders in our community reach out to us and tell us that there was mass confusion. There were members of the opposition who were directly calling business owners and telling them that a decision had been made and that the full cost of putting a sick-leave provision in place — I believe up to 10 days — had been made and they would have to shoulder that. Of course, when we met with business leaders, we said that there are recommendations that are in place and that there is a dialogue that has to happen. We understand where you are, coming out of the pressures of the last two years.

I just want to again set the record straight. That confusion, which then led to, I think, a misunderstanding, which then led to letters to the editor or conversations — we have done our best. Of course, this happens in the political realm. Each party is out there, but I would urge folks to please present your philosophical argument, but the facts about where we are in the process are important.

I think it's also important for us to look at the overall state of the economy. It was touched on by the Yukon Chamber of Commerce. I think I have heard it from the opposition. I will paraphrase: Don't hang your hat on GDP. I agree. I think what we have to look at is — let's go into the Yukon and take a look at, first of all, immense growth from 2015 to 2020 when we look at retail sales. I think you can also go back — feel free. Anyone who looks in Hansard can look at Yukon's Bureau of Statistics. They do an incredible job. I want to say hi to Mr. Gary Brown, who I get to e-mail every month, early in the morning when the numbers come out, concerning unemployment. Of course, those numbers of late have shown that we are leading the country when it comes to the unemployment rate.

I think it's important for individuals to take a look at where we are in wholesale sales. I think it's important for individuals to look at the investment last year and this year when it comes to residential investment of hundreds of millions of dollars. I think it's important to look at construction numbers. I think it's important to look at mining output. I think it's important to look at growth in almost every category that an economist would look at. So, I think we shouldn't just look at GDP. I think we should look at all of those other statistical pieces of information.

I think that you should look at the sales of bars and restaurants, and if one takes a look at those numbers and looks at where we were in the months leading up to the pandemic and then we take a look at where we are now, I think they will see

some extremely strong numbers. In some cases, month by month, you will see that, when we look at received value in the bar and restaurant industry, we will see that we are in a stronger position now on those sales than we were leading up to the pandemic.

Although I will always listen to our business community — and I think that there is a lot for them to share and lots for us to learn — they are the business people and we are making policy. But from my time in the private sector, I think that many business people in this country would love to be doing business in the Yukon, they would love to see the growth that is in front of us, and they would love to see the opportunity. Yes, it is challenging when it comes to staffing, and we are working with the business community and our immigration unit on that and making sure that Yukoners can skill up from the work that was done through our previous Education minister and our current Education minister, but I think that overall, when it comes to this economy, we are in a great spot.

I will reflect as we go through, as well, around tourism. I have testimonials that are just from the last month around tourism from entrepreneurs from our communities who are talking about the fact that they have not seen bookings like this previously. I will talk a little bit about Air North and their flights now to Toronto and Ottawa and the growth that they are seeing in their market and their optimism as they see those bookings. Of course, it was reflected on earlier that we have Condor coming back — another great sign. I think that there is work to be done, and I think that we will discuss that. We are not there yet when it comes to ensuring that we have folks coming back to the Yukon through the cruise industry, and it is extremely important that the right measures are put in place by other levels of government to ensure that is there. I want to be respectful to my colleagues in opposition. This is something that both parties have touched on.

Again, I think that the business community is in a great environment to recover. I know that we'll monitor what's happening, as we move through. As we have done from the start, we will adapt when need be. If we have to build programs, we'll build programs, and our departments will pivot in a fashion that's required to ensure that we have that stability.

There is so much ahead of us in the next year. I will just do a quick overview to finish up. We'll be talking about our innovation plan. We use subject matter experts from across Canada, globally, and from home to make sure that we had a proper blueprint to go forward and to not only invest in our tech sector, but to find other areas of value and places where we should invest.

Our immigration strategy will be a document that we'll be able to see come to fruition this year, and it will also be important, as we move forward. The work by the previous Minister of Tourism and Culture — lots of work that was done, and now we have the opportunity to bring that work to reality, and that is the creative potential — advancing Yukon's creative and cultural industries. There is tremendous excitement from our gig economy and from others. You will see investment and work that we've done in the revitalization of programs around

film and around sound. There's so much work that has been undertaken.

On a very positive note — and to my colleagues here — I want to just touch on one of our other very exciting things that will happen this year, even though there's a tremendous amount of angst in our world right now. We will be looking forward to showcasing what the Yukon has to offer to the world stage this summer as we welcome the third international Arctic Arts Summit to the territory. The previous Minister of Tourism and Culture did a tremendous amount of work on this. The team at Tourism and Culture has been very excited and has been so passionate about this. This summit aims to strengthen arts and culture in the north and develop circumpolar cooperation to stimulate collaboration in the arts and creative industries. That conversation is more important than ever, if we look at what's happening around our circumpolar world.

We have identified just over \$300,000 in this year's budget that we will use to host this international, in-person event. It was first hosted in Norway, then Finland, and this is the first time that Canada will host. We will have individuals from around the world who will come to the Yukon. As we continue to welcome guests back to the territory, I would like to highlight some of the efforts we have made to ensure that we are prepared.

We are forging ahead again to implement our work with the Yukon tourism strategy, and this fiscal year, we will continue to support our Yukon Tourism Advisory Board and our Yukon First Nation Tourism and Culture Association.

With that, I will look to conclude my remarks. I think that we are pretty excited to be able to debate our budgets from these multiple departments. That will give us a chance to really reflect on the funds that we are putting in place that we believe are going to help us to look at a full recovery in these departments. I think that for some of our sectors, like tourism and culture, there will be a bit of a lag compared to others — but if one looks at all the numbers, if one looks at the data and the situation that we are currently in when it comes to this economy, we are in a very promising place. I think we are the envy of a lot of provinces and territories, and I want to commend the work of our departments and the work of the private sector. If I think back to April of 2020, in those first weeks, the conversations were really difficult. It is nice to see the spring coming, the sun out, and have the opportunity to properly recover and have the Yukon's economy back to where it belongs.

**Ms. Clarke:** I am happy to rise today to speak to the 2022-23 Yukon budget. I have a few comments for budget debate. My constituents in Porter Creek Centre continue to reach out to me to raise issues important to them. I hope that we will see some of their concerns addressed as we debate the budget over the coming weeks. Many of these issues are municipal issues, so on the record, I would like to thank the members of the Whitehorse City Council for assisting me on those issues, like the Whistle Bend pond, snow removal this winter, and traffic concerns.

Porter Creek Centre is a combination of an older, well-established neighbourhood and the fastest growing part of Whitehorse in Whistle Bend. I hope to see budget items that help both neighbourhoods. I am pleased to see work finally begin on the Whistle Bend school. This long-promised project will be a welcome addition in the neighbourhood for families and the 400-plus students who are expected to start school there in the fall of 2024. I will be asking questions this Sitting about the cost and timeline for completion of this school.

As we know, the expected completion date was already delayed due to the election last year. Housing affordability is an issue, and I am interested to see what money has been set aside in the budget for lot development, particularly in Whistle Bend. I noted that the government announced late last week the new land lottery for 42 phase 6 lots in Whistle Bend, which is good to finally see. It is important to remember that the minister cancelled the lottery for those lots last spring, and the lots were rescheduled to be released before the end of last year.

I will also be looking for plans for Whistle Bend phase 8 development. Government documents indicated that Whistle Bend phases 7 and 8 would be tendered around the same time, in December or January. Of course, we are now in March, and only phase 7 has been tendered. The government had planned phase 9 to be tendered in early summer of this year. Housing availability is very important. I am hoping to see that these timelines will not be delayed further.

Traffic is increasingly becoming an issue in Whistle Bend, so I also hope to see the government planning to address it in the coming phases of development.

During the election last spring, we supported the construction of a new gymnastics facility, so I am happy to see that project in the budget. I am looking forward to hearing more details on the project. As I understand, it may be planned for Whistle Bend.

I am also pleased to see money in the budget for the first Pride Centre in the Yukon, which was another Yukon Party platform commitment.

My constituents in Porter Creek are interested in proposed upgrades to the Alaska Highway planned in the Porter Creek corridor. Many of them use the highway as their major commuter route. I am interested to hear what the updated capital plan is for that section of the Alaska Highway corridor project.

I also know that the Department of Education has been working on adapting to COVID, so I am interested to hear what upgrades have been completed at Holy Family School, Jack Hulland Elementary School, and Porter Creek Secondary School.

I wanted to note that housing affordability and availability remains a massive issue for all Yukoners. I have many questions about the budget for the Yukon Housing Corporation. It is important that we increase the housing and rental availability for Yukoners. I will save those questions for when we get into the housing debate in Committee of the Whole. I look forward to the debate.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** I am pleased to rise to respond to the budget speech delivered by the Premier for the upcoming fiscal year 2022-23. This is our government's second budget. I am proud of the hard work that has occurred within our respective departments that made it possible for us to be here today in order to support Yukoners.

I will start today, Mr. Speaker, by mentioning how grateful I am to be able to debate the annual allocation of funds within this Chamber in a respectful and peaceful manner. War is raging in Ukraine. The situation is terrible, and it appears to be escalating. Authoritarianism and fascism are unfortunately and tragically ascendant in the world. In many countries, elections are pro-forma, and legislators are just a rubber stamp. It is the rule of the strongman where graft, corruption, and intimidation are the order of the day.

I would certainly confirm that we are extremely fortunate to live in a prosperous, functioning, and liberal democracy.

I will turn to the budget discussion. As the Premier mentioned in his speech, the budget is fundamentally the most important decision and function of a democratically elected government year after year. These decisions are ultimately choices that we are making on behalf of Yukoners for the next fiscal year and into the future. The choices reflect the values and priorities that this Yukon Liberal government wishes to highlight, values such as adapting to the impacts of climate change, reducing our emissions, and making the future of a changing Yukon more resilient.

I am particularly proud of the work of my departments, the Department of Highways and Public Works and the Department of Environment. Overall, the 2022-23 budget includes an estimated \$1.97 billion in spending. Of this sum, operation and maintenance expenditures amount to a total of \$1.42 billion. That leaves \$546 million in capital expenditures. This corresponds to almost double the capital budget from five years ago. In fact, it represents a 26-percent increase from last year.

In 2016, we were left with an infrastructure deficit. Our government has worked tirelessly and continues to work hard to resolve this deficit and its long-term implications on Yukoners young and old. It is clear from studies that, when economies are slower, interest rates remain low. For every dollar that we invest in infrastructure, more than one dollar of economic activity is generated. All Yukoners benefit when infrastructure is improved. New roads and bridges allow us to get around the territory more efficiently and reach our destinations safely. The benefits of building new schools in a rapidly growing urban centre don't even need to be stated. These are worthwhile investments that will provide benefits to Yukoners for many years to come. I will speak of several of those during my speech today.

Mr. Speaker, one of the principles that guides me in my daily work is responsible fiscal management. Government has navigated and continues to navigate the COVID-19 storm in a fiscally responsible manner. I am proud of the resilience and level-headed decision-making that characterize our Liberal government team year after year.

Moving into my departments, I will provide a snapshot of the Department of Environment budget for this year. Totalling approximately \$51.9 million, it is slightly higher than the previous estimate, with 1.2-percent growth. Out of the \$51.9 million, the capital estimate is approximately \$4 million, of which \$1.2 million is recoverable. The operation and maintenance portion represents \$47.9 million, with a slight increase of \$93,000 from the previous estimate. Unlike my other department, the Department of Highways and Public Works, the Department of Environment does not have a large capital component.

I spoke earlier of values and priorities for this government as reflected through the budget. The importance and prioritization of *Our Clean Future* is clear in this budget. This is year 2 of implementation, and we have added a little over \$500,000 in operation and maintenance related to the *Our Clean Future* initiative. This government recognizes that we are in a climate emergency and that the time to act is now.

This is why we are working to reduce our emissions, adapt, and mitigate the impacts of climate change and chart what the hopeful future for the Yukon might look like. One element is dealing with our waste, which is a huge element of this project. This budget allocates \$131,000 for extended producer responsibility. The extended producer responsibility program is a waste-management approach that shifts the responsibility for end-of-life management of product and packaging waste from municipalities, government, and taxpayers to the producers and the consumers.

Extended producer responsibility is part of *Our Clean Future*. The commitment is to implement extended producer responsibility in the Yukon by 2025 as part of an effort to increase waste diversion to 40 percent by 2030.

Priority product categories to be managed through extended producer responsibility are packaging and printed paper, household hazardous waste, and automotive waste, such as used oil and antifreeze. We recognize that the existing recycling system in the Yukon is in a challenging financial position and that transitioning to extended producer responsibility is crucial to ensure the sustainability of the recycling programs that Yukoners expect. This year, we will be putting the extended producer responsibility program forward to Yukoners for public engagement.

Another clean future commitment is to upgrade the *Our Clean Future* website at [yukon.ca/en/our-clean-future](http://yukon.ca/en/our-clean-future). For this, we are allocating \$100,000. This will assist us to share more knowledge about climate risks and impacts, build community resilience, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and demonstrate progress toward our goals. The new version of the website aims to have content being provided all the time from an internal database. I am a strong proponent that good data makes for good decision-making whether we are talking about moose surveys, climate change research, modelling, or flood mapping. To that end, we are allocating \$150,000 in climate change research and modelling in a partnership with Yukon University.

Climate change also, of course, impacts our waters and glaciers. We saw this in 2016 and 2017 when the Slims River, which once continued to the Bering Sea, now flows east into

the Kaskawulsh River and then south to the Alsek River and to the Gulf of Alaska. This was a rare geomorphological phenomenon called “river piracy” or “stream capture” that was caused by the retreat of the Kaskawulsh Glacier. This in turn is already having an impact on Yukon’s largest lake, Kluane Lake, as well as a significant impact on migrating chum salmon.

Last year, we also witnessed record flooding in the Yukon. We know that climate change affects evaporation, precipitation, surface water, snow pack, groundwater, recharge, and demand. This work is fundamental if we are to understand what changes are occurring.

To this end, the Water Resources branch was allocated a \$224,000 increase in the budget that is before you today. The branch is adapting its already existing water monitoring, whether it be for surface water or groundwater, to understand water quality and quantity trends. As part of this, we are also developing flood maps for flood-prone communities and critical transportation corridors to understand where to focus our efforts when dealing with highwater events. All of this will help to produce reliable flood forecasts.

The Fish and Wildlife branch continues to monitor the species of wildlife present in the Yukon, whether it is polar bears in the North Slope or muskox, wolves, deer, bison, sheep, fish, or non-harvested species such as pika, bats, and ground squirrels. Most importantly, the branch monitors and informs our decision-making on the most harvested species, such as moose and caribou.

Specifically for caribou, we continue to collect and analyze data for the various caribou herds, such as the Porcupine, Fortymile, Hart River, Coal River, and Wolf Lake herds. This work includes collaring to inform us on the overall health and condition of these resilient and majestic animals. It is important to state that the department prioritizes which areas to survey based on harvest levels, access, community concerns, land use planning, data needs, date of last survey, and the volume of human activity in the area. All of this is to say that we invest in our data collection and analysis that in turn informs our solid, data-based decision-making. This allows us to identify management goals and to set priorities that support evidence-based decision-making.

This specific species and habitat work amounts to approximately \$1 million in operation and maintenance. This also includes a new allocation of \$40,000 in elk monitoring.

Speaking of priorities, we know that enjoying nature is a huge part of Yukoners’ lives. The best way and most successful way to enjoy nature is to go out and experience our extensive parks infrastructure. We know that many Yukoners share this sentiment, as we heard in the *Yukon Parks Strategy*. In this budget, we have allocated \$2.6 million for capital improvements. This will include improvements such as boat-launch maintenance and replacement at numerous campgrounds, enhanced trails, paddle-in and hike-in campsites, a new booking system, and more campsites at existing campgrounds.

The past two years have been challenging, and I think that we can all agree that opportunities to recreate in nature are

invaluable to Yukoners’ mental and physical health and resilience. We know that Yukoners love their campgrounds — the value provided — and they certainly appreciate the abundant firewood provided. As was the case last year, this camping season will start in April and go until October so that we can all enjoy the Yukon’s world-class outdoors for another extended season. We have allocated \$52,000 for early work to expand camping opportunities in the vicinity of Whitehorse.

Again, our government is guided by public engagement, and we will prioritize what is important for Yukoners.

On another topic in the Department of Environment, there are also significant environmental liabilities that we have allocated funds to remediate. The department is responsible for enforcing the *Environment Act*. Under that, dumping and spills have the potential to cause long-lasting environmental damage that needs to be cleaned up. This year, we are investing approximately \$4.2 million toward remediation of various sites throughout the Yukon — sites such as the Wellgreen mill and tailings pond north of Burwash Landing, the old fire hall in Ross River, the Carcross library, and the Marwell tar pit in Whitehorse, which is now in post-remedial monitoring and assessment. This ongoing work is integral to protecting our land, water, and air and sometimes creating new development options for those remediated sites.

The department engages in a wide array of agreements with management and stewardship partners every year. We work closely with First Nations, renewable resources councils, and local Yukoners. We foster these long-lasting relationships and build upon them to create a collaborative atmosphere to achieve results that Yukoners can be proud of.

In addition, the year-round, ongoing, and extremely valuable work that our conservation officers and our Animal Health unit do in the Yukon is greatly appreciated. In the Department of Environment, I am delighted to be leading this hard-working, motivated, energetic, enthusiastic group of people.

An aspect of my work is to combine, where possible, the work of my two departments. One promising area of synergy is transportation. We know that Yukon’s road transportation sector is our largest greenhouse gas emitter, which accounts for approximately 54 percent of our territory’s greenhouse gas emissions. My colleague, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, is responsible for spearheading the significantly subscribed rebate programs for zero emission electric vehicles and plug-in electric vehicles. We know that this has received significant uptake over the course of the last year to 18 months.

Our government has committed to making all roads accessible in Yukon communities reachable by electric vehicles by 2027, and we will certainly endeavour to exceed that objective. On my end, the Department of Highways and Public Works will be assisting with the installation of an additional seven fast-charging stations by the end of the year. This will bring us to a total of 19 public fast-chargers for electric vehicles throughout the Yukon this summer. The price tag for those charging stations is approximately \$300,000 from the Highways and Public Works capital budget.

I would like to address the Highways and Public Works budget. The Highways and Public Works total budget is approximately \$436 million. Out of \$436 million, the capital estimate is approximately \$277 million, while the operation and maintenance portion represents \$158 million.

As the glue that binds it all together, the Highways and Public Works department is responsible for the coordination of all information technology, otherwise known as "IT". If it is IT-related, the Department of Highways and Public Works makes it happen. The department supports all related functions, whether it is e-services, data management, the personal vaccine credentials, geomatics, our financial systems, citizen engagement platforms, internal data portals, video conferencing, and more. For a large organization like the Yukon government, this is a major responsibility. In this budget, we have allocated a little over \$14 million in capital for the purposes of corporate information technology and systems.

I would like to now talk about the operation and maintenance portion. With a budget of approximately \$66 million, these are the dedicated Highways and Public Works employees who maintain our transportation infrastructure. These are the tireless individuals who run our ferries, clear our roads, provide our drivers' licences, manage the weigh scales, fix our culverts, and so much more. I would like to take this opportunity right now to thank them for their ongoing work and dedication.

Reviewing the capital portion of the Transportation division, it totals approximately \$154 million. A little more than \$6 million is allocated to facilities and equipment. This is to ensure the adequacy and availability of the facilities and equipment necessary for the delivery of the capital and operation and maintenance of the Transportation division.

For example, with these funds, we are scheduled to acquire paint machines for the Erik Nielsen International Airport, a loader and snow blower for the Old Crow Airport, a dump truck for Old Crow, and various other pieces of equipment. Out of the \$6 million, \$3 million is going into the revolving equipment replacement fund to ensure that the Transportation division is able to keep our infrastructure in top shape.

Remaining in the Transportation division, we have allocated approximately \$5.5 million in capital to projects on the Alaska Highway.

This includes significant multi-year work through key segments of the Alaska Highway through Whitehorse and specifically between the weigh scales —

**Speaker:** Order, please.

The time being 5:30, this House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

*Debate on second reading of Bill No. 204 accordingly adjourned*

*The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.*