



# Yukon Legislative Assembly

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Number 45

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35<sup>th</sup> Legislature

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## HANSARD

Tuesday, March 8, 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**  
**Tuesday, March 8, 2022 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

*Prayers*

## DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

## INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I would like to ask all of us to please welcome — I believe it's Mary Tiessen. My sign language is a little rusty — if we could please welcome her to the Assembly.

*Applause*

**Ms. White:** Today we have joining us in the Assembly — we have Lahela Reid, Amanda Buffalo, and Marie Gallagher. They are joining us today for the tabling of a petition and in support of the strong women that they know.

*Applause*

**Speaker:** Are there any tributes?

## TRIBUTES

### In recognition of International Women's Day

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I am proud to rise today on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government in recognition of March 8, International Women's Day. The first International Women's Day was held in 1911 to recognize the economic, political, and social achievements of women and acknowledge the challenges that they continue to face in the quest for gender equality. The Canadian theme of this year's celebration is "Women Inspiring Women". On this International Women's Day, I am sure that many of my colleagues here today can think of the women in their lives who have helped them along the way.

Today, I will highlight Alice McGuire, who sadly passed away in December 2021. I recently reflected on her life and the impact that she made on my life and the contribution that she made to the Yukon. Alice McGuire was a trailblazer and a courageous leader in our territory. She was the first Yukon First Nation woman elected to the Yukon Legislative Assembly in 1978. She broke down a major barrier for all indigenous women in our territory. Why do I consider her courageous? During this time in our history — it was only five years after the tabling of *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow*. It was a time when residential schools were still active in our territory. It was rare to have women elected as Members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly. Further, Ms. McGuire had only been granted the right to vote, as an indigenous person — indigenous woman — in this country, 17 years prior to being elected to this Assembly.

We are very fortunate to come from a territory with a rich history of strong and resilient women, particularly indigenous women and girls who have faced even greater adversity.

As the Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity, I am proud to work closely with and support the many women's organizations in the Yukon.

I recognize the work of the Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council, the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle, and the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society. Your advocacy, community building, and consistent work to hold up and honour indigenous women is truly inspiring. Organizations like the Yukon Women's Transition Home Society, the Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, Dawson Women's Shelter, and Help and Hope for Families in Watson Lake provide not only the basics, but also offer advocacy, navigation, and community-building opportunities for all women and children.

Yukon Women in Trades and Technology encourages young women and gender-diverse people to see themselves in spaces that have excluded far too many of us for far too long. Les EssentiElles, Yukon Status of Women Council, and many more organizations are working every day to break down the barriers that still exist for women and gender-diverse Yukoners.

I encourage all of us to hold our hands up to those women who have inspired us to do better as we continue to strive for women's equality.

*Applause*

**Ms. Clarke:** I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize March 8 as International Women's Day. Never before have the campaigns and voices of girls and women been so visible, so loud, in so many parts of the globe, shining a spotlight on this year's theme: "Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow".

Today, we celebrate the many achievements and efforts made that have paved the way for women around the world. We have seen so many changes in our world over our lifetimes. Steps taken to break barriers around the world for women continue today as we highlight social, scientific, and political achievements and more — achievements by women and girls that together bring us steps closer to gender parity and equality for all.

The Yukon is a pretty incredible place, filled with equally incredible women. It is home to a number of organizations that work hard to ensure that women and girls are afforded equal education and opportunities. I would like to highlight a couple of these organizations. Yukon Women in Trades and Technology continues to do incredible work in our communities, inspiring young women to consider trades and tech as an option for them. They offer training, workshops, education grants, and more to help women and girls get into the trades and technology. Yukon Women in Mining is dedicated to the ongoing advancement of a diverse, inclusive, respectful, and progressive mineral sector that supports healthy and prosperous Yukon citizens and communities. In fact, that is their mission statement.

We are seeing a major shift in careers where men and women are stepping more confidently and with ease into

positions that may have historically been seen more as careers of the other gender. We are moving in a very positive direction with respect to inclusion and abolishing historically gender-specific roles in our society.

I would like to give a shout-out to two very important women in my life, my daughters, Rachel Ann Tan Clarke and Sabrina Ann Tan Clarke.

Women, today is our day. Let us celebrate and be thankful to the women who stood before us. We stand on their shoulders. Thank you, women.

*Applause*

**Ms. Tredger:** I rise today on behalf of the Yukon NDP to recognize International Women’s Day. We don’t have to look far today for examples of women fighting for their rights.

Yesterday, women and girls were in front of this Legislature protesting sexist and offensive dress codes in their schools — dress codes that led to harassment and humiliation of students in an effort to police their bodies.

Today at city hall, protestors were demanding the right to safe transportation in taxis. After years of stories and the tacit understanding that taxis are not a reliably safe place for women, they are demanding action. They are demanding that women can take a cab without fear of harassment and violence.

Across the world, women experience disproportionate levels of discrimination and violence. Across the world, women are fighting to change that.

One of the themes of International Women’s Day this year is “Women Inspiring Women”. These women near and far inspire me, but I hope we don’t stop at being inspired. Let’s make changes to make transportation safer for women. Let’s make changes so that girls feel safe in their classrooms. Let’s make changes so that next year when we give these tributes, the Yukon and the world are different, fairer, and safer places for women and girls.

*Applause*

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

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

## PETITIONS

### Petition No. 9

**Ms. White:** I have for tabling the following petition, which reads:

“THAT

“Wood Street School, and all Yukon schools should be a place where students can be themselves, be comfortable expressing themselves, and be safe in a non-hurtful and non-judgmental environment

“there is an oppressive and sexist dress code at Wood Street School

“students are being humiliated through the subjective and inconsistent enforcement of the sexist dress code

“through the enforcement of the dress code, students are being shamed for developing biological sex characteristics that are beyond the students’ individual control

“students do not feel safe in the classroom or in the school because of the enforcement of the dress code

“the dress code is being enforced outside school hours

“THEREFORE we request the following:

“that Wood Street School teachers and administration immediately cease and desist in enforcing the dress code

“that the MAD program teachers and administration at the Wood Street School issue an apology to the students for shaming, humiliating, and sexualizing them in their place of learning

“that the Wood Street School teachers and administration receive training respecting gender, sex, healthy body image, body dysmorphia and shame, consent, sexual harassment, and sexualized violence - and the impact of these on holistic health

“an immediate revocation of dress codes in Yukon schools, both formal and informal”

**Speaker:** Are there any further petitions to be presented? Are there any bills to be introduced?

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

### Bill No. 13: *Act to Amend the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act (2022)* — Introduction and First Reading

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I move that Bill No. 13, entitled *Act to Amend the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act (2022)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 13, entitled *Act to Amend the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act (2022)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

*Motion agreed to*

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

## NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT the membership of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges, as established by Motion No. 9, as amended, be amended by:

- (1) rescinding the appointment of Annie Blake; and
- (2) appointing Emily Tredger to the committee.

**Mr. Cathers:** I rise today to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to use its 2022-23 capital budget to proceed with major upgrades to Takhini River Road, including improving the roadbed, road surface, and ditches.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with the organizations and authors of the *Taxi Safety Report* and follow up on recommendations in the report, including implementing the *National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence* recommendations relating to transportation.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to ensure all Yukon students are provided a safe learning environment in schools and educational facilities by:

(1) reviewing all policies on school attire and dress codes in Yukon schools, including the informal policies that are enforced by staff;

(2) engaging facilitators with experience in social justice, anti-oppression, and violence to work with students, teachers, and the community to ensure that any and all policies on school attire, including formal and informal, are anti-oppressive and inclusive; and

(3) ensuring that teaching and administrative staff in schools and in the Department of Education have training on the rights of children and youth as included in the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and human rights legislation.

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

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Atlin hydro expansion project

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I am happy to rise today to provide an update on the Atlin hydro expansion project. The Tlingit Homeland Energy Limited Partnership, or THELP, continues to lead the development of this project, which is expected to add 8.5 megawatts of dependable capacity to the Yukon's main grid, primarily in the winter when peak electrical demand occurs. From the outset of this project, it was clear that a combination of capital loans, grant funding, and proponent equity would be required to ensure the financial viability of the expansion. More recently, it was signalled by all major stakeholders that a financial contribution from the Government of Yukon in particular would support THELP's access to additional funding opportunities and bring this much-needed project a step closer to construction.

I am pleased to announce that a decision was made by our government to invest \$50 million to the Atlin project, starting in the 2022-23 fiscal year.

This year's budget includes \$15 million of the \$50 million for the project. Prior to transferring the funds to THELP, the Yukon Development Corporation and the Department of Finance will establish a funding agreement that stipulates funding deliverables and reporting requirements.

This is a significant investment. It indicates our commitment to address climate change, our effort to keep electricity rates low for Yukoners, and our due diligence as part of the investment decision to fully assess the cost and benefits of the project.

The Atlin hydro expansion project will make a substantial contribution toward reaching our renewable energy generation goal under *Our Clean Future*, which requires that 93 percent of the electricity on the main grid comes from renewable sources by 2030. The project is expected to generate 31 gigawatt hours of renewable electricity each winter and eliminate the need for four rental diesel generators, thus reducing greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 27,000 tonnes per year.

The project is an important milestone in Yukon Energy's 10-year renewable electricity plan. The synergy between the Atlin project, the Moon Lake storage facility, and the expansion of the Southern Lakes transmission network is crucial to generating an ambitious 97 percent of the electricity on the main grid from renewable sources while delivering enough dependable power as the Yukon's demand grows now and into the future.

Our government's investment decision coincides with other positive developments for this project. In February, Yukon Energy announced that it had signed an agreement with THELP to purchase power from the Atlin project. This electricity purchase agreement is currently available for public review on the Yukon Utilities Board's website. We're also beginning to see positive indications from the Government of Canada and the Government of British Columbia that the remaining funding gap for the project can soon be addressed. Our commitment of financial resources to this project emphasizes the priority of clean energy to Yukoners, and I look forward to seeing the results of that investment take shape in the upcoming construction season.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to provide this statement on how our government is working to help advance the Atlin project and meet the targets set out in *Our Clean Future*.

**Mr. Cathers:** First, we want to emphasize our strong support for hydroelectricity and other renewables. If done properly, hydro is one of the cleanest forms of energy and can be one of the cheapest, if not the cheapest, energy sources. Hydro has the potential to generate a large amount of energy very efficiently and at a much lower cost per megawatt. Of course, that's if it is done properly. With the Atlin hydro expansion, we have questions and a number of concerns.

We are already seeing significant cost overruns. In 2016, Yukon Energy Corporation conducted an assessment of the project and determined that it would cost \$120.7 million. In Yukon Energy's 10-year renewable energy strategy that they released in December 2020, they indicated that the estimated cost of the project was \$131 million. Then, in October last year, Yukon Energy told the Legislature that the project is now roughly going to cost \$200 million. So, in eight years, the project has gone \$80 million over the original estimate and shovels are not even close to hitting the ground.

Further, at a cost of \$200 million for just over eight megawatts, that means a cost of roughly \$25 million per megawatt. To put this in perspective, in 2018 and 2019, this Liberal government spent a significant amount of money on planning for a new LNG or diesel plant. This new plant was

going to create 20 megawatts for an estimated cost as low as just \$2 million per megawatt. This would have been considerably cheaper for Yukoners. Of course, with the Liberals, taxpayers' money is no object, so they flip-flopped on their planned 20-megawatt generation facility and took the more expensive option.

To be clear, Mr. Speaker, we are not opposed to hydro. We are, in fact, strongly in favour of hydro, but, unlike the Liberals, we are also strongly in favour of being fiscally responsible with taxpayers' money. Yukon Energy's 10-year renewable energy plan even highlights that the extremely high cost of the project means that there is really no business case for the project without massive government subsidies. The plan states — and I quote: “Without federal funding, these projects are not considered cost-competitive and would most likely not be approved by the Yukon Utilities Board.”

I would like to move on to another area of concern that we have with the project, and I hope that the minister can explain this. With the project, \$200 million of taxpayers' money is being spent on a project in BC for an asset that will not be owned by Yukoners. That is concerning enough itself. However, a Québec-based engineering company will do a considerable amount of work on this project, and it has now been revealed that the design and engineering firm hired to lead this project is SNC-Lavalin. SNC-Lavalin is a massive engineering firm based in Montréal, and it became infamous as part of the SNC-Lavalin scandal in 2019 when *The Globe and Mail* revealed that Prime Minister Trudeau attempted to bully former Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould to intervene in criminal proceedings against the company. Of course, Wilson-Raybould resigned from Cabinet and was kicked out of caucus by Trudeau for refusing to cave and interfere in these criminal proceedings. The criminal proceedings related to the fact that SNC-Lavalin was accused of paying millions of dollars in bribes to former Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

So, it certainly raised some eyebrows and questions for us when we saw that \$200 million would potentially be leaving the Yukon for an economically questionable project that has gone significantly overbudget in a short period of time and a significant amount of the funding would be going to this southern Québec company that has been tied to very serious scandals.

So, I'm hoping that the minister, when he rises, can tell us how much of the \$50 million from Yukon taxpayers will be flowing toward SNC-Lavalin as part of the Liberal's Atlin deal.

**Ms. Tredger:** There is a lot to be excited about with this project. This project matches our energy needs rather perfectly, providing us with power in the winter when we need it most, when our demand is highest and our hydro production is lowest. Yukon Energy has come to an agreement that will secure power for Yukoners when we need it, without requiring us to purchase power when we don't need it. It's an agreement that is beneficial for Yukoners, and we congratulate Yukon Energy and the Tlingit Homeland Economic Limited Partnership on their work.

What's most important about the way this project is being funded is that ratepayers will not see increases to their bills. This is something that we've heard a lot about from Yukoners this winter.

When we build a highway, we don't put up a tollbooth. When we renovate a government office, we don't start selling tickets at the door. Energy projects are no different. Like highways and office buildings, they are public infrastructure, and we need to invest in them collectively to build a renewable energy future for the Yukon. This project is a good start, and we hope to see energy projects continue to be treated as collective, public infrastructure going forward.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I would like to thank the members opposite for their comments. I'll make sure to pass on to the Taku River Tlingit that the members of the Yukon Party don't support the project and don't appreciate who they are working with; I'll make sure to pass that on.

I think what's important is that right now — let's talk about the price of this electricity for Yukoners and what it's going to cost, because that's what is in front of the Yukon Utilities Board right now. There will be an energy price and a capacity price, but the energy price — right now, we talk about 19 cents a kilowatt hour being the cost of diesel. Well, that's what it was — sorry — because diesel just went up to \$2 per litre and so prices likely go up, so we want to get to renewables because then we're not paying that.

What does the agreement that has been negotiated between THELP and Yukon Energy say? It says 13 cents a kilowatt hour for winter energy. If we get above what we have agreed to — 25 gigawatt hours — we will go down to seven cents a kilowatt hour, and that's in the first 10 years. In the subsequent 30 years, that's going from 11 cents in winter down to three cents when we do more.

So, we're somewhere between 13 cents and three cents a kilowatt hour compared to 19 cents a kilowatt hour, which is going up.

So, no, I don't think that we should build a diesel plant. That's the wrong thing to do.

What this investment will do is that it will reduce the need for four rental diesels. We will reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, so I disagree with the members opposite. This project aligns with keeping bills low for Yukon families and transitions the territory to rely on more renewable energy sources. It aligns with Yukon Energy's 10-year renewable electricity plan and sets out a pathway to reach our goal of generating renewable energy, displacing fossil fuels and reducing our emissions.

What is interesting to me is that, during the election one year ago here in the territory, all three parties at that time said that they also agree with this project. It's unfortunate now that the Yukon Party does not support this project, just when the average price of diesel has hit \$2 a litre. I will certainly let the Taku River Tlingit know that.

I will say to Yukoners that this is a great project for the Yukon, and it is going to get us very reasonably priced energy from a renewable source for the long term. I am looking very forward to this project.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

## QUESTION PERIOD

### Question re: Cost of living

**Mr. Dixon:** Yesterday, when we asked the government whether it was considering any measures at all to help Yukoners deal with rising prices at the pump, and despite the wide range of policy tools that the Yukon government has to influence fuel prices, the minister's answer was: Don't worry, the *Our Clean Future* strategy is helping transition us away from fossil fuels. That, of course, is cold comfort to Yukoners who are struggling to fill up their tanks this week or businesses whose biggest cost is fuel.

I will give the minister another chance to answer this: Does the budget contain any measures at all that will actually help Yukoners with the jaw-dropping price of fuel?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Just to correct the record, yesterday what we said was that these are measures. We didn't say, "Don't worry." Those are the words of the opposition.

What we are doing in this budget, first of all, are a number of measures. Our budget for 2022-23 invests in, first of all, housing supply, which is a key item right now and was discussed yesterday in Question Period. Again, universal childcare — we are a leader in the country to ensure — others might laugh at that, but when you have two children and you are paying \$900 per child for childcare, before this deal, certainly my constituents don't think that's a laughing matter.

We had paid sick leave in place, and thanks to our agreement and collaboration with the NDP, we are now looking at a territory-wide dental plan. We think that all of those things are going to make life more affordable for Yukoners.

**Mr. Dixon:** Of course, my question was about fuel prices. This is one of the biggest issues in the country right now, and it's clear that it's not even remotely considered in the budget. We are not even a week into the legislative Sitting, and this budget is already stale and out of touch with the real challenges facing Yukoners.

Several other jurisdictions are considering real action. Alberta just announced that they are pausing the collection of their fuel tax, the Saskatchewan NDP are calling for something similar in Saskatchewan, and the Liberal government in Newfoundland says that they are reviewing their fuel tax in advance of their budget later in April.

Will the Liberal government here in Yukon consider pausing on the collection of the fuel tax to help Yukoners with the staggering cost of fuel?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Yes, the question previously was about gas, but the other part of that question, as I heard it, was: Is there anything in your budget for measures around affordability?

What I would say is that I think that Yukoners need to know that, up until yesterday, we had the lowest gas tax in the country — just over six percent. Yes, there was an announcement by the Alberta government yesterday, and that was to eliminate the tax on gas in Alberta. I think that they are

in a favourable position. We have just seen the revenue in their budget almost double with the inflation of oil, and they also have a government that's under a lot of pressure, and there could be decisions being made for political reasons under the current circumstances.

What we will do, as we have done all along, is continue to monitor and adapt, as we have done. We believe — and the economists whom I have reached out to over the last number of days and who really support political thinking across the spectrum, are thinking that there are some moves this week that are more boutique items that are driven by political decisions, rather than good policy decisions, and that's why we're going to continue to monitor the situation.

Again, the budget for 2022-23 helps Yukoners mitigate the financial impact of fighting climate change, which is one of the big drivers, with green energy retrofits and making sure that those carbon rebates go back to Yukoners.

**Mr. Dixon:** I'm shocked at the number of inaccuracies in the minister's comments there. The fuel tax in Yukon is not six percent; it's 6.2 cents for gasoline and 7.2 cents for diesel, so the minister was wrong on that. The member is wrong on a number of other points — about what our question is about — but, quite frankly, the question is: Will this government take this issue seriously and begin to take measures to reduce the cost of fuel for Yukoners?

The Premier likes to point out that the surplus gives the flexibility to respond to emerging issues. Well, this is certainly an emerging issue that is affecting just about each and every Yukoner. The government could waive the fuel tax for the year and make life just that much more affordable for Yukon citizens, and the government would still be comfortably in a surplus.

So, will the Government of Yukon consider dropping the fuel tax for the year to lighten the cost of living for Yukoners?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** It is interesting that the Yukon Party has finally woken up to inflation. We have seen rates that have concerned us since August, with no questions from the opposition all fall about inflation, and now it seems like political expedience has them finally to a place where they are actually concerned about this, so that is interesting.

Taking a look at gasoline taxes by region in Canada as far as cents per litre, it is 6.2 for Yukon — when compared to BC, which is 27 cents per litre, or compared to Alberta, which the member opposite is talking about, where it was 13 cents before their actions this week.

We have been saying for five years now — making sure that we keep prices low for Yukoners and making sure that we have quality of life up here. That has been a concern of ours for five years now. When the members opposite scoff about the initiatives in this budget — keeping those prices low for Yukoners — that is horrible. The early childhood care and learning investment is massive for keeping the price for Yukoners down low for the quality of life that they enjoy here. The retrofits programs that are in this budget are not things just for political reasons in the last month or couple of weeks now that these folks are back to work; it has been important to us for five years of budgeting.

I could go over the economic development and tourism and culture relief programs for businesses that have been renowned all over Canada, but there are too many to list in this short time frame.

**Question re: Rent control**

**Ms. McLeod:** Following the Liberal-NDP coalition agreement, the government brought in a poorly thought-out rent control policy. To quote directly from the CASA: “Residential rent increases will be capped at the rate of inflation...”

According to the Bureau of Statistics and the government’s own website on key economic indicators, inflation from January 2021 to January 2022 was 3.7 percent. Now the Liberals and the NDP have decided to cap rent increases at 3.3 percent this year, below the inflation rate presented on the government’s own website.

Given that the Liberal-NDP coalition agreement clearly states that rent increases will be capped at inflation, can the Minister of Community Services confirm why they have capped them lower than inflation?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** I am glad to be on my feet this afternoon to address the issue of the rent index. We heard from Yukoners about the need to work together and we continue to respect the agreements made under the confidence and supply agreement. This includes having met our commitment to index rents to inflation as of May 15, 2021.

The rental index aims to offer stability in rent for Yukoners over the term of the confidence and supply agreement. Given the rate of inflation, we know that landlords may choose to increase rents as of May 15, 2022 by up to 3.3 percent, which is the rate of inflationary change measured by the consumer price index. This means an additional \$33 per month where rent is currently \$1,000.

Stable, affordable housing is fundamental to the health and well-being of all Yukoners. The rental index is one of the other initiatives being taken with the focus on housing in the territory, including working with our partners across governments to increase housing options for Yukoners. We are trying to make Yukon affordable for Yukoners. We are doing that in concert with our colleagues across the way, and we are happy to talk about this again.

**Ms. McLeod:** I would rather have an answer to the question.

One of the first things that the Minister of Community Services did, upon taking this portfolio, was to bring in this poorly thought-out rent control policy. As a result of this poor policy, people have been evicted. Landlords have exited and rental units have been removed from the market. In fact, it has become clear that, since this minister brought this policy in, the housing crisis has gotten even worse.

Can the minister point to a single example of how this policy has done anything but make the housing crisis worse?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** I am happy to rise again to talk about the rent index. I will note that the CASA has been endorsed by all three parties, including the rent index. We heard it loud and clear from the leader of the opposition last fall that he was actually in support of CASA and actually stood up and said that he was more than willing to endorse it, including the rent index.

This is actually something that all three parties have endorsed in this House. We know that this is the case.

This was a priority for the New Democratic Party, and we agreed to support their policy. We appreciate the NDP’s willingness to work together to address housing pressures in the territory. The Yukon Party’s only solution, in addition to endorsing the CASA’s rent index, was to develop land, which we are already doing and at a faster clip than the Yukon Party had ever done when they were in government.

We have shared our concerns about this policy with the NDP. If people are being evicted as a result of this policy, it is clearly not making affordable housing more accessible. Since 2016, our population has grown by 12.1 percent, and housing and construction has kept pace. The number of private dwellings has increased by 12.9 percent. \$267 million in residential construction in 2021 shattered the 2020 record of nearly \$200 million. This year’s budget includes more than \$60 million for housing initiatives across the territory. I am happy to talk about it more.

**Ms. McLeod:** It’s clear to anyone who bothers to look at the government’s own website with key economic indicators that inflation from January 2021 to January 2022 was 3.7 percent. Furthermore, it’s clear that, by setting the cap at 3.3 percent, the Liberal government is inconsistent with the CASA. Finally, as we’ve seen, this policy has done nothing but negatively impact the rental housing market and further contribute to the housing crisis.

Will the minister admit that this policy is a failure and commit to fixing it by repealing his misguided rent control policy?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** We made a commitment through CASA, as did apparently the opposition itself, to follow the CAS agreement. We are following through with that, and we will follow the agreement until its expiry in January 2023.

We went into this with eyes wide open. We had identified some of the problems. We decided to proceed ahead with it because it was a pilot project — to see how it worked. We agreed to take a look at the inflation rate every single year in May and set the inflation target for the year. We have done that, as per our agreement, and we will continue to monitor how this policy affects the housing market. When it comes for renewal in January 2023, we will have another look at it.

**Question re: Midwifery in Yukon**

**Ms. Blake:** In April 2017, the current Premier said — and I quote: “Working with midwives, doctors and other medical professionals, the government anticipates licensing the practice of midwifery later next year.” It didn’t happen — not in 2018, in 2019, or in 2020. In 2021, we finally saw regulations for the practice of midwifery in the Yukon. In May 2021, the Premier said that they were — and I quote: “... working toward a fully funded program later this year.” It’s now 2022, and we have no midwives currently practising in the Yukon.

When will the Premier allow Yukon families to have access to midwives in the Yukon?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Our government remains deeply committed to making strides going forward with the integration

of publicly funded, accessible, and regulated midwifery services into Yukon's health care system. Our goal is to provide Yukoners with additional options within a range of health care services, which support healthy pregnancies, birthing experiences, and care after childbirth, without having to pay out-of-pocket for any of those services.

Our implementation plan and model of care for regulated and fully funded midwifery services is based on the recommendations of local and national experts, based on significant research and extensive public and stakeholder feedback gathered throughout the engagement process. It also aligns with Yukon's approach to midwifery care and the best practices and standards of most of the provinces and territories in Canada.

**Ms. Blake:** The midwifery regulations were approved early in 2021. This was a long-awaited day for midwives in the Yukon and for Yukon families. Finally, midwifery support would be a real option for all Yukon families, but here we are in 2022 — no midwife has been able to provide their essential and valuable services in the Yukon to any family wanting that support. Midwives have left the Yukon for better-paying jobs where their expertise and the importance of their work is respected.

What has this government done to ensure that midwives return to the Yukon to practise?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** This is a very important service for Yukoners, and they told us that it was important to them and that midwifery be regulated across the territory and that there be a very high standard of care. That is why we are working hard with our local and national partners to ensure that the midwifery program is fully integrated into our health system to offer the highest quality and consistent care for all Yukoners.

Change is never without its challenges, but it was time to regulate the profession. Before this, there was no minimum education or training requirements for people offering midwifery and midwifery-type services here in the territory. Our Liberal government is integrating midwifery into our health care system so that Yukoners have more options for care. Under our leadership, the Yukon's health care system is transforming into a national leader, and this is just one aspect of how that is happening.

I can indicate that recently, working with the Yukon Hospital Corporation, I noted that they have changed their bylaws and their rules to integrate midwifery into that practice, and we are looking forward to services coming onstream very soon. We have regulated midwifery for the first time in Yukon history — an incredible challenge and opportunity for Yukoners and their health care.

**Ms. Blake:** A government committee was struck to consult and make recommendations on the implementation of midwifery in the Yukon. Two meetings were held before the Yukon Association for Birth Choices was invited. Recently, the same association was informed that their services on this committee were no longer required. The Yukon Association for Birth Choices has long been the voice of midwives and, even more importantly, the voice of Yukon families wanting to be able to choose the method of birth that they feel is best.

Will the minister explain this reluctance to work with midwives and families in creating an accessible birthing choice for Yukon families?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Thank you, again, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure that the facts presented in this question are correct. I have personally looked into the makeup of the implementation committee. What I can indicate is that it is extremely hard work and important work to regulate and to build a framework for midwifery in the Yukon. It has involved extensive engagement, consultation, and research for the past four years. We have posted and attempted to hire midwives. We have had very interesting comments. We worked with the Public Service Commission to increase the rate of pay — something that was discussed here in the fall — for individual midwives being hired, and we have had challenges from the Yukon Employees' Union on that issue, and we are working through that with them, but certainly not something we expected in the process of achieving midwifery here in the territory.

In addition to seeking advice of the Midwifery Advisory Committee, made up of key health care partners, we also engaged Yukoners, midwives, physicians, and nurses. The regulations are in place, as noted, and our government is very pleased to welcome the first Yukon midwife to the territory. We are, of course, hiring a second midwife for the services so that they can be properly deployed and serve Yukon birthing mothers.

#### **Question re: COVID-19 vaccination requirement rollout**

**Ms. McLeod:** Last week, a day and a half before the Legislature began sitting, the Premier announced that the remaining public health restrictions would be lifted over the course of the coming weeks. In particular, the Premier announced that he was abandoning the Liberal's vaccine mandate for government employees. According to his announcement, many of the employees who refused to share their vaccination status will be able to return to work on April 4. Mr. Speaker, this announcement was light on details.

My question is simple: How many of the hundreds of Yukon government employees placed on leave without pay will be able to return to work on April 4?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** The public service has been working very hard. I would like to thank all of our public servants throughout this time. This was all about keeping Yukoners safe. We know that the policy has been very effective in reducing the impacts of COVID-19, so I want to thank everyone for all of their efforts, strong leadership, and work in guiding the territory through the pandemic.

We just finished our two large waves of COVID. At last count, when the public service gave me the numbers, it was 95 full-time Yukoners who were on leave without pay. The Premier announced last week, after working with the chief medical officer of health, that we are bringing back our employees. We are repatriating them. We are looking at the most vulnerable sectors, which are settings, for example, like long-term care facilities, and whether we need to maintain some vaccine requirements there. But by and large, the majority of

those workers who have been on leave without pay will be back working with us as of April 4, as long as the health stays positive for the territory.

**Ms. McLeod:** There are hundreds of Yukoners who have been placed on leave without pay because of this vaccine mandate the Liberals have imposed. This means that those families have been going on without a regular income for months now. Now they are hearing that they may be able to go back to work, but it's not clear which jobs or how many jobs.

Will the government at least commit to a date by which these people will get to know whether or not they get to go back to work?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Yes, we are working with the union and the chief medical officer of health. We are just talking through what it is to make sure that we keep folks in our long-term care facilities safe. That is what we are working on right now. We will get that information out as soon as possible. What we've always done — and what the Premier has been doing often, as well as others — is that, as soon as we get the information, we go out and we indicate it publicly. We will make that commitment to do that again, as we have done all along. In fact, what we've been doing all along is asking for the advice of our chief medical officer of health.

I am just not sure now whether or not the members opposite think that is the right thing to do. I know that, last year, they said no, they would not follow that leadership, and now that this advice has come from the chief medical officer of health to repatriate folks, I am just not sure whether the Yukon Party is supporting that or not supporting that. I look forward to hearing from them.

We are very happy, as the territory's largest employer, that we took these actions to keep the public safe, and we are very happy that we are now able to get workers back to work again. The number of full-time employees is 95, and we have casual and part-time employees around 200 — some of them summer employees.

**Ms. McLeod:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Regardless, when the Liberals let these families know that they can return to work, it remains clear that at least some of those employees will not be welcomed back. The [yukon.ca](http://yukon.ca) website makes clear that the vaccination mandate will likely remain in place for some sectors.

So, if the government is planning on maintaining the vaccine mandate for some sectors beyond April 4, what is the plan for those employees? Will they simply be left on leave without pay indefinitely, or will there come a time when the Liberal government stops pretending to care and terminates their employment?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Let me start by saying thank you to all of our public service employees. Thank you to those who did choose to be vaccinated. Thank you to those who did not and went on leave without pay. In their way, they stepped away, because they chose not to be vaccinated, but they gave service to Yukoners, so I want to thank everybody for their service to this territory. Together, we have had some of the best health outcomes — the best outcomes out of COVID generally. So, it is not that there wasn't heartache and challenge throughout this

global pandemic — there has been. But I would like to say thanks to all public servants.

We are working to keep our most vulnerable settings safe. So, we have asked the chief medical officer of health to advise us on what she believes the risk is around places like our long-term care facilities. So, yes, we may say that it may be a requirement for people who work there to be vaccinated, because we think — or if we are advised that way — I haven't been yet — but, to keep the risk low, that is what is important, and we will come back and we will let all of our employees know that and we will work with them to support them through that.

#### **Question re: COVID-19 vaccination requirement rollout**

**Mr. Hassard:** So, the vaccine mandate doesn't just apply to Yukon government employees; it also applies to a range of private businesses in the allied health sector, NGOs, and the private contractors who do work for the government. When the Premier announced that the vaccine mandate was being removed on April 4, several businesses in the allied health sector reached out to our office to ask if that meant that they could rehire staff who they had laid off. Unfortunately, there's no clear answer to that question.

When the Liberals brought the mandate in, they waited until close to midnight the day before it was to come into force to pass the OIC.

Can the government explain which businesses will be able to bring back the employees they had to place on leave as a result of this Liberal's vaccine mandate, or are they planning to wait until midnight on April 3 to tell them?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I thank the member opposite for the question. This is effectively the same question, and I thank him for that question. We are working, right now, with the chief medical officer of health to understand how to keep people in our most vulnerable settings safe, whether that's long-term care facilities or similar facilities. That's what we are working on right now, and there's a big difference between when we let the public know — the Premier often has gotten out ahead of when the order-in-council is written.

What you ought to know is that — and let me just give a shout-out to the Justice department — also public servants, by the way, who have worked flat out every time we make these changes to get those orders-in-council ready, to put everything in place appropriately. But the Premier — or the Minister of Health and Social Services or other members of Cabinet who are asked to inform the public — does so ahead of time — to tell everyone that here is where we're getting to. So, our apologies that they have been working until midnight to serve the public. That is what they're doing, but what I would like to say to them is thank you so much for helping to keep Yukoners safe.

**Mr. Hassard:** In fact, that was a very different question for the minister, but unfortunately, it was the same non-answer that we are very used to.

The vaccine mandate also applies to any contractor or business that bids on work with the Yukon government. In fact,

the mandate found its way into contracts and is now an explicit contract requirement. So, if the government is removing the vaccine mandate for contractors doing work on government jobs after April 4, what happens to contracts that were signed before April 4? Will contractors be forced to maintain the vaccine mandate until the conclusion of their project, even if the Yukon government has otherwise completely removed it?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** If my answer did not seem clear, I will do my very best right now to make it as explicitly clear as I can.

We are working right now with the chief medical officer of health to ask her for her advice around our most vulnerable settings — for example, long-term care facilities. That is what we're asking the question about.

There may be others. I don't want to be explicit with a list today because it's her advice that will come to us. We will then take that advice and make a decision on the vaccine mandate. For the majority of our public servants, the contractors, and all the people around in the vaccine mandate, it will end on April 4. For some in our most vulnerable sectors, it may continue. We are waiting to get that advice. We have asked for it as soon as we got the advice that we could move in this direction. We signalled it more than a month out, and we are now working to get that advice.

I promise this House that I will come back as soon as I can, and we will make it public as soon as we have that advice. I thank everyone for their patience.

**Mr. Hassard:** Unfortunately, this is less than a month away, and businesses, contractors, and NGOs need to make decisions, families need to make decisions, and they need to know if they in fact have jobs.

NGOs that had to lay off staff because of the mandate were very interested to hear the government's announcement that the mandate was being removed. We have heard of several NGOs that had to put on leave or lay off multiple staff, yet it remains unclear which NGOs will get to hire these employees back.

Can the government explain which NGOs will bring their employees back on April 4? If NGOs are unable to bring their employees back on April 4, will the government assist those groups with the employment liability associated with permanently terminating those employees?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Thank you to the Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission for answering this question to the members opposite. Really, if the members opposite paid attention to the press conference last week, this was exactly what was said by the chief medical officer and me at that time. Added to the list are volunteers as well, so whether it is NGOs, allied health professionals, or volunteers, this is the conversation that is ongoing right now.

We are very appreciative of people's patience as these conversations continue, but at the same time — and the members opposite clearly don't want to hear the answer because they talk every time that we talk and then they say that we don't answer their questions.

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

## Speaker's statement

**Speaker:** Order, please.  
The member has the floor.

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was explaining to the members opposite, if they care to listen, we are working on this right now. We have said, again, the most vulnerable population — that is where we have to focus our attention.

We will make the announcement as soon as possible, when we have all the details. We do appreciate the patience of folks as we work through this.

Also, putting things into perspective, compared to other jurisdictions, as far as school closures, as far as business closures, as far as other health measures, this government and the Yukon population have worked in tandem together to reduce the worst pressures that this devastating disease could have had on the Yukon, and I am very, very thankful for that.

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

## Notice of opposition private members' business

**Mr. Cathers:** Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the items standing in the name of the Official Opposition to be called for debate on Wednesday, March 9, 2022.

They are Bill No. 302, *Act to Amend the Civil Emergency Measures Act (2022)*, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge; and Motion No. 288, standing in the name of the Member for Porter Creek North.

**Ms. Tredger:** Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the item standing in the name of the Third Party to be called on Wednesday, March 9, 2022. It is Motion No. 168, standing in the name of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin.

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

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

#### Motion No. 282

**Clerk:** Motion No. 282, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

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

THAT Standing Order 76 of the Standing Orders of the Yukon Legislative Assembly be amended for the duration of the 2022 Spring Sitting by deleting all instances of the words "Government Bill" and substituting in their place the words "appropriation bill"; and

THAT, following the 2022 Spring Sitting, the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges meet prior to the 2022 Fall Sitting to review Standing Order 76.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Last fall, we had a debate here in this Legislature to talk about permanently removing Standing Order 76 or amending it so that it would reflect just on government bills other than budget bills.

At that time, I rose and I spoke about the importance of taking that conversation to the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges. We did take that debate there, and we talked about it for some time. I wouldn't say that we have yet reached agreement as a committee, but what we did come to was a bit of a compromise. That compromise was to do a pilot project where, this session, we seek to remove — or to alter, sorry — Standing Order 76 so that it does remove the clause that would end debate on government bills other than budget bills and that we would trial it for this Sitting and that we would ask the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges to come back over the summer and to look at that and to try to understand how that affected the work of this House.

What I will say is that the tension in the debate is how to make sure that there is an opportunity for bills to be debated fully, while also allowing that bills have the opportunity to get to a vote ultimately.

Other legislatures have done this differently from Standing Order 76. We all seem to agree that it is time to move to something new, although we haven't yet agreed on where we should land. I think this is a good compromise.

I look forward to debate on the motion today, and I look forward to the temporary new rules that we will have in place for us, as a House, and to see how that will work to do the work for Yukoners and make sure that the business of government proceeds here in the Legislature.

**Mr. Cathers:** I'm pleased to rise in support of this motion. It was agreed to by the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges, of which I am a member. It also is, as the Government House Leader made reference to, very similar to what we had proposed last fall, through a motion brought forward in the Legislative Assembly by my colleague, the Leader of the Official Opposition. If memory serves, I believe it was Motion No. 113.

This is a positive step forward, albeit something that's being test-driven just for this Sitting of the Assembly. I would note — and also just for the reference of everyone — that since SCREP has moved toward also making its minutes public, this is not a violation of the committee's privilege — that what we have proposed there includes the possibility of expanding the role of the work done by the Legislative Assembly through committees, such as the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, which has been active in name only for many years. We believe it could play a valuable role, including possibly having some legislation referred to that committee and allowing that committee to do work outside Sittings of this Assembly to consult with the public on legislation that is of more interest to the public. There may be a desire and benefit in having an opportunity, in a more relaxed setting than this Chamber, for stakeholders and other witnesses to come forward — recognizing that is a matter under discussion, but, just for the record, I wanted to note that and the fact that I believe and

we believe that there is room for this Legislative Assembly to grow as an institution, and part of that should include more opportunities for public consultation and public involvement on legislation, regulations, and other things that are affecting the lives of Yukoners.

I will wrap up my comments at this point, and I look forward to further work of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges. We will be supporting this, of course, and would just note in closing that the Yukon Party Official Opposition does believe that we should be looking at collectively increasing the opportunities for public consultation on legislation, including direct consultation with MLAs through making more use of committees outside the Assembly.

**Ms. White:** It's a pleasure today to speak in favour of this motion. I believe that we've all been sent here by people who expect us to do better, and by that I mean not passing legislation that hasn't had the opportunity to be fully debated. We saw in the last Sitting what can happen if we work together. That example is going to be the better building program that comes forward again this spring.

The real test will be whether or not we can hold ourselves accountable, whether we can do the work in a timely fashion and get through it, and I believe we can. I'm looking forward to seeing this work out for this Sitting. I'm looking forward to hearing — well, I'm looking forward to seeing how that works and then, of course, the discussions that will follow, but I believe this is the first step toward doing what we all said we would do for Yukoners, which is working together.

If we fundamentally believe that ideas come from all sides, then we can work together to make them happen and I am looking forward to seeing that happen in this Sitting.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** First of all, I would like to thank the members opposite for their comments. I agree that this is an important step for us as a legislature — trying to find our way forward. I acknowledge that, as the Member for Lake Laberge noted, we agreed as a committee that we should try to allow ourselves to be able to reference what is happening in the committee work here in the Legislature. I think that is a good step, and we agreed that, on a go-forward basis, we would ensure that our minutes are more public after, of course, they have been vetted. It was really the discussion, or the debate, on this topic that led to the agreement on making the minutes public. We have now made it a go-forward thing, so that is also a good step.

I thank the member for his interest in hearing that there should be more public engagement on bills. Of course, anytime that we bring forward legislation, unless it is housekeeping-types of legislation, we always do public engagement. We put out things like "what we heard". I look forward to hearing, as their bill comes forward tomorrow, what type of public

consultation they have done on that. That is really important to me. I look forward to that.

On this motion, we will do our best to adjust. We will have to work hard to make sure that the government non-budget bills have enough time, because we always want to get those bills to a vote ultimately, and I thank the Leader of the Third Party for her words about working together to find a way so that we can make sure that there is debate and that we get to a final decision.

With that, I will sit and I look forward to the vote on this motion.

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

**Some Hon. Members:** Division.

### Division

**Speaker:** Division has been called.

### Bells

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Mr. Dixon:** Agree.

**Ms. Clarke:** Agree.

**Mr. Cathers:** Agree.

**Ms. McLeod:** Agree.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Agree.

**Mr. Hassard:** Agree.

**Mr. Istchenko:** Agree.

**Ms. White:** Agree.

**Ms. Blake:** Agree.

**Ms. Tredger:** Agree.

**Clerk:** Mr. Speaker, the results are 17 yea, nil nay.

**Speaker:** The ayes have it. I declare the motion carried.  
*Motion No.282 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, Hon. Mr. Clarke.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** As I was continuing with my comments, I was reviewing some of the work that is being done by the Department of Highways and Public Works on roadwork. This included significant multi-year work through key segments of the Alaska Highway through Whitehorse and specifically between the weigh scales and Lodestar Lane. It also includes some design and pre-engineering for the thaw slump at kilometre 1456, as this section is significantly impacted by permafrost thaw.

Separately, still on the Alaska Highway, we have also allocated \$2.3 million to the replacement of the Big Creek bridge, which is 60 kilometres west of Watson Lake.

While these are notable, we are also continuing to invest a significant portion on the Klondike Highway. Almost \$43 million is allocated in this year's budget. I can advise that significant work has been ongoing between kilometre 418 and kilometre 646 on the Klondike Highway, with ongoing road resiliency improvements occurring. This is also what I was referring to when I spoke previously about infrastructure deficit. This is also why we are investing in this portion.

We are also replacing bridges, such as the one at Crooked Creek, located just south of Stewart Crossing, for the sum of \$15 million. Members will be familiar with that, as it was quite a precipitous or a fairly steep drop to a small bridge and then up a steep incline on the other side. If members have travelled on the Klondike Highway, a lot of that ground has already been reprofiled, and it is a significant project. It will certainly make that area significantly safer for the travelling public. We are also rehabilitating bridges, such as the ones over the McCabe River and Moose Creek, for a total of \$3.3 million.

There are also allocations for capital for roads, but I would also like to mention the \$51 million that is allocated to various airport projects. Approximately \$46 million is allocated to the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport project, which is a critical facility for the territory. I can advise that this project will be multi-year and is ongoing. Also, \$27 million will go toward a parallel runway and the rest of the other improvements around the runway, including apron panels.

We are also investing approximately \$800,000 on the Dawson airport and Old Crow aerodrome for work on the runways and other site improvements. The community aerodromes have been allocated approximately \$2 million for capital maintenance in this year's budget.

I would like to move to the Property Management division at this time. This division has a wide variety of responsibilities. One of them is building maintenance, and for that purpose, we have allocated a little more than \$10 million. Some examples of this are painting and flooring work, elevator upgrades, parking lot work, emergency generator replacements for the Haines Junction health centre, and the main sewer replacement at Whitehorse Elementary.

In the building development portion of the budget, we have allocated \$56.7 million for the building of housing, and there is a health and wellness centre for Old Crow for about \$28 million. Out of those \$56.7 million, almost \$14 million have been allocated to energy retrofit projects for government buildings.

We will also be upgrading the Selkirk storm drain for a little over \$2.5 million. This drain will run along Selkirk Street and eventually connect to the storm line under Lewes Boulevard to ultimately discharge into the Yukon River. Residents of Riverdale will be aware of the clearing that was done last year in anticipation of that project.

Staying in Riverdale, we have also allocated funds to demolish Macaulay Lodge. The contract for the demolition of this building has been awarded to a Yukon First Nation

business, and we expect the work to be completed by the end of this summer. I am optimistic about the ongoing work with the Yukon Housing Corporation to plan for a future housing development on this site.

We are also allocating approximately \$4.25 million for the purposes of replacing the Whitehorse airport maintenance facility.

Last but certainly not least, under capital planning, we have, in this year's budget, allocated \$27 million for the purpose of the continuation of the Dempster fibre project. As members will know, this project will connect the Yukon to the existing Mackenzie Valley fibre link and create a 4,000-kilometre long fibre network that will provide reliable, dependable, and redundant Internet connection to the communities in the Yukon and, in fact, across Canada's north.

We have also allocated \$7 million to the green infrastructure program. Through this allocation, we will be modernizing our grader stations and phasing out inefficient diesel generators for solar-powered facilities. These solar array systems, once installed at the grader stations at Ogilvie, Blanchard, Tuchtua, and Klondike, will offset approximately 200,000 litres of diesel fuel each year, which is a reduction of 530 tonnes of greenhouse gases.

I can also advise that the grader stations have been prioritized, and these are the first four, as far as having the greatest impact on the reduction of greenhouse gases, but there are another four that have been identified as well over the course of the next few years. Given that they are island-grid diesel generation stations, these were seen as being highly attractive targets for solar-powered facilities and for the reduction of significant volumes of greenhouse gases through the significantly less use of diesel fuel.

I am particularly proud of this project where the synergy with the departments of Environment, Highways and Public Works, and Energy, Mines and Resources really bears fruit.

We are making the most substantial investments in renewable energy in the Yukon in more than a decade as we continue to support efforts that empower Yukoners and Yukon businesses to advance the territory's climate change goals.

Of course, I have not covered all of the projects and programs from my departments. I would like to thank all employees at both departments for their ongoing work and dedication. The values and priorities, as represented through this project, are a great source of pride for me.

This budget addresses critical needs in the territory and makes necessary investments so that all Yukoners will benefit from this economic growth and the substantial and meaningful commitments to a greener and more sustainable future.

In closing, I have a few final comments to make.

Candidly, from my position of privilege and in a peaceful community and in light of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, I thought I would make a few brief comments as a legislator in the Yukon.

The other day, I was walking outside of the Legislative Assembly and some individuals were protesting lawfully, freely, and unimpeded against government COVID-19 policies, as they can expect to do in a free and democratic society. One

held a sign that read, "Vaccine mandates equal Hitler's Germany", and another sign implied that Yukon decision-makers should be judged at Nuremberg 2.0. The City of Nuremberg in Germany is, of course, where Nazi leaders were tried for their atrocious crimes against humanity at the end of World War II in 1945 and 1946. Mr. Speaker, 12 of the Nazi defendants were sentenced to death for their egregious crimes — crimes that included genocide.

As I indicated, we as Canadians value freedom of expression and peaceful protests. However, to analogize current and past public health restrictions in that manner, in my view, is extremely excessive rhetoric that is being advanced against Yukon lawmakers. Most importantly, it completely diminishes the actual horrific experiences of actual victims and descendants of the loathsome Nazi regime.

I would like to, once again, express my extreme gratitude and thank my good fortune for living in a prosperous, functioning, liberal democracy, warts and all.

Members of the House will be familiar with the economist democracy index. I looked at the most recent democracy index, which was in 2020, which highlighted democracy in decline, but the only full democracies in the world, without reservation, were Canada, all of the countries in Scandinavia, Ireland, Iceland, and New Zealand. In fact, the general public may or may not know this, but there are less than 30 countries in total in the world that are deemed to be non-flawed democracies.

I am acutely aware — and we are constantly reminded through both tragic history lessons and also as it is unfolding in the present day. As we well know, President Putin is meting out his iron-fisted, brutal, and authoritarian clampdown in real time, which ultimately is having an awful and disproportionately devastating impact on innocent civilians who we pray for, as we try to support them concretely from faraway Yukon.

I would finally express the sincere honour that I have being able to serve as the MLA for Riverdale North and that I never take for granted my freedom of speech in this Assembly in a free, democratic, and peaceful country.

**Mr. Cathers:** I am pleased to rise today in response to the budget. I will be speaking to a number of issues on behalf of constituents and other Yukoners. A few of the areas that I will talk about include: the pandemic; the doctor shortage; the opioid crisis; and the impact of rising prices on Yukoners' ability to pay for food, fuel, electricity, housing, and other necessities. I will also talk about our agriculture sector and challenges faced by the private sector and rising property crime.

First of all, I want to begin by quoting the letter that the Leader of the Official Opposition sent to Prime Minister Trudeau recently with regard to the federal government's decision to use the *Emergencies Act*.

In the letter urging the Prime Minister to repeal the declaration of a national state of emergency, the Leader of the Official Opposition said this — and I quote: "We also urge you to recognize that there are deep divisions in Canadian society right now, and it is time for all leaders to show respect for citizens, including people with whom they disagree, and to

focus on unifying our country. We need to come together as Canadians again, and jointly find a path forward.”

Mr. Speaker, the pandemic has created a lot of strains on citizens and on society. It's important to remember, especially as we talk about our fellow Yukoners, that we may not always agree with each other, but we don't have to agree with each other to care about each other or to respect people, including those who disagree with us and with whom we may disagree.

I want to move to talk about the international situation.

Mr. Speaker, the illegal and immoral invasion of the Ukraine by Russia is a world-changing event. Millions of people in the Ukraine are feeling the impact of this unjustified attack by Putin. People in Canada and in the Yukon, along with others around the world, have watched this happen with a mix of sadness and anger.

Canada and international allies have imposed a series of strong sanctions on Russia. Provinces and territories, including the Yukon, have also taken action. As the Leader of the Official Opposition and I both stated on the opening day of this Sitting of the Legislative Assembly, the Yukon Party strongly supports those actions. We support sending weapons, ammunition, and equipment to Ukraine and supporting refugees fleeing from the conflict.

We also urge the Government of Canada to recognize the importance of making protection of our Arctic sovereignty a top priority by taking immediate action to modernize and strengthen our air force, navy, army, reserves, and Coast Guard. As Canadians, we need to realize the importance of ensuring that we can protect our country and come to the assistance of our allies. That includes making sure our Armed Forces are ready to meet the needs of today and the future.

We also need to realize that some of the assumptions that have guided many governments, and indeed much of western society in the last few decades, have been naïve.

Our hearts go out to the innocent victims of this war in Ukraine, and we commend the people of Ukraine for their courage in facing the Russian invaders and fighting for freedom and democracy. With this invasion, the world had changed.

In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. I recall listening to the news of this in my grandparents' kitchen. As events led to the Cold War ending, many people, especially in the west, breathed a sigh of relief. As a new era began, many believed that we lived in a rules-based international order and the time for major conflicts and invasions of the type seen and feared in previous times was a thing of the past.

Global trade and mutual economic growth were thought by many to characterize the modern era. These naïve assumptions and hopes met reality when Putin invaded Ukraine. Like during the time period between World War I and World War II, some people and some countries wanted lasting peace so strongly, many made the mistake of believing other nations and leaders felt the same and then ran into hard reality when a major power invaded a peaceful neighbour. This has happened again, and the world changed again in February 2022. This will impact not only national security, but the economy, the supply chain, and many other things we have taken for granted. It includes

presenting increasing potential threats to our Arctic sovereignty, including off the Yukon's north shore.

As we face these challenges together, we must remember that whatever differences we have, together we are all Canadians, and our national interest is in protecting our democracy and the freedom we all enjoy. We also must be realistic, and we must respond to the changing global situation with actions guided by wisdom and principles, not ideology or idealism or naïve hope. We must be realistic. We must be wise. We must be principled.

We can take action at home, and we should. Some of the actions we should take have other benefits. These include becoming more self-sufficient and being able to meet more of our own needs here in the Yukon, or at least in Canada, if we are unable to do it here. This includes supporting and growing our local agriculture sector. We've seen a number of Yukon farms, market gardeners, and producers take significant steps to expand production in recent years. There are many in my riding, and I would like to thank all of them for their contributions to growing Yukon agriculture.

Other opportunities that have benefits, both economically and in potentially reducing fossil fuel emissions, include repatriating parts of the Canadian manufacturing sector that have largely gone offshore. Instead of shipping so many of our raw minerals and resources thousands of miles overseas and then shipping them thousands of miles back, there is the opportunity to actually benefit economically and reduce emissions by making more of the goods we depend on here in Canada, and it includes ending our dependence on oil, natural resources, and other products from authoritarian regimes.

Mr. Speaker, in standing here today and speaking to the 2022-23 budget, I am reminded of a time that seems ages ago in many ways, but was not that long ago — two years ago, in March 2020, just before the pandemic was declared. Once again, with all due respect to colleagues across the floor, the current government seems slow to realize that a major world-changing event has happened, and the talking points we have heard so far this Sitting once again seem stale-dated and out of touch with the new reality. The world has changed. These changes are not all what we want, but we must be realistic about the challenges that we are facing.

We will have some spirited debates, including criticism, but we should ultimately remember that, together, we are all Canadians. The interests of the Yukon and Canada should be paramount in everything that we do, and we need to recognize the importance of acting in the best interests of Yukoners and all Canadians.

I would like to move on to focus on a few of the major issues that were impacting the lives of Yukoners before the world-changing attack by Russia on Ukraine and are continuing to impact people here today.

I would like to begin with the doctor shortage. As we debated in the Fall Sitting of the Legislative Assembly on a number of occasions, according to the government's own numbers, 21 percent of Yukoners — over one-fifth — do not have a family doctor. Our health care system is largely set up to operate with the assumption that everyone does have a family

doctor, and if you are one of the over one-fifth of Yukoners who don't, it creates challenges in accessing the medical care you need when you need it. The closing of the walk-in clinic last summer created a further challenge for people and created further pressure on the hospital.

We raised this issue repeatedly in the fall. We asked the government to reinstate the recruitment position that they had cut. We asked them to work with the Yukon Medical Association on a plan to improve the recruitment and retention of family doctors here in the Yukon. I gave some examples of the success that we had previously when I was Health and Social Services minister in working with the Yukon Medical Association, the Yukon Registered Nurses Association, and other health professions and stakeholders on a health human resources strategy.

I urge the government to work with those same stakeholders to update the strategy to reflect the needs currently and ensure that the Yukon is doing everything it can to recruit and retain family physicians here in the territory and ensure that Yukoners have access to the health care professionals that they need, including physicians, when they need them.

Unfortunately, despite repeated questions in the fall, the Minister of Health and Social Services was unwilling or unable to point to anything tangible that this government had actually done to recruit and retain physicians here in the territory. Instead, we heard talking points about talking to the YMA, but we didn't see tangible actions. We heard that they were considering reinstating the position that they had cut, but we didn't see tangible actions. Unfortunately, especially with the additional strain caused by the pandemic, every day that this physician shortage goes on, it is a problem for Yukon citizens.

I have to remind the government, as well, that through actual information that was shared with us by the physician community, it was pointed out to us that, in contrast to the government's claims of doing well, in terms of family physicians per capita, the Yukon actually has the worst ratio of family physicians per capita in the country. In the time period between 2015 and 2019, which is when the report they like to cite covered, the Yukon was the only one of all the provinces and territories in the entire country that had gotten worse in terms of the family physician ratio per capita. That is continuing through their lack of action.

The solution that we suggest is working with the Yukon Medical Association on an action plan to improve recruitment and retention of family physicians and to take those actions as quickly as possible, because it is directly affecting the lives of thousands of Yukoners every single week, every single month, and every single day.

Mr. Speaker, returning to the topic of the pandemic, one of the things I would note is that I've had a number of people mention to me the fact that, in the early days of the pandemic, there was a lot of unity within society — people standing out on balconies, in some places, clanging pots and pans together in support of our health care workers.

Unfortunately, as time has gone on, the pandemic and the politics related to it have been divisive in society. It is unfortunate. While I am trying — in urging everyone to

recognize the importance of leaders and showing respect for citizens, including people with whom they disagree, and a focus on unifying our country, I'm going to try not to point out too many people in the examples I've given, but I do want to point out that some political leaders have used very divisive rhetoric, both at a national level and here in this Assembly unfortunately, including earlier this afternoon. That rhetoric is not helpful.

Again, it's important to recognize that for Yukoners and other citizens we may disagree with, we can disagree with them, but do so respectfully. It is not helping our society when politicians choose to paint individual people within a protest — who may be saying things in an inappropriate way or have a sign that we do not agree with — it's not helpful when everyone who has come out to express concerns is painted with the same brush.

I want to be clear that I'm not defending for a moment unreasonable signs or unreasonable behaviour, but there are many others in the protests we've seen here in the Yukon who, even if members disagree with them, those citizens still deserve to have their views heard respectfully. It is not helpful for our society if people choose to play wedge politics and use divisive rhetoric. It's also not the Yukon way.

I'll move on from that, Mr. Speaker, but I do want to again emphasize and urge everyone to recognize that there are deep divisions in Canadian society right now, and it's time for all leaders to show respect for citizens, including people with whom they disagree, and to focus on unifying our country. We need to come together as Canadians again and jointly find a path forward.

Moving on to some of the specifics in the pandemic, I want to note and acknowledge that the pandemic has been tough on most people in some ways, but it has been harder on some. This includes, especially, people who have suffered job loss as a result of it or have felt divisions, including divisions within families over their views on the pandemic. I have had people contact me who are really not doing well right now — personally, financially, or in some other way.

What I want to note is that I think it is very important that we recognize the unintended consequences of the pandemic and some of the rules — no matter how well-intentioned — the cascading impact that this has had. I also want to acknowledge that it has been tough for many of our health care professionals in dealing with seeing a situation of how people's views on this have evolved and, in some cases, rather than being respected for the work that they are doing on behalf of Canadians, they have, in some cases, been blamed by some people for pandemic rules. That is, of course, neither appropriate nor acceptable.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, I want to mention as well that, in the area of public health measures, as you will recall, we have been calling for more public consultation and checks on the use of emergency powers since May 2020. We proposed and tabled amendments to the *Civil Emergency Measures Act* yesterday that we are calling for debate tomorrow. These measures are aimed at creating increased democratic safeguards and checks and balances over the use of emergency powers and providing for public consultation. Many of the changes are based directly on the federal government's *Emergencies Act* and the

safeguards contained in that. I want to again emphasize that, in our view, it is important that emergency powers be used only when there is no other reasonable alternative, not simply because it is more convenient for government. There are other ways to deal with matters, including public health rules that may be required to deal with situations such as the pandemic. Whenever it is possible to avoid the use of emergency powers, through using those other measures such as legislation, we believe that the use of emergency powers should be avoided.

It is also important to note that one of the themes that we have emphasized for many months throughout the pandemic is that, even if public health measures are needed, it doesn't mean that people, businesses, churches, NGOs, sports associations, et cetera, shouldn't have an opportunity to be consulted on the details that impact their lives. In fact, that exercise is not just a public relations exercise, but it is one that will lead to improvements to those policies and rules because of the fact that people have a better understanding of the rules affecting them than government does when the rules are put into place.

An example of that is the unintended consequences, as members will recall — among the letters that we have written regarding specific aspects of the pandemic is one I wrote to the Premier regarding the impact of the pandemic rules on churches and faith-based organizations. The Leader of the Official Opposition talked about this yesterday, as well as some of the other specific issues that have been raised with us by other Yukoners and the actions we took to raise these concerns.

As members who have seen the letter will recall, it noted that not only were we seeing a situation where the Yukon had more restrictions on churches and faith-based services than any province in the country, but it was actually directly impeding the ability of churches to offer addiction support programs while, at the same time, the Yukon had declared a public health emergency related to the opioid crisis. We were seeing support services directly helping people with an addiction being shut down as a result of pandemic restrictions. While Yukoners have died tragically from both the COVID-19 pandemic and the opioid crisis, in fact, more people have lost their lives due to the opioid crisis than the pandemic — my point being that addiction support services are especially important in the current situation we are in.

I also want to note as well, moving to the topic of the opioid crisis — as members will recall, we issued a press release regarding this outlining where we feel that the current government's approach regarding it is lacking. We believe that, in response to the opioid crisis, there needs to be more focus on prevention, treatment, and enforcement.

I want to emphasize that we do support effective harm-reduction programs, but there is more that needs to be done, and a real plan to address the opioid crisis needs to be much more than a list of actions focused mostly on harm reduction. In fact, I believe that the number one goal of any opioid action plan should be to help as many people as possible break their addictions and live free from the risk of overdose. As well, it is important that, in addition to prevention and treatment, appropriate resources are there to help the RCMP go after

illegal drug dealers and to arrest and prosecute the people who are selling these toxic drugs.

As I noted, in the government's response so far, we don't see enough emphasis on helping people break their addictions and stay sober through actions, including making addictions and mental health services more available in all communities, as well as improving aftercare and diversion programs. I should note as well that Yukoners have mentioned to me that, in addition to the opioid part of the drug crisis, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that there are Yukoners who are addicted to other drugs and experiencing harm as a result of that. I agree and we recognize that. It is important that, in responding to all of the illegal drug crises, there should be more focus on prevention and treatment to help people break their addictions and hopefully stay sober, as well as the enforcement piece to help the RCMP go after the people who are selling these illegal drugs.

Just moving on in my notes here, there are a number of issues that I will touch on at a later date. Rather than attempting to deal with everything at second reading here today, I will bring up some issues that I have on my list during Committee.

I would like to thank my colleagues who earlier today raised the issue of the impact of the vaccination mandate on Yukoners and the question about at what point people who have been placed on leave without pay will be able to return to work. The government has at times talked about this in a way that suggests it is a success because of the percentages, but for every one of the hundreds of people who are affected by it and who were placed on leave without pay, they don't see this as a success.

I, along with others, have heard from people who have suffered financial hardship as a direct result of this. The lack of answers from government is not helping anything.

As we look across the country and see other jurisdictions that have lifted vaccination mandates earlier, it is increasingly hard for people who have been placed on leave to understand why the government is not allowing them back to work. I would just urge them to recognize that and to recognize that government getting around to providing those answers may seem reasonable when you are the one making the decisions, but for people who are desperately looking for answers, they are concerned about this.

I would just note, in closing on this topic, that it is important that government do take appropriate steps to protect public health. One of the things that has been lacking throughout the pandemic is transparency, including the government — today we heard again the minister's attempt to question whether we support the advice of the chief medical officer of health, but we're now almost two years into a pandemic, and the government has yet to share with us, even a single time, the actual recommendations and advice that they are receiving from the chief medical officer of health. We're expected to just trust them and we have asked them repeatedly to provide it publicly to MLAs and to everyone so that everyone can judge that advice. They should have no reason, in my view, for not sharing that information.

I want to note, as well, that one of the things that has come up from a number of people is the request for more information about the statistics in the territory around adverse reactions that we've asked government to disclose. In response to my last letter, the Minister of Health and Social Services suggested that I check two websites, both of which were actually open when I wrote the letter — one, the government's COVID website and one on the hospital's website. But the specific request around information that Yukoners have been asking us for — and government has — and should be happy to share, they wouldn't share.

Other examples of where the government is not providing information — I heard from a constituent who contacted me yesterday asking for information about treatment, including whether the drug that had been approved recently — the name is escaping me at the moment — was available here in the Yukon — earlier announcements had suggested that a small quantity of it was being made available here — and how they would go about getting that if they or their family required it.

That person pointed out to me that if you look at the BC government's website, there is a lot more information about treatment for COVID-19 than here in the Yukon. That's just another example of where the government here, due to the direction of ministers, is not sharing as much information as a number of provinces are.

Again, I just want to note that the sharing of information is a very good counter to people who have questions about government decisions and that sharing more information — as long as the decisions make sense — with the public should help reinforce public confidence in the decisions being made, not undermine them. Governments should have nothing to fear from sharing this information, and it would, I believe, help answer some of the questions, rumours, and doubts that go about in the absence of that information.

Another related matter I want to touch on — I have expressed concerns every single Sitting since the 2017 Spring Sitting about the funding government is providing to the Hospital Corporation, most of the time the insufficiency of that funding, including their failure, some years, to even provide millions of dollars in core funding until after the end of the fiscal year.

Another related issue that we heard previously from the previous chair of the Hospital Corporation and the current CEO was that the hospital had wanted to increase the ICU bed capacity to increase the surge capacity of the hospital to respond to the pandemic. They wanted to increase from four beds to eight.

Last fall, when the new chair and the CEO appeared, I asked them about the progress of that in the year since witnesses had appeared. We were informed at the time — and members can go check the transcripts from late November of 2021 of what I said and what the witnesses said — the indication was that the hospital had wanted to increase the ICU bed capacity, but the stumbling block was that they did not have the staff to do that, because as members may know, the hardest part about the ICU is not the beds but the staff and the resources to operate and keep operating those beds.

Well, staffing requires financial resources. Again, had the government stepped up to provide the hospital with a funding increase to allow them to hire permanent staff for those ICU beds, we would very likely see those beds up and running. Unfortunately, due to their failure to provide those resources, we see a situation that affects the rules that are in place regarding the pandemic because of our very limited ICU capacity of just four beds. Again, I would encourage government to actually take a look at this and recognize that increasing the surge capacity within our hospital and health care system will have benefits, even after the pandemic is done.

One of the things that has been faced across the country is that, in many areas across Canada, hospitals and other parts of our health care system were struggling before the pandemic. When the pandemic occurred, that simply placed the system under additional strain. This has resulted in significant delays of surgeries and other procedures across the country, which is creating a crisis of its own. The Yukon, as we heard from the Hospital witnesses last fall and the previous fall — the indication is that our wait times for a great many procedures — both those offered by the hospital and those offered by government — are beyond what they would like it to be. In many cases, for specialist services that are hosted out of the hospital campus, though not directly operated by the hospital itself, the procedures have wait times that are longer than is considered medically appropriate. This also affects us for procedures that Yukoners have to access out of territory. What we don't see from the government is any type of a wait-time reduction action plan. This doesn't really seem to be a priority for them. That is unfortunate because Yukoners are feeling the impact every day.

I also want to note in the area — the Minister of Health and Social Services somewhat bizarrely claimed earlier today in Question Period that the Yukon is a national leader in health care. But certainly not at the front of the pack — I was baffled by that statement, because when you have the worst family doctor ratio per capita in the country and when you have long wait times, to style yourself as a national leader in health care seems a bit rich. There are parts of our health care system and people within it who do an excellent job, and I don't want to take away from that for a moment, but overall, there is an unacceptable level of gaps within our system and unacceptably long wait times that are affecting too many Yukoners. The minister, I would suggest, should work with our health care professionals on fixing those gaps and shortening those wait times before trying to claim to be a national leader in anything.

In the area of midwifery, as well, as members have raised earlier in this Legislative Assembly, we see the situation that government, in their haste to be able to announce before an election that they had regulated midwifery, they created rules that actually shut down unregulated midwifery, and the timelines that they had announced for hiring midwives as government employees keeps slipping and keeps getting pushed out. So, we see a situation of a long gap in midwifery services, and that has affected people. I heard from a constituent who, without delving into the personal details, was in a serious

situation that would have been better off if she had had access to the midwife who she had used for previous deliveries.

So, there are impacts to the gaps, and patting yourself on the back for regulating something without actually having the service in place is not very useful.

We also see the continued problem that, through the model they have chosen, they have provided only for public employees and not provided an option for midwives and private practice to continue to operate within the system. That continues to be something they should change.

One issue that I meant to mention earlier that I missed in terms of talking about the pandemic is that — regarding the pandemic rules, restrictions, mandates, requirements, et cetera — in addition to the lack of consultation with businesses in general, one of the issues that we have heard repeatedly is about the lack of consultation with allied health professionals, with the medical community, and others by government and the lack of answers for them, in some cases, that have stretched on for — in the case of, for example, one person whom I wrote a letter on behalf of in the adult health field — that government, over a month after the questions were posed, they still didn't have answers that were very important for their ability to provide a health care service. That is just not the right way to do things.

I want to move on to the issue of flood preparation. In the interest of time here this afternoon, I will try to get through some of the other important items on my list and raise others at a later date.

Last year, we saw the situation of unprecedented flooding in the Southern Lakes area, as well as in the Lake Laberge area. We appear to be, based on snow pack, facing a situation where that could occur this year. There were issues last year with government being slow to listen to concerns from constituents of the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes in terms of early actions they wanted to see. We have issued a press release regarding some of the changes that we believe would be necessary to prepare for this season, including ensuring that there are further upgrades done to the Jackfish Bay road to raise it.

I understand that I have less time remaining than I thought I did here. So, I will just briefly, in wrapping up my comments before you cut me off, Madam Deputy Speaker, note that we will be raising additional points on flood preparation, on continued requests for improved cell service for people in my riding and elsewhere. As well, we'll be seeking to see the government listen to the request that has come forward from the Yukon Agricultural Association and farmers to do more on protecting farms from government elk, as well as increasing hunting opportunities there.

I have more issues I wanted to touch on, but in the interest of time here, and recognizing that you are about to cut me off, I will thank the House and look forward to raising them later.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** I rise today in response to the Budget Address. I serve as an MLA in an urban riding. Similar to the Member for Porter Creek Centre, I receive many concerns surrounding City of Whitehorse issues, such as plowing of the streets, snow removal, the flow of traffic, speeding, and things

that pertain to the city. My riding of Porter Creek North is a wonderful mix of residential and commercial, with the Alaska Highway running through it. Thank you to the many residents who reach out with their concerns and also those who show their continued support, and also, a special thank you to my family and friends who continue to support my work and passion to be involved with all things Yukon.

The past several years have been really trying on all citizens in varying degrees. We all react differently to different rules and regulations that are put in place. Now that a more relaxed situation is starting to happen and there are more coming, the spring and the summer seasons look more welcoming. The mental health of citizens is foremost in our minds, as we move into a new phase; however, we still need to be vigilant, and I think that we have learned enough to protect ourselves to the best of our abilities.

I, for one, being a tourist advocate, am going to be very happy welcoming the return of visitors. When the border crossings are easier to traverse, we will be in better economic recovery for our seasons, for sure. Let's continue to push the federal government and use all the means that we have to get the borders open and strict vaccine mandates put away. Many businesses are thanking locals for their support, but they do really rely on the numbers that come during the tourist season to make it through the slow winter months. If rooms are not booked soon, this year is looking bleak, and believe me, time is of the essence — we need to move today.

As the opposition leader mentioned in his budget response, small business is in crisis: the pandemic, the downturn in customers, layoffs, terminations, and now a labour shortage. I see hiring signs where I have never seen them before. Some of the problems began at the beginning of the pandemic when we were scared and no one really knew the answers to the many questions. The answers were elusive, as we listened and tried to understand our best moves. The federal dollars were given out with little or no oversight — just get the money out the door. This has certainly hurt the service industry, and we can only hope that there is a turnaround in mindset on these necessary jobs for the tourism industry.

Now, the energy situation is ongoing, and although the blame game continues on who started what and when, the reality is rising costs. We will not be able to sustain the high cost of living, as it is happening in Yukon. The answer we are given is to look at the clean energy strategy — words that don't help the monthly bills that keep rising.

To purchase an electric car, to get off fossil fuels, is also another answer that we get from this government. There is \$2.1 million for electric vehicle rebates and, of course, the charging stations that are being put in throughout the territory. To get that up-to-\$5,000 rebate, we have to look at the rebate application, and there are so many hoops to jump through to be eligible. So, to get between a \$3,000 to \$5,000 rebate, the vehicle must be new — no recycling here — the retail price base model — below \$55,000 — must be purchased by a Yukoner, registered in the Yukon, and the list goes on and on.

Then, as we know, not many things last forever, especially batteries, and it is such new technology that it is still unclear

how long the lifespan of a battery is. A company or vehicle warranty is between five and eight years, depending on the vehicle, and then it could cost between \$5,000 to \$16,000 to replace a battery, plus installation costs — I could go on about the downside to this rush to put everybody in the same vehicle.

As we have stated already, there is much repetition in this budget, moving the same projects down the year slots. There is even a section within the Budget Address interpreting the five-year plan. I assume, because it is so confusing as to when the money stops on any particular project, we need an interpretation. The explanation, the five-year capital plan — and I quote: “The Five-Year Capital Plan is an evolving document where budgets may shift and change from year to year.” So, that is why we see the Burwash Landing school, the Dempster fibre project, development of a new campground, and the Nisutlin Bay bridge replacement repeated and repeated.

As a critic, I look forward to speaking fully and asking questions of departments during the debate so we can hopefully get some solid answers on various dollar allocations.

I would like to thank all the staff in the departments who put the hard work into this budget. This job cannot be done without a team, and our office caucus team is the best. They support us every day, all year. Danny Macdonald, Robin Boss, Tim Kucharuk and, of course, kudos to our former chief of staff, Ted Laking.

**Ms. Tredger:** I would like to start by thanking my constituents for the year we have had together since the last Budget Address. It has been a tough year, there is no doubt about that, but it is an absolute joy to represent Whitehorse Centre and be part of its incredible community.

I could talk about many, many highlights of the last year — a few of my favourites — I think we were all very delighted to see the Yukon Theatre reopen under the banner of the Yukon Film Society. I was personally thrilled to see my favourite part of Rendezvous return, which was the snow sculptures in Shipyards Park. This spring, when the downtown urban gardeners plant their gardens this year, it will be their 25<sup>th</sup> year of bringing together our community to grow local food.

There have absolutely been highlights, but there is no denying that it has been a devastating year. We are currently in three separate official emergencies. We are in a pandemic. I am cautiously optimistic that we are through the worst, but the last two years have left Yukoners exhausted, depleted, and vulnerable. We are in an opioid poisoning emergency that has caused death after death. Heartbreaking doesn't even begin to cover it.

And we are in a climate emergency. As one of my constituents said to me last week, if we don't act on the climate emergency, nothing else we do will matter. Again, if we don't act on the climate emergency, nothing else we do will matter. That's not even to mention housing, which certainly feels like a crisis to Yukoners facing skyrocketing housing prices and rental prices, with few to no options to choose from. All these crises have been acknowledged by this government. They have held press conferences and summits. They say that they are listening and that they are going to act, so I looked to this

budget with hope — hope that would see that the action they promised is coming. To be frank, I am disappointed.

Sure, there are some things I am excited about. They are fulfilling their commitment to the NDP to start a universal dental program. There is funding for developing new housing lots, and after years of the NDP asking questions, Macaulay Lodge is being demolished to create space for new housing, but ultimately, I see business as usual. We are in a climate change emergency, and this government has cut funding for rural communities to get off diesel. We still receive more revenue from hunting licences than we do from placer mining fees.

I could go on and list many examples, but I would like to zero in on one example in particular, because I think that it is illustrative, and that is the funding for All Genders Yukon Society. For people who are not super familiar, they tend to fly under the radar. They are a small group of dedicated board members and a single staff member. They provide access to counselling for the trans, non-binary, and two-spirit community, as well as their families. Their services are about as close to barrier-free as it gets, and that is critical, because there are a lot of barriers to accessing mental health for the trans community.

I don't know if you have ever had the experience of having your first appointment with a therapist, of carefully dropping in the fact that you're queer, and then watching for the reaction to see what it will be, to know if this is someone you can trust, but it's stressful. Then combine that with the fact that there are many supportive and well-meaning therapists for whom gender identity is not an area of expertise. It is not easy for people to find an appropriate therapist. This funding is a lifeline — and I mean that it is a lifeline for many of the people who access it.

Funding has not been easy for the All Genders Yukon Society. For the last two years, they have had inadequate funding from the Yukon government, and they have been making ends meet by accessing emergency funding from the Red Cross to bridge them through the next year. Now the Red Cross funding has ended. Has this government stepped up to fill the gap? Have they taken their speeches about supporting mental health and supporting the LGBTQ2S+ community and put action behind it? No, they haven't. As All Genders Yukon Society lost \$112,000 of funding, this government has done nothing to help them.

Last week, members got an e-mail saying that everyone is now only eligible for one counselling session per month — one session a month.

Let me remind you that this is a group of people who have staggering mental health disparities. A recent Canadian study found that young trans adults have eight times the risk of serious suicidal thoughts in the past year and over 16 times the risk of a suicide attempt in the past year.

If you were suicidal, do you think one counselling appointment a month would be enough? If your child was suicidal, would you feel good about them seeing a therapist one time a month? I can't imagine that anyone would say yes, so why is that good enough for our trans, two-spirit, and non-binary community?

This budget had a nearly \$60-million surplus, and this government couldn't find \$114,000 that All Genders Yukon needed. That surplus was more important than \$114,000 for adequate mental health care for the trans community.

This feels to me like a story that we have heard many times — a story that has played out over and over again in the Yukon. People are in crisis. Their community steps up to fill the gap. They get praise from the government that is all too happy to talk about their accomplishments. In this case, they have told everyone how they are allies of the LGBTQ2S+ community and all about how they released the territory's first ever LGBTQ2S+ action plan and all about how they are investing in mental health, but the people on the ground who need the help are left piecing together scraps of funding, stretching their money thinner and thinner to cover ever-increasing needs.

I've talked a lot about this one example, but this example, really for me, is this budget in a nutshell — a lot of talk about how this government wants things to be different and about their exciting and bold new vision, but at the end of the day, they do what they have always done.

Ultimately, it is Yukoners who pay the price. When we talk about emergencies — when this government talks about emergencies but doesn't put their money where their mouth is, it's Yukoners who pay the price.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** It's tough to rise today because of the challenges that we're facing across the planet. First of all, we're in a worldwide pandemic that has led to two crises here in the Yukon, but across the world — on substance use, mental wellness, and addictions. Also, just COVID itself — and COVID has not been fair; that's for sure.

At the same time, we have a global climate crisis, and then we also have an international conflict. I have been trying to think about our budget and trying hard to understand the budget from the perspective of Yukoners. I was in a meeting in Mount Lorne last night, and I have one tomorrow night in Marsh Lake. I have another one in Tagish on Thursday — so, talking to Yukoners about the choices that we are making. Always, the role of opposition is to criticize. It is an honourable role. Their job is to poke holes in what government is doing, and government itself often stands up to talk in warm terms about what is going on, but how do we judge it? How do Yukoners judge it? That is what I have been talking to neighbours about to try to understand the choices that we are making.

It is tough, because I think that others have discussed these challenges and how they impact us. They can make life hard — for example, with the price of fuel. I saw last night when I was coming back from Mount Lorne that the price of fuel for diesel is up around \$2 a litre. Definitely it has gone up recently because of the war in Ukraine, and like others, I will condemn Russia for what is happening there — not the Russian people as much as Russian government leadership.

One of the things that I have been thinking about is that, despite all of this heartache and challenge, I feel lucky to be a Yukoner. I feel that, in this place, we can stand up and disagree respectfully, generally. I heard on the first day and even subsequent days as we have been here in the Legislature

speaking — as there were some horns honking. I think that is the protest around the COVID restrictions. I respect Yukoners and others who protest peacefully and respectfully, who honk their horns to say, "Hey, we disagree with you." I think that is okay, and I will work hard to protect their rights to have that ability to disagree with us.

That doesn't mean that you should block other people's freedoms, whether that's through your horn or through a blockade. That is not right, but it is right that people should be able to stand up and criticize, including here in this Legislature, so I will do my best to take that criticism respectfully. I will challenge some of it, of course, but I think that it is important to start by at least acknowledging that we are all Yukoners and we are all Canadians. We are all working to make this as good a place as it can be for our parents, our kids, and future generations. I know that we have differences of opinion, and that's great. I actually think that diversity builds strength, so that range of thinking is probably important to how we conduct ourselves.

I want to talk about those three crises: the international conflict in Ukraine, which has created a lot of inflation across the world, and try to talk about how we conduct ourselves fiscally; the global climate crisis and how we are trying to make ourselves more sustainable here; and the pandemic and what we are doing to try to protect the health and wellness of Yukoners.

When we landed here in the role of government roughly five years ago, the first thing we saw was that there was a structural deficit in place. We were worried. We needed to try to move us back into the black. We were concerned about where things had been heading. We worked hard to course-correct that ship. The first thing we did was to strike the Yukon Financial Advisory Panel. That panel created a report for us and a pathway to lead us to where we would get surplus budgets and responsible fiscal management. As boring as it sounds, that is super important.

I saw another deficit as well, and it was in our infrastructure. We realized that we needed to invest more in our infrastructure, whether it is water or sewer or roads, green energy, or sports facilities. We saw that there had been a lack of investment over decades and that the Yukon needed to reinvest.

So, we made this commitment to increase our capital budgets and to work to invest in the Yukon. For example, this year we have in the budget a water treatment facility for Mount Lorne. It will help out the community centre there, and I think that is really great.

I know that we are working on some sewage lagoons — two of them. One is in Carcross and one is in Marsh Lake. These are important small projects in our communities. They make a difference for the communities that they are in.

I know that we are working to invest in renovations. We are working right now on the Carcross RCMP facility and also in the wellness centre in Carcross — again, trying to invest in the infrastructure. I think that it is so important when we make these investments because they are the future of the territory.

One of the things that I have heard in terms of criticism is that there is nothing new here today. Mr. Speaker, I talked about \$50 million going to the Atlin hydro project. Of course, we have talked about the Atlin project, but investing that kind of money is new. That was actually a ministerial statement today to share that information with the Legislature and with Yukoners.

This is about investing in our future, whether it is housing, education, health care, or social services. The goal is sustainable communities and, as the Premier said in his budget speech, to create a sustainable future for the next generation of Yukoners.

One of the criticisms around this thing is that there is nothing new. Well, one of the reasons that I think you can make that argument is because we have a five-year capital plan. I just heard the Member for Porter Creek North criticize it for being evolving — that it would change over time — but I also heard the Leader of the Official Opposition say that it is not new. Well, that is because we put it out there before and said that here is where we are going to go. We thought it was important to create a road map for Yukoners and to show the direction that we are going to head.

Sure, we take away the shininess of it — that we sort of surprise people with it — but we create a more planned version of where we are trying to head as a territory. That's what the Financial Advisory Panel was about. That is what the five-year capital plan is about.

In talking about our economy, I just want to talk about inflation. It appears to me that the Official Opposition is going to talk about inflation a lot this year. Yes, we have inflation here. What's our inflation? From January to January, the latest numbers that I have seen from Statistics Canada say: 3.7 percent for the Yukon, which is the second lowest in Canada; Newfoundland and Labrador is four percent; Saskatchewan is 4.2 percent; British Columbia is 4.3 percent; Alberta is 4.8 percent; Nova Scotia is 4.9 percent; Québec is 5.1 percent; New Brunswick is 5.3 percent; Manitoba is 5.5 percent; Ontario is 5.7 percent; and Prince Edward Island is 7.1 percent. We are lower than all the provinces here. This inflation is not caused by the decisions that we have been taking; this inflation is caused by conflict in Europe.

I listened closely to the comments from the Member for Lake Laberge and his assessment about geopolitics, and I thought that he made some very good points about how it is important that we work together, that we shouldn't take any of these things for granted, that the time of peace we have had up until now may not be what we have going forward, and that we need to be concerned about our sovereignty, our safety, and our security.

But that conflict is what is causing inflation. I think, because of the advice we took from the Financial Advisory Panel — that boring advice — we have managed to keep our inflation here low. I am not saying that it will be that way forever, and I don't think that we should take complete credit for it, but on the other hand, it sure stands out as a difference. So, while we are facing these hardships right now with inflation and things we do need to address, I think that it's important to

put it in context. Canada's inflation — overall average of 5.1 percent — is lower than Germany's; it's lower than the US; it's lower than the G7 countries. So, Canada is the lowest in the G7, and we are the second lowest in Canada. Yes, it is a problem, but you really can't suggest that this is because we have made mistakes. I think that it is just the opposite; I think that we have made good choices. We have a strong GDP. I want to talk for a second about one of the things that is helping, and that is the mining sector.

My colleague, the Member for Porter Creek South, teases me about being an environmentalist who is now Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources.

This sector is doing very well, and I would like to thank them for that because it wasn't a given. When COVID hit, there were some very tough choices that they had to make. Mines generally these days are very big on safety in the mines, and they came out with a vaccine mandate ahead of us. They made those choices in several of the mines. They said, "You know what? We need to do this in order to keep Yukoners safe." I thank them for it. They wanted to keep the community safe. That is so important. In doing so, they have helped also to build our economy. I think that someone from across the way pointed out that some of our economic growth is due to mines, and I would like to thank them for that. The forecast is that we are heading into some strong years with mining.

I would also like to thank the mining industry because, as I have stood up and talked to them, I have said to them that we have to deal with a bunch of things. We have agreed to work on successor legislation, mining intensity targets so that we move off of fossil fuels for our mines, wetlands policy, and land use planning — we are doing all of this, and I appreciate their effort.

I was on a panel discussion with some of the mining industry recently. It was talking about how we are going to move off of fossil fuels. As an environmentalist, I sort of had to pinch myself for a moment there because this is an industry that is really working to take on the responsibility of moving off of fossil fuels. Of course, over time, we are going to need many of these critical metals, like copper from the Minto mine, in order to help make this transition.

Economically — I think that it is important to note that there have been some really hard decisions that have been taken but good decisions for the Yukon broadly. I'm glad we have done that because, as we navigate through something like the invasion of Ukraine by Russia and as it affects global prices, at least we're in a strong position to try to address that and to support Yukoners as much as we can.

Let me turn for a moment to talk about the global climate crisis.

Again, when I started talking about the economy, I talked about the Yukon Financial Advisory Panel and their report, and we have another one here — well, two reports. One is *Our Clean Future* and one is the 10-year Yukon Energy renewable strategy.

This year, we're investing \$80 million to move the energy economy. This is not a small thing.

I'm going to touch on a few topics. First of all, I want to talk about some of the impacts that we have been feeling. The north has more climate change happening and so we feel some significant impacts, although amazingly, it has been some of the provinces that have been harder hit lately than us. In some ways, again, I feel lucky to be a Yukoner. But we have had some hard-hitting things. One of them was the flood.

Last year, in 2021, we had a flood that affected three places: Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes, Whitehorse Centre, and Lake Laberge. These three ridings — and luckily, Whitehorse Centre avoided much of the impact, but Lake Laberge and the Southern Lakes really did get quite a flood. It was about a foot higher than the 2007 flood, which was a record flood. To be a foot higher is a huge amount.

What happened was that we had a very heavy snow year, as everyone remembers, and then, at the same time, there was that heat dome that happened in the spring over top of British Columbia. The edge of that heat dome was up here, and basically it helped to melt the snow up in the alpine. I have never seen the water come up that high that fast.

The Member for Lake Laberge said that we hadn't acted swiftly enough, and I think that it is almost always true that we could do better on communication, but when I look back to try to judge how well we did out of the flood — so I was there during the 2007 flood, and we lost a lot of homes — a lot of them. This flood, just as a reminder, was a foot higher and we didn't lose a lot of homes. We might lose a couple to groundwater and mould. The Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation said yesterday that there is \$2 million that is going out as a fund to support homes to be repaired from the flood and that the Yukon Housing Corporation has been going around meeting with homeowners to look at the damage that has been sustained. It is a pretty good response. It can and should be better. I freely admit that, but that is a much better outcome than we had in 2007.

There are other things where we face risk. Wildland fire is an example, and I just want to acknowledge that this year we now have all 14 of our First Nations with wildland fire crews. If I was allowed to ask for clapping, I would at this moment because I think that is something worth celebrating as a territory.

We know that we are getting impacted by climate. What are we doing about it? We will get the impacts and we will, of course, adapt to those impacts. We will do better flood mapping and all that, but what are we doing to change the source of this problem? Really, that is how we reduce our emissions. So, the Yukon Climate Leadership Council is working right now. We are starting up our second Youth Panel on Climate Change. We are asking them for their advice outside of government. It is really good to get that external advice.

The Member for Porter Creek North was talking about electric vehicles. She is saying that maybe she is concerned about electric vehicles. I will add a few thoughts there. The first one is that, yes, those rebates are just for Yukoners and, yes, they are for vehicles that are registered here in the Yukon. Yes, that is correct.

There is a \$3,000 to \$5,000 rebate, but that is matching the federal rebate, so you can get up to \$10,000 back. That is pretty important to note. It's also worth noting that you can get an e-bike and get a rebate on an e-bike as well, which is also good. She was talking about the potential high cost of batteries, but what I have come to understand, with e-vehicles, is that the cost of maintenance is extremely low compared to our internal combustion engine vehicles. The lifecycle of e-vehicles — right now, the thought is that they are going to be pushing a million kilometres. Brakes are regenerative. It's actually one of the great advantages. Yes, it is more money up front. I guess that is part of the challenge. In order to get into the market, it costs more money, but once you do, your costs come down quite a bit.

As we have already made announcements, we have fast-charging stations, which are going in from Watson Lake to Beaver Creek, from Carcross to Dawson, and points in between — the Silver Trail and the Robert Campbell Highway. We have just announced earlier, in conjunction with support from the federal government, that we are going to do a couple hundred level-2 chargers, which are kind of in between the fast chargers and the charging that you will do at home. This is all really great news to move us in that direction.

I have already talked previously in the Legislature about the battery project, the grid scale battery that's going in. We are working with First Nations on that project. There were a couple of announcements recently with some of the firms that Yukon Energy is working with. It's due to replace four of our rental diesels. The Atlin project that I talked about today, and spoke further about, is due to replace four more of our rental diesels.

I appreciate that, as elected officials here, we work respectfully with each other, and this is one of those places where we disagree. I just want to highlight it — not that we need to disagree, but there is a difference, and I think Yukoners can judge.

The Official Opposition has often said that they believe the right thing to do is to build a diesel plant. I called up Yukon Energy and asked them: "If you're building a diesel plant, how long do you need to pay that off? What do you levelize your cost over?" The answer was 40 years. Let's run it forward in time. Today is 2022, so that plant would be there and need to be working to 2062. But hold on — in 2050, we're supposed to be at zero emissions everywhere. The members opposite have said that they support that plan. I'm not quite sure how that's going to work.

We talked about how to try to make things affordable, and the members opposite talked about the cost of electricity going up. There are some things which push up the cost of electricity, I agree, but not the Atlin project.

This is the interesting point. Right now, in front of the Yukon Utilities Board, is a proposal to purchase the energy from Atlin — hopefully the project moves ahead. We usually use, as an upset cost or comparison cost, diesel at 19 cents a kilowatt hour. By the way, that's the old price of diesel, because diesel has gone up a huge amount in the last couple of months from that conflict in Ukraine. I don't think that it's going to be the cost going forward, but we used 19 cents previously.

What we got was an energy price that is 13 cents a kilowatt hour. That's winter energy. That is what is super important. It will displace more of the fossil fuels that we use, and that's one of the great things about the Atlin project, but it is more than that.

If we go beyond the amount of energy that we agreed to purchase from Atlin and they sell us more, do you think our price goes up? No, it goes down. Our price goes to seven cents a kilowatt hour — again, comparing back to the 19 cents for diesel. That's the first 10 years. From 2035 and beyond — and hydro projects usually run for half a century or more — the price goes down to 11 cents a kilowatt hour in the winter, and the surplus energy will be three cents a kilowatt hour. I like those prices. Those are good prices for Yukoners, for ratepayers. I will take that any day over committing to fossil fuels and that choice.

I think that it is a good thing to compare and to look at the differences between us as a government and the Yukon Party Official Opposition.

Yesterday in the Legislature, the Member for Whitehorse Centre made some comments about ATCO. I would have to look them up for sure, but the sense I got was that it was as if ATCO was cheating Yukoners, so I checked in with the Yukon Development Corporation to ask about the rules of the Yukon Utilities Board. I was told that what the Member for Whitehorse Centre said was not correct. I will just read this first: It is possible that rates of return may be higher in a given year than originally ordered and any discrepancies are addressed at subsequent rate applications.

So, what happens is that there is an estimate of what is expected in terms of a rate of return. If the return goes higher, you bring a new rate application and you adjust it. It isn't that ATCO did anything inappropriate; it's that there have been more people switching to electricity — especially electric heat. The Yukon has been growing, as we know. It turns out to be the most popular place for people from across the country to want to come. I think that this is putting a lot of pressure on all of our systems.

The main point that the member opposite had noted — as I said, the Minister of Justice and I met with the Yukon Chamber of Commerce, and there was a request from the chamber that we take a look at this and look at possible ways of reviewing it. I said here in the Legislature yesterday, and I will say it again, that I am happy to do so.

There are just a few other things around the climate crisis that I think are super important. One is food. As others have said in this Legislature, we just need to support as much local agriculture as we can. It is a good way to adapt to climate change, and it is an incredibly important way to mitigate against climate change. The more that we can be self-sustaining here, the less we have to truck stuff up and the less diesel we need to be dependent on. It's really important. I want to thank all of our farmers and producers around the territory.

A few years ago, I was talking with the head of the Agriculture branch and they explained to me that, in recent years, Yukon agriculture has doubled. When I spoke recently at the Yukon Agricultural Association AGM, I talked about

working with them to do that again — to double the amount of food that we produce here and get it onto our shelves and into our pantries and into our bellies. That is super important.

Let me move on to the last of my three broad themes, and this is just talking about people. A few years ago, we took a look at our health care system and we put out another one of these boring documents. It is called *Putting People First*. It has a whole bunch of other little pieces underneath it. You can think of our aging-in-place strategy. You can think of our mental wellness strategy. You can think of a whole suite of supports that we are trying to put out there, but we talked about how we are working to change the way that we deliver health care here to try to move it from a focus on acute health care and move it more toward being people-centred, to be more about wellness. Out of that, we worked on early learning, and we made an historic investment in early learning and childcare to ensure that our youngest folks have a bright future. That is a huge, important step.

We are building a bilingual health centre. I sat down with l'Association franco-yukonnaise just last week and we talked about the progress on staffing the health centre. There is no doubt that there are challenges around staffing right now. Why is there such a challenge? Again, it is not a local challenge. If we ask ourselves what is happening across the country — and I spoke about this last fall. I looked into the doctor shortage across the country, and the evidence that I had was that there is a higher shortage everywhere across the country than there is here, but there is a shortage here, so it is important to address. But, again, let's put it in the context of a global pandemic that has been around for two years and a lot of pressure.

I am going to talk just for a minute about our vaccination mandate and our response to COVID. I think that we should try to judge how the Yukon has fared and try to think of it against other jurisdictions. It's always difficult, because we are a place of 40,000 to 45,000 people. We are a large geography with a small population overall that is concentrated in Whitehorse, but all of us care about our communities a lot. We do need to think about the choices we have made. The members opposite talk about why we haven't lifted restrictions earlier. The Omicron wave hit here after it hit in other places, so we are just coming out of those restrictions, like other places have. If, over time, we were to try to take a look at what restrictions we have had and compare them over time with other places, in terms of the amount of time that we have been locked down or the amount of time that we have had schools closed, or remote learning, or working from home — all of those things — we would find that we compare very well against the provinces. I would have to check to make sure against the other territories — of course, every place is a little bit different — but overall, we have had less lockdown, fewer restrictions, less closure of businesses, and more supports for our businesses.

One of the arguments seems to be that there is no problem right now. The Member for Lake Laberge talked about the number of people who have died. My wife is a nurse. I know that I have said that many times here in the Legislature. She teaches health care assistance at the university. I think that is very important, because we need those people. They are so

important. They are on the front line. She and I were talking about what the choices that we have made have done. We talked about it in terms of: What if you perceive a risk? Let's say that you were standing on the highway, and you see a car coming toward you. You say to yourself, "I'm going to step out of the way." You step out of the way and the car goes by safely, and you are not hit by the car. Then do you say to yourself, "I didn't get hit by a car; therefore, I didn't need to get out of the way"? No.

The things we have put in place — those hard choices to try to protect Yukoners, and having protected Yukoners, it's not now that you can say there was no harm, because we protected Yukoners. I sure hope that is not the message that folks opposite are trying to give.

I agree with people that COVID has not been fair. I look forward to hearing — every time the members opposite talk about the use of emergency powers and what we have done, I've asked: Which ones don't you want us to do? Which ones do you disagree with? I have still yet to figure it out, because what I have heard is, "Oh, you should have done that one more." It's usually about the one allowing for remote sales for cannabis, which is now done, but what I have heard is, "Oh, you could have brought that in under the rules of the pandemic and kept it in there longer." Whereas, I think it is important that we only use those authorities to the bare minimum, in order to try to protect the safety of Yukoners. So, we have taken significant action to try to protect the health and well-being of Yukoners.

I think those things will show out over time. Again, I want to say that I appreciate that there are Yukoners who disagree with these choices, and I respect that they have a different view. I ask us all to be kind and respectful with each other about how we share those different views. I spend a lot of time trying to follow up on the information that folks who are concerned about COVID share with me, and I will do my best to be respectful of their perspectives. Has COVID been hard on folks? Oh yeah. Super hard. Starting from that very, very first choice — which I call a courageous choice — to cancel the Arctic Winter Games. When I heard from parents saying, "You can't do this; this is wrong" — then, afterward, I heard from them saying, "Thank you. That was the right call."

I know that these are hard choices, and I know that they are tough on folks, including those public servants who have been put on leave without pay. I checked the number, and I correct myself from earlier during Question Period. It's 92 — 1.5 percent. Members opposite talked about it being 20 percent early on. I said, "No, it's not 20 percent; it's much less." They said no.

I think it's important that we have worked to protect Yukoners.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I would like to acknowledge that I am speaking today from the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and as the member elected to represent Riverdale South. I truly appreciate the opportunity to address the Legislative Assembly and all Yukoners today.

Before I begin to speak about the 2022-23 budget, I would like to acknowledge that, as we celebrate the freedoms that we have here in the Yukon and in Canada, as evidenced by this very debate, the people of Ukraine are fighting for those same freedoms in the face of completely unjustified aggression. We must support them however we can and unite against the actions of Russia.

While we are geographically far from the war, Yukoners are rallying to support our local Ukrainian community, and we are preparing to welcome refugees as they arrive. Our hearts break for the people of the Ukraine and for all of Europe at this uncertain time. Some of us have very close ties to the Ukrainian community, so I urge you all to look after yourselves and your families and friends.

I believe yesterday was two years to the day that we had to cancel the Arctic Winter Games in 2020, as noted by my colleague just a few minutes ago. We can all remember how we felt at that time, and I'm sure that no one had any idea what was in store for us or how our daily lives would be affected over these last two years. I know that we are all anxious to see the end of COVID-19, and we look forward to less uncertain times, but we should take care to remember that this pandemic is not over.

As Dr. Elliott has said recently, what has happened is that we have all gotten smarter about how to keep ourselves safe. As times change and we move forward, we must continue to respect the "safe six plus masking" and make decisions for ourselves to keep us, our families, and our loved ones safe.

This budget includes \$11.6 million dedicated to the health and social resources necessary to manage the ongoing risk of COVID-19. There is also a \$10-million COVID-19 contingency fund that I am sure we will have time to speak about as we proceed with this debate. As evidenced by this budget and the Premier's Budget Address, we are building a bright future for the Yukon. I am always inspired by the government's Budget Address.

We are so very fortunate that this budget brings us positive news. It is a hopeful time. It is the result of tremendous planning and hard work. Thank you to the dedicated staff of every department — particularly to the Department of Finance — for their amazing work, insight, and dedication. This budget is a looking-forward document and an opportunity to tell Yukoners the direction and priorities of their government. It allows us to identify what projects and programs will be our investment for the future. This year's Budget Address addresses critical needs in the territory and makes necessary investments so that all Yukoners benefit from this historic economic growth.

It might be easy to focus on only one or two areas. We have lots to focus on, and this budget, I am proud to say, addresses critical needs everywhere in the territory. The surplus budget reflects our government's enduring commitment to responsible fiscal management, even in the face of COVID-19. We are working to ensure that Yukoners benefit from economic growth. We have worked for the past five and a half years to rebuild relationships and to build partnerships to address the issues that matter to Yukoners.

Mr. Speaker, for the past two years, we have been under the COVID-19 cloud. As part of our government's response to COVID-19, we concentrated on two main priorities: public health measures and supporting Yukoners through a world pandemic. That brought with it difficult choices every day. The Yukon's economic support programs have been recognized as the best and most generous in the country, and they have prevented the most severe economic impacts of COVID-19.

Our government continues to work on issues as they come forward — brought by the communities — to address inequities and to solve problems with them.

The Yukon's economy is seeing tremendous growth, and it truly sets us apart from the rest of Canada. Those initiatives will continue moving us along the path to recovery.

This budget shows very clearly that we are investing in housing, education, health care and social services, green energy, and resilient infrastructure that will create sustainable communities for a generation of Yukoners.

I would like to take the opportunity to describe just a few of the initiatives from Health and Social Services and Justice, the departments that I am responsible for. First, it is important to thank the dedicated professionals who work in every corner of Health and Social Services and Justice. Health and Social Services, of course, is a much broader department than Justice, but the work is equally critical. Mr. Speaker, we have asked more than what is humanly possible of the professionals who work at these two departments. We have asked them to work to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the exemplary work of these departments is incredible. After we asked that of them, then we asked it again, and then we asked it again, and we continue to ask it of them now.

With respect to COVID-19, our government has consistently followed the science to protect the health and safety of all Yukoners. As a result, we have avoided the worst economic and health impacts of COVID-19. We are in a positive position, thanks to the diligence of Yukoners. Mr. Speaker, this cannot be overstated. Yukoners have stepped up to get vaccinated, to abide by public health measures, and to look after themselves and their fellow community members. We have developed a plan to forge ahead toward recovery in a way that protects the most vulnerable in our territory and supports the health and well-being of all of our communities. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources emphasized those points in Question Period today.

Mr. Speaker, all Yukoners have been affected by the pandemic, and our government will continue to support them as we move further along the path to recovery. I have already noted the total amounts in this year's budget to do that kind of work.

We know that our territory has been overwhelmed by loss due to substance use and suicide. I share my deep condolences to all Yukoners impacted by these tragic deaths. The loss of each friend, member of a family, or a loved one means that many more Yukoners will struggle with trauma, experience mental health crises, and carry the pain that persists as a result. These preventable losses devastate communities. Tragically,

some have had to cope with multiple losses, making the healing journey that much longer and more painful.

In January 2022 alone, there were a devastatingly high number of opioid-related deaths. The impact of this crisis truly touches every corner of our territory. We are acutely aware that we are facing the most critical health issue in Canadian history.

On January 20, 2022, our government, with the support of many leaders from across the Yukon Territory, declared a substance use health emergency. We chose the name carefully. It is to include the use of illicit drugs, opioids, alcohol, and the terrible tragedies that can result, including overdoses, including drug deaths due to overdose, and suicide.

We need to work together to address substance use and make our communities safer and healthier places to be. Our government has taken the most progressive steps toward substance use harm reduction in the history of the Yukon Territory. We have taken significant action to address substance use in our territory, and it is clear that we need to do more. That is why we have committed over \$5.5 million in this year's budget to support our government's immediate response to the substance use health emergency.

By coming together as a territory, we are working to find solutions that will help ensure that every Yukoner can access the support that they need when they need it and benefit from our recovering economy.

Through this declaration, we want to ensure that Yukoners feel supported and that we begin to move toward a stigma-free community and remove the stigma associated with drug use and addictions. We want Yukoners and communities to be aware of the resources that are offered and work to expand those services. We have reached out to First Nation governments, partner agencies, and Yukon citizens to seek collective input on how we can work together on the actions and responsibilities that will be taken under the emergency declaration. We declared this emergency to send a clear message to every Yukoner — whether it directly affected them or not — that substance use, overdoses, and suicide — and the underlying issues that lead to those outcomes — is a crisis that will take all of us to address. We also wanted to send a clear message that we intend to bolster substance use and mental wellness services, strengthen community-level responses across the territory, and support Yukoners who use substances or experience mental health challenges to safely find a path to healing.

Our government recently hosted a mental wellness summit on February 14 and 15, 2022 where presenters learned about participants, and presenters learned about and discussed topics such as prevention, treatment, support services, and aftercare, while also sharing a variety of harm-reduction models and solutions. By all accounts, this summit was a resounding success in sparking ideas, innovations, and conversation.

Our government is working to find immediate crisis responses, as well as long-term, community-focused approaches to prevention and support.

We have committed to developing a new territory-wide public awareness and education campaign that addresses the toxic drug supply present in Yukon communities. It must be

aimed at all aspects of our communities — those who use drugs and all of us who need to know how to help them.

We have also committed to expanding drug testing and opioid treatment services to rural communities and to continuing to expand availability here in Whitehorse.

We have worked to enhance our government's supervised consumption site to support those who use inhalants. We are only the second place in Canada to provide such service, as I understand it. We are told by the experts that this is a service that our community needs.

We are working with local agencies to broaden services to vulnerable populations. This includes increasing support to existing resources that have shown success, such as extending operational hours for innovative services like the outreach van, which is a mobile, multi-service unit. We have committed to increasing on-the-land treatment options across the territory and to working with our partners throughout the territory to expand these services. We are committed to working to remove barriers to treatment options by reserving treatment programs and arranging payments for those most in need. We are also working to develop a new opioid action plan to build on the work of Yukon's first action plan from 2018. This work will be essential to the health and well-being of our territory, and it will be the result of our coordinated efforts for the substance use health emergency.

I want to acknowledge the leadership of many of our First Nation governments that announced programs and initiatives to address the substance use health emergency — in particular, the community outreach done by the Carcross/Tagish First Nation designed to educate and protect their citizens. As well, an example is the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, which has organized treatment programs and announced a managed alcohol program to be opened soon on their traditional territory.

Mr. Speaker, we are building a brighter future for the territory by investing in the sustainable, people-centred health and social services system that improves outcomes for all Yukoners. I heard the leader of the opposition say that there is nothing new or exciting in this budget. I completely disagree. We are transforming the Yukon's health care system into a national leader in people-centred service as we continue to implement *Putting People First* recommendations. An independent examination of how we can improve Yukon's health care system was done. *Putting People First* is the result, and the recommendations have been accepted by this government and will improve our health care system.

Our government has taken significant steps to make service delivery more accessible, more efficient, and responsive to the needs of Yukoners. Our government is committed to modernizing the Yukon's health and social services delivery to better meet the needs of all Yukoners. We are increasing access to medical services in the territory while reducing wait times and the need for out-of-territory medical travel, but if you do need to travel for medical treatment, our government is supporting you with increased medical travel subsidies and places for you to get treatment.

We have listened to Yukoners and what they have told us on the doorsteps, through public engagement, through our

partnerships, working with First Nation governments, municipalities, community groups, and Yukoners.

Government must understand their responsibility to the people of this territory. Government must understand their authority to act, their obligations to serve all Yukoners, and government must foster innovative, progressive, problem-solving leadership among a talented public service, and this one does.

This budget, like every budget we have tabled, reflects that attitude and the approach. It is fair, efficient, and accountable. It ensures that priorities that exist in every corner of this great territory are addressed.

Anybody who is sometimes difficult in this Chamber, and anyone who thinks maybe the work that we've done on any given Tuesday, like this one, doesn't matter need only to cast their minds back to the last day of the Fall Sitting.

Our work resonates with Yukoners, and they just had to be here on maybe that last day or have heard about it in the Fall Sitting of 2021, when many Yukon firefighters took time out of their lives to put on their dress uniforms and came down here to witness the passing of a piece of legislation that affects their lives, their professions, and their safety. They brought gratitude and, for us, a visual opportunity to see that the work that we do every day matters to people — to ordinary people, to people who work in this community, to people who work hard to build their lives in this community — and by community, I mean the entire Yukon Territory.

Maybe another example of something that seems like a small gesture but will mean so much to so many people — and often those are opportunities that exist on the road to reconciliation — Mr. Speaker, a total of 10 eagle feathers were unveiled yesterday at the court house in Whitehorse and will now be available for use in courtrooms in Whitehorse, in Watson Lake, and in Dawson City and during circuit courts in rural Yukon communities.

The feathers may be used to swear oaths in court and are a means of acknowledging and incorporating Yukon First Nation culture within the mainstream justice system, as well as bringing respect and awareness to Yukon First Nation culture within the buildings that these courts take place. It is another example of meaningful work here done by government in building relationships and listening.

For generations, our courtrooms across the country have acknowledged colonial traditions and willfully ignored the significance of the Yukon First Nation cultures, or cultures across the country, and practices and beliefs. By ensuring that witnesses have the cultural means to swear or affirm their oaths with ceremonial feathers, our territory is taking an incredibly significant and important step in acknowledging and respecting Yukon First Nations and advancing reconciliation. It is a proud moment for those who work at the Department of Justice, for the individuals at the Council of Yukon First Nations, at Yukon First Nation governments, the Government of Yukon, and the court system as they come together to make this small but significant change.

Mr. Speaker, all communities matter, and I am so proud that our government has not only made this a priority, but has

worked extensively with each and every community to meet with them and to listen to their priorities and to respond. This budget is about growing vibrant and sustainable communities and supporting Yukoners everywhere.

As I turn to the Department of Justice for a moment, I want to say how proud I am of the work that the department has done and the dedicated individuals who have made it their career. The work they do truly affects us all. The department has developed priorities to guide its work on behalf of Yukoners. And they are: reconciliation with Yukon First Nations; working as a team; identifying and meeting their clients' needs; initiative; innovation; and communication. Such an expression of these commitments could not even be contemplated without the foundational work done by our government to repair relations and build trust with Yukon First Nations. We are committed to reconciliation and to rebuilding trust and relationships in order that we can discuss and solve complex problems at a table, rather than in a courtroom.

There are a number of new initiatives underway through the Department of Justice that will support action taken under and according to the substance use health emergency. In our 2022-23 budget, there are reflections of those priorities. The RCMP will engage five new members, which increases their capacity to expand to drug trafficking enforcement. We are working with the federal government to expand First Nation policing support through the First Nation and Inuit policing program. We have feedback from First Nation communities on policing, and it has been recognized, and our government supports culturally responsive policing.

We recognize the importance of housing, and we are very pleased to be moving forward with supervised community housing for justice-involved women. This program is intended to support women as they transition from custody to the community or to provide an alternative to custody or to support their participation when accessing services through the Yukon's treatment courts.

Our government has developed and integrated a restorative justice unit to improve restorative justice service delivery and to increase engagement with First Nation governments and to support community-designed, community-led restorative justice initiatives. This is a piece of work, along with community safety planning, that the now Minister of Education and I have worked on together for many years, prior to even being elected here to this Legislative Assembly. It is a proud moment for us to see the progress of this work.

The new restorative justice unit combines existing youth justice and adult justice resources to provide program delivery across the Yukon. Our goal of creating the integrated restorative justice unit is to increase the use of restorative justice services throughout the Yukon and to provide a holistic, integrated approach to clients accessing these services.

I am old enough to have been here and working in the criminal justice system during the first wave of restorative justice practices, and I am so proud to see us move and progress these practices across the territory. They have not been used as well as they could have in the intervening years.

We have many other priorities that are being worked on, but lastly today, I would like to speak about how we are expanding community safety planning practices in our territory. As many may know, there is much interest expressed by First Nation governments, Yukon communities, and others about community safety concerns and community-led initiatives to address them — again, a project that the now Minister of Education has worked on endlessly in her career.

Yesterday, we heard tributes to the Arctic Inspiration Prize and one of this year's winners, the House of Wolf and Associates and its leader, Gina Nagano. The award was given out last Friday. The commitment and dedication of Gina Nagano's team, and the values of community safety, are helping communities face the issues they identify and are almost single-handedly making our communities safer.

Both community safety planning and community safety officer programming are important to the safety and well-being of northern and remote communities. These initiatives provide for communities to lead in the assessment of safety concerns and the identification and implementation of appropriate mitigations. They recognize the uniqueness of each community and the value that each individual can contribute to community safety. We are learning from experience that it is important to enable communities to create tailored community safety approaches that are responsive to individual circumstances, concerns, and priorities that are meaningful to their citizens and their communities.

This year's budget introduced funding that will be available until 2030 for Yukon First Nation governments to do community safety planning and some implementation of programs. I'm very proud to have taken this step as a government. For the Government of Yukon, it is essential that we take a people-centred approach to improving how Yukoners engage with the justice system.

A story I told earlier, the initiative that I spoke about — the eagle feathers in the courtrooms — are in fact an example of such a people-centred approach to improving how Yukoners engage with the justice system. This program, as others, shows respect for our partnerships and helps move forward priorities of Yukon First Nations to achieve justice for their people.

I want to take a moment to thank my family and friends for their endless support and understanding. As everyone who has ever done this job or one like it, being a member of the government and of this Legislative Assembly takes a toll on your personal life. Everyone who has done it knows that. It is wrong, but the demands on your time mean that your family and friends regularly take a back seat, and they don't have you in their everyday moments of their lives as much as they or you might like.

COVID-19 has brought a whole new layer of responsibility and workload. This past year has been particularly egregious. Thank you to the hundreds of people who have reached out to me with words of support and encouragement. I would also like to thank the people of Riverdale South. The honour is mine to have been elected a second time to represent them and to bring forward their concerns and to help resolve issues that are of interest to them and to all Yukoners.

Those are the individual Yukoners who have taken the time to express their opinions, to express their votes, and to participate in our democratic process for the purposes of having a representative here in the Yukon Legislative Assembly. I also appreciate that we come here representing all of our individual neighbourhoods, our ridings, and our communities and those who cast the vote for us, but maybe more importantly, we represent those who did not cast a vote for us because the responsibility and honour of sitting in this seat — the honour of representing the people and of respecting our democracy is what our friends in Ukraine are fighting for this very second.

I just want to take the last opportunity to thank all of the front-line workers for keeping us safe and making the past two years more bearable than it has been in most places. Our store clerks, servers, cleaners, and medical professionals of all types have allowed our lives up here in the left-hand corner of Canada to remain relatively uninterrupted. I know that may not be what is on the front pages of the papers, or it may not be what some people think, but the truth is that our lives have remained relatively uninterrupted, and I want to thank each and every one of our front-line workers for going to work, for being safe, and for being kind.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address this Legislative Assembly.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** It is my pleasure to rise today to speak to our government's 2022-23 budget, Bill No. 204. I rise today as the MLA for Mountainview and also as the Minister of Education and the Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate. As I stand here, I want to acknowledge the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. I am always filled with gratitude to be in this position, and I am humbled by the trust that folks in the Yukon have put in me. I stand with that every single day. Each day that I can represent my constituents with absolute honour is an opportunity to stand shoulder to shoulder with these people, my colleagues, knowing that this year's budget will absolutely build a brighter future for all Yukoners.

I just hosted my latest constituency event on Sunday for Mountainview. It was the second one for this year, and I'm so proud of the level of commitment and engagement that comes from this community. The people in McIntyre, Hillcrest, Granger, and Valleyview are focused on community safety, youth, and empowering and supporting people to be the best that they can be. I know that these are priorities for many Yukoners across the territory, and I am pleased to see them reflected in this year's budget.

There are many other areas supported by this budget as well, including housing, education, health and social service delivery, and climate action, just to name a few. I know that these were many of the priorities that Yukoners expressed to me during the last election, so I'm very happy to see them reflected in our budget. It is a thoughtful, comprehensive, and holistic budget. I would like to thank the Premier's team in the Department of Finance for all of their efforts to develop the budget and the supporting materials. I would also like to thank

the many staff in Education, the Women and Gender Equity Directorate, and all of the departments for their work to support this year's budget. It takes a lot of work at a time when our entire government is working to support Yukoners to get on the path to recovery.

The last two years have been very challenging. I am proud to say that our public service has stepped up to the challenge and continued to provide the programs and services that Yukoners rely on. Along with the budget, the fiscal and economic outlook shows that our territory is in a very strong position with many exciting opportunities on the horizon. As our economy continues to grow, the five-year capital plan identifies up in the range of \$2.6 billion in spending on priorities that are important to my constituents and all Yukoners. This includes: new schools for our children; homes for Yukon families; community and recreational infrastructure to support activity and healthy living; and investment in our transportation infrastructure to keep our communities connected. There are also substantial investments in green energy that will help us achieve the goals identified in *Our Clean Future*.

I think it's important to note that we have not let the pandemic prevent us from moving the territory along in the direction Yukoners have asked us for. Our work to implement *Our Clean Future* is vital as we face a climate emergency. It really comes down to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and supporting all Yukoners to build more resilient communities so that the next generation is better equipped to deal with our changing climate. These problems are not going away, and we cannot waste any time to address them.

Our ongoing work to implement the *Putting People First* recommendations is vital to build a sustainable health and social services system that is holistic and people-centred. This work will improve outcomes for all Yukoners and make our territory a national leader when it comes to health and social services.

We are also continuing to work to make Yukon a safer and more inclusive and welcoming place for all Yukoners. The Yukon's MMIWG strategy and the LGBTQ2S+ action plan are key elements to this work. I will speak more about that in a moment. These are just some of the areas that we are focused on, ensuring that all Yukoners benefit from economic growth.

With this year's budget, our government continues to invest in a brighter future for the people of the Yukon. I would like to take an opportunity to speak about the work happening to improve Yukon's education system. There is a tremendous amount happening. I won't be able to touch on all of them, of course, but I would like to highlight some of the major initiatives underway that are reflected in this budget.

Yukoners begin their learning journey as children, and our Liberal government is working to ensure that Yukon children get the best start at life. Last year, we launched our universal, affordable childcare program to put more money in the pockets of Yukon families. This program offsets the cost of childcare by up to \$700 per month per child. This is making life more affordable for Yukon families. Our government also ensures that fully qualified early childcare educators in the Yukon

receive over \$30 per hour. This is the highest minimum wage for early childhood educators in the country. This program has been in place for a little under a year, but it is already receiving praise. The Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development is a research centre at the University of Toronto that is committed to using the best available evidence on early childcare development to inform public discourse, public policy, and the professional learning of those who work with young children.

In recognition of our universal, affordable childcare program, the Atkinson Centre called Yukon Canada's new leader in early learning and childcare. They noted that we did not wait for the federal government to come through with funding to launch our program, which ticks all the boxes to address affordability, quality, and accessibility.

This year's budget includes more than \$40 million to continue providing nationally recognized early learning and childcare opportunities in our territory.

By working with our partners, we have reached an agreement to access an additional \$54.3 million in federal funding over the next five years for early learning and childcare. This includes \$800,000 in cultural enhancement funding to develop enhanced, culturally rich early learning programs and environments. This funding will help us to continue expanding access to high-quality early learning and childcare throughout the territory, including our universal, affordable childcare program.

This kind of program was never even considered under the previous governments. I'm proud to be part of the Liberal government that introduced universal, affordable childcare in the Yukon. This is a key part of our work to support Yukon families by making life more affordable and to support childcare operators and early learning educators to ensure that our children have the support that they need to succeed. It is also a great example of our work to modernize and improve our education system.

Another \$255,000 in this year's budget will support work with Yukon University and other partners to support the development of a qualified early learning workforce. Ensuring that Yukon learners are supported from childhood all the way to adulthood is an essential part of ensuring a brighter future for the territory. They say that it takes a village to raise a child, and we continue to work with our partners throughout the territory to improve education outcomes for all Yukon students.

It was an honour and a humbling experience to join the Yukon Chiefs Committee on Education to establish the Yukon First Nation School Board. Our government, the Chiefs Committee on Education, and the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate share the common goal of providing high quality and culturally appropriate education systems for all Yukon students based on an indigenous world view. The establishment of the Yukon First Nation School Board is part of our work to decolonize the Yukon's education system, and it will ensure that Yukon First Nations can meaningfully shape their children's education. This historic accomplishment happened on the 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow*, and I can't think of a better way to honour

the vision of past First Nation leaders and build a brighter future for the next generation.

Earlier this year, seven school communities, including eight schools, voted in favour of being governed by the First Nation School Board starting in the 2022-23 school year. As the Minister of Education, I look forward to working collaboratively with the Chiefs Committee on Education and the new First Nation School Board Interim Governance Committee to move this important work forward. I also look forward to continuing to work on a government-to-government basis with individual First Nations on their education priorities for their citizens. Education is a critical area of reconciliation, and Yukoners can be confident that our Liberal government is a willing partner when it comes to working in partnership with First Nations to improve our education system.

The past two years have created many challenges for our education system. It has been inspiring to see how adaptive and resilient our schools are. I want to thank all the educators, staff, and families across the territory who have supported our students to continue learning throughout the pandemic. I am pleased to see money in the budget specifically for mental health supports in our schools. We know that mental health is a key contributor to our students' success, and we will continue to work with our education partners to support mental wellness. Part of that support includes making sure that students feel that they belong in our schools and are supported to thrive in their learning.

I am very excited to see nearly \$800,000 in this year's budget to continue implementing the recommendations of the review on inclusive and special education. This includes funding for additional psychology assessments, professional services, and a specialized teacher to support students on the autism spectrum. That review provides a road map to build a world-class inclusive education system here in the territory. This work is long overdue, and I am thrilled to see it moving forward.

There is a lot of momentum right now when it comes to improving our education system, and this is good news for Yukoners.

The 2019 Auditor General report on education is unfortunately not much different from the report from 2009. The difference has been the response of our Liberal government. We are working in collaboration with our partners and doing the hard work to make our education system better for all Yukoners.

In addition to modernizing and improving education delivery, we are also investing in education facilities to meet the needs of our growing communities, so \$1.275 million in the budget is dedicated to design work for the new Kluane Lake School in Burwash Landing, which will accommodate students from kindergarten to grade 12. The Kluane First Nation requested a school to be built in Burwash Landing more than 100 years ago. We are thrilled to be working alongside the Kluane First Nation on this new school, which will support Kluane First Nation citizens to learn and thrive in their own community.

In our fastest growing community, Whistle Bend here in Whitehorse, we are investing more than \$25 million this year toward the first new elementary school in the city in over 25 years. I am pleased to see that a local business, Ketz Construction, is building that school. Yukoners will recall the poor decisions that were made to replace F.H. Collins Secondary School and the breakdown in trust among the contracting community. I want to thank my colleagues, the Member for Whitehorse West and the former Minister of Highways and Public Works as well. The work that he and his department undertook to overhaul the government's procurement during our previous mandate has helped to mend broken relationships with Yukon contractors and restore confidence in government procurement in the territory — thank you.

I would also like to commend the Member for Riverdale North, the current Minister of Highways and Public Works, for his efforts to fully implement the First Nation procurement policy. That work began under his predecessor and has also been a key part of improving procurement in the territory to support our local businesses.

The construction of the CSSC Mercier school in Riverdale is a great example of our improved approach. It has served as a model for the new Whistle Bend school. I was pleased to join the Minister of Highways and Public Works, along with representatives from Ketz Construction, for a land blessing of the site last fall. This new school will soon be able to provide families and children in this neighbourhood with a modern learning environment just a short walk away from their own homes. This is much more than a building; it is a groundbreaking investment in our children's future for years to come.

I am so pleased to share some highlights from the Women and Gender Equity Directorate budget for 2022-23. This represents the first budget since we updated the name and formal mandate of the directorate in the fall of 2021. The work of the directorate has kept women's equality at the heart of what we do and continues to strengthen the depth of our work to reflect the equity of all genders and sexual orientations. I'm so pleased that the new name of Women and Gender Equity Directorate accurately represents this work now.

Something that I have spoken about many times in this House, but it bears repeating, is the implementation of the Government of Yukon's LGBTQ2S+ action plan. With over 100 action items, the action plan paves a path to end discrimination and improve inclusivity, both within Government of Yukon services and the territory as a whole.

This year's budget contains \$110,000 to continue the implementation of the plan, although that doesn't reflect all of the work that is happening within our government departments that will move this agenda forward. I am pleased to say that there is also funding for Queer Yukon Society and for the Yukon Pride Centre. We have allocated \$425,000 for this existing project. The Pride Centre will serve the LGBTQ2S+ community, which has experienced discrimination and systemic barriers for far too long. I'm sorry that the member opposite, as part of the NDP caucus, feels differently about this. I certainly will be meeting with members of their caucus to

discuss paths forward, and I will continue to strive to implement this important action plan.

I also want to highlight the important work that is happening at Women and Gender Equity Directorate to implement the Yukon's missing and murdered indigenous women and girls strategy. The Yukon was the first jurisdiction in Canada to release our response to the national inquiry. We have been working hard to make change ever since. Our strategy contains 31 actions and four main paths: strengthening connections and supports; education and economic empowerment; community safety and justice; and community dialogue in action.

Officials at the technical level are now working very hard to develop the implementation framework for this strategy. This fiscal year, we're providing \$285,000 in funding for the Yukon's missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and two-spirit-plus people strategy.

Again, as the LGBTQ2S+ action plan doesn't sit in one particular place within the budget, nor does the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls strategy sit in one place within our budget. We are investing in low-barrier, affordable housing, inclusive education, restorative justice responses, *Putting People First*, and health overall, specifically mental health, community safety, and the psychiatric services and programming. We are investing in SART. We are investing in justice-involved women and better programming for these folks in the Yukon. When we support these, we are supporting changing the story to upholding dignity and justice and the Yukon missing and murdered indigenous women and girls strategy.

We look forward to hosting an accountability forum this upcoming May for partners, signatories, and family members as a way to reconnect and communicate about how we are all taking action to change the story for all indigenous women and girls and two-spirit-plus people, which ultimately will help to create safer communities for all Yukoners.

I am also very pleased to see nearly \$600,000 to support the work of the Yukon First Nation Government's Burial Investigation Committee. The work of this committee is very important. I was honoured to be in Lower Post last summer with the Premier, the Liard First Nation Chief Stephen Charlie, Daylu Dena Council Deputy Chief Harlan Schilling, BC Premier John Horgan, and federal Minister Marc Miller for the ceremonial demolition of the Lower Post residential school.

All of our communities continue to feel the lasting impacts of trauma caused by the residential school system on survivors and their families. Shedding light on this tragic history is absolutely necessary for healing and moving forward on the path to reconciliation.

This budget continues to support Yukoners across the territory. First, we are also working hard to expand the sexualized assault response team, which was first launched in the territory in March 2020 in Whitehorse. One of my main priorities in this new mandate has been to work to expand the services of the sexualized assault response team beyond Whitehorse. Currently, any victim of sexualized violence can now access a 24/7, toll-free support line and a website with

information and local resources from anywhere in the territory, but we can do more.

We need to expand victim-centred collaborative services to be available outside of Whitehorse. This year, we are partnering with the Government of Canada to provide another \$125,000 to support the planning for the expansion of SART services. I am also pleased to say that we are increasing the funding to the Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council to support the Sally and Sisters program. This important program has been a critical service for women and children in need for the last 10 years. It provides a safe environment for women to access food support and navigation services. The increase in funding of \$143,000 will allow the program to operate four days per week.

I would also like to touch on some other priorities that I am pleased to see included in this year's budget, such as \$3 million to support the implementation of community safety initiatives in the coming years, including \$300,000 this year. I know that the Minister of Health and Social Services and of Justice already spoke about this, but I really am excited about this move and the support that our government is putting into this. Again, when we talk about missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, this is a foundational piece to transforming our communities. It goes right alongside the economic prosperity that we are experiencing in our territory. We will have true balance when we see social prosperity as well.

Another \$400,000 is included for the Selkirk First Nation community safety officer program. These programs are so important for our communities. I want to give a big shout-out to Gina Nagano and the House of Wolf. I am so happy to see the Indigenous Community Safety Partnership program win the Arctic Inspiration Prize in the \$500,000 category. This is so well-deserved and will help expand this important program in the territory. I know that safety is one of the number one issues in my riding.

I met with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, our community associations, and the RCMP to bring everyone together to make some much-needed positive changes in Mountainview. As a result, we are now working toward finalizing the Mountainview community safety and wellness committee working group. The working group is slated to meet this week for the first time since October. We have, as we know, had a lot of restrictions and have been unable to come together in person, so I am very excited to sit down with everyone again and keep moving forward on this very important project together. Last year, we discussed the draft terms of reference as a group in an effort to formalize the document and officially make this a functioning committee to advocate for the riding. I want to commend and celebrate these folks for their continuous advocacy toward safety and wellness in our riding.

We have reached out to the city to invite them to the upcoming meeting and to join the group itself, and we are looking forward to taking the next steps together. So, it's very exciting and I can't wait to talk about that more publicly.

I am also pleased to see more than \$5.5 million for the immediate response to the substance use health emergency in our territory. This is a serious issue impacting all of our communities. We all know someone who has been affected by

substance use, by mental health challenges, and by suicide. These are hard topics to talk about. When I reflect on how I got here into this position, it was really about saving lives and about making a difference for Yukoners. It has been incredibly difficult on every level to see our community struggle and to lose young people. That is not the vision that our elders had for the Yukon, and I will work alongside my colleague, the Minister of Health and Social Services, and other Cabinet ministers and other leaders in the Yukon to change that story as well. There are no simple fixes here. Communities right across Canada are facing these challenges and we are looking for ways to better help those in our communities who are struggling. These are complex issues that require all of us to work together. These are health issues that demand a harm-reduction approach. Our Liberal government has put a focus on harm reduction over the past five years. We recognize that so much more needs to be done, and we are taking action.

I want to thank again the Minister of Health and Social Services for her leadership on this file. The supervised consumption site that we opened last year is a first in northern Canada. This provides a safe place for people to use substances and improves access to a range of supports. It will soon be one of the only sites in the country that supports users to inhale substances. A safe supply of opioids in the territory is helping those suffering from addiction and serious substance use issues. Last fall, we expanded this program to help more Yukoners in need. These are critical elements of our Liberal government's harm-reduction approach. They are hands down the most progressive steps that have ever been taken in the territory to address substance use.

We are also expanding outreach and public education, along with harm-reduction initiatives like naloxone training and drug-testing services. Phase 1 of the Mental Wellness Summit was an important opportunity to bring people together to discuss solutions. It has been disappointing to hear the disparaging remarks about this summit, which is just part of ongoing conversation that we need to continue to have here in the Legislative Assembly to bring the awareness and to bring the conversation together.

Having community leaders come together to acknowledge these problems and to work together in good faith to improve our response is critical. The substance use health emergency can only be addressed through collaboration right across this territory. That includes every single member of this House.

I know that Yukoners whom I have spoken to are pleased to see our government working in partnership to address the emergency. We all need to step up our response to this emergency. I want to acknowledge the work and leadership of Kwanlin Dün First Nation, which recently announced plans to expand programs and services for citizens dealing with substance abuse issues. We will continue to work with our partners on solutions that help all of our communities.

The encouragement and advocacy of my constituents is grounding. I am so humbled to represent Mountainview. One of the things about my livestreams that I have been having for the last couple of years is that people tune in from all over the territory. They reach out, so I have caseworks from across the

territory on a regular basis. I'm so humbled to have Yukoners reach out and seek the assistance of me and other MLAs on really personal issues that they may have in all different types of areas in their lives. It gives me energy in my role as a Member of the Legislative Assembly and reinforces the importance of our government's work. We are here to improve the lives of Yukoners. We take that role seriously, and we work every day to improve government service delivery and create the conditions for our communities to thrive. The work that my colleagues and I did during our previous mandate has helped us to move our territory in a positive direction after many years of division.

In closing, I want to leave my final words to the people I love dearly. I thank my husband, Rick McLean, for his unwavering support and commitment to me and to this team as well. I thank my sons, Jedrek and Colin, for their ongoing support and encouragement. I am so proud of them. I have always said that the work that we do, anything I have ever done, has been for them and the next generations to come. I view my life that way. I do the work for the next seven generations, and they represent that to me. I want to, as the Minister of Health and Social Services has said to my colleague, thank my friends for never giving up on me and for continuing to invite me to things even though I don't always have time to do it. I don't always have time for the people who have supported me to be here. But knowing that they are there and that they are patiently waiting and they are silently, sometimes, supporting — that means the world to me. They fill me up when I need that. They invite me out, and we have some good laughs and enjoy the company of each other. I encourage Yukoners to do the same. Get out. Exercise. Try something new. Get together with friends. We are starting to see that light at the end of the tunnel. This has been a really hard few years for every single Yukoner, for every Canadian and worldwide. I cannot even talk about the war that is happening in Ukraine without moving to tears, so I'm not going to do that, because it's a difficult topic and my heart is with all those people who are suffering throughout the world but particularly there.

On that note, I thank you very much for your attention to the words that I have been able to share with you today. I very much look forward to Committee of the Whole debate and talking in more detail about the areas within the budget that are important to all Yukoners.

Thank you.

**Ms. McLeod:** Of course, I'm happy to rise today to speak to Bill No. 204 this afternoon. I would like to first thank my constituents for their continued faith and support for me to represent them here in this place. I appreciate their support and, of course, the support of my family.

I will be brief this afternoon. Of course, there are programs and services that we can all support that are contained in this budget. There are some things that should help Yukoners, and of course, we are happy about that, and I look forward to discussing specific items when we get to the departments. I know that we have mentioned this over the years, and when you

think that it can't get any worse, well, son of a gun, it gets worse.

It is almost impossible to find information in this budget that you can relate to anything that is going on. Everything is very buried within a line item, so I expect that we are going to spend a great deal of time in Committee when we go through each line to find out exactly what is contained there. One of the reasons I mention that is because for five years — over five years — my community and I have been advocating for street lights on the Robert Campbell Highway. Now, lo and behold, there is a news release that says that street lights are going to happen on the Robert Campbell Highway. That is good news. I cannot find a single thing about it in the budget — not one.

Of course, it is a concern to me, because when I look at the Town of Watson Lake's budget, I see a line item in there, because they are being made to pay for part of that project. I am going to be quite interested to know how every Yukon community is affected by these payments that they have to make to see projects move forward. Now, \$150,000 obviously doesn't stack up to a \$50-million surplus, but it is certainly a great deal of money to a community the size of Watson Lake.

The Premier, in his budget speech, mentioned that — I want to just talk about one thing for sure today, and that is the issue of lot development within Watson Lake, and it is vitally important to my community, of course. The Premier, in his budget speech, mentioned that planning and feasibility work is being done for lots in Watson Lake. Now, clearly, there is something wrong with the translation of the language here.

Last fall, the Watson Lake OCP was approved by the government. The tender for lot development was expected to go out this spring. It was a year late, at that. Now, it's sounding an awful lot like it's not going to happen again this year. When the Minister of Community Services addressed AYC recently, there was no mention of lot development in Watson Lake. Certainly, I look forward to getting into debate on Community Services to try to find out for my constituents just what is going on, because it is an issue of vital importance, as I mentioned. We can't grow and can't begin to address any housing issues until this matter is sorted.

I would like to say that, because I am so short here, I would like to share my time with the Member for Lake Laberge, but that happens in the House of Commons, as I understand it. I just wanted to get that in there, because I realize that we have some extra time.

**Mr. Hassard:** It is a pleasure to rise today to have the opportunity to respond to the budget that the Premier brought forward last Thursday. It has been a pleasure to listen to everyone's speeches and get their perspectives as well.

I would just like to begin by thanking the good people of Pelly-Nisutlin for their continued support. I certainly appreciate it very much. I am happy to see the days get longer and sunnier, and hopefully that, combined with the lifting of restrictions, will help people's lives return to some type of normalcy. I, too, would like to thank Yukoners for their incredible patience getting through this past winter, in particular, despite some of

the rather ridiculous restrictions that this Liberal government has imposed on them.

Moving on to the budget, on Thursday, as I said, the Premier tabled the budget here in the Legislature. It's the largest budget that has ever been tabled here in this House. It is in the neighbourhood of \$1.97 billion. Unfortunately, bigger is not always better.

As I was listening to the Leader of the NDP the other day, she was criticizing the government for spending too much money on highway maintenance. As a resident of rural Yukon — as you are yourself, Mr. Speaker — I would have to question her judgment on that. Then, even more interesting, when I got to looking closer at the budget, the reality is that the actuals for 2021 show just over \$49 million for maintenance. This year, the government has budgeted \$46.5 million. According to my math, that's actually a decrease.

That's in light of the fact that, for the past two winters, we've received more than normal precipitation, and we've seen more severe weather patterns. One would think that a forward-thinking government, in fact, would have increased that maintenance budget, rather than cutting it.

I know that the government doesn't like it when I say that they're cutting budgets. They prefer to say that they're finding efficiencies, but the reality is that costs are increasing and the budget numbers are getting smaller. There is no two ways about it; that's a cut. So, here we have an almost \$2-billion budget, which is a record, but we're cutting the highway maintenance budget. It seems rather bizarre.

As we know and as we've talked about, budgets are about priorities. When a government sets a budget, it's about setting their priorities. It's clear that highway maintenance for rural Yukon is not a priority for this government, which is interesting. You know, they talked about — one of their campaign slogans was every community matters. I said, from day one, that unfortunately for this government, some communities matter more than others, and it continues to be shown.

The Minister of Justice doesn't like those comments, and that's fine. I didn't expect her to like it, but it's a reality.

Mr. Speaker, I'll just talk about the three communities in my riding, and I'll talk about a few of the realities. I was in Ross River a couple of weeks ago, and I stopped by the school, as I always do, and I certainly wasn't surprised to see that the school is still short-staffed and still under-supported. We have two EMS volunteers in the community, because the EMS service was gutted by this government with their mandate. When I stood in this House last fall and talked about how this was going to affect the community of Ross River, the minister said: Oh no, don't worry; they are going to be supported by Whitehorse. We are going to take people in there to help out with EMS — but that was just another empty promise from this government.

I had the opportunity to take the water delivery person for a drive. He wanted to show me a few things around town and show me some of the absolutely deplorable conditions that he is expected to work in to try to deliver water to houses that are owned by Yukon Housing that haven't been — walkways haven't been shovelled the entire winter — and he has got to

almost take his life in his hands to deliver water to government buildings. It is not right.

I looked at the swimming pool and was kind of musing about whether the swimming pool would get to reopen this summer in Ross River, and as I was talking to people about it, I was informed that there have been more than one letter and e-mail sent off to the government and not even a response given to them about what was going to happen with the swimming pool this year. There are limited recreation facilities in Ross River, and the pool is very important to that community, and so I would hope that someone on that side of the Assembly would take that into consideration and take it seriously.

Moving to Faro — many residents in Faro have asked for increased supports in light of the tragic shooting in that community. Government's response was: Well, we have wellness hubs in Watson Lake and Carmacks — but that is cold comfort to the citizens of Faro who, in that time of need and in that time of tragedy — Mr. Speaker, you know how far it is from Carmacks to Faro. That's not acceptable.

I won't even get started about the lack of mental health supports throughout the entire Yukon. We have been in a state of emergency for almost 24 months. We have seen an unprecedented number of opioid deaths and suicides, so I would like to hope that the government would take this a lot more seriously.

I know that we don't have a lot of time, so I'm going to try to be quick. I will talk about Teslin for a few minutes. Last year, we had snowpack conditions at roughly 140 percent of historical levels, and this year they announced — in the last couple of days — that we were at 164 percent of historical levels, I believe. I really hope that the Minister of Community Services and the government will listen to the community — that they will listen to the Village of Teslin and the Teslin Tlingit Council — and help them prepare earlier for flooding. There is a very good chance that Teslin will flood again, and it would be nice if the government would actually have some forethought and spend some money ahead of time to be prepared rather than wait until it is an emergency situation.

I do have to give kudos to the citizens of Teslin. They did an absolutely amazing job of dealing with the flood last June. I would like to note that there was no support from the army and there were no Cabinet ministers down for photo ops. That maybe sped things up and kept things moving a little smoother.

When they needed help from the officials in Community Services, whether they needed sandbags or help getting funding, the officials were really, really impressive, very helpful, and really good to work with. That was really appreciated by the community.

As I listened to the Minister of Community Services in his budget speech, he spoke, as he has many times, about the Nisutlin Bay bridge in Teslin. As we all know, as the previous Minister of Highways and Public Works, he has often talked about how he and his Liberal government have done such a great job of moving this project forward and negotiating a deal with the First Nation. Ironically, here we are five years later and still nothing has happened.

I won't say nothing has happened. The tender closed in February, but now apparently it won't be awarded until September, and that is if the contractors will actually hold their prices for another six months, which could be debatable. Only the Liberals could see this as an improvement and progress as we go another building season with nothing happening.

I don't have a lot more to say, but I can't cede the floor without responding to one of the comments made by the Minister of Community Services in his speech. I really have to wonder at his almost delusional ideas that the Yukon Party may be in some way supportive of a carbon tax. It is almost comical. We have discussed the carbon tax for probably hours in this Legislature. Certainly, no one ever said that we were in favour of it. Actually, if I had another minute, I would encourage the Premier at this time — we have talked about the skyrocketing fuel prices and what it's doing to the Yukon, driving the costs of everything up. Now would be a great opportunity for the Premier to have a talk with the Prime Minister and maybe cut the carbon tax, get rid of the carbon tax, or at least put it on hold or stop the April 1 increase. Anything that we can do to help people would certainly be of benefit.

So, Mr. Speaker —

**Speaker:** Order, please. The time being 5:30 p.m., the 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.*