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Thursday, April 7, 2022 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2022 Spring Sitting

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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, April 7, 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. Clarke: In honour of the tribute to Bob Daffe, we have a number of guests here today. I apologize in advance if I don't have a comprehensive list because there are quite a number of people here to show their love for Bob. I will do my best. We have: Kevin Daffe; Kathleen Froese; Theresa Landman; Danielle Daffe; Nathan Mole; Issac Daffe Lamothe; and Karine Genest. There are Bob's Ranger colleagues: Ranger DonaSun Novecosky; Ranger Al Parker; Ranger Fred Smith; Ranger Boyd Campbell; Ranger Mike Bellon; and Ranger John Mitchell.

I served with Mr. Parker and Mr. Bellon almost 30 years ago, so it is great to see them. Trish Loretz, Kelly McGill, Andrew Hyde, Lisa Preto, Len Janzen, Scott Burrell, Will O'Brien, Diane and Russel Tait, Hilary Calnan, Jan Klippert, Walter Brennan, Jeanne Burke, and Lawrence Brennan. I also have a few last-minute names that have been provided to me: Alison Daffe, Crystal Bartszak, Heather Burrell, Jason Basnett, Olivier Roy-Jauvin, Rodney D'Abramo, and I think that is it.

Welcome to the Assembly and thanks so much for coming today.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: I would ask all Members of the Legislative Assembly to please welcome here Carmen Komish, president of Yukon Chapter, BC and Yukon Branch, Kidney Foundation, her husband, Mark Robinson, and their son, Ryan MacLean. They are also constituents of mine in the riding of Porter Creek Centre. Also in the gallery today are Bev and Doug Thomas, and Anne Huang. Thank you for coming today — if we could welcome them, please.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McLean: I ask my colleagues to please help me in welcoming some special guests here today for a ministerial statement later on in the Orders of the Day. David Morrison, chair of the board of governors of Yukon University; Dr. Lesley Brown, president and vice-chancellor of Yukon University; Dr. Karen Barnes, former president of Yukon University; Blake Buckle, associate vice-president, external, at Yukon University; and Michael Vernon, senior communications coordinator.

Welcome.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES

In remembrance of Bob Daffe

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I rise today to pay tribute to the memory of Bob Daffe. Bob moved to the Yukon at the age of 19 in search of adventure, and he never left.

He built a great life here. He raised his family, he established Tatshenshini Expediting — a thriving business that he was so passionate about — and he touched upon so many people in varied and diverse circles.

Bob took part and was a proud member of a number of groups, from the Junior Rangers, innumerable outdoor education programs, the Canadian Rangers, the Yukon Canoe and Kayak Club, and so many others. Always patient, always enthusiastic, and always with that contagious laughter and smile. His fluid and poetic movement on the water was inspirational to all. As a true outdoorsman, he wanted to share his passion and survival skills, and he was endlessly enthusiastic about sharing his confidence and deep appreciation of being in the wilderness. He had so much to teach.

In preparing for this tribute, I was told a short story about one of his river trips in Mexico. Mr. Speaker, we know that Bob cared deeply about rivers. They became a metaphor to the way he lived — never still, relentless, determined, and fun.

All these attributes he demonstrated in 2003 when leading a group of Canadian and French kayakers into depths of the Mexican jungle to run the Jatate River, which is situated in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. The group was unable to finish because, on day one, they were taken hostage at machete point by a group of hostile villagers. These villagers held the group in a small schoolhouse for two days. Bob, being fluent in French, English, and Spanish — I'm told that the Spanish he learned from playing tapes in a Walkman while working on vehicles as a mechanic — tirelessly translated for the various group members while negotiating the group's safe exit from that rather harrowing situation. It was nerve-racking and tense for those involved, but in the years following, Bob still managed to laugh about it, often contemplating going back just to see if the villagers would receive the group differently.

There are so many other stories, and probably each of you in the gallery today have at least one special story in mind when you think of Bob. He was a leader, a mentor, a role model, a guide, a father, a husband, and a friend. He meant so many things to so many people. Bob Daffe is truly a contemporary Yukon legend.

A real man of the water, your memory will always be a blessing. When launching our kayaks, when navigating meandering waterways — gentle or tempestuous — when climbing up with a packraft, when paddling in full force, your passion lives on in so many ways. As Bob would always say, "Life is good, life is beautiful, particularly when on the water."

Thank you so much for the legacy that you have left.

Applause

Mr. Istchenko: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition in tribute to Bob Daffe.

It's so wonderful to see his family and so many people here for the tribute today, but there's no surprise that there are so many people. Bob was a remarkable man and great Yukoner. The life that he led can be described in so many ways: awesome, interesting, exciting. Bob was one of the most positive people I've ever known. I met Bob in the early years of his successful business, Tatshenshini Expediting — so many exciting trips running the river, especially during high water and maybe the few Saturday-night rum runs.

Bob was very skilled at anything he did. He made it easy to learn from him and you always felt safe. He was always able to fix or find a solution for the problem. Bob worked with so many groups, but I want to focus a little bit on Bob as a Canadian Ranger and the impact that he had as a teacher and a leader working with Canadian Rangers and the Junior Rangers.

For many years, close to 200 Junior Rangers from across the north would congregate in Whitehorse for training. The highlight for them was always the whitewater rafting and swiftwater rescue. Learning while having fun is what made their training exciting and memorable.

Bob was tough and his skills were an asset to his patrol and all other patrols. One incident found us at Aishihik Lake where two snowmobiles had fallen through the ice. Bob was about to load up as we were at the end of the exercise when he heard. He came running to me and said, "I have a dry suit. I'll put it on and jump in and hook the sleds up — help pull them out." It was cold. We had just gone through a spell of 40 below. Without hesitation, Bob suited up, jumped in, and I've never seen a man's eyes get so big as when he hit the water. I said, "What's the matter?" Bob put his hand in the water and said, "My zipper's open." Well, we both laughed, but we got the job done. That's the kind of guy he was. Our patrol was super impressed and very thankful.

At his celebration of life, it was just a testament to the life that he lived. All the things he loved doing, from snowmobiling to rafting and everything in between, were on display with a story that you could read. It was just low key with lots of great conversations.

I was honoured to participate in the 21-gun salute for Bob on behalf of Canadian Rangers to recognize Bob as a great ranger and just a special person who has touched so many people. I am honoured once again to stand in this Legislature and have the opportunity to further recognize a great man here today. Thank you.

Applause

Ms. White: I stand on behalf of the Yukon NDP to honour and celebrate a beautiful life. We have heard so much about the impact that Bob Daffe had not only on those around him, but also on the adventure tourism industry. I loved everything about Tatshenshini camp. I loved the energy of the guides, the guides in training, and everything that comes along with this lifestyle. I loved Bob's stories and his manner and sense of humour. As much as I wanted to be part of Bob's world

as a teenager and a younger person, I was, and remain, fearful of fast-moving water.

Since his passing, I've spent a lot of time thinking about the impact that Bob had on the people and the communities around me. I think that the true testament of how he lived his life is present today in the gallery — in the faces of the people he loved and respected — and it is those listening at home or reading this later on.

He will live on through the impact that he had on the lives of those who were lucky enough to find themselves in his light and how those people have taken his lessons and shared them out with the world around them. Each and every one of you is a testament to his legacy. Your jobs are so varied and your life has taken you in so many different directions, but the commonality that you share are the lessons that he taught you: to love and respect the natural world; to love and support and lift the people around you; to live authentically; to be curious; to work hard; and especially to rejoice in humour.

So, there is no better way to celebrate him than by taking the lessons he taught you and sharing them with others. His legacy will live on through your actions and the stories you share. Bob, you taught us so much — life is good.

Applause

In recognition of Green Shirt Day

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I rise today to pay tribute to Green Shirt Day, which is recognized across Canada the first week of April each year. The purpose of Green Shirt Day is to encourage and inspire all Canadians to register to become organ donors. This day was created to remember and recognize all the victims and families of the devastating Humboldt Broncos bus crash that took place on April 6, 2018. In particular, it is a day to honour the legacy of Logan Boulet, a 21-year-old Broncos defenceman who died of his injuries the day after the crash.

Logan's parents, Bernadine and Toby Boulet, made the selfless decision to donate their son's organs. They did so because Logan had told them that he planned to register as an organ donor. Because he shared his plans with his family, Logan's heart, lungs, liver, both kidneys, and both corneas saved or improved the lives of six people.

This inspiring story spread quickly, and it is estimated that almost 150,000 Canadians registered to become organ donors in the weeks following the crash.

This is the largest number of Canadians registering to become organ donors in Canadian history due to one event and one person. This remarkable impact has since become known as the "Logan Boulet Effect". Some have said that this selfless act was nothing less than miraculous. The young man's legacy is a lasting reminder about how important it is for Canadians to talk to their family about their organ donation wishes.

Almost 90 percent of Canadians say that they support organ donation, but only 32 percent have actually registered their intent. This number has been increasing in recent years, but we can still do better. It is estimated that more than 4,400 Canadians are currently waiting for an organ transplant. Each year, about 250 of those people die while waiting.

Mr. Speaker, today I remind all Yukoners that they can help save lives by choosing to be an organ and tissue donor. The organs of a single donor can save as many as eight lives. A donor registration form can be found in most doctors' offices or on yukon.ca or at Yukon Motor Vehicles Services. Registered donors will have a little heart added to their driver's licence or receive a sticker for their health care card that indicates their donor status.

Most importantly, I urge Yukoners to talk to their families about their intentions. Make sure they know what you want so that they can understand, support, and respect your wishes for the future. This is crucial, as doctors will support the wishes of family at the time of death. By making your wishes known, you can help your family make this decision and save or improve the lives of fellow Canadians who are waiting for help. In doing so, you will leave your own lasting legacy and the greatest gift that there can be in the face of a tragedy.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: Salamat. I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize today, April 7, as Green Shirt Day in support of organ donation in Canada.

On April 7, 2018, Humboldt Broncos defenceman Logan Boulet passed away from injuries obtained the day before, when his team bus was involved in a fatal accident that killed 16 and injured 13 others. Logan Boulet was an organ donor. Inspired by one of his coaches, Ric Suggitt, who passed away the year before, Logan had signed up to be an organ donor. That decision saved or changed the lives of six people after his death. He donated his heart, lungs, liver, both kidneys, and both corneas.

What happened next has become known across Canada as the "Logan Boulet Effect". News began to spread of Logan's selfless act following this devastating accident that had the attention of the whole nation.

In the weeks to follow, almost 150,000 Canadians would register to become organ donors. Green Shirt Day recognizes and honours Logan and his legacy and all organ donors who have changed and saved the lives of others. It continues to serve as a yearly opportunity to raise the importance of organ donation across the country.

According to the Canadian Organ Replacement Register, the total number of organ transplant procedures in Canada has increased 42 percent between 2010 and 2019. Unfortunately, the number of people who have passed away waiting for an organ transplant has also risen. Organ donation is not something many want to think about or talk about, but we need to start having these conversations. If there is one thing that Yukoners can take away from our words today, it is the importance of having that kitchen table discussion with your family to let them know your wishes around organ donation.

Yukoners can find the registration form to be an organ donor on the government website along with information about organ donation and how to talk to your family about your wishes. Salamat po.

Applause

Ms. Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to Green Shirt Day and Organ Donation Month.

Organ donation is a simple act that saves lives. It is an act of care and generosity to community. The process to become a donor in the Yukon is simple: As mentioned, you need to fill out and return a form, but as my colleagues have also mentioned, even though 90 percent of Canadians support the idea, far fewer are registered organ donors. There are thousands of people waiting for transplants across the country and hundreds who die every year while they wait for a transplant. Despite the fact that the process is so simple in the Yukon, we know that many people never get around to filling in and returning that form.

So, I want to take a moment to talk about a different approach for organ donation. Our Yukon system, like many provinces, is an explicit consent system, also known as "opt-in". That means that only those who have given their explicit consent by filling out the proper paperwork and returning it can be donors. An opt-out — or a presumed consent — system is widespread throughout Europe. Nova Scotia recently became the first jurisdiction in Canada to implement the opt-out system, and now they are anticipating an increase in organ donations of between 30 and 50 percent over the next five years. Think of the lives that could be saved.

I applaud everyone who has taken steps to become an organ donor. Our community applauds you — thank you — but I know that there are many more willing donors out there and that moving into an opt-out system would help so many more people in the Yukon live longer and healthier lives.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have for tabling a media analysis, dated April 7, 2022, entitled "Conservative Yukon Party Leader is dangerously indecisive as he continues to confuse Yukoners with conflicting information about the Party's position on Carbon Pricing".

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I have for tabling a legislative return in response to a question yesterday from the Leader of the Third Party which confirms, in fact, that I have spoken about a new walk-in medical clinic in this House on three prior occasions during this Spring Sitting.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I have for tabling the Yukon University five-year strategic plan for 2022 to 2027, entitled *Becoming*.

Ms. White: I have for tabling 17 Hansard excerpts from October 20, 2021 to April 5, 2022 in which the minister did not reference her plans to open a public walk-in clinic when asked.

I also have for tabling a *Whitehorse Star* article entitled "McPhee rules out a YG-run medical clinic".

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?
 Are there any petitions to be presented?
 Are there any bills to be introduced?
 Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to improve the organ donation program for Yukoners by reviewing potential options, including but not limited to:

- (1) better promotion;
- (2) more accessible registration;
- (3) active-offer initiatives; and
- (4) opt-out policies.

Mr. Cathers: I rise to give notice of the following motion for the production of papers:

THAT this House do issue an order for the return of any transfer payment agreement between the Department of Health and Social Services and the Yukon Medical Association that includes funding for a recruitment officer.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to introduce legislation to create deemed consent on organ and tissue donation, also called opt-out legislation.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to provide immediate support to Hidden Valley families by:

- (1) working with affected individuals to determine their unique and specific needs;
- (2) allowing staff, students, and families to access counselling at no cost to themselves; and
- (3) allowing staff, students, and families to visit the counsellor of their choice.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to address the substance use health emergency by:

- (1) increasing the number of beds available to Yukoners for alcohol withdrawal management;
- (2) providing housing options for patients when they are discharged from withdrawal management; and
- (3) establishing a policy requiring monthly follow-up with patients for at least one year after they have been discharged from withdrawal management.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to address the substance use health emergency by following BC's leading-edge overdose response plan to allow registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses to prescribe certain controlled drugs and substances, including a safe supply of opioids.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Yukon University strategic plan

Hon. Ms. McLean: I rise to congratulate Yukon University on launching their five-year strategic plan for 2022 to 2027 released on Monday, April 4 with the title *Becoming*. The plan embraces the unique opportunity of becoming Canada's first university north of 60 with the vision of a thriving learning and research community leading Canada's north.

On Tuesday, leaders of the Yukon University came to this Assembly to appear as witnesses and provide an update to its new strategic plan to guide the institution's operation over the next five years. Unfortunately, they didn't have an opportunity to do so after the Yukon Party and the Yukon NDP voted against having them appear. Mr. Speaker, I will provide that update for this Assembly today.

Yukon University values integrity, quality, and a just society and relationships. This is evident in their approach and commitments. The strategic plan incorporates feedback from more than 600 Yukoners, including students, faculty and staff, Yukon First Nation governments, the business community, municipal leaders, indigenous youth and elders, community campus committees, the Yukon University Foundation, the president's advisory committee on initiatives, and the Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining.

The board of governors agreed upon five commitments for determining the path forward for Yukon U, which are: building identity and nurturing culture; advancing reconciliation; developing northern expertise; developing bold thinkers and confident change leaders; and being leaders for the common good.

I look forward to our government continuing to support Yukoners with access to a local university that aims to equip learners to seize opportunities, make change, and positively impact local and global communities.

Last week, we celebrated National Indigenous Languages Day, and I would like to recognize and appreciate Yukon University for releasing its strategic plan with its title translated into Upper Tanana, Gwich'in, Han, Southern Tutchone, Northern Tutchone, Tagish, Tlingit, and Kaska. I think this speaks to the integrity of Yukon University's commitment to advancing reconciliation and cultivating strong relationships with Yukon First Nation people and governments.

Yukon University is quickly growing. A few short weeks ago, I rose in the Assembly to speak on the new accelerated pathway program for early childhood educators that will be offered at the university and better equip ECEs in the territory to build a stronger learning foundation for the youngest of Yukoners. From this year's developments in early learning to higher education, this truly is an exciting time for advancing quality educational experiences here in the Yukon, and I look forward to continuing to uplift Yukon University as a strong institution and leader in the north.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, we were interested to see the university's strategic plan released a few days ago. We look

forward to reviewing it thoroughly and debating the budget of the Department of Education here today.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her statement and we congratulate the ongoing leadership we see from Yukon University with the release of their 2022 to 2027 strategic plan, *Becoming*. *Becoming* lays out a beautiful and bold plan for the transformation of what Yukon University is striving to be. Drawing strength and pride from their past, the university is ready to step confidently into the future, knowing that their true success lies in their focus on students.

The Yukon NDP celebrate this path forward when that focus is on quality, relationships, integrity, and a just society. We know and understand the hard work being done at the university, so our questions are for the government.

I appreciate that the minister has taken this opportunity to pay tribute to the university; however, ministerial statements are typically used for the government to inform Yukoners about the work that they have been doing. So, I was wondering: How much support did the government give the university in developing their new strategic plan? Can the minister outline the financial support year over year for the university, and does she believe that the funding is adequate to support the growth of this institution?

While on the topic of growth, page 7 of the strategic plan leaves out its commitments — commitments that their capacity to realize are — and I quote: "... predicated on a deep need to revitalize our critical physical and digital infrastructure." So, how is this government planning on supporting the university and revitalizing its infrastructure? Has the minister directed her department to assess the Yukon grant program that currently does not allow students to access funding support for some of the programs offered at the Yukon University?

We all know that the COVID-19 pandemic has been a trying time for all Yukoners — businesses, schools, and organizations alike — so what communication was had with the university prior to the vaccine mandate announcement last November? Did the Yukon government speak with the Yukon University leadership about their expectations on how the university should enact the mandate, and if not, why not? What supports did the Yukon government provide the university and the students who were caught in the in-between of the mandate? Did the Yukon government reach out to the university prior to the public announcement ending the vaccine mandate — again, if not, why not?

Before I wrap up, I just need to touch on one more thing. On Tuesday, the government tabled a motion to call the university to appear as a witness in this House. Appearing before the Legislative Assembly is no small feat. It requires immense behind-the-scenes prep work to ensure that witnesses have all of the information that they could possibly need to answer any possible question at the tips of their fingers. This takes a lot of staff time to prepare — time that could otherwise be spent with students or doing the hard work that is necessary to implement a strategic plan. Both opposition parties signalled to the government, in advance, that they were not in favour of calling these witnesses, and the government still chose to go

ahead and waste the precious time of the university staff just to make a point — to be able to share their post on social media.

You would think that the government has better things to do, so I will remind the minister that, this spring, her government tabled the largest budget in Yukon's history — a budget that needs scrutiny, as any budget does, but especially one that is nearly \$2 billion. Scheduling witnesses from arm's-length entities just four months after they last appeared for questions further shortens debate each time they appear. So, this begs the question: Does this government not want scrutiny on their spending?

Although we have been told that the government wants to get back to the previous schedules, those schedules were not ideal. We would suggest that witnesses appearing in the fall, not during the spring budget Sitting, makes the most sense.

So, we celebrate Yukon University's new strategic plan, and we will continue to hold the government to account under budget priorities this session. We look forward to hearing more from Yukon University in the fall.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, I am so proud to present the strategic plan for Yukon University today. I know that there was some disappointment in not having that opportunity for the witnesses to come and be here earlier this week to speak to a number of the questions that were just posed by the Leader of the Third Party. I believe that it was an opportunity missed. I just want to clarify for the record that we have a number of days still in this 32-day Sitting, and all the legislation has passed this House; all of it has passed this House. We now have one bill in front of us, which is the main — the 2022-23 budget. I believe that there will be plenty of time to debate that budget.

I know that my colleague has also spoken to this a number of times in terms of bringing the schedule back on track to have these particular witnesses — they usually give testimony in the spring — back on that schedule.

I want to again congratulate Yukon University. As a hybrid university, Yukon University offers degree programs, diplomas, certificates, career and trades training, second language support, and upgrading to meet the diverse learning needs of Yukon communities. In 2021, the Government of Yukon allocated \$1.5 million in O&M and \$500,000 in capital to further support the university transition. In the 2022 budget, the Government of Yukon is continuing to allocate \$1.5 million in O&M and is requesting \$200,000 in capital to support the Yukon University transition.

We have earmarked \$10 million going forward in the five-year capital plan to support the science building project. I will make note that Yukon University, within our main budget, has \$28,913,000, and we have strategic initiatives that we have earmarked in ELC, practical nursing, and other health professions. I am looking forward to that debate, and I know that it will happen later this afternoon — the start of my debate.

I would like to again congratulate David Morrison, the chair of the board of governors, Dr. Lesley Brown, vice-chancellor and president, and your entire team and, of course, Dr. Karen Barnes for your work in bringing us to where we are today. I really appreciate all of the work that you have done. I

know that our entire team does, and we share the university's vision of becoming a thriving learning and research community leading Canada's north.

I want to reflect momentarily on the vision that Grand Chief Peter Johnston expressed many times while we were transitioning and dreaming about this moment, about what this means for Yukon First Nations, and breathing life into this institution is going to build capacity. This is how we work to make reconciliation action. This was the vision of our elders, and I can celebrate with, I hope, all members of this Legislative Assembly today in this huge achievement.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Health human resource strategy

Mr. Cathers: Yesterday, we called on the Minister of Health and Social Services to take the crisis facing primary care in Yukon seriously and commit to launching the development of an integrated health human resource strategy. The minister refused to make that commitment.

Earlier today, the president of the Canadian Medical Association was interviewed on CBC. She said that, while using the ER or walk-in clinics are better than nothing, they cannot replace the importance of a long-term relationship between a patient and their doctor. It's clear that a new health human resource strategy is needed for the Yukon.

Will the minister commit today to launching the development of a new health human resource strategy for the Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think it's critically important that Yukoners know that the health and well-being of Yukoners is the foundation of our work to provide increased health and social services, as well as transitioning our health and social services system into an amazing leader in Canada. The *Putting People First* report did in fact lay out a map for us to do that, including the concept of polyclinics and other ways in which medical services could be transformed in their service delivery.

We look forward to that work. The words and the preamble of this question are the member opposite's — they are not mine — with respect to the commitment we have made. I answered this question yesterday and the day before, and I'm very pleased to do so again to be able to reiterate our commitment to a partnership with the Yukon Medical Association and with the Canadian Medical Association for the purposes of providing Yukoners with the best possible care.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, again, the minister paints a rosy picture, but we've seen the lack of action and a real failure to work with Yukon doctors again and again.

Another point raised by the president of the CMA in her interview with the local CBC this morning related to regulatory barriers. She noted their regulatory barriers that restrict the mobility of health professionals, and this lack of mobility is of particular concern for places like the Yukon that rely on health professionals coming in from other parts of the country, either to practice or as locums. A well-planned health human resource strategy developed in partnership with the Yukon Medical

Association and other health stakeholders could help to address these regulatory barriers.

So, again, will the minister agree to immediately launch the development of a new health human resource strategy?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I'm not sure whether the member opposite has read *Putting People First*, but it is a comprehensive report with respect to how we can transform all aspects of Yukon's medical services and health services delivery. We look forward to the implementation of that agreement. We have implemented many of the recommendations in that report already. We have continued to interact with our partners for the purposes of making sure that we are on the right path to increase and improve the medical system for Yukoners.

With respect to the interview that the member opposite is speaking about, Dr. Katharine Smart was in fact speaking about removing barriers for medical professionals to be able to move around the country. She was speaking about federal leadership with respect to that issue — looking forward to it with respect to some announcements, hopefully, in the federal budget.

I have met with Dr. Smart. We agree that this is a primary concern. I have also, in my former career, worked to achieve that kind of system for lawyers in this country, and I look forward to working with the medical associations to do the same.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, of course I have read that, and I have to point out that it's unfortunate that the Liberals sidelined doctors in that and treated them as minor stakeholders.

Another significant challenge that the Yukon faces is the shortage of doctors interested in entering primary care and, in particular, family medicine. We've heard from doctors who are experiencing burnout and some who are thinking of cutting back their clinical hours. Newer doctors are increasingly turning away from primary care and not taking patient practices because they are not getting enough support from government. An integrated health human resource strategy should include focusing on how to get younger doctors interested in primary care, how we can retain them, and how we can create an environment where they can care for patients without being burned out.

There is a need for immediate action, as well as long-term goals. So, will the minister finally show some leadership on this file and immediately launch the development of an integrated health human resource strategy?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I'm happy to rise with respect to this matter. I appreciate the position, or the point of view, of the member opposite that this is the ultimate solution — the Pandora — the opportunity for one particular organization. I'm not sure what he's suggesting, whether it be a strategy — and that would be the answer.

Putting People First is the strategy. It is the strategy to improve health care for Yukoners. It has been done independently. It has been done comprehensively, and it has set forward a path for us going forward.

As I said yesterday, our best resource for having young doctors or doctors move to the territory is, in fact, our current

medical practitioners and the work that they're doing and the work that we're doing with them in concert to determine how we can make the Yukon the very best place in Canada to come to open a practice for primary care.

I can also indicate that we have more doctors here in the territory per capita than anywhere else in the country. We have the numbers — I believe I have given them already, and I will leave that to those who want to read it in Hansard.

We have a great staff of medical professionals. We're trying to increase that.

Question re: Territorial medical director

Mr. Cathers: What we've seen repeatedly is a lack of action from this government and a failure to listen to Yukon doctors.

In the 2021 territorial election, the Yukon Party promised to create the position of territorial medical director within the Yukon government. We believed then, as we do now, that the position would be valuable to both government and the Yukon Medical Association in their collaborative efforts to deliver health services.

Will the minister agree to create the position of territorial medical director?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I believe this is a new question, to be clear, Mr. Speaker. I have answered this question in the past. I appreciate that the member opposite is catching up. Work is well underway to determine how a medical director can best be hired and assist our government with respect to all of the activity going forward.

Mr. Cathers: Again, we see a lack of action from the government and a failure to listen to and work with Yukon physicians.

At the 2021 Yukon Medical Association AGM, the association passed a motion calling for the creation of a territorial medical director. In that motion, they noted that the Yukon is the only province or territory without a medical director or equivalent. They noted that the evidence is clear that top-performing health systems have physicians in administrative leadership. Their motion read that the YMA calls on the Government of Yukon to work with the YMA to create the position of Yukon territorial medical director, who would work directly with government to advance health system transformation in the territory.

Will the minister agree to this request from the YMA? If so, when?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The health and well-being of Yukoners is the foundation of the work that we are doing with respect to accepting the recommendations of *Putting People First*, as well as implementing those recommendations.

With respect to the medical director position, I am fully aware that it was a resolution at the Yukon Medical Association's annual general meeting. After that, they quickly wrote to me about it. The work was underway prior to that. I have confirmed with them that we are working to obtain an appropriate plan for the hiring and recruitment of a medical director. I have said that here. The work is underway. I look forward to that position being filled.

Mr. Cathers: It is nice that the minister is at least paying lip service to this request, but we have seen this government repeatedly commit to things, like midwifery, and then take years to actually take action.

One of the most notable concerns about the plans the Liberals have for changing the health care system has been the lack of proper engagement with physicians. In August 2020, the YMA expressed surprise and disappointment that the Liberal government failed to consult properly with them in making the decision. In a statement, the president of the YMA said — and I quote: “The doctors of Yukon are very concerned about the announcement to accept all 76 recommendations contained in the report without properly consulting first with the YMA.”

If we had a territorial medical director, perhaps the government might not have skipped consulting the medical community. So, going forward, if they wish to address the challenges facing the health care system, they would be negligent to continue to ignore the voices of physicians and need to take action now to create this position. Will the minister agree to set a timeline for establishing this position?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: There is actually only one thing being ignored here, which is my answer to this question.

The medical director position is well underway. I think I have said that, and I have said it clearly. I am not sure why the member opposite is bringing up things that were said by the Yukon Medical Association a couple of years ago. Certainly, it is critical that we work with our partners and continue to build trust in those relationships. That is the work that is being done, and that is the work that will continue to be done.

I also note that some documents were tabled today about something I might have said back in the fall. Apparently, the opposition seems stuck on the idea that nobody can evolve or change their mind or change their thinking or determine an opportunity to respond to the needs and the wishes of Yukoners, which is what we do every day.

Question re: Food security

Ms. Tredger: Anyone who has been to the grocery store to buy even the most basic of foods is very aware of the rising cost of food, whether it's fresh produce, meat, or staples — everything is going up. We can talk about the impacts of the pandemic, interruptions in the supply chain, and rapidly rising fuel costs, but that doesn't help the senior on a fixed income, the individuals and families relying on social assistance, or the people struggling to put food on the table. If you don't know where your next meal is coming from, that becomes your only focus.

When will this government raise the social assistance rates to address the rising costs of food in the Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think that there is an assumption here in the question that social assistance and seniors are always connected, and I think that does a disservice to Yukoners.

We must, and absolutely do, respond to Yukoners in all walks of life. Seniors are often on a fixed income and are therefore particularly affected by the inflationary cost of living here in the territory and frankly across Canada. As a result, we have worked with seniors' groups and continue to do so. We

have introduced a rent subsidy that happens to be primarily to the benefit of seniors and we will continue to work to address seniors.

With respect to the social assistance rates, again, I think that I have — I know I have answered this question several times, but I am happy to remind Yukoners that we have one of the highest sets of rates in the country and that, in the current situation with respect to inflation and the issues involving the cost of living in the territory, we must always be vigilant and make sure that we are reviewing those for the purposes of making sure that Yukoners are well cared for.

Ms. Tredger: The Whitehorse Food Bank is working hard to help individuals and families of all kinds and not just in Whitehorse. They now are also distributing food to Mayo, Carmacks, Haines Junction, and Watson Lake. On average, the Whitehorse Food Bank is distributing emergency food to between 1,700 and 1,900 recipients a month. That is enough food for three days and only accessible once a month.

Every year, these numbers continue to rise. In 2021, an estimated 740,000 meals were distributed through the Yukon. Let me repeat that: 740,000 meals. Why is this government letting so many people go without basic necessities in this territory?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: It's a completely different question, which I'm happy to address. I also am well aware of the services of the Whitehorse Food Bank. My family has been involved with the food bank for many, many years. We are — our government remains committed to helping Yukoners who need support. We know that the rate of inflation is impacting services for Yukoners across the territory, including those who are recipients of the food bank.

That said, I certainly would like to take the opportunity to make sure we thank the volunteers — primarily volunteers, board members, staff members — at the Whitehorse Food Bank. They expanded the work that they do to communities during COVID-19 and continue to do so. It is a remarkable effort on their part. It is a remarkable effort of the volunteers, the board members, and the staff members on providing services for Yukoners who are in need.

We recognize that individual Yukoners can be struggling to pay for housing, or groceries, or transportation, or a number of things, and the Department of Health and Social Services does support individuals with food security and I'm proud of the work that they do.

Ms. Tredger: We're talking about food insecurity and we're talking about the gap in a territory as rich as this and trying to figure out how we can have so many Yukoners facing food insecurity.

When we talk about these numbers, we're talking about children; we're talking about seniors who worked all their life and can barely afford milk or meat on their pension; we're talking about people with disabilities; we're talking about families; we're talking about people who are working full time and still can't make ends meet. The *Putting People First* report recommends the government design and implement a pilot guaranteed annual income program, but every time we've asked about it, we've had no answers. Will the government

implement the recommendation of their own report, or will they continue to leave people behind?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The members opposite want to talk about the budget; let's talk about the budget.

The budget of 2022-23 has significant entries in that budget — line items that make life more affordable for Yukoners. It has been a driving force with respect to the development of that document.

We've made historic investments in creating the Yukon's first-ever universal affordable childcare program, which serves families by providing up to \$700 per month per child, making life more affordable. We have cut the small business tax rate to zero percent, saving Yukon businesses millions of dollars. We have raised the minimum wage. We have doubled the per diem for medical travel and made it available on the first day. We are still paying the price for the Yukon Party's inaction on housing.

The good news for Yukoners is that our Liberal government is making historic investments in housing. You heard that from the minister responsible. Together with our partners, we have supported hundreds of new homes in Whitehorse that will be complete in the coming months. We have massively increased lot development. We have brought people together to increase housing options.

There is strong growth for Yukon's economy and that's certainly creating some challenges. We're working with our partners to address those challenges because that is our responsibility and job.

Question re: Waste-water testing for COVID-19

Ms. McLeod: With changes to who is eligible to be tested for COVID-19, many jurisdictions across Canada have turned to testing waste water to monitor the amount of COVID in their communities.

A February 15, 2021 CBC indicates that waste water was being sampled for COVID-19 in Whitehorse by the Yukon government. At the time, the government refused to provide details on the results of that testing.

Can the Minister of Health and Social Services update us on the results of the waste-water testing from last year?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Yukon is, at this point in time, only one of two jurisdictions in Canada that is not tracking COVID-19 through waste-water sampling. I have heard that there have been conversations about this. We are focused on the strain on our health care systems, and we have currently — by all accounts, including the acting chief medical officer of health's — a fantastic system to trace outbreaks and how the virus moves through our communities. We note that, perhaps, as the member opposite did, the Northwest Territories has used waste-water testing successfully, but we have not relied on that for our testing. It's not something that is recommended by our chief medical officer of health.

All members of this Legislative Assembly will know that we have relied on the science, followed the science, and worked closely with the acting chief medical officer of health and, before that, with the chief medical officer of health to determine how to best do surveillance.

I don't understand that this recommendation is changing anytime soon. Should the advice of the acting chief medical officer of health change, we will certainly take that into account.

Ms. McLeod: According to the documentation that the CBC received last year, testing of the waste water in Whitehorse was being done to get an idea of how much of the population has the virus over time, because not everyone who gets the coronavirus necessarily finds out. This kind of testing could potentially signal undetected cases.

This brings me to a January 7, 2022 CBC article entitled: "Why testing sewage for COVID-19 could be more useful than ever". That article indicates that, because traditional testing regimes have been overwhelmed, resulting in advice to reduce the scope of those who are supposed to get tested, this may offer a solution to tracking the amount of COVID-19 in a community. Despite this, the government ended testing of waste water — why?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am pretty sure I just said this, but I'm happy to say it again. It's important for Yukoners to know that the advice that we have from the acting chief medical officer of health is that this has not been a tool needed here in the territory with respect to determining surveillance of COVID-19. I think that this is the core of this question. It seems to be about this particular area of testing, but the underlying impact of the question is: How do we know what is happening with COVID-19 in our community? We have an amazing communicable disease team, we have an amazing acting chief medical officer of health team, and we have had contact tracing in the early days of COVID here in the territory that was second to none.

We know, as we heard yesterday in relation to the update with respect to COVID-19, that there is community spread. We know that vaccines are the best protection for Yukoners against the spread of COVID-19 and against serious illness. We urge everyone to get their vaccines. We announced only yesterday, after being told the day before that a fourth shot of the booster was going to be available, and we have committed to that booster being available. Appointments will start on April 12, next week.

Ms. McLeod: Jurisdictions across the country have turned to the testing of waste water to track the amount of COVID in their communities. The Yukon government is not currently doing this — of course, the minister has said this. The unfortunate thing is that this means that the government has a less accurate picture of the prevalence of COVID within the community.

Why is the minister not following the lead of other jurisdictions?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I guess the members opposite didn't pay attention to the press conference we did yesterday where our medical team advised not to be using this particular method because of the impeccable job that the chief medical officer of health office and the Department of Health and Social Services has been doing in being able to trace COVID-19 throughout the last two years.

I guess I am not surprised that, once again, the Yukon Party does not want us to follow our own medical advice.

Question re: Secure medical unit

Mr. Hassard: Staff at the hospital have been raising red flags regarding safety to this Liberal government for almost three years. This is one of the reasons that we need a secure medical unit at the hospital. On March 7, 2019, the Premier stated in his budget speech — and I quote: "This budget also provides \$1 million for a larger secure medical unit at the Whitehorse General Hospital..." The 2019-20 budget documents go on to state that this is for planning. However, on November 3, 2020, the former Minister of Health and Social Services told media that the Liberals had actually delayed that \$1 million by a year.

Now the government states that \$5.7 million was spent on it last year.

So, can the Deputy Premier tell us what this \$5.7 million was for, and has construction started?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am happy to be on my feet again for the purposes of responding to questions about Yukon's health care system.

By investing in the territory's health care system, our government is increasing access to medical services, while reducing wait times and the need for out-of-territory medical travel. A total of \$88 million will support the Yukon Hospital Corporation to continue providing Yukoners with the best possible health care services. We have, once again, increased the Hospital Corporation's operation and maintenance budget, as we have in each of the last five years.

In addition to expanding services, we are also enhancing our health care facilities to ensure that they meet the needs of all Yukoners. \$10.8 million is in this year's budget for the completion of a new short-stay psychiatric unit at the Whitehorse General Hospital.

This is but one of the responses that we have with respect to the substance use health emergency, as it will provide services to Yukoners — that have not been available to date — in a place that is welcoming and caring for them.

Mr. Hassard: Maybe next time the minister is on her feet, she could actually answer a question.

On April 11, 2020, the former Minister of Health said that the current secure medical unit — quote: "... does not meet current client and patient safety standards." The Liberals have been aware that their delays and inaction to building a new secure medical unit have put people at risk. Planning was supposed to be completed in 2019, and rather than treat this urgently, the Liberals delayed this project.

As stated in the Premier's Budget Address in 2019, he claimed that \$1 million would be spent on this project in that year. He was later contradicted by the former minister. This year's budget has \$10.8 million. Combined with the money last year, this brings the total amount spent on this facility to \$16.5 million.

So, can the Deputy Premier tell us if this will be the total cost of the new secure medical unit?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate that the member opposite thinks that this is somewhat of a clever question. The concept of COVID-19 — a world pandemic — requires us to recognize that capital projects have been off-schedule. Capital projects have been sometimes off-budget. We all know — I think anybody who has read a recent paper knows — that capital projects for every government and for every private enterprise have come in at higher than necessary.

What I can say to Yukoners is that enhancing our health care facilities to ensure they meet the needs of all Yukoners is critical. \$10.8 million is in this year's budget for the completion of a new short-stay psychiatric unit at the Whitehorse General Hospital. I truly hope that this place — as I know it is being designed to do — will be a safe place for patients with mental health diagnoses to receive medical care, and it is critical that we proceed with completing this project so that just one of the parts of the implementation of *Putting People First* will be realized to the benefit of Yukoners.

This is not about bricks and mortar; it's about caring for Yukoners.

Mr. Hassard: I'm certainly not trying to be clever. I'm just looking for accurate information for Yukoners.

Just five months ago, I asked the Deputy Premier what was the total estimated cost for the planning and construction of the new secure medical unit. In response, she stated that it was \$15.7 million. So, I would just like to confirm if this project has gone overbudget by almost \$1 million since the minister provided that last update just five months ago.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to rise again to note the support that this government has provided to the Whitehorse General Hospital, because investing in our Yukon Territory health care system is critical. Our government is increasing access to those medical services and increasing the services at the Whitehorse General Hospital for the purposes of achieving just one part of the care that Yukoners receive.

I have great hopes that the \$10.8 million in this year's budget will be for the completion and is designated for the completion of the new short-stay psychiatric unit. I look forward to that being completed this year so that we can offer a safe place for patients with mental health diagnoses. It's critical that they receive compassionate care in a safe place that has been long awaited by that community.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Deputy Chair (Ms. Tredger): Order, please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

Motion re appearance of witnesses

Committee of the Whole Motion No. 7

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I move:

THAT from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 7, 2022, Mike Pemberton, chair of the Yukon Development Corporation Board of Directors, Justin Ferbey, president and chief executive officer of the Yukon Development Corporation, Lesley Cabott, chair of the Yukon Energy Corporation Board of Directors, and Andrew Hall, president and chief executive officer of the Yukon Energy Corporation, appear as witnesses before Committee of the Whole to answer questions relating to the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 7, 2022, Mike Pemberton, chair of the Yukon Development Corporation Board of Directors, Justin Ferbey, president and chief executive officer of the Yukon Development Corporation, Lesley Cabott, chair of the Yukon Energy Corporation Board of Directors, and Andrew Hall, president and chief executive officer of the Yukon Energy Corporation, appear as witnesses before Committee of the Whole to answer questions relating to the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation.

Is there any debate?

Mr. Cathers: I will be very brief. I would just note for the record that we had indicated, as had the Third Party, that our priority is budget debate. We had encouraged the Government House Leader not to bring forward this motion to call witnesses for this instance or for Yukon University earlier. It is unfortunate that, in addition to not being cooperative with members of the Official Opposition and the Third Party, government has lined up these witnesses. We certainly will be voting against this motion.

As the Leader of the Third Party noted earlier, certainly with the instance earlier this week, witnesses were lined up, the government knew that the Official Opposition and the Third Party were not supportive of using the House's time in that way and, despite that, those witnesses were forced to prepare by government for that appearance, which didn't end up happening.

We will be voting against this motion in the interest of focusing our limited time on debating the budget.

Ms. White: Although I appreciate that my colleague from Lake Laberge likes to repeat me, I am able to speak for myself.

We had a briefing with the Yukon Energy Corporation two months ago that was almost two hours long — both opposition parties. The Yukon Energy Corporation appeared here as witnesses four months ago. At this point in time, we would like to concentrate on the budget and we look forward to the opportunity of speaking with them when more time has passed.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I am going to say a few things about this motion. I thank the members opposite for indicating that they are not in support of having the witnesses here. I am going to share for Yukoners a little bit about how we got to this place.

In 2017 in our first Sitting here, we brought in the Yukon Development Corporation and Yukon Energy Corporation, and we have every year. Yes, last year with a shortened Sitting in the spring, we moved that corporation to come here in the fall — that is correct — but once a year, we have had the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation come. On the first day of this Sitting at the House Leaders' meeting — or maybe it was even the day before the first day of this Sitting; I think it was March 2 — I indicated at House Leaders' to all parties that our intention was to bring the Yukon University, the Yukon Development Corporation, and the Yukon Energy Corporation here as witnesses this session. I didn't hear anything back, actually.

Last week, late in the week, I came to give a heads-up to the opposition parties that we had arranged for those witnesses to come here. I heard from both parties that they didn't have a lot of questions and that they weren't sure they would want those witnesses here. I said okay.

To the corporations and the university, they did do a lot of work in preparation to come here. They always do — that's correct — because it's an important process to allow for that transparency, that accountability, and that opportunity for the opposition to ask questions. Today, for example, the Yukon Development Corporation has a budget of roughly \$43 million, but that's not going to be debated today and questions won't be asked about it because the members opposite are saying that they want time to discuss the budget.

Well, there is a budget for the Yukon Development Corporation. I will happily rise to debate the budget in Committee of the Whole for the Yukon Development Corporation, but I think it really does a service to Yukoners to allow the opposition the opportunity to ask questions of the Yukon Energy Corporation and the Yukon Development Corporation directly — and the university, for that matter.

Now, I appreciate that the opposition members don't wish to ask questions today — that's fine — but what that will mean is that the corporation will be a year and a half before they are back here. That's a long time — a long time when we're in a climate emergency. Just yesterday, we were in debate around this, through a ministerial statement, talking about the importance of this. I heard members opposite make lots of statements about diesel generators and the Yukon Energy Corporation, and today they don't wish to have the Yukon Energy Corporation here in order to ask those questions directly. No problem — I think it's unfortunate for Yukoners.

By the way, when the members opposite say that they informed me, I was informed this morning by the Official Opposition — the Yukon Party — that they did not have questions and would vote against bringing in the witnesses. I was not informed at House Leaders'; I was informed subsequently. What I did when I had my meeting with the Yukon Energy Corporation and the Yukon Development

Corporation — my regular meeting with them this morning — I said to them: "Look, the opposition parties may not wish to have you in as witnesses." They were surprised. I said to them that I will not know until we get to about 2:00 p.m. because that's when we will hold the vote. As much as it's true that the members opposite gave me some indication that this wasn't their preference for witnesses, I have also heard notices of motions for having witnesses here.

So, how do you square that against: "We want time for budget debate"? Frankly, today I thought that there would be an opportunity because the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation are spending money on behalf of Yukoners, some of which — the Yukon Development Corporation — is directly in our budget, which gives us the opportunity for the members opposite to ask questions directly — no problem.

I will take my seat. I appreciate that we have a difference of opinion about witnesses here in the Legislature. I look forward to budget debate, and I will happily answer questions on the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation. I am disappointed that I don't have those witnesses, but I disagree with members opposite. We started working to line up these people — the corporations — from the beginning of March, and today, here we are on April 7, and the work to get them here has been ongoing. I would like to thank them for their work for Yukoners.

Deputy Chair: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Count.

Count

Deputy Chair: A count has been called.

Bells

Deputy Chair: All members in favour of the motion, please rise.

Members rise

Deputy Chair: All members opposed to the motion, please rise.

Members rise

Deputy Chair: The results are seven yea, eight nay.

Committee of the Whole Motion No. 7 negatived

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 204: *First Appropriation Act 2022-23* — continued

Deputy Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Is there any general debate?

Department of Education

Hon. Ms. McLean: I'm happy to rise in the House today to speak about the Department of Education's 2022-23 main budget. I would like to welcome my officials, Nicole Morgan, Deputy Minister of Education, and Andrea McIntyre, director of Finance. Welcome, and thank you very much for coming today.

I will be keeping my comments fairly short today. I gave a lengthy reply to the budget when it was first tabled. I'll just go over some highlights of our budget that we're presenting.

Over the past year, we have continued to face challenges brought on by the pandemic, especially as we weathered the waves of the Delta and Omicron variants. These waves certainly have had an effect on Yukon families and caregivers. I would like to acknowledge all of the hard work that went into keeping our schools and early learning and childcare centres open and available for learners. Despite these challenges, we have also made exciting and important progress on a number of initiatives in Education.

Yukoners, our staff, students, and families have, yet again, demonstrated incredible resilience. We are remaining focused on ensuring that our education system, at all levels, provides positive outcomes for students. This budget will allow us to achieve a number of educational priorities, including ensuring that our school curriculum reflects the diverse needs of Yukoners, including First Nation ways of knowing, doing, and being; responding to the review of inclusive and special education to improve our educational programs and services; enhancing Yukon's early learning and childcare programs; responding to rising school and childcare enrolment numbers, as our territory's population increases and Yukoners grow their families; and continuing to work on several capital projects to ensure our schools meet the needs of the communities they serve.

The health and safety of our students and staff remain our top priority. In the 2022-23 budget, the department has a total budget request of \$272,072,000. Of this, \$234,538,000 is requested for operation and maintenance. This represents a \$20,668,000 increase over last year's budget, primarily for early learning and childcare programming and the collective agreement increases. The remaining \$37,534,000 is for critical capital projects. This represents an increase of \$12,761,000 from the 2021-22 capital budget.

The success of our initiatives relies on having the right people. I am so pleased to have so many dedicated educators and public servants in the Department of Education. I know that this has been a challenging year professionally and personally for many. When I say this, I am speaking of our dedicated staff in the schools, in central administration, and the partners we work with. You bring value each and every day, and you are

absolutely making a difference in the lives of children. Piece by piece, together, we are changing our educational system. This is hard work, but it is exciting and rewarding, and I know that we are doing the right work.

Thank you again for all of your dedication, and thank you, Deputy Chair, for the opportunity to speak to Education's 2022-23 main budget in these opening comments. I am looking forward to the debate today in Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Dixon: Thank you very much to the minister for her opening remarks, as well as for the officials who are joining us today. I will forgo the normal introductory comments and jump right into the material, given the tight time that we have.

I would like to begin with Hidden Valley school. We have heard from a number of parents and teachers in the school community who have raised concerns about the availability of counsellor supports for affected students of the scandal, or incidents, that have occurred at that school. In particular, we've heard that, while some students have been able to access support for counselling through Jordan's Principle, others who are not eligible for Jordan's Principle support have struggled to find access to the necessary counselling to deal with the incidents that have occurred there.

So, I would like to begin by asking the minister if she can explain the role of the Department of Education in ensuring those students have access to the counselling that was promised by the minister and what steps the department has taken to ensure that those students do indeed have access to that counselling.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I've said many times, of course, that there's nothing more important than the well-being, safety, and protection of students when they're in our care. I remain absolutely committed and I know that our department does. We're focused on taking needed steps to, of course, rebuild the trust and provide the best targeted support to the school community.

In terms of additional support for families, supports have and continue to be available for families and staff, including on-demand support coordinated via the school community consultant.

Supports have included but are not limited to — and here are some examples of supports. Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services facilitated six parent-support evening sessions with a clinical counsellor and an outreach worker. This was held off-site to best accommodate the requests and privacy of families. The child, youth, and family treatment team has been attending the school to monitor the needs of staff, students, and families — providing service to parents and families — and delivered sessions on resilience and social and emotional skills for grade 5, 6, and 7 students.

Referrals to other supports and services are being facilitated, as needed, such as through Family and Children's Services, Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services, and Victim Services. Some examples of this are: child and family rapid-access counselling, as well as long-term, individual, and group counselling support for children and their families and assistance with how to talk to children about abuse and how to support children's personal safety.

Supports have been, and will continue to be, provided to staff as well, including presentations on services and supports available to them and crisis counselling services through LifeWorks and information on the broader employee and family assistance program.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the minister's listing of the information there, but what we were hearing is that students who were affected by this fairly horrific incident aren't being able to access the counselling that they need. We have heard that some students have been able to access funding support for Jordan's Principle, but that doesn't apply to all students.

So, my question, I guess, is simple: What should students who are not eligible for Jordan's Principle do when faced with the high cost of private counselling and wait times for that counselling of up to nine months?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I think that I have been clear already today in terms of the supports that are available. The supports have been, and continue to be, available to families and staff including on-demand support coordinated via the school community consultant. Her name is Brenda Jenner. Her phone number is 867-332-7015. I would just encourage the members opposite, if they are aware of families — and if there is the perception that they are not receiving the services or if they have asked for additional supports — and if the member has information, please provide that to me. I will definitely bring that forward to the Department of Education.

I think that I have been very clear already today in terms of the supports that are available to families and students. This remains one of my highest priorities. I definitely am working also to work alongside families in terms of the work that we are doing on the action plan. I heard families say that they wish to have a voice and actions that will be undertaken in response to the reviews and the investigations; therefore, I am establishing a parent committee to inform the work of the Government of Yukon as well. The first meeting of this group will be taking place on April 11 with parents who express interest in joining this committee to set the groundwork on how we will work together, including undertaking school-level actions to support healing and restorative activities in concert with the school administration and school council.

We are committed to walking side by side on this path with parents, no matter how long it takes.

Mr. Dixon: Perhaps I will be a little more direct: Will the Government of Yukon and the Department of Education cover the costs of counselling for students affected by the incidents at Hidden Valley school?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, I want to, of course, ensure that the member opposite understands that we are committed to the safety and well-being of our students and know that the matters that happened, particularly at Hidden Valley, have had impacts on children. I do not want to move away from the fact that the children are at the heart of this discussion, as I stated in the fall and through this Sitting as well. A tremendous amount of work has gone on in terms of really defining and figuring out what happened.

As I've stated, there are a number of actions over and above what we normally do within a school that have been

provided. I've already gone through those examples. Referrals to other supports and services are definitely being facilitated as needed on a case-by-case basis. I've given the contact information of our school community consultant who can be contacted to look at the needs that are being expressed.

In terms of the Jordan's Principle, Jordan's Principle is a federal government initiative that aims to ensure that First Nation children can access public services in an equitable way and in a way that reflects their cultural needs. The federal government provides funding through Jordan's Principle to support programs for First Nation children who need support to access services available or additional services that are not offered through regular government funding processes. The Department of Education continues to work with the Council of Yukon First Nations and Yukon First Nation Education Directorate on ways that Jordan's Principle can support the needs of Yukon First Nation students. There are a number of programs that they can access — and provide extra support to — such as food programs, access to specialized assessments, and provision of technology to support learning and counselling supports. I'll end that part there.

In terms of our budget this year, we have allocated — within this budget, there is \$400,000 identified for additional mental health supports. That is a new ask that's over and above the amount that we had last year. We know, of course, that this is important additional funds. We requested \$400,000 in mental health supports for this year's budget in recognition of the increased mental health and wellness needs for students. Meeting the mental health needs of students will require flexibility in the approach. We will continue to work with school councils, First Nation governments, and partners to determine how best to coordinate support services, provide additional training, student outreach and awareness, and peer counselling.

I will note, as well, that we are asking for an allocation of another \$150,000 to go toward student assessments this year.

Mr. Dixon: There is some interesting information there from the Minister of Education, but it's not at all what I asked. I asked a question specifically about students at Hidden Valley who are currently seeking counselling. Their parents are currently paying out of pocket for that counselling.

The question is very simple: Will the department cover the costs of the counselling that these students are seeking as a result of their exposure to the traumatic events that occurred at that school?

Hon. Ms. McLean: It's very difficult to, without all of the information — so, I will go back to my previous answer in terms of those families who are — what I'm hearing here today is that this is information that I do not have at my fingertips, in terms of what the member opposite is specifically asking about families who may be out of pocket for counselling services. I really do recommend that those families speak to the community consultant, Brenda Jenner. We can then look at the services that are available to Yukoners, and we can work on a case-by-case basis. That is how we have been working all through this and with other situations in other schools.

We certainly encourage families to speak to the school community consultant to provide that additional information to us so that we can properly respond.

Mr. Dixon: Is the consultant authorized to provide funding for counselling for these students?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, I encourage families to speak to our school community consultant. I want to just be clear that all Yukoners have access to counselling — all Yukoners have access to counselling. We have a number of services that are available to all Yukoners.

Private counselling is a choice. Without all of the information to look at each individual case — it's very difficult to answer specific questions without all of the information in front of me. I recommend, again, that the individuals and families speak to the school community consultant, and we can then better assess the situation.

Mr. Dixon: Again, the minister did not answer my question. I asked: Does that school community consultant have the authority to provide funding to cover the cost of counselling? There are students at Hidden Valley who are currently having counselling. They are paying out of pocket currently. The minister has committed previously to ensuring that these kids are taken care of and that the counselling will be provided.

So, my question is simple. The minister has said that these families should contact the consultant. Is the consultant authorized to provide funding to cover these costs?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, in terms of the community consultant, our consultant can bring forward their concerns to those who can make the appropriate decisions in a timely manner, based on family needs, and that is absolutely our commitment to meet the needs of families. The community consultant will certainly bring forward any concerns that family members have in terms of out-of-pocket costs. If we have all of the information, we can certainly make informed decisions.

Mr. Dixon: So, the minister has answered that no, the school community consultant is not authorized to provide the funding and that they can simply forward on the request to the people who do make the decisions. I would note that the minister is in the position to direct her department to make money available for students who are seeking counselling and make that money available to those students.

So, will the minister make money available for students seeking counselling at Hidden Valley, and where do those families go to make that request of the minister?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I want to be clear: No family will be left without support. If there's information that the member opposite has that will help a family seek support that they need, then I recommend that the member provides that to the Department of Education through myself or the deputy minister.

You're asking me questions that are really difficult to answer in terms of what the need is. I will again say that no child or family will be left without support. I recommend again that the families — through the MLA here or through our school community consultant — provide us the information and that we can have all of the information that we need — it will

be done in a timely manner. The member opposite makes it sound like it would go into some abyss; it would not do that; we would not do that. We would make a quick informed decision about the needs of our children and families.

I recommend that the member opposite provide the information to us so that we can help families, if there are families who are in need.

Mr. Dixon: How much money is available to these families to pay for this counselling?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, there is a lot of discussion on this side of the House in terms of our many ministers standing to inform this answer because it is an important one. We are absolutely committed to the mental health and wellness of Yukoners. We have financial resources and human resources throughout our entire government that all play a role here. In terms of support for children and families, there will be no children or families left unsupported.

If the member opposite wishes, I can bring back a legislative return with all of the mental health resources that are throughout our entire government.

I wasn't able to listen to the release of the federal budget today, but I do note that \$100 million in support was announced today in the federal budget. There is still a tremendous amount of work to identify, of course, what that looks like for us going forward, but you can rest assured that mental health and wellness is a high priority for our government, and it's a priority for me in all of our schools. I know that Hidden Valley has been impacted in a different way. I remain committed to those families and children.

Mr. Dixon: My question is very specific. It is about the Hidden Valley school and the budget for supports for those students who were affected by the traumatic events there. What I am asking is: What is the budget specifically for mental health supports for students specifically at Hidden Valley school as a result of the traumatic events that happened there?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, I will say that no child or family will be left without support. I have to again explain to the member opposite that the Department of Education works in partnership with departments across government that hold different responsibilities for different budgets and for different services that are part of the services that can, and will, be provided to any child or family in need of services.

Those departments that hold the majority of these types of budgets are Health and Social Services and Justice, and we continue to work in partnership with those departments.

I will offer to bring back a legislative return to the member opposite that lays out the services and the budget allocations throughout government and will show the commitment from our government to mental health and wellness for students and families.

Mr. Dixon: So, my question was specifically: What was the budget within the Department of Education for supports for students at Hidden Valley school to provide the kind of care that the minister has promised?

I appreciate that the government has a broad commitment to mental health across the territory, but my question is

specifically from parents and teachers who have raised this question with me.

How much money is available for these kids to seek counselling, as they are right now and paying out of pocket? Where can we see the amount of money that is actually available in the minister's budget for the commitment that she made?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, the member opposite has asked the same question several times. I will continue to say that no child or family will be left without support. I encourage the member opposite to please provide information to me or to the Department of Education or through the school community consultant so that we can have the information that is needed to help this family or families, as he has described today, to access the supports that they require. I will say a hundred times over that we will not leave any child or family without support.

We can potentially, I guess, do this for a while, but I just want Yukoners to know that we take the issues that have happened at Hidden Valley very seriously. We remain committed to the changes that are required throughout our government. We remain steadfast in our commitment to the mental health and well-being of Yukoners. I can assure the member opposite that the needs of children and families will remain at the centre, and I encourage him to provide us with the information.

Mr. Dixon: This is budget debate. I asked a very specific budget question about the money allocated for this particular issue, and the minister was unable to answer. I asked several times, so we can let the record show that.

But the minister is correct that we do have to move on. There are other issues that I need to address, but I will certainly provide the transcripts of this discussion to those affected and let them judge the minister's answers on their own.

I will have to move on, though. I will ask the minister now about Jack Hulland. What is the current status of the Grove Street program? I know that the students who had been in that program, I believe, have all been moved out of Jack Hulland. Where have they been moved to? Will there be students in Grove Street coming back to Jack Hulland next year, and what other information can the minister tell me about the current status of the Grove Street program?

Hon. Ms. McLean: In terms of where things are at with the Grove Street program, new intakes into the Grove Street program have been placed on hold. As part of the review of inclusive and special education, all shared resource programs in the Yukon, including the PASS program and Grove Street, will be examined to ensure that they are best meeting the needs of students. Those programs may look different going forward, but the Grove Street program intakes have been on hold and will remain on hold.

Mr. Dixon: How many students started the school year at Jack Hulland and the Grove Street program?

Hon. Ms. McLean: We are talking about a very small number of children. I want to just be cautious about the confidentiality of the students, and I will say less than five.

Mr. Dixon: I believe we talked in the Legislature about it being four, and I don't think that we are breaching

confidentiality by saying that. My understanding is that this is down to zero. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. McLean: We do not have any children in the Grove Street program. All children who transitioned from Grove Street are being supported in different environments and under specific supports for their individual needs.

Mr. Dixon: Will the hold on new entrants to the Grove Street program continue until next year? That is my first question. The second question is: Does that mean that there will be no Grove Street program students at Jack Hulland next school year?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The intake for Grove Street is suspended indefinitely. Until we have the review and the work that's being done on inclusive and special education and the review of the shared resource programs, we will not be making any — we'll be waiting for that process to complete in order to inform the next steps going forward on this program and the other shared resource programs.

Mr. Dixon: So, I infer from that response that, no, the Grove Street program will not be in operation next year.

The minister has said that program is under review. Can the minister explain the nature of the program review that is being undertaken on Grove Street?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I think there are a couple of things here, in terms of the review of the programs that we're speaking about today, that fit in inclusive and special education. In terms of the shared resource programs, we have a couple of things happening. Of course, we have — in the inclusive and special education that I have spoken about, a lot of times here we have a number of communities of inquiry that are underway. One of them that really is very specific to this, updating the inclusive and special education policies — but clearly one of the foundational pieces that we expect to have coming through the community of inquiry very soon is the co-constructing of definitions of inclusive and special education. This will build a new foundation for inclusive education in the territory.

We also have a meta-analysis of all of the reports and anything that has been written and research around the shared resource programs that are under review now, which will inform the next steps going forward.

Again, we want to make sure that we are having alignment with the inclusive and special education review that has been done and the further work that we are doing now in these communities of inquiry to make sure that our resources are going to be deployed in the right way and that the services needed by our students are meeting their needs.

I think that is the underlying intention of taking the time to ensure that we are getting it right and that we are not just making quick decisions that are uninformed. We want to make sure that our partners are part of this, and that is what the communities of inquiry are doing now.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate that there is a lot of review going on with regard to special and inclusive education. I appreciate that there is a meta-analysis going on and that there are many communities of inquiry, but my question is specifically: Is the Grove Street program specifically being reviewed?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, it is. Actually, I meant to speak about it when I got back up on my feet the last time, to just make a correction. One of the questions previously was: Will the program be re-initiated or will there be children in Grove Street next year? The member opposite made a statement on my behalf in terms of saying that I had said no. I actually said that we are taking the time to review the shared resource programs and that the Grove Street intake is fully on hold now as that work happens. I am hoping, of course, that what we are steering toward is having a tremendous amount of work done by the next school year, and we will make those determinations through that process. My commitment is always to work with our partners to make sure that we are moving along together in this work around the implementation of the findings of the communities of inquiry and that we are working in partnership.

Mr. Dixon: Thank you. At the start of that answer, the minister said that, yes, there is a review of the Grove Street program. Will that review include consultation with the Jack Hulland school community?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I definitely have had a number of opportunities — last year and this year — to meet with a number of folks from the Jack Hulland school community. I have met with the school council, I have met with the teachers, and I have met with the parents on a number of occasions. I am very committed to doing this work with the Jack Hulland school community. I know that there is a project underway now around the Jack Hulland handbook and the policies that will come out of that around inclusion and safety. I am definitely very committed to working with the school community and doing that in a collaborative way that holds value for everyone who is involved in the work that we're doing around the reviews for the school and how it will impact their community. I remain committed to that.

Mr. Dixon: Can I take that as a yes?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes.

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

The Department of Education has launched a review or an investigation at Jack Hulland Elementary School, which involves the hiring of a lawyer to do a review. I would like to ask about the status of that review. Who is the lawyer that they have hired? My understanding was that there was a slight delay due to that lawyer getting sick. Other than that, can the minister give us a timeline of that investigation and when it will be complete? Also, what specifically is that lawyer looking at?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, we are undertaking a review with the Jack Hulland school. Mitha Law Group was engaged to conduct the employer's fact-finding investigation using copies — of course, we had to have duplicate copies of a number of documents and workplace risk assessments because we've had to disclose to the RCMP all of these records. The law group is working with duplicates. Workplace risk assessments and other reports involving the use of holds and isolation rooms over the last five years are being reviewed by this law group.

Workplace risk assessments are required to be completed and submitted to the Student Support Services unit when students become elevated or holds are used.

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

I'll read another question that has been submitted to me. Jack Hulland has an extremely high enrolment due to the impacts of Whistle Bend's growth, and there have been a number of serious incidents over the past two years that could have been better managed if the department had appropriately allocated the necessary resources to the school given the current capacity issues. Will the department commit to allocating additional staff and resources at Jack Hulland for the 2022-23 school year?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I just would like to ask a clarifying question — a question for clarity. I'm just wondering if the member opposite is asking about the increase in — is the question about increased enrolment, or is it about workplace risk assessments?

Mr. Dixon: The question was: Will the department commit to allocating additional staff and resources for Jack Hulland in the 2022-23 school year? Will there be additional teachers or EAs at the school next year?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I will just say that all of our schools in the territory are staffed based on enrolment. Educational assistants and other support staff are based on needs. What we do — and I'm sure the member opposite is aware of this — is that we take the projection around this time of the year, and the school makes best attempts to tell us what the enrolment will be, and then we verify that.

September 30 is the date when we reassess the enrolment, and also in between that time, there is a lot of work that happens between the department and all the individual schools to determine — they may know by then or through that time between the beginning of the school year and September 30, they already know of increases, and so, those adjustments start to happen. Then the educational assistants and other resources are determined by need. Those vary from school to school. Jack Hulland certainly is a school of our many schools that we support and staff, and we will definitely work with the administration within the school and the school council and use those proper avenues to determine the need in Jack Hulland.

Mr. Dixon: Unfortunately, for those in the Jack Hulland school community who are listening, I will have to move on, just given where I am at in terms of time.

So, I will move to the plans for the new school in Whitehorse. Obviously, this has come up in Question Period, in the media, and elsewhere. The Minister of Highways and Public Works told the media very clearly that the decision about which school to replace rests with the Minister of Education, and so I would like to ask the Minister of Education which school will be replaced in Whitehorse.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I have had an opportunity to speak about this throughout this Sitting already. Our government's commitment is to replace an aging school in Whitehorse. We have \$200,000 in our capital budget that has been identified for preliminary construction and initial design for an existing, aging Whitehorse replacement school.

Conversations with our school communities is definitely part of our process. A final decision has not been made yet. It's

still within our internal process, which is the Cabinet process that is underway now.

Mr. Dixon: When will a decision be made?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, we have made a commitment in our five-year capital plan to replace an aging Whitehorse school. This decision is within Cabinet right now. I am not able to give a specific timeline of when this decision will be communicated. When I have that information, I will be sure to inform the public and our partners first, of course, that we are ready to make that announcement.

Mr. Dixon: Can the minister clarify what she just said? She said that the decision is before Cabinet right now. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes.

Mr. Dixon: So, to date, I don't believe that there has been specific consultation with school councils. I know that at least the École Whitehorse Elementary School Council has been seeking information for some time about enrolment trends, et cetera. If the decision is currently before Cabinet, can we assume then that the decision will be communicated to the school councils after it is made?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I certainly have had a number of discussions with school councils across the territory. Every single one has included a discussion around infrastructure and need. We make capital planning decisions based on current information and on facility assessments, and we recognize, of course, that there are number of aging school facilities in the City of Whitehorse and some throughout the territory as well. We continue conversations that include all of our school communities. My commitment is to continue to have those discussions.

I would note that there are a number of Cabinet types of committees that we have. We have the Cabinet Committee on Priorities and Planning. We have regular Cabinet. We have Management Board. We have the Cabinet Committee on Legislation. So, there are a number of Cabinet committees that we work with that have different types of roles that help us to move projects along. I can tell you that the decision around next steps in this process is currently before the Cabinet Committee on Priorities and Planning.

Mr. Dixon: The minister would be presenting the document as the sponsoring minister to that Cabinet committee. Does that document include a recommendation — a recommended school from the minister?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you for the question. I know that the member opposite, at one time, sat in Cabinet and knows very well that the content of Cabinet documents is confidential — and for good reason.

I will reiterate, since the member opposite has said that there are a number of folks listening to these debates, that our commitment is to replace an elementary school in Whitehorse and that we've allocated dollars through our five-year capital plan for that. I think that this is the most important information.

We will continue working with our school communities. I have not had an opportunity to work closely with the member opposite, but I certainly know that what Yukoners know about me is that I always work in a collaborative way, and I work in

partnership and bring everyone into the room who I can bring into the room. I will continue doing my work in that way.

This is a Committee of the Whole debate that has a lot of edge to it today, and I recognize it and I feel it. I know that the member opposite is trying to get me to potentially make announcements on the floor of the Legislature in Committee of the Whole, and I will not do that.

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

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Is there any further general debate?

Ms. White: It's a pleasure today to be joining the minister and her officials in the capacity of having this conversation around the 2022-23 budget. There have been questions asked already today, and some might touch back, and then there will be others. I think that we will weave our way through the educational world today.

The first question I want to start with is actually around specifically the budget allocation for the specialized teacher for autistic supports for schools. If the minister could just start by kind of walking me through what that means, and then I will ask additional questions.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thanks for the question. I will start framing it out a little bit. In 2019, the auditor's audit and the final report and review of inclusive and special education told us that we have to rethink how we are supporting students and delivering timely, effective supports for their learning needs.

There is a growing need for specialized programming support to students on the autism spectrum across the territory. The Department of Education is piloting an itinerant teacher for autism, based from the Student Support Services unit. We are continuing with efforts to recruit a qualified candidate for this position right now. We have run the competition a couple of times.

The itinerant teacher for autism will assist staff in developing, implementing, documenting, and evaluating strategies outlined in students' programming plans to support success in both inclusive and individualized program settings. This teacher for autism will also be responsible for determining the direct needs of Yukon educators for further professional development in the area of support for students on the autism spectrum.

I can continue to build on that, but that is basically — it is new. It is something that is being piloted right now — and, I think, a really important and valued resource.

Maybe I will just stop right there and see which questions you have further around this.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that.

My preference is always to have short exchanges just so that I don't forget where we are or what I might have missed. If the minister is open to those kinds of exchanges, I would appreciate that.

I appreciate that the position has been put out multiple times, looking for the right candidate, but I also know that one school specifically is really hopeful for having that teacher — which would be Hidden Valley. So, if we continue to try to hire for that position and we don't get the right applicant, what is the status for autistic kids at Hidden Valley who are waiting for that professional to come to help assist in their day-to-day learning?

Hon. Ms. McLean: This is an important pilot project. We are very committed to ensuring that we find the right skillset — the pilot project — and that it does not take away from other specialized supports that are offered. We intend to have this position, at least initially, work out of Hidden Valley Elementary School — or other schools — from the Student Support Services unit.

I think that evaluation criteria will be established, and we'll check in — once we have someone in place, of course — at the six-month point and then evaluate at one year. Many of our students who are on IEPs are also, if the need is there, assigned an EA — educational assistant — and/or other supports that are identified in the individual education plan. We'll continue to work with the school council around this, but that is really what our hope is — that we'll determine that with the school community, with the school council, in terms of embedding that position, at least initially, at Hidden Valley Elementary School.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. Is there intention of allocating funding for a classroom at that school as well? One of the concerns that has been highlighted by parents is that they would like to see a small inclusive classroom, one that's more specifically designed for autistic kids, as opposed to — they used the comparison of Grove Street. So, is there an intention of making sure that funding is available to get proper classroom space for that program?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thanks for the question; it is a good question. It is exactly the analysis that we hope will come from the autism specialist in terms of making those types of recommendations that will help children who are on the autism spectrum thrive. That is really what the intent is — and that we would take that and work with other school communities to apply that.

I just want to — sometimes I wonder about what folks know about the supports that are in place now. I mean, this is an additional, over and above — and a pilot that we think has a lot of promise and will be trying something new — and working, of course, with our partners. That is something that I didn't say — working with Autism Yukon and working with other partners to make sure that we have that whole view on it, but the positive intervention coach works with the students right now. That is something that is happening now, and we have 11 children on the autism spectrum at Hidden Valley alone.

Once we have those recommendations — if there are infrastructure needs or those types of needs in our schools —

we will work with our school councils. I know that we have a number of schools that are coming on — and the First Nation School Board. Those will all be things that they can determine, as well, within their school infrastructure. I know that we are going to probably have that and a number of other recommendations coming from the specialist.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that.

Just knowing that the minister said that the job posting has been posted for a while but there haven't been suitable applicants, can the minister let me know a bit about what the department is looking for in this specialized teacher?

Hon. Ms. McLean: One of the things that I do want to point out — and I can return with the full job posting because we have posted it twice, and now it is posted until it is filled. We have some confidence that we will be able to find the right candidate.

In terms of the special skills that we are looking for, we are looking for someone with a really specific and strong background in special education — very specialized in terms of an individual who can teach the teachers as well. That is very important — a specialty in facilitating professional learning, behavioural planning, applied behavioural analysis, strategies for developing communications, programming experience, working in team-based environments, and data collection and evaluation. We really want to have somebody with a skillset that can bring us the analysis and strong recommendations and be able to work with us on how to work with all of our school communities, so it would be dynamic.

I do want to say that this pilot project came out of work that we did directly with parents and the school community. I definitely hold my hands up to all of those who have thought through this and were able to put forward a viable option for us to pilot.

We posted it right away, last fall, and just haven't been able to find the right candidate, but we feel confident now that there is interest and that we'll be able to fill it with this current posting.

I can return, if you like, with the actual job posting. That is easy. I can bring it back in a legislative return.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. I am capable of looking for it too.

I guess, mostly, the reason I wanted the minister to talk about the specialized needs was just to get a better idea, on the floor here and in the record, about what we're looking for.

I think there are lots of families — in my experience, when we talk about disability, the fit is often more important than whatever experience comes. Some people are naturals when it comes to doing the work that's required. By that, I mean the support, the coaching, the education — those aspects.

So, sometimes, if you are looking for the data analysis more than a person's ability to work with the kids we're talking about, then — I hope we don't miss that opportunity because it's focused on that. I just want to say that I hope the person we find is the one who is best suited to work with the kids who are intended for this program — understanding that sometimes all of those boxes might not be checked, but the ones that are

checked are with really big colourful stars and big check marks, as opposed to small check marks across the board.

I was really lucky in my early years in this position. I was not the Education critic from 2011 into 2016.

Actually, it was Jim Tredger, and Jim had a long history as an educator in the territory, including as a principal. One of the real assets that I learned from Jim in his time here was just about the different tools available to families as they navigated the education system. A really big one that he was a big proponent for was the Education Appeal Tribunal. His reason for highlighting and holding up that one is — I am just reading from the website: “The Appeal Tribunal functions as a board independently of the government. It may hear appeals arising from departmental, school or school council decisions. This includes decisions such as those affecting special needs students, suspensions, student records and locally developed courses of study. The Appeal Tribunal hears appeals from parents and students who wish to go beyond the Department of Education to resolve a dispute. In determining the outcome of an appeal, the Appeal Tribunal considers the educational interests of the child, the impact on all other students and any other relevant factors.”

The reason why Jim held this one up is that, if a person went through the Department of Education to try to get the supports and services that they needed for a student and it wasn't going anywhere, this was the ultimate — this was where you would go. He walked a lot of people through this process. The reason I have any knowledge about the Education Appeal Tribunal is just because of Jim.

One of my concerns is that, if I look at current appointments, currently the position of the chair has expired. It expired on March 13 of this year. My concern with that is that, knowing that someone has put in an appeal to the Education Appeal Tribunal, what they have heard back is that there is currently no chair, and without a chair, it can't go forward. The way that this tribunal works, as the minister knows, is that it is a ministerial appointment. So, there is an appointment process — they are appointed by the minister. When does the minister intend to appoint a chair to the Education Appeal Tribunal?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I absolutely agree. The Education Appeal Tribunal plays a critical role in giving parents the ability to appeal education decisions, such as suspensions or individualized education plans that they may disagree with and other matters as well, as the member has pointed out. I think that it is an important tool.

The chair of the tribunal also declared a conflict with the current appeal before the tribunal and then had indicated that she would not be seeking reassignment at the end of the appointment. We have worked hard to advertise. That advertisement has closed. We have a number of great candidates who have come forward, and we will be making those appointments very soon.

Also, we now have a member who has agreed to take on the chair role. So, I am really happy about that. It has been a worrisome aspect for me. I have been concerned and not wanting to hold up any matters for families. We definitely have spent — the team has worked hard — in Education and here in

our office — to make sure that we have a full slate of members on this tribunal and chair.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that.

Also, from one of my colleagues — one of her favourite expressions was: “Justice delayed is justice denied.” So, the reason why I wanted to ask about that chair position is because, until someone is able to fulfill that, if they feel that is the way they need to go, knowing that it is not — it wasn't peopled — meant that they were being denied — it was being delayed.

Another concern that was highlighted is that the secretary registrar is an arm's-length position that is contracted, in my understanding, through the Department of Education. So, has that expired contract either been renewed or has another one been issued?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I do not have this particular detailed information with me today, so I will bring back a return to the Legislature.

Just going back a little bit, in terms of the *Education Act*, I wanted to say one thing — and I missed this, in terms of the last question. It has been identified that the *Education Act* doesn't allow for the appointment of an interim chair when a conflict has been declared. We are looking at options to address this, moving forward. I think that it is a key and critical point. Although I can't talk, of course, about details of any matters that are before the tribunal — for privacy and confidentiality — I just want to flag that as an area that we are looking at right now, but I'll bring that information back around the registrar.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that answer from the minister. It's also just to highlight that — again, I am just going to go back to one of Lois Moorcroft's favourite quotes, which is: “Justice delayed is justice denied.” So, once that process gets started — I was looking for a timeline on the website, but there isn't one. My hope is that it's not in perpetuity — that once it starts, we know that the process starts and it's clearly defined.

I do thank the minister for getting back to me and making sure that there is a registrar or secretary who is able to support the good work of that board.

Today, in response to the ministerial statement that you gave, I did ask the question about the Yukon grant and whether or not that program is being assessed or has been looked at. The reason why — I have had lots of conversations in this House with the previous Minister of Education. I come from a trades background, and not only do I come from a trades background, but I went through a private institution. I went to a school that cost close to \$10,000 in four months, but I left that school and worked in the industry from that point forward. I was able to access a couple of achievement awards — if I calculated it, it would probably work out to \$750 — and a very small portion of my Yukon grant money. For the rest of it, I worked full time when I went to school.

The Yukon grant program is incredible. It's set up to facilitate a person's ability to access post-secondary education, but what it's not set up for, I'm going to say, is for education as it currently stands or maybe even the job world as it currently stands.

So, one of the problems that I've highlighted here before is that the Yukon grant program doesn't recognize education programs per se.

One of the things that I've championed here is that, if a Yukon student has access to this program — and it's a finite amount of funding, and it clearly defines what you are able to do and how long you're able to access it for — then why is the Yukon government limiting people's ability? If someone wants to be a commercial pilot and they are willing to go all in and they are willing to do the \$80,000 to \$100,000 worth of education to get there, being able to access \$25,000 from the Yukon grant is a big deal because then you are taking on less debt.

Yes, it's not traditional. No, it's not going to take four years to do. No, it's not going to be on a semester basis. No, it's not going to be divided into that. But if our ultimate goal is making sure that we have productive humans on the other side, I might challenge that becoming a commercial pilot is as valuable, if not more valuable, than a degree in political science.

I had a friend who had a degree in political science and he worked at McDonald's after. So, that's the joke. He'll understand — Dominic will understand the joke.

So, has the department undertaken an assessment of the Yukon grant and the requirements for students to access it?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Important questions regarding adult learners — and I know that we just made some shifts in terms of certain programs moving over to Economic Development, but the ones that we retained at the Department of Education are specifically for the areas that you are asking about today. Currently, we have a few ways in which we support adult learners. The Department of Education supports adult learners through the student financial assistance, including the Canada student loan and Yukon grant. I think that is the line right there. We have to follow the Canada student loan — on the Yukon grant. Then we also have the Yukon bursaries, which have all kinds of individual criteria.

The Yukon apprenticeship and Working Up — in terms of Yukon apprenticeship, this year alone, we have 139 apprentices funded through that program. That includes funding for their needs when they are in educational programs and are not earning funds. That's definitely an important support that we provide.

Then we have the Working Up program, which provides broad support for individuals to advance toward their labour market goals. We have 40 individuals funded to date in 2021-22. This is where we have the most flexibility to support adult learners. We also have the summer career placement and student training employment programs where we create work experience opportunities for students. We have 132 positions created through both of those programs.

In terms of flexibility — oh, this is where I was going to go. The total amount that we retained under the apprenticeship training and student financial assistance is \$3,876,044. So, that is for the O&M to deliver the programs. We definitely remain committed, and I am sure that you may have had questions — or will have questions — for the Minister of Economic Development on the other two areas that have been shifted over

to Economic Development. I like the examples you gave around your friend who is in political science and the comparison to trades.

My son is just graduating this year from political science, and my older son is a tradesperson, an electrician, so I get that. There is that difference, for sure, but I think that these programs that we now have and how we have re-worked them to best disburse the funding for students and to support them wherever they are going to be successful in the labour market — I believe that we have some balance here in terms of academic and trades. We know that trades and other training to move into the labour market is incredibly important and valuable. We agree on that front, in terms of your build-up to the question around this particular funding.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that, and I appreciate her using her sons as examples. I know which one will be giving the loans and which one will be needing the loans, just based on my own experience.

So, when I was talking about the Yukon grant, I wasn't specifically talking about adult learners. I was actually just talking about high school graduates, so I reference flight school. The reason for this is that a number of years ago — and I would have used these examples at the time. There is the Canadian Aviation College, for example, out BC way, which is a nine-month program. So, a nine-month program and you get your commercial pilot's licence at the end. You know, it has a list of the criteria. It has a list of the classes and the teaching methods, and the tuition fee is \$42,900 before taxes. It talks about other fees for just about \$1,400. But the thing is, the way Yukon's education funding exists, even though the Yukon grant — when it talks about the grant — it says: "Students can receive up to 170 weeks of funding over their lifetime. You must continue to meet eligibility requirements."

It uses an example. It says: "If you study from September to April inclusive, your school year is 34 weeks long. The calculation is 34 weeks x \$145 per week = \$4,930."

So, that's great for people who are attending an academic post-secondary institution, but it, for example, doesn't work with pilot school, which is nine months long in a row, and it doesn't meet the requirements laid out under the Yukon grant, despite the fact that, at the end of it, you are employable; you will get a job in that industry.

Today, I mentioned that there are programs through the Yukon University that don't qualify. For example, at the Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining, underground mining operations don't qualify for financial support in this way — not for full coverage. It talks about the admissions requirements. It talks about the graduation requirements. The tuition cost is \$4,400, plus technology fees. So, all in, that program is \$4,720.

The thing is, this is a program that is 100 percent training students for employment, so much so that it does a two-weeks-in, two-weeks-out program structure to get people ready for what to expect when you work a cycle at an operating mine. Which, I have to say, if no one has done two weeks in, two weeks — or rotations like that, there is a reason — that's fantastic — there is a reason to get someone used to that because, as a person who used to work in the mines, two weeks

on, two weeks off almost felt like a vacation, but the three in and one out was definitely harder.

So, there are programs at Yukon University that don't meet the requirements for the Yukon grant funding. So, we have Yukon kids who, for example, want to work in mine remediation or environmental monitoring, for example. Those programs don't work under this definition.

So, the question I continue to ask is: When is the Department of Education going to look at that? Because it even says — when you go into the Yukon grant, it does say that you can — it lets you know that you can combine it with, for example — it says that students may receive the Yukon grant along with other student financial assistance, but again, you must meet those requirements.

So, if we use me as an example, when I went to culinary school, I got a very minimal amount for the Yukon grant because of how short the program was. It didn't come remotely close to covering the cost. I accessed student loans and I worked full time.

I don't wish that on anybody. Maybe it was character-building, but I can tell you that it was not a pleasant time. I certainly didn't live the college experience with that, but my point is that education has changed. I think that, at this point, my expectation is that we are looking to not only support academic programs but also non-academic programs.

I am just asking if there is an intention within the Department of Education to review the Yukon grant to make sure that it is accessible to more students, even including if someone goes into a program where they access the full 170-week funding that they are entitled to — I would imagine that people understand that, once you have accessed it, it's gone. Even if you do it for four years, you know, once you access it, it's gone. Is there an intention to review that program?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thanks for the question and the clarity.

In terms of when a high school student is leaving high school, they are considered an adult learner from that point forward. The two programs that I talked — well, three — but the two specifically that are specific to what you're talking about here — asking about today — the Yukon apprenticeship and particularly the Working Up program — this is a new program that provides the greatest flexibility. The example that you just gave in terms of that sort of mining training that's not an accredited program is something that could be supported through this type of — or this particular program.

So, we've already — we have looked at it. In terms of the Yukon grant, it does have to align with the Canada student loan criteria. That's a discussion we can potentially bring up to Canada and have that discussion at that level to look at what, if any, changes can be made there in terms of the — and that is definitely something that I can have discussions with my colleague, the Minister of Economic Development, on as we move forward, because we are working closely together on this new shift that we've made in terms of building our strategy going forward. That's something we can talk about, whether that's something that we want to bring up to Canada to have that discussion around the Yukon grant and how we can

potentially make shifts to look at the future of our workforce — labour market needs and goals.

Again, if you know of folks who are struggling with funding in any programs that are shorter term or not those full degree programs — or long term — please have them reach out to the Department of Education — in this particular program, Working Up — and they can have a discussion with folks there on what their options are and how we can support them.

Ms. White: I do thank the minister for that clarification. So, I guess that, as soon as we graduate, we are all adult learners, which I do appreciate.

Just on the website, I can't actually find the Working Up application — when it talks about applying for financial supports for students — and so possibly it is just because I haven't looked for it on the website before, but I do not see it as I am scrolling through. I will just ask the minister to point it out to me at some point, and I would appreciate that.

Another topic that I have discussed previously with the previous minister — and I am going to bring it again — is about the student eligibility. I appreciate that often we think that young people are dependent on their parents and live with their parents, but that is not the case. One very specific case that I will talk about — and the appeal did happen — is a young person who lived on their own after they graduated from high school. Their parent left the territory. The young person stayed here, and the young person maintained residency, paid taxes, had a health care card and driver's licence, and applied for the Yukon grant ahead of school, like they were supposed to, before they left the territory, and it was denied because their parent had left the territory. But this young person was not being supported by their parent. They were independent. They needed that financial support to be able to attend school.

So, when we look at eligibility, it says things like — well, first of all, it assumes that a student is a dependant, and it says where to apply as a dependent student. Even as an independent student, it does say that you should apply in the jurisdiction where you have lived in the past 12 months in row, but I do know that there have been problems with that. So, if the minister can just help me understand.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, dependent students, under the Yukon grant, are students who are pursuing post-secondary education within four years of leaving high school and have been in the labour force full time for two 12-month periods or more, have never been married or in a common-law relationship, or have never been a single parent with legal custody and financial responsibility for supporting a child.

Dependent students apply for funding in the territory or province where their family has most recently maintained a family home. If a dependent student's parents are separated or divorced, the student is required to apply in the province or territory of the parent with whom the student normally lives. If a dependent student does not live with their parent, they should apply for funding in the province or territory of residence of the parent who financial supports them.

In Yukon, and I think everywhere else, there is an appeal process. We do have a Student Financial Assistance Committee

that can hear appeals very quickly and make very timely decisions based on the circumstances.

Again, all of the structure of the Yukon grant is based on the Canada loans program. That's why it is so specific and it does speak to the province and territory aspect of it.

I recognize though that there are those times when circumstances happen that are not planned for or there are changes. We have definitely had different circumstances during COVID-19 where people have not been able to travel back home, back to the territory, and so they couldn't meet that requirement of having been in the Yukon for a period of time because of the restrictions. Those are the types of situations that the Student Financial Assistance Committee hears rather quickly and can turn around a decision on them to make sure that students are supported where they're at.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that.

What is the typical timeline for an appeal process for the Yukon grant?

Hon. Ms. McLean: It depends on what the issue is. We do try to resolve them at the department level quickly, depending on what the issue is. If it is something that cannot be resolved, it will be moved to the Student Financial Assistance Committee. They meet on a monthly basis, but if there was something that was urgent, I think that we would be able to bring the committee together rather quickly. This is a very committed group of folks who definitely are committed to the work that they do in this committee and know the importance of it — and I think that they know the pressures that students have and the desperation that can happen in a moment, being a student. We have all been there, I think, where you are depending on something, and if it's not there, then it causes hardship. That is why we have this committee that can resolve matters rather quickly.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. It is good to know that the committee meets monthly and can hear those appeals.

I know that I was contacted last year by a student whose grant was very late in being disbursed — so much so that they had quite a lot of penalties, because they had to put everything on their credit card because they are not able to access financial resources from, for example, families or friends, and so they had to cover that themselves. When that happens, when it's no mistake from the student and that disbursement is much later than generally happens, what is a student's recourse? What actions can they take?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I know that we did have to make some changes to the administration of the Yukon grant as a response to the pandemic. Training Programs worked with Finance to implement a direct deposit system. There were some delays with the addition of direct deposits. Students applying for the Yukon grant in person or by distance due to COVID-19 are now required to provide confirmation of full-time post-secondary enrolment just prior to each funding disbursement. So, that did cause some — and we're not aware of huge delays, but I really would encourage that student to talk to Training Programs and work with them to resolve those extra fees.

The other thing that happened as a result of the pandemic and the need to move into remote learning — we did provide all students on the Yukon grant an additional \$500 for technical support in response to the extra needs that students had during this time.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that.

I did, under the yukon.ca website, put in the search for Working Up and I did find it. Is that program under the Department of Education?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, it is.

Ms. White: I guess, then, that part of the next question would be: Why isn't that in the funding? When you are under the Department of Education and you are seeking funding assistance, this program doesn't come up. This is actually under "Employment and Work Programs" with other such things such as "Apply on a job", "Employment standards", "Ethics, behaviour and culture", "Find a government job", "Find a volunteer opportunity", and it goes on like that.

So, when the minister was saying that this was a program that could work for people, one of my concerns is that, when it talks about eligibility, it says — and I quote: "You cannot be 'self-sufficient' in the labour market. This means you cannot get and keep employment that meets your: basic needs; and the needs of your dependents. A case manager will assist you to develop an application that shows this."

So, someone who wants to be an underground miner and who wants to take a program from the Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining up at the university, it doesn't mean that they can't get a job and they can't meet their basic needs. They just want a different job, which isn't covered under other funding streams. So, I guess my concern is that if Working Up is one of those avenues, but it says that the way you have to qualify is that you cannot get and keep employment that meets your basic needs, can the minister help me understand how, for a person who is employable but wants to change career paths — for example, wants to be an underground miner, an environmental monitor, or maybe wants to be a commercial pilot — this program would support them?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you for the question and for identifying that in the way that you did. In discussion with the department — I mean, we are in a transitional period right now and updating the comms profile around this particular program. I think that the key thing to note is that it is about improving employability. That gives the most flexibility in this in that the intent is to meet the needs of the person or individual seeking enhanced training to move into something different or enhance their employability. I think that this is the key piece of it. That is what brings that flexibility to this particular program. We are definitely working on updating the comms profile. It is part of this new shift and move into the labour market — really meeting our labour market goals and helping people advance where they want to and need to.

Ms. White: I do thank the minister for that. So, is that an indication that the description of this program will change in the future?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, that is correct. It will be updated to have a focus on learners. This is part of the transition

that is happening now. It did come into effect on April 1. That work is happening right now in terms of that — updating the comms profile and ensuring that it's clear and focused on the training needs and improving employability of Yukoners.

Ms. White: I do thank the minister for that. I'm a bit mortified to admit that I didn't know that program existed, and I spend a lot of time trying to help people access funding for education purposes. This might be one where the wizards in the IT department can have multiple headings in multiple locations. Again, it isn't listed under "Financial supports for students". I'm sure that I'm not the only one who didn't know about it, and I do appreciate the minister walking us through what that's about and what that's for. I do appreciate that.

Deputy Chair, I probably have about — well, I don't want to exaggerate, but many more questions to go. I do appreciate that the time is 5:23 p.m. right now, so instead of us leaving on a cliffhanger of a question to come back to, I move that you report progress.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Ms. Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*, and directed me to report progress.

Speaker: You have heard the report from the Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole.

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:24 p.m.

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Becoming — Strategic Plan 2022-2027 — Yukon University (McLean)