



# Yukon Legislative Assembly

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## HANSARD

Thursday, April 14, 2022 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

# YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

## 2022 Spring Sitting

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

### CABINET MINISTERS

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

### OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

#### Yukon Party

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

### THIRD PARTY

#### New Democratic Party

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

### LEGISLATIVE STAFF

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**Yukon Legislative Assembly  
Whitehorse, Yukon  
Thursday, April 14, 2022 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

*Prayers*

## DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

## INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I have a few constituents here from Marsh Lake: Ron Davis; Kristin Kulachkosky; and I think that is Nate Kulachkosky, but sometimes he looks a lot like his brother.

For our tribute today to Bill Thomas, we have many guests who have come to the Legislative Assembly.

Can we please welcome Gwenda Bradley, Jean Francois DesLauriers, Sylvie Léonard, Natalie Taylor, Jason Charlie, Cyprian Bus, Ngeta Kabirii, Jack Bogaard, Michael Dougherty, Kristina Craig, George Green, Hilary Wilkinson, Laurie MacFeeters, Jesse Whelen, Dennis Senger, Chris Gishler, and Bill's family — Ellen Thomas, Thomas, Liam, Elliott, and Sophie — if we could please just welcome them.

*Applause*

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I will ask my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly to help me welcome today Melissa Laluk, who is the supervisor of the chronic conditions support program and a clinical exercise specialist and certified respiratory educator. With her is Amelie Clark, chronic conditions nurse educator and certified respiratory educator, and also with them is Joline Williams, a virtual health monitoring program coordinator, here for the ministerial statement today. Welcome.

*Applause*

**Speaker:** Are there any tributes?

## TRIBUTES

### In remembrance of Bill Thomas

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** It is my sad privilege to rise today to commemorate Bill Thomas. The youngest of four children, born to Macedonian immigrants, Bill grew up in Ontario and studied at Western and Queen's universities, earning his master's in economics.

In 1969, Bill started teaching — a profession that suited his gentle way. As an educator, Bill had an endless love for reading, research, and continuous learning. He taught at Mohawk College and was professor of economics at Sheridan College until he retired in 2007, when he and his wife Val moved to the Yukon to be close to their daughter, Ellen, and their grandkids.

When he arrived in the Yukon, Bill got stuck in right away and became an active community member. His contributions to Whitehorse and the territory are long-lasting. Bill's firm belief that volunteerism is critical to a healthy society demonstrated his genuine commitment to making our community a better place for all, especially those who are vulnerable or marginalized. Bill played an extremely active role in addressing the issues of poverty, homelessness, and the care for and the rights of people with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

His humility, empathy, and wisdom made him exceptional at what he loved to do — engage and cajole others to think, question, and take action. Bill's focus remained on assisting the organizations that he volunteered for on the path of reconciliation and social justice.

When I met Bill, he had recently begun as co-chair of the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition, a role that would end up spanning 15 of the coalition's 25-plus years. Bill also helped to chair Seniors Action Yukon and was an active member of the Options for Independence Society and Northern City Supportive Housing Coalition. I know I am listing off a lot of groups that Bill helped with, but by far, it was more about how Bill did it rather than how many groups he worked with. Bill's leadership was subtle and quiet and somehow infectious. We didn't know that we were being mentored, but we were.

Bill led an impressive life and had a positive impact on many. As a loving husband of Val, proud father of David and Ellen, and the very dedicated grandfather of Kendra, Iain, Asa, Thomas, Liam, Elliott, and Sophie, Bill spoke often of his beautiful family.

He was a supportive and honest man. He put in countless hours driving the kids to after-school practice, taking them to the park, and spoiling each one of them with his attention, humour, and kindness.

Bill's biggest joy in life was bringing his family joy. Sadly, Bill lost his beloved wife Val this past spring. I would just like to acknowledge that it was actually one year ago today that Val passed away. It appeared as though Bill didn't quite know how to live his life without her.

Bill was a champion and a colleague to all those who shared his unflinching dedication to fighting poverty. Bill's perseverance left an indelible mark on efforts over the last decades to squarely face our ongoing housing crisis.

He brought insight, creativity, dedication, and wit to his work — in short, the ability to connect with people from all walks of life through community and volunteerism. He had a powerful yet quiet presence and believed that help cannot be given from a place of judgment. Bill often said, "Have the courage to step through your fears and to keep what's true in front of you."

I will close my tribute and honour Bill Thomas with a simple and powerful word he would use to sign off — courage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

*Applause*

**Mr. Cathers:** I just want to rise today to express, on behalf of the Official Opposition, our sincere condolences to Bill's family and friends — sorry for your loss. I thank Bill as

well for his dedication to the Yukon and its communities and all his services that my colleague, the minister, just detailed here earlier.

*Applause*

**Ms. White:** It's an honour to stand on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to Bill Thomas, a man who not only believed but lived by the principles of social justice. He treated each and every person as a valuable member of society, always seeing the best in us and raising us up to be the best versions of ourselves.

I have to say that I was surprised to learn that Bill only moved to the Yukon in 2007. I say "surprised" because I can't imagine a Yukon without him.

Bill was a social justice activist to his core. As a retired professor of economics, he took all he knew from the world of academics — leadership, mentorship, research, and facilitation — and then he applied it to his volunteer work. He volunteered like it was a full-time job. If there was work to be done, you could count on Bill.

He played an active role in advancing the issues of poverty, homelessness, care for and the rights of people with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and, of course, seniors' rights. The organizations that he cared about and where he shared his energy and his passions and his heart read like Yukon's conscience.

Bill was a master of hard conversations. He had the ability to truly listen before responding. He was able to facilitate meetings with folks from all walks of life and experiences, and because of his abilities, each person always felt heard. He took this skill with him wherever he went. He used that talent to the benefit of so many organizations he cared about: Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition, Options for Independence, and Seniors Action Yukon.

For eight years, he worked with the Northern City Supportive Housing Coalition, which sadly didn't grow wings when we all wanted it to back in the day, but we can see the seeds that were planted growing in the Safe at Home housing initiative.

Bill believed that volunteerism is integral to a healthy society, and his life's work attests to this. Contributing and giving back are things that he did throughout his life. He was wise, kind, and made sure that his heart was always available. He never judged anyone or anything and worked so hard to help make life better for everyone around him.

Bill has left behind a lasting impact on Whitehorse and the Yukon. His dedication to community and to the people around him helped make us all better. So, our heartfelt condolences to his friends and his family. He will be missed.

*Applause*

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

## TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** I have for tabling today a number of documents. The first is a CBC *A New Day* episode from

November 7, 2012, titled "Advocacy Group Says Proposed Changes to ATIPP Act Attack On Democracy"; a *Whitehorse Star* article, dated November 14, 2012, entitled "Privacy commissioner objects to acts changes"; a *Yukon News* article, dated November 14, 2012, titled "Territory pushes for greater secrecy"; a *Whitehorse Star* article, dated November 6, 2012, titled "Lawyer denounces changes to information law"; another *Whitehorse Star* article, dated November 10, 2012, entitled "Minister skirts questions on openness"; and finally, a *Yukon News* article from December 14, 2012, titled "NDP calls for the..." — Member for Kluane's — "... resignation."

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I have for tabling a legislative return relating to matters outstanding from discussions with the Member for Copperbelt South on March 21 in Committee of the Whole under Vote 3 for Education.

**Ms. White:** I have for tabling an editorial written by the Minister of Community Services, entitled "A cost-benefit analysis", dated September 21, 2011.

**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

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

THAT this House urges the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and the Minister of Community Services to hold a public meeting to explain to constituents of Lake Laberge why they are planning to break the election promise not to develop Stevens Quarry that their Cabinet colleague, the MLA for Porter Creek South, made at the public meeting he held on April 1, 2021 and in writing on Liberal Party letterhead on April 7, 2021.

**Mr. Istchenko:** I rise in the House today to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Canada to reject the recommendation to create a new tax on trucks and SUVs, as proposed in the new ministry of Environment and Climate Change plan.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to grant Yukon midwives hospital privileges in the Dawson City Community Hospital and the Watson Lake Community Hospital.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to make midwifery support available in communities outside of Whitehorse.

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

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT****Chronic conditions support program**

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I rise today to speak about our government's ongoing efforts to support Yukoners' health and well-being and, in this case, those living with chronic health conditions.

The Government of Yukon's chronic health conditions support program provides client-centred programming to help Yukoners with chronic health conditions live well and plan for the future. All programs are free and available by doctor or self-referral. Clients can participate as individuals or in group activities. The services cover a range of conditions, including diabetes, cardiac disorders, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and many more. Programming is varied and includes nurse educator support, exercise services — both virtual and in person — and virtual health monitoring.

The chronic conditions support program is about a healthier tomorrow and focuses on improving quality of life for Yukoners. To do this, they offer a mix of virtual and in-person services. This allows the chronic conditions staff to adapt quickly to changing circumstances and, most importantly, to help ensure that clients can access the care they need wherever they are.

By offering a variety of services, it is our hope that the chronic conditions support program provides Yukoners with the health, education, and services that they need to feel empowered and live well.

Mr. Speaker, the program has just moved into a new physical location in NVD Place. This new space is a permanent home for the program, after operating for too many years in various locations. It has four clinic rooms, a gym, a group education space with video-conferencing capabilities, and other technologies. The space provides staff with the room and the amenities they need to do their important work effectively and helps clients to feel supported and comfortable.

The new space also recognizes the important contributions of one special individual. Shelley Gellatly worked on the chronic conditions support program team from its very beginning and remained a part of the team once it became a permanent program. She was a strong advocate for a balanced lifestyle and was committed to helping her clients live healthy, fulfilling lives. She was also an active member of our community, coaching, teaching, and making a difference in the lives of others.

Sadly, Shelley passed away in 2021 after a hard-fought battle with cancer. To honour her memory and her enthusiasm, the chronic conditions support program team has dedicated part of their new space as Shelley's Corner. It will no doubt be a lasting reminder and inspiration to all who spend time there. Shelley's Corner serves as a reminder to both staff and clients of the importance of empowering each other to be the best, healthiest version of ourselves.

I thank the members of the chronic conditions support program team today for their dedication, their hard work, and ongoing commitment to helping Yukoners living with chronic health conditions to reach a healthier tomorrow.

**Mr. Cathers:** I am pleased to rise on behalf of the Official Opposition to respond to the statement.

The chronic conditions support program is an important part of our health care system, and I would like to thank the staff here in the gallery for the important work that they do.

Through this program, they provide supports for Yukoners living with a chronic condition. These client-centred supports include collaborative chronic-care and self-management support, and the program helps people living with a chronic condition, such as COPD, diabetes, and hypertension, and results in improved health outcomes for Yukoners.

We also want to acknowledge and thank Shelley Gellatly for her work, and we join in honouring her contributions to the community and the Yukon. We also thank all the staff who offer this important program for their dedication in helping Yukoners who need the support.

On the topic of the space, though, while it is welcome news that the chronic conditions support program is finally able to move into this new purpose-built space, and we are pleased to see it happen, there are some facts the minister left out. We understand that this space was actually ready last year for the chronic conditions support program, but their move-in was delayed. Our understanding is that, because of mold discovered in their facility, the government moved the Child Development Centre into this building, delaying plans to move chronic conditions support into there.

Now that chronic conditions support has finally moved in, the government has moved the Child Development Centre from this space to make room, and the CDC is now located in temporary locations in several spots throughout the city, and the government still has not announced what their plans are for helping them and when they will stop being shuffled around to temporary office space. My understanding is that the CDC has changed locations several times over the last year and that staff are separated among many locations, making it difficult for them to provide services.

While this is good and welcome news for the chronic conditions support program — and we are pleased to see this happen — it does raise questions about the future of the Child Development Centre. Regrettably, the important services they offer are scattered and housed in temporary spaces. The government has, so far, not been forthcoming about their plans for the future of the Child Development Centre when we asked about it in Question Period. I am hoping the minister, when she rises today, can tell us when a solution will be developed to help the CDC. Will their old building be renovated? Will it be demolished? What is the budget for that work, and when will it take place?

Is the government looking at leasing a space large enough to house all the CDC staff in one location, and when do they expect that they can move into a new permanent space?

**Ms. White:** We agree and recognize the importance of the chronic conditions program and those folks who are there to support Yukoners to live their best lives. We understand that the space at NVD Place was always intended for the chronic conditions program, but when the Child Development Centre

needed to find a new home fast, the chronic conditions program was put off to the side and made to wait.

So, we're relieved to learn that this important program has finally moved into its permanent home. This has been a long time coming. Shelley's Corner is the perfect way to honour the work and enthusiasm of Shelley Gellatly. I know her smile will be felt by many in that corner. So, we thank the team at the chronic conditions support program and congratulate them on their new permanent space.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** It's important that all Yukoners have the services that they need to lead healthier lives, and Yukon seniors and elders have the tools that they need to age with dignity and comfort in their own homes or communities as long as possible.

Far too often, seniors and elders wait too long before getting the help that they need or they aren't aware of some of the preventive health services that are available to them and the very important health services provided by this program and the dedicated nurses and professionals who work there.

That's why our government is working hard not only to provide these services through the chronic conditions support program, but also making sure that Yukoners are aware of them. As some of the members here may have seen, our government recently launched the healthier tomorrow campaign, which uses a combination of traditional and digital media to get the word out to seniors, to elders, to Yukoners and their families on the important services available through the chronic conditions support program — and that's what we're here to focus on today.

I'm very pleased to report that there has been a noticeable increase in the interest in the program since the campaign was launched. We have committed to create a territory where all Yukoners, including seniors, elders, and their families, have the support that they need for a healthier tomorrow, and that plan is working.

A few weeks ago, I rose in the Assembly to highlight the *Aging in Place Action Plan* and the work that is underway with respect to that action. We have made significant progress to help ensure seniors and elders can age comfortably in the territory, but we know there is still work to do. Our government will continue to work on supporting Yukoners by strengthening our services and communities to help promote, protect, and enhance their health, well-being, and quality of life.

I know that is what the goal and the focus is for the professionals who work in the chronic conditions support program. The chronic conditions support program is about just those kinds of supports. It's about helping Yukoners achieve a healthier tomorrow in a patient-centred, holistic, and compassionate way.

Thank you for all the work that the program does, thank you for reaching out to Yukoners, and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

## QUESTION PERIOD

### Question re: Fuel-wood supply

**Mr. Kent:** So, last summer, the Yukon Wood Products Association raised the alarm with the Yukon government about the shortage of commercial firewood. Unfortunately, the Liberals didn't take those concerns seriously. The result was the massive shortage of firewood that we experienced this past winter, as well as higher prices per cord than ever before. Now Yukoners are starting to get concerned about what the situation for fuel wood will be next year.

So, can the minister give us any assurances that the Liberals have learned from their mistakes and that the fuel-wood shortages that we experienced this winter will be resolved in time for next winter?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I thank the Wood Products Association for meeting with us last summer and alerting us to their concerns. The Forest Management branch worked diligently with the Wood Products Association and with industry broadly. We worked with YESAB to get the Quill Creek project approved. It is approved, and wood came from there this winter and there is a supply of wood for many years to come out of Quill Creek.

We worked with one of our main suppliers in southeast Yukon. He has been cutting just across the border in BC, and we have been working to assist him in his applications with the BC government. We will continue to do that.

I checked in with the department after Committee of the Whole yesterday, and the note that I got back is that there is supply for coming years across all of our forest districts. I am happy to report that we are working on the longer term as well and that the work is ongoing, of course, but the situation is looking positive for the coming year and years.

**Mr. Kent:** We have heard concerns from both of the harvesters that the minister mentioned in the past while. We have been hearing from commercial firewood cutters across the territory that they are still dealing with back orders from this past winter. This is to say nothing about what will happen next winter. The minister mentioned it, and it was his solution that he touted last fall — to open up Quill Creek. Unfortunately, due to the process being so slow, that proponent wasn't able to access the wood until later in the winter and has now been shut down as of March 31. This means that much of the harvested wood from that area is still laying on the forest floor and cannot be accessed until next winter.

So, will the minister take steps to ensure that commercial wood harvesters can access this new area year-round to help address this backlog?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I think it's typical — and the note that I have says that, between April 1 and September 30, we don't allow cutting in areas — for example, like Quill Creek — and the reason is pretty straightforward: It's because it's fire season. So, it's about protecting Yukoners.

I will check to see whether there's any opportunity to collect wood that has already been felled — whether that's possible — and I will check with my colleague, the Minister of Community Services, and just confirm the rationale for that — that it is safety. But if that is the rationale, I think it would be

prudent for us stand by that as we're coming into fire season now.

I thank the members opposite for their concerns. Of course, Quill Creek was not online at the beginning of the woodcutting season last year, whereas this coming year, it is. I understand that there is a right-of-way cleared to support small-volume harvesting operations that will start as early as October 1 of this year.

**Mr. Kent:** Minus 20 degrees and a heavy snow cover doesn't really tell the story of any wildland fire risk to us.

While I appreciate that the Liberals claim to be taking this seriously, the facts on the ground tell a different story. Their failures of last year led to increased cost for Yukoners, and commercial firewood cutters are telling us that they can't get access to enough wood to meet the demand in Yukon and that, yet again, we are going to be relying on wood imported from BC. This makes no sense environmentally or economically, and it will inevitably mean more unsustainable prices for Yukoners who rely on wood heat. This is the direct result of the inability of the Liberal government to provide an adequate supply of good-quality firewood to commercial cutters.

So, can the minister assure Yukoners that the actions he will take between now and next winter will result in real change, or will the Liberals dither again while Yukoners face another winter with unsustainably high firewood prices?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** First of all, what I will say is that we've always had wood coming from British Columbia and we will continue. Some of it — I agree — if it's coming from far afield, we don't want that, but the wood that's coming from just on the other side of the BC border along the Stewart-Cassiar Highway — that has always been there; that's fine.

I have had conversations, for example, with the Teslin Tlingit Council. They might wish to harvest on the BC side and they have asked me to work with our counterparts in the BC government. That has always been here in the Yukon.

With respect to —

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

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I think that is grateful encouragement.

What I will say is that we will continue to work to make sure that there is a wood supply. I am told that, across all jurisdictions, we have areas for harvest and we will look to do that.

Finally, can we please talk to our fire folks about the reasons for the periods of time when we say "No harvesting"? I think that is better than listening to members of the Yukon Party or even us as a government. We should take the advice of our experts.

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

**Ms. Clarke:** Salamat, Mr. Speaker. The housing affordability crisis is crushing the dreams of many Yukoners. People cannot afford a home. People cannot afford rent. Unfortunately, last week's federal budget left the Yukon behind. While Nunavut and the NWT were both given \$60 million each to help address the housing crisis, the Yukon was only given half of that.

Will the government lobby Ottawa to have us treated equally to help address this affordability crisis?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I want to commend our folks at the Yukon Housing Corporation for the work they have been doing. I think that, as we know — and we will have a longer conversation during Committee of the Whole debate on our budget about the amount of investment that we are putting into affordable housing.

I like to hear the Yukon Party now supporting affordable housing. We know that there were lots of opportunities before — when there was federal funding in place and those projects were cancelled, so that federal money wasn't used. I also am aware that the member opposite who is asking me the question wasn't part of those discussions, but that is what had happened previous to this government.

Again, we have had a great relationship with the federal government when it has come to our northern carve-out. I had gone through the budget. Yes, I see the numbers for this year, but I also think that there is more to that story when it comes to self-governing First Nations and what has been allotted, which makes up a large portion as well of our population and opportunities.

I think that it is best at this time for us to get into Committee of the Whole. I look forward to a vigorous debate and a large discussion on that.

I also have reached out to my counterpart, Minister Hussen — or I had asked my department to draft. We will be looking to meet with him and ensuring that we have good flexibility in the money we have and that we continue to have the good relationship we've had over the last number of years.

**Ms. Clarke:** It is clear that the Yukon is an afterthought to Ottawa. In the middle of a housing affordability crisis, they are providing our territory only half the amount that the other two territories are receiving.

Will the government stop making excuses for Ottawa and fight to get us the same amount of housing money as the other territories?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Mr. Speaker, what the members opposite are not telling you is there is dedicated funding to three territories. That's \$60 million to Nunavut, \$60 million to Northwest Territories, and \$62.2 million to Yukon. Now, out of that, what they're also not telling is that \$32.2 million did not go to the other two territories for hydro expansion. That's what we put our money for; that's the money that we got from the federal government.

So, the members opposite can make it seem like the federal government is somehow turning a blind eye to housing, but on the contrary, actually, another half-billion dollars over the next five years is going to self-governing and treaty First Nations for housing as well. That is a massive influx of money to First Nations who are self-governing. We have 11 self-governing First Nations here in Yukon. The challenge that we're going to have is to be able to work with the First Nation governments to make sure that we're planning properly and coordinating a bumper crop of money when it comes to housing from the federal government.

The members opposite can spin it any way they want, but the reality is we are aflush with federal support that we will spend.

Again, when the members opposite got federal money for affordable housing, they sat on it for years. We will not do that. We will make sure that we work with the First Nations. I will say as well, the Yukon Days and the Yukon Forum — these are the conversations that really helped the federal government decide where they're going to focus their attention when it comes to housing.

**Ms. Clarke:** Does the Premier think it is fair that the Yukon only got half the amount of housing money as the other two territories?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite should listen to the answers. I just responded to that question.

### Question re: Midwifery in Yukon

**Ms. White:** Tomorrow will mark the one-year anniversary of the midwifery regulation coming into effect. Unfortunately, this means it has been one year since any midwife was able to practise in the territory, one year since women and birthing folks have been deprived of the ability to choose how they want to give birth, and one year since some families have had unassisted births at home — and we know there have been some close calls.

To be clear, there is nothing wrong with having your baby at the hospital, but that's not everybody's choice, and people should have just that — a choice.

The minister has said over and over — and I quote: “Our government is committed to providing regulated and funded midwifery services as a birthing option for Yukoners...”

If the government is so committed, why has it been a year since midwives were last able to practise in the territory?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I appreciate the question and the opportunity to respond to it.

I think what is important for Yukoners to know — and many do, understanding the process — the Yukon midwives regulation provided a foundation which enabled us to engage with our health system and First Nation partners to build a safe and sustainable midwifery program. That program will be regulated, it will be fully funded, and it will be integrated into our health care system.

The passing of the regulations was not magic. It was one of the important milestones that we needed to pass in order to proceed with that process. Our implementation plan — which came after those regulations — and the model of care for regulated and fully funded midwifery services are based on the recommendations of local and national experts, significant research, and extensive public and stakeholder feedback gathered through the engagement process.

We have been very pleased to have been able to work with these professionals, to work with all the stakeholders, including the Yukon Hospital Corporation, to make sure that the program has been set up properly. The new program will provide Yukoners with additional choices, and I look forward to continuing my answer.

**Ms. White:** Again, it has been a year since anyone has been able to access midwifery services in the territory, and the minister doesn't seem to understand that it's her government's regulations that are also keeping midwives away from the Yukon. Right now, midwives have to be registered for at least one year in another Canadian jurisdiction to be able to practise in the Yukon, and the posted salary is still far below neighbouring jurisdictions. So, the government is expecting midwives to practise somewhere else for a year, come back to the Yukon, and accept a lower salary.

It shouldn't take a year to realize that this is an issue — enough delays. Because of this government, we have women birthing at home alone.

Not only is this failure of these regulations unacceptable, it's unacceptable that they were ever put in place with no real interim plan. This government is failing —

### Speaker's statement

**Speaker:** Order, please. No holding up a sign, please, visitors in the gallery. Thank you.

Leader of the Third Party, please continue.

**Ms. White:** This government is failing mothers and birthing folks. Will this government fix its mistake and set up an interim solution that isn't flying expectant people out of the territory?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** The regulation and design of a regulated free midwifery program for Yukon families is an important shift in the health care system here in the territory. It is also incredibly important that Yukoners can rely on the regulation and fully funded midwifery services that will be available and have been based on recommendations from federal and local experts — absolutely critical. The new program will provide Yukoners with additional choices that they have asked for and the same high standard of care and access to safe, integrated, and publicly funded midwifery care that can be found nationally.

We acknowledge that establishing our midwifery programming, including recruitment — which has been the most recent hurdle — has taken longer than foreseen due to several reasons, not the least of which is the world pandemic. We have completed significant program development and are pleased to share that we are close to being able to launch this program.

The program requires the employment of two registered midwives. We are actively recruiting and interviewing a panel of midwives for the second registered midwife position. The first person was hired in December 2021, and this individual is also serving as the program clinical manager at this time.

**Ms. White:** So, the minister can repeat all of the benefits over and over again of a fully funded midwifery program, but to date, not a single midwife has practised in the Yukon for over a year. Pregnancies don't just happen in Whitehorse, but for years now, Whitehorse is the only place to give birth. Communities have been waiting for years to have birthing options closer to home. We all recall the Yukon Party's failure



to provide just that with the opening of the Dawson City and Watson Lake community hospitals.

The Liberals have had years to fix it, but here we are: no midwives anywhere in the territory and no birth options in communities — no plan. How many years does the minister expect it will take before all expectant people have access to midwives in the Yukon?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Both registered midwives, who will be initial employees of this program, will have hospital privileges here in the territory, which is essential to ensure that our midwifery care is safe, it's sustainable, it's people-centred, and it's fully integrated into the broader health system. Making this kind of a shift has not been an easy task. No government prior to ours has even considered it in any real way, and we anticipate launching the full continuum of full-scope midwifery services, from prenatal to postpartum care, in 2022. We look forward to offering accessible, safe, and regulated midwifery services.

I can indicate that one of the issues we have had with recruitment has been the salary available to registered midwives. The Department of Health and Social Services requested and obtained a waiver to offer a higher salary. I can indicate that, unfortunately, the Yukon Employees' Union objected to that rider, and conversations have to continue with them.

We are continuing our recruitment process. We, of course, are looking forward to launching this program and to having properly paid midwives here in the territory.

#### **Question re: Support for seniors**

**Ms. McLeod:** The inflation crisis gripping the Yukon right now is hard on all Yukoners, but seniors on fixed incomes are finding inflation especially difficult to deal with. The Premier says that he and his colleagues have been concerned about this since last August. It is clear that the Liberals have ignored this inflation crisis, and we see little to no relief in this budget for seniors in our territory.

Can the Premier please point to any specific items in this budget that are designed to help Yukon seniors living on a fixed income?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Everything that we do in budgeting is to make life affordable for Yukoners, whether that is our seniors or our youngest Yukoners; that is the goal of this government. We recognize that COVID has brought supply chain management issues. I think that's funny to the Member for Lake Laberge for some reason. It is not funny to us, Mr. Speaker. This is extremely important; it is not a joking matter. Everything that we do as far as budgets go is to make sure that we use the taxpayers' money wisely, and to do so, we have done a lot for every jurisdiction, making sure that all communities matter and all of our age groups matter as well.

I don't have enough time in Question Period to go through all of the different initiatives, but we have, in Committee of the Whole, talked with every department about what we do to make lives more affordable. It is really great to hear that the members opposite are now urging us to do more for seniors in our rural communities, because we know that, when they were in

government, that was not necessarily their MO. They wanted to have all of our seniors come into Whitehorse to a facility if they needed extended care. We have changed things around. We can now have acute care turned into collaborative care — a massive, massive injection of cash to do so — to make sure that our elders are supported where they live, which is the most important thing that we can do: Keep our elders in the community as long as possible.

**Ms. McLeod:** I only asked for one thing, so if the Premier would like to provide a list, then great.

We have suggested a number of actions to the Liberal government and unfortunately they have dismissed them all. We will continue to offer ideas to this Liberal government to help Yukoners through these difficult times.

The pioneer utility grant, PUG, is designed to help Yukon seniors and elders with the cost of heating their homes for the winter. With fuel wood, propane, electricity, and home heating fuel all skyrocketing in price under this Liberal government, here is another question: Will the Liberals double the amount of the pioneer utility grant to help seniors and elders get through this difficult time?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** We see it all the time with a political party that has been proven unreliable — talking about some of the old initiatives that the Yukon Party may have done and making it seem like no alternative has been put into place. That is just simply not the case. What we just did as well as far as inflation goes is reduce the cost of home heating. That is going to help our seniors for sure. We have made historic investments in all age groups around the Yukon. We have cut the small business tax rate for our businesses. We have added money for early childhood development. We have raised the minimum wage. We have doubled the medical travel.

As members opposite snicker as we talk about all the things that we have added money to — and they mention one thing that they used to do. Again, we are answering the question, but the members opposite —

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

#### **Speaker's statement**

**Speaker:** Order, please. The member has the floor. I am having a hard time hearing him.

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** You can tell when you hit a nerve, Mr. Speaker.

We are also still paying the price for the Yukon Party's inaction on housing. We just talked about that today, which affects our seniors as well.

The good news for Yukoners is that we are making historic investments in housing. Together with our partners, we have supported hundreds of new homes, and we will continue to do that in all of our communities. We have massively increased lot development. We have identified land for Yukon's community development trust. We are bringing people together around housing. We are bringing people together in collaborative care and also in wellness.

When we move the pages forward on *Putting People First* — again, investing in our seniors.

**Ms. McLeod:** I guess that seniors will have to take that as a no.

Many seniors still own and live in their own homes. One of the programs that helps to make this affordable is the homeowners grant. The homeowners grant reduces the amount of property tax that you pay for your principal residence. Eligible individuals 65-plus can receive up to 75 percent of the property taxes owing on their residence to a maximum of \$500.

Will the Liberals consider increasing this amount to a maximum of \$1,000 for eligible seniors until the inflation crisis is over?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** We're not going to necessarily listen to the members opposite only when it comes to what we're going to do for our communities. We're going to listen to municipalities. We're going to listen to First Nation governments. We're going to continue to go out with our liaisons into the communities and find out, from our communities, important goals. That's what we've been doing for five years. Every single page of our budget reflects the fact that we're trying our best to make lives more affordable for Yukoners. If you take a look at comparisons to other jurisdictions, we are in a good place right now. We are paying attention to our seniors. We're paying attention to housing. We're changing the narrative when it comes to how we do health and social services.

Again, when the Yukon Party was in power, they built hospitals in my community and in the Member for Watson Lake's community without a plan. They ran an acute care model at that time. We have revolutionized how we do health care and we're going to continue to do so, which is putting money into our most marginalized individuals, all the way through to our most healthy individuals, in every single community. We're going to continue to draw down on mental health supports in our communities where the members opposite have failed. We're going to continue to expand on lot development and social housing where the members opposite failed. We're going to continue to make sure that every single page and every dollar that we spend is going to help make lives more affordable for Yukoners.

#### **Question re: First Nation School Board**

**Ms. Van Bibber:** With school council elections coming soon, there have been a lot of questions about the schools moving to the new First Nation School Board. For schools that voted to move away from the school council model and toward the First Nation School Board, it is still unclear what that transition will look like. We have heard from some of these school councils that there has not been much support from the Department of Education.

What steps has the minister taken to ensure that the Department of Education has supports in place to assist with this transition to fall under the new First Nation School Board and to help those school councils wind down their operations?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I'm very happy to stand and talk about the new First Nation School Board. Together with our partners, we are truly writing a new chapter in education for the Yukon and building a brighter future for the territory.

I'm very proud of the work that we have done with our partners to establish the first Yukon First Nation School Board. We certainly are working with the Chiefs Committee on Education and the new interim governance body to work through all of the work that needs to be done to have the First Nation School Board come into effect at the beginning of the next school year.

We have a number of very capable folks who are working on this alongside our department and are working with our school communities to answer the questions that are on the floor today. I am excited to continue the work that is underway. We have a new interim executive director for the First Nation School Board, a member of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation.

I am happy to continue building on the answers as we go forward.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** The next big step for the creation of the First Nation School Board is the negotiations between the interim board and the Department of Education around the preliminary funding formula for the new board and each school. These negotiations will affect the funding available for all Yukon schools.

Can the minister tell us: Have these negotiations started?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I am happy to continue talking about the First Nation School Board and where we are at. I mentioned a few moments ago that we have the Interim Governance Committee in place to move forward with governance and funding arrangements and other matters that will have to be worked on as we move closer to the next school year. The committee includes a number of very capable folks: Dr. Alyce Johnson, Erin Pauls, Jocelyn Joe-Strack, Mark Wedge, and Melanie Bennett. This is our interim governance body that is working on all of the matters that will bring us to seeing our first group of schools go under the First Nation School Board.

We look forward also to having official elections for the trustees in November 2022 and to continue working on ensuring that we have a successful transition.

Again, these are historic moves. I am so excited about the new chapter that we are writing in education in the Yukon, and I am happy to continue talking about this today.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** We have been told that the final financial arrangements with the Department of Education will be negotiated in time for the beginning of the next school year. This means that these fairly major negotiations will become effective at Yukon schools and they need to be completed in the next three to four months.

Can the minister confirm that they will indeed be completed by August, and since these negotiations will affect the funding available for all Yukon schools — even the ones that remain under the Department of Education — will the minister commit to involving or providing information to existing school councils about the financial negotiations?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I am excited about the work that's underway. I feel very confident in the Interim Governance Committee alongside very, very capable folks within our Department of Education who have supported the work to

happen. It truly is a new era that is emerging in education in the Yukon and it is work that I'm extremely proud of. I note that the schools that have chosen to go under the First Nation School Board are the St. Elias Community School, Johnson Elementary School, Watson Lake Secondary School, Ross River School, the school in Old Crow, Grey Mountain Primary School, Takhini Elementary School, and the school in Beaver Creek. Those are the schools that are transitioning to the First Nation School Board. Of course, there's a tremendous amount of work that is underway. That includes establishing a funding arrangement. We're very, very focused on ensuring that all of the work is done in a timely manner to be ready to transition these schools to the First Nation School Board. I'm looking forward to that being a successful endeavour.

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

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

#### Motion No. 302

**Clerk:** Motion No. 302, standing in the name of the Hon. John Streicker.

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

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

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

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I'll just speak very briefly to this motion. I want to thank MLA Blake for her contribution to the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges. It has been for sometime now that the Member — sorry, pardon me, Mr. Speaker — the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin — her involvement on the committee. I would like to thank her for that and just acknowledge that the Member for Whitehorse Centre has been sitting in as an alternate, and this would be to just formalize the membership of the committee.

*Motion No. 302 agreed to*

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

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

*Motion agreed to*

*Speaker leaves the Chair*

### COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, 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 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Is there any general debate?

#### **Department of Economic Development**

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** With me today are the officials from Economic Development: Deputy Minister Justin Ferbey, who I would like to thank for coming in to support me; and Beth Fricke, who is our director of Finance.

Before I get into some prepared words, I would just say that these are two individuals who, along with the team of folks numbering about 64 now in our department, are owed a big thank you from Yukoners for the good work they do. We are in a very favourable position after the last two years, and they were two very difficult years.

The conversations that took place over the last two years were difficult conversations with many folks. People were in very difficult times in the private sector, and it was a mix of real action as well as real strategy and implementation to make sure that we could meet their needs.

Deputy Chair, I am pleased to rise today and table the Department of Economic Development's operation and maintenance and capital budgets for the 2022-23 fiscal year. At the Department of Economic Development, we work to create opportunities for Yukoners to have meaningful employment, and we offer resources for new and existing Yukon businesses to thrive and expand.

Statistics Canada's GDP numbers show the Yukon's economy grew at a blistering 5.2 percent in 2020, while Canada's GDP shrank by 5.2 percent over that year. The Yukon's economic growth rate is, again, by far the fastest in the country. Despite the onset of COVID-19, the Yukon's population has continued to grow, reaching a new high of 43,568 individuals at the end of September 2021. Average weekly earnings are up and retail sales are still strong and rising.

There are now three operating mines in the Yukon. Unemployment is low and the technology and innovation sector continues to grow. The department remains focused on growing

and diversifying the Yukon economy, while keeping our methods sustainable and environmentally responsible.

We provide economic opportunity across the territory by working with businesses, communities, and First Nation governments to support their identified needs. Recent projects approved for funding include the Watson Lake ski club for \$143,000, and that was to build a train park and a new ski jump at the ski hill — Mt. Maichen Ski Hill. Kryotek Arctic Innovation was provided \$100,000 to field test and optimize a software system that senses approaching wildfire. Evidence of this field testing will allow them to move the product to the next stage of development. Carmacks Development Corporation received \$25,875 to complete an assessment of several owned infrastructure and assets to prepare for upcoming economic opportunities. Cody's Lil' Critters daycare received \$10,187, and that was to make various improvements to their leased building to become operational for a safe daycare centre. Once operational, the daycare will provide opportunity for parents to return to work who did not have proper daycare previously.

Again, in our mandate, we outlined the series of goals and accomplishments vital to the Department of Economic Development, including developing an innovation strategy to create opportunities for local entrepreneurs, creating a mineral exploration fund, and working with the non-profit sector to recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

To meet these expectations, in our operation and maintenance budget for the 2022-23 fiscal year is \$26,721,000 with a capital budget of \$1,106,000. Just over \$4 million has been allotted to Corporate Services to keep the department's programs running successfully. This includes the deputy minister's office, Finance and Information Management branch, Human Resources branch, and Policy Planning and Communications branch.

The deputy minister's office is responsible for ensuring that the departmental goals and objectives are met, while contributing to the government's overall goals and objectives. A budget of \$669,000 is required for this work. With a budget of \$1,063,000, Finance and Information Management provides financial oversight, budgeting, day-to-day financial transaction processing services, and other administrative support services. The Human Resources unit has a budget of \$294,000 and provides human resource services to the areas of staffing, job design, classification, labour relations, organizational development, human resources planning, and other human resource management services to the department.

The Policy Planning and Communications branch provides a full range of policy development, communications, and public relations functions as well as support for legislation, regulations, policy analysis, strategic planning, and legislative sessions. Policy Planning and Communications will benefit from \$1,977,000 to support this work, among other activities, this fiscal year. The branch represents the Yukon in a number of trade negotiations and discussions with other jurisdictions. Among these is the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement* negotiated by all 13 provinces and territories and the federal government to address barriers to trade, investment, and labour mobility in our country.

As chair of the Committee on Internal Trade for 2022, the Yukon is helping to guide to conclusion negotiations for the inclusion into the CFTA of provisions related to the trade in cannabis and financial services.

We are also chairing the Regulatory Reconciliation and Cooperation Table, a table that is tasked with identifying regulatory barriers to trade within Canada and working collaboratively among jurisdictions to reconcile those differences to the benefit of goods and service providers, investors, and consumers across Canada.

Again, through our work in these negotiations and at these tables, we are reducing and eliminating — to the extent possible — barriers to the free movement of persons, goods, services, and investments within Canada to enhance trade, investment, and labour mobility opportunities for Yukoners and Yukon businesses. By participating in these conversations, we are advocating for open and efficient access for Yukoners and Yukon businesses to markets across Canada, making it easier for them to grow and expand.

The branch, along with the Business and Industry Development branch, is also engaged in ongoing discussions to determine the future of the Skagway ore terminal. We continue to work with industry here in the Yukon and the municipality of Skagway to identify both short-term and long-term options for tidewater access, recognizing that Skagway is the port of preference.

The Department of Economic Development, again, supports the growth of the private sector through the Business and Industry Development branch. The department is making \$2,088,000 available to the Business and Industry Development branch this fiscal year. This includes \$320,000 committed to transfer payments that support various chambers of commerce throughout the Yukon. The branch promotes and facilitates the development of Yukon's strategic and emerging industry sectors through projects that benefit the Yukon's economy. The branch also administers the business incentive program and assesses projects for eligibility under the economic development fund. The business incentive program provides rebates on eligible Government of Yukon contracts promoting Yukon hires and Yukon-made goods and services.

The Business and Industry Development branch also builds connections with Yukon businesses to increase exports, support trade agreements, and attract investments and talent to the territory. The focus for attracting investment to the Yukon is the mining sector. In addition to the chambers of commerce, the branch also oversees transfer payments, including the Yukon Mining Alliance, to support the industry and attract investment. We also support the Yukon Chamber of Mines for the Yukon Geoscience Forum, Yukon Mining and Geology Week, and Roundup.

Mining activities have continued throughout the pandemic and have helped to ensure that Yukon's GDP continued to grow when many areas around the world were seeing a decrease. We promote the Yukon as a world-class mining jurisdiction, adhering to strong environmental, social, and corporate governance practices. These funds will allow the Business and Industry Development branch to continue this important work.

I will just now quickly move to immigration. Our budget allocation of \$757,000 will allow the immigration unit to continue its work. This year is shaping up to be yet another significant one for immigration to the Yukon and will help to bolster our growing economy while taking pressure off businesses that are struggling to find staff. The immigration unit administers the Yukon nominee program and the business nominee program. The Yukon nominee program assists employers in finding employees through both the skilled workers and critical impact workers streams when local workers are not available.

Once a nomination has been approved, nominees can apply for permanent resident status. The Yukon nominee program is in partnership between the Government of Yukon and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, also known as “IRCC”. This is especially important because of the low unemployment numbers and lack of available staff for many businesses throughout the territory.

In 2021, the Yukon nominee program utilized its entire annual allocation of 300 spaces for the first time since the inception of the program. In 2021-22, the immigration unit saw a 200-percent increase in the number of applications to the program. Because of this high demand, we have secured an additional 40 spaces for 2022. We have also announced a temporary suspension of the advertising requirements for businesses seeking foreign nominees through the program. This change will be in place until June 30, 2022 to help support Yukon businesses in urgent need of workers.

The business nominee program works with potential international entrepreneurs to invest and set up a business in the Yukon where owners actively participate in the running of the business. This strategic use of immigration programming can help us to meet the Yukon’s future economic and community development needs.

In our mandate, we committed to developing an immigration strategy that will help to guide how we address labour shortages throughout the territory. The immigration unit is working with our Policy Planning and Communications branch in the development of the renewed immigration strategy. The Department of Economic Development is in the process of developing this strategy to ensure that our immigration programs are modernized and responsive to the needs of Yukon businesses seeking employees and foreign nationals moving here for work.

Our immigration unit is also an effective resource when helping on world issues, with the situation again in Ukraine being a case in point — or the situation in Afghanistan that we talked about previously. Canada has announced support in response to the evolving situation in Ukraine, including implementing measures to quickly issue travel documents to help Canadian citizens, Canadian permanent residents and their immediate family members in Ukraine to get to Canada as quickly as possible, should they wish to do so. The Department of Economic Development fully supports these efforts and recently launched a Ukraine family support desk and is ready to help Ukrainians who want to come to the Yukon.

The Department of Economic Development also supports market-driven media production in the Yukon. Media development is a valued contributor to our economy and plays a significant role in showcasing local talent on the larger stage. This fiscal year, Economic Development has identified just under \$2 million for the media development fund. Media development provides funding to help Yukon content creators make their sound and media productions a reality. Additionally, these media productions provide employment opportunities to locals and showcase the Yukon to other parts of the world.

We recently announced changes to how we will fund media projects. Four new media funding programs, including administrative business guidelines, were announced on January 10, 2022 to support the production of professional film, television, and digital media projects.

The key changes, which are consistent with national funding agencies, were requested and supported by industry. So, we have simplified the administrative processes for the media programs and reduced red tape. The budget to support these new programs is \$1.160 million, so \$1,160,000, which is an increase of \$500,000 from the previous year. We also are currently working to relaunch our sound funding programs in a similar way to meet the evolving needs of the industry.

Moving on just quickly to Regional Economic Development, for the next fiscal year, we’re looking to allocate \$4,372,000. Of that total, just under \$3 million — \$2,950,000 — will be directed toward the community development fund. The community development fund assists in projects that provide long-term economic and social benefits to Yukon communities. Again, I would just touch on the ski club in Watson Lake. The investment there of \$143,000 is just an example of some of the things we do. There is \$200,000 to Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in for the construction of a playground and community greenspace; another \$36,975 to the Ross River Sportsman’s Association for improvements to their gun range; and almost \$75,000 to Little Salmon Carmacks to complete an architectural concept design, climate resilience assessment, and greenhouse gas mitigation and assessment for a new cultural centre — so, just a bit of a snapshot of what the folks there do or support.

Through these and other projects funded through the CDF, we are supporting events and initiatives that provide long-term sustainable economic and social benefits to communities across the Yukon.

The Technology and Innovation unit of Economic Development plays a key enabler role in promoting an entrepreneurial culture that attracts and supports start-ups. The department has committed just over \$2 million to technology and innovation programs for 2022-23. The branch has continued to support the knowledge sector through partnership with the innovation ecosystem to deliver on programs, such as YuKonstruct’s 12-week training program, called Startup Bootcamp; Tech Yukon’s launch of the North of AI artificial intelligence program; investment readiness workshops for entrepreneurs and angel investors through a partnership between Yukon University Innovation & Entrepreneurship and Vancouver Spring Activator; Yukon University Innovation &

Entrepreneurship's innovation grant; and Yukon Innovation Week and our Hall of Innovators; as well as co-sponsoring of the Yukon research internship program and continued support for Yukon University's IncubateNorth program to provide space, tools, and services to help market-ready start-ups grow faster.

The Technology and Innovation unit also funds the Yukon Innovation prize through Innovation & Entrepreneurship at Yukon University. Again, according to the 2020 branch program review, the Yukon's technology industry has been growing, and the technology industry represents approximately 3.7 percent of the Yukon's GDP. As compared to other sectors, it's actually quite impressive just where we're going with technology as compared to complete other sectors that have been foundational for us previously.

Yukon entrepreneurs are being noticed outside the territory as well. DISCOVELO CEO Scott Keesey was recently named to the Future of Good 2022 list of 21 New Founders to Watch. That's a fantastic company and set of values that they work with.

The Government of Yukon will remain focused on developing our local entrepreneurs and their ideas and keeping Yukon modern and relevant in a constantly evolving society that emphasizes innovation more than ever.

The final branch I will discuss is the newly added Labour Market unit. Again, we're allocating \$6,432,000 to provide more effective support for employers. Education's Post Secondary and Labour Market unit has been separated into a labour market development component and training component. The labour market component has been moved to the Department of Economic Development and will be known as "Labour Market Development." This will help the unit to leverage Economic Development's existing relationships with employers and allows our government to provide better access to services by centrally locating employer supports.

This move is an important part of how our government is working to tackle the labour shortage. The number of job vacancies in the Yukon was about 1,300 in the third quarter of 2021, and the job vacancy rate was at about 6.6 percent. Labour shortage is being experienced throughout all of Canada, and the national job vacancy rate in late 2021 was the highest that has ever been seen across the country. It is clear that the work of the Labour Market development unit is greatly needed to address this labour shortage, and the unit will continue to administer its existing funding programs, which include Building UP, which provides funding support for organizations that strengthen the labour market, and Staffing UP, which provides funding support for employers seeking assistance to find, hire, and keep workers.

Deputy Chair, the programming managed and delivered by the Department of Economic Development provides clear and tangible benefits to Yukon and its industries. In February 2020, there were 1,310 active businesses in the Yukon. While this number did decrease following the months when the initial impacts of COVID-19 were felt, the department took swift action to mitigate these losses. By December 2020, the number

of active businesses reached 1,312, recovering to pre-pandemic levels.

I will leave it there and open it up to questions from the opposition.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** We on this side of the House would like to welcome the officials as well this afternoon. Thank you to the minister for a good briefing on all the programs. We also agree that the last two years have been very tough around the world as we tried to deal with COVID, so I will go right into the regional relief loan program.

You can apply for a loan of up to \$100,000 with zero percent interest. This came into effect on February 24, 2021, with an intake for the month of March that was eventually extended to the end of June of that year. If you repaid the loan on time, 75 percent of it was repayable and 25 percent was forgiven, but if you don't hit that repayment deadline of December 31, 2022, which is coming up, you will owe the full amount plus interest.

As CEMA has just lifted and life is semi-normal, has the minister considered extending the payback time for this loan beyond December 31, 2022, without penalty, and perhaps allow businesses to adjust a little bit?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I would like to thank the member opposite for the question. The total funding that we received for this program — and it was money that flowed from the federal government through CanNor — was \$3.9 million. As of September 29, 2021, we had 62 applicants who were approved for \$3,450,000. I think what I can do on this one is probably come back, because we administer this through a third party. What I would have to do is just take a look. First, to answer the question, we have not contemplated any extensions or changes to the scope of the program to date, but what I will endeavour to do is get a briefing from the department on an update of where the third party is, because I think that we will probably reach out to them, and I think we may have some pertinent information for you.

I have a list here. So, we have the repayment to date — just to put on the record — is \$251,307.84. That is the repayment to date on the loans that have been provided. The total amount forgiven — and that is three separate tranches or three separate companies — comes to a total of \$35,000. So, the remaining balance is \$3,159,894.16.

We will be in a position, once we have a chance to get a report from our third party — which is dāna Näye Ventures — we will have a better understanding of what they are hearing from their clients, and I am certainly comfortable to come back to the House and give you an update on that.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Along with that, as this program is stated as "regional", can the minister give us a breakdown by region and by sector as to the allocations of the funds that are the \$3.9 million? And if you would like to return that, that is fine as well.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** You know what? Because we have a fantastic detail team — I would love to tell you that I stayed up last night preparing this spreadsheet for the member opposite, but our director of Finance, who always looks through all of these different lenses and perspectives — I am prepared.

We will just quickly go through so that we have it on the record for today — the total amount. Under accommodation and food services, we have \$960,000 that was allotted through the program; administrative and support and waste management and remediation — \$55,000 in loans; agricultural, forestry, fishing, and hunting category — and to Hansard, I will bring this to you afterward today for cross-reference — we have, in the third category, \$15,150. We have: under arts and entertainment and recreation, \$140,000; under construction, \$377,000; under information and cultural industries, \$100,000; under manufacturing, \$180,000; under mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction, \$160,000; other services category, which is sort of a broad mix, \$91,335; under professional, scientific, and technical services, \$353,500; under real estate, rental, and leasing, \$240,000; under retail trade, \$274,217; under transportation and warehousing, \$460,000; and wholesale trade, \$40,000. Again, going back to our list, the total in that allocation comes to \$3,446,202.

I will just quickly go through by region or community. The communities that access this are: Carcross with \$40,000; Carmacks with \$100,000; Dawson City with \$355,000; Haines Junction with \$320,000; Keno City with \$30,000; Old Crow with \$40,000; Ross River with \$80,000; Teslin with \$100,000; Watson Lake with \$70,000; and Whitehorse with \$2,311,202 — for that same total of \$3,446,202. The communities that I have omitted in my response are areas where there were no applicants for the loan program.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** The Yukon business relief program offers a non-repayable grant. Could the minister give us a little bit of information on how this program works and if the program was fully subscribed?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** The Yukon emergency relief program has supported Yukon businesses and non-governmental organizations directly affected by restrictions under the *Civil Emergency Measures Act*, CEMA. The program focused on funding eligible fixed costs for businesses, non-recoverable financial commitments, and incremental expenses incurred by non-governmental organizations for things such as events that were cancelled or significantly altered due to our COVID orders that were in place.

In March 31, 2022, there were 27 businesses and five NGOs that had active emergency relief program files for approximately \$99,245. That has been approved for support again to date.

Additionally, the program had accepted applications up to March 31 and then again two weeks after the state of emergency was lifted. Applications and all supporting documents were to be submitted by April 15. The COVID-19 pandemic has, of course, affected our economy, so we have provided the necessary supports to Yukon businesses and non-governmental organizations to cope with impacts of restrictions that were put in place for the safety of all Yukoners. The relief program targeted those businesses and organizations directly impacted by CEMA orders, which were lifted on March 18.

I think that gives just a bit of background on the thoughts and work.

As well, we have our Yukon business relief program — I have a couple of other notes here — and it ran from the onset of the pandemic — our other program — through to September 2021. This program helped Yukon businesses cover their eligible fixed costs. That was really the first work that we did. That program ended up providing \$12,800,000 to over 500 businesses. The accommodation and food sector services received 43.6 percent of that total funding. Funding went to businesses in every community.

We can come back with a breakdown of all of our programs. Just for the record, we had the Yukon business relief program and the emergency relief program — the two that I just spoke about — and, of course, we have the Yukon Essential Workers Income Support program. We also had our paid sick leave rebate, which we have continued, and a regional relief and recovery fund, which we touched on first. Within that, we have a breakdown of every sector. We also have it broken down into broad community allocation. Again, for that first fund, the Yukon business relief program, we did see uptake in absolutely every community in the Yukon.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** You mentioned the Yukon Essential Workers Income Support program, which topped up wages with \$4 per hour up to a maximum of \$20 per hour for 16 weeks. It could be extended once, up to 32 weeks. Was this program successful and did it have a good uptake? Was there any kickback from the employers? I understand that it is employer-accessed for the employee, so were there issues with that part of the program?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** The Yukon Essential Workers Income Support program was over — almost \$5,500,000 was allocated across pretty much every sector. When I look at it, there might be one or two sectors — one was mining and quarrying, and that is because we were in a situation where the wages within that sector are quite high, and there were some educational services, but, really, it was taken up across a number of different sectors and through many communities.

Again, just for the record, it provided a wage top-up, up to \$4 per hour, to essential workers until February 2021, and we paid out \$5.4 million — for the record — of which the federal government provided \$4.3 million and we provided the rest. That was to more than 2,000 workers employed by 160 businesses.

If we look back on it, our perspective would be that it was a successful program. I think that sort of depth and scope of reach is significant when you take into consideration — in my opening statements, I talked about the 1,300 businesses that we saw — and we saw that pre-pandemic level of businesses surpassed over the last couple of years — more businesses than we had before. Again, understanding that we had 160 businesses that were supported by this, I would say that we feel good about it. We think it was something that worked.

Probably, some would say that it could have even carried on and extended longer. Of course, many front-line workers have gone through lots of challenges, and it was really about respecting them and the risks that they took. In the early stages when we were all in a position — we were very fearful about what was happening, I think collectively. We were all trying to

stay safe and all of us here — whether you were in Watson Lake, Old Crow, or here — you were walking into grocery stores and the people who were on those front lines, as an example, were there every day and continue to look after us and provide us our essential goods. I think that it was a strong program.

There were very few situations of pushback. The members of the opposition — I think we worked very collaboratively, where some workers had reached out to their MLAs and identified the fact that there was hesitancy from their employer to take a program on. I think, in a lot of cases, that was maybe due to a lack of understanding about how the program worked or just the lack of interest for whatever reason. In those cases, we had folks reach out to just say, “This is a program that exists. We think this is something that could work. We know that you have employers who would like to see this.” Actually, we had some pretty good debate — the Leader of the Third Party and I — about how this should run and who should drive the opportunity. In the end, I don’t think that we came to reconciliation on our philosophy about it, but we did work together. I did that with other MLAs to make sure that those folks who were not getting the initial supports they should have gotten inevitably did.

The Leader of the Third Party touched on the fact that, if it was driven by the employee, we wouldn’t have had those problems. Of course, my counter to that was from a standpoint of providing the money and the administrative work that we did. The number of touch points that the department had over the last two years was exceptional. I think we have had 5,000 different interactions with either an employer or an entity in all of these programs.

In the end, I hope that answers the question. I think that we got some of those hesitant employers on board. I hope that, once they were on board, they felt they were doing something that was good for their employees. I think their employees appreciated it.

The other question that was asked — if I remember correctly, just for the record — we looked at: What was the percentage of individuals who could have received — if you look at that \$4, how many maxed out the top-up? I think we went through that as well, and we put that on the record during the supplementary debate. In the end, the total number of employees was 2,845, and about 59 percent used that total top-up. That amounted to 1,678 folks.

As you go through it, you could see 20 percent was sort of in the \$3 to \$4 range, just over 11 percent in the \$2 to \$3 range, and then 7.4 percent in the \$1 to \$2 range. Less than \$1 was only two percent. It kind of gives you a sense of the folks we were supporting. There have been changes made to the things like minimum wage and other things since then and during that time period. Again, we feel that it was a strong and effective program.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** The economic development fund supports projects and initiatives that provide long-term sustainable economic benefits to Yukoners and to the communities. There has been a report of a number of businesses that are frustrated with the new economic development fund

and the reported frustration range from a belief that the government is directly funding businesses to compete with existing businesses to a perception that there is an unclear or arbitrary approval process.

Can the minister outline if he has heard concerns from Yukoners or the Yukon business community, and what adjustments may have been considered to the new fund to refine the scope based on any feedback that he may have heard?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** For the folks who are following this debate today, I have just a little more information. The economic development fund provides funding for the broadest possible range of initiatives while reducing the administrative burden on applicants.

With the introduction of this new fund on April 1, 2021, the range of eligible activities was expanded to include — and, as the member opposite sort of touched on, I’ll expand on this — capital expenditures and implementation activities. The economic development fund now includes capital costs up to 50 percent of that cost in response to private sector feedback obtained during the consultation process. The economic development fund is a cost-shared fund, and applicants must demonstrate the economic impact of the EDF’s contribution.

The Department of Economic Development is pleased to consider all applications under the fund and we encourage all interested businesses to apply. All economic development fund applications are reviewed and assessed to ensure that they meet fund eligibility and evaluation criteria.

In that earlier statement opening up, I touched on which team takes care of that for us. The program enables businesses to make improvements through a capital purchase in order to enhance competitiveness. We will also consider supporting capital investments where the applicant can show that the project has real potential for positive long-term impact on the broader Yukon economy and not solely to an individual business. All eligible businesses are welcome to apply and are subject to eligibility screening and project evaluation.

When we put this together, we had a number of economic development funds. With our team in Economic Development — we touched earlier on what our policy team does. What you will see, if you are following this, is that we modernized essentially every fund in the entire department over the last number of years. I touched on the sound recording, which is coming to a conclusion, and then we have the work around our immigration strategy, which is very close to being completed. As well, there is our innovation strategy, so that is a tremendous amount of work. We could go back and talk about how long these programs were in existence. Even the community development fund was tweaked early on in the last mandate.

I want to state and make sure that folks are aware that we went out for consultation on our economic development fund. The changes that were made were directly in response to the advice from the private sector and business community. An example would be the Yukon Chamber of Commerce. We took that and we made the changes to the program.

As the member opposite said — I think that we are having a very friendly debate today. There are some businesses — that is correct. But really, I think that we’re talking about — I might



be wrong. I might not get every e-mail that comes into the department, but I definitely directly received an e-mail and a response, and there has been an exchange back and forth from one business. There might be two. In reading that comment about a capital expenditure — and it was one of our first big tranches that we rolled out. There was a feeling from that company that we were providing an unfair advantage to another company that worked in the same field as them. It was good advice from that individual. As soon as I received that complaint, I sat down with the deputy minister and talked about how the decisions are made and to make sure that we are making decisions for the greater good of the economy and not giving someone an unfair advantage. I requested that anything in the future of this magnitude — any decision of this magnitude of allocation of funds — would have to be seen by the deputy minister. I trust the deputy minister I get to work with. We've worked together closely for a long time, and I think that any deputy minister who is in that role should have the expertise to take a look at it.

I felt that there was a really strong argument made by that individual, and I felt that we wouldn't want to see a similar decision made in the future. The change was that, when you are in that range — it was \$100,000. I said that, if we're in that range, to please make sure that it goes to the deputy minister to sign off on it before the decision is made.

But the other thing that I want to just stress is that the Department of Economic Development, over the last couple of years, did a really significant job and was a leader in the country because — folks get uncomfortable probably hearing this in the public service — we took risk. We knew that we might get it wrong. We believed that we could get it right, and we did the best due diligence that we possibly could in a short period of time under immense pressure.

Those early days were Saturday mornings — I'll never forget — with half an hour allotted to the best and brightest business people in this territory calling to share with us how they were going to lose everything that they built over multiple generations. When you have that sort of arena to work in and that construct, you must trust the people around you. You must make strong decisions. You have to get the support of your colleagues. I had the support of all my colleagues when I went to the Management Board table — we had the support of the deputy ministers, the Department of Finance, and the Premier — and we trusted our people. They worked long hours and they put their heads down and did amazing work.

We lucked out in that, when we go back and reflect on the last two years and all of this work, I'm giving you examples of one or two things in 5,000 interactions that we might have — should have — done better on. But, overall, the department knocked it out of the park. In this case, I just want to touch on that.

We have tried something new. The private sector told us how to do it. We trusted the private sector in how we built it. We probably could have done better on at least one application out of all the applications that we've had. We made a change in our governance model — another piece of decision. We likely will get something wrong again on these funds, in the eyes of

those out there, and, if we do, we will respectfully listen to them. We will not be defensive, we will take advice, and we will make necessary changes where we have the opportunity to do that and will continue to be focused on serving the overall economy at large and the private sector in how we deliver our programs.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Thanks for that explanation. I was kind of surprised to hear that people below the deputy minister have an okay cap of over \$100,000 or close to — that is a good adjustment to make, if I do say, because it could lead your department into a lot of trouble. The perceptions are out there, so be aware.

I am going to move on to immigration and sponsorship of refugees. Can the minister tell us how many people came through the Yukon nominee program in 2021, and how does this compare with previous years?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** We touched a little bit earlier on this. In 2021, we used all of our allocations. We have a bilateral agreement with Canada under IRCC — Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada — and then, when we have an individual who comes through and who becomes an employee of a local business through the nominee program, that person — we have a trilateral agreement. Part of the trilateral agreement — I just want to touch on this, and the Leader of the Third Party and I usually discuss this topic — is really about ensuring that the individual is treated appropriately and that their rights are adhered to, and that is the trilateral. In the bilateral with Canada, we are allotted 300 individuals. We ran through the two streams that I talked about — the nominee program and the business nominee program. For this year, we have now — and we were pretty close, I think, the year before. I can go back and see. As the member opposite asked what it looked like, I think that it was 260, if I remember — in that range — in 2020. It might be higher — yes, 300 spaces.

In 2021, the Yukon nominee program utilized its entire annual base allocation of 230 nominations for the third consecutive year. We had our base of 230, and then on top of that, we used our other allocations. This year, as I stated at the start, we have an extra 22 allocations that we are going to use. We can bring back some numbers for the member.

Between, just alone, which is really important — sorry, in 2021, IRCC again, because we had used that base, and we got up to 300, because Yukon received 40 additional base spaces on top of that, so available for 2021, and then in January of this year — so this is important to share with you — of 2022, at the end of last fiscal, going into this year, to February, 58 new candidates have been approved — just in January and February. That is 47 critical impact workers, six skilled workers, and five express entry, which are high-skilled. That represents a 200-percent increase compared to 2019, so it gives you a bit of sense.

For our numbers, I will request that we do 2020, 2021, and 2022 broken down, and I will make sure that we provide that in a submission to you, and you can take a look at where our numbers are, when it comes to this, just so it's clear.

We have seen continued growth. What is important to say on this is that, it has always been — the two big countries of

origin are — it has always been the Philippines. I have discussed that in Question Period with the MLA for Porter Creek Centre. Then we have seen the country of origin switch in the last couple of years, and that has been — we've seen from India, and we have also seen students.

I think we are seeing that shift back, and that is because we are seeing federal programs now having more flexibility. We see a lot of — as India has been the country of origin, we're seeing those individuals take different programs, and they are going to urban centres across Canada. Now I think we are going to see a change where there are more folks from the Philippines.

What I will say is that I think all of us in this House have great respect for the amazing job the Filipino diaspora has done to enrich our community, but there's another reason that we're really trying to work as closely as we can with the Filipino community, and that is because there is — the Filipino community — that diaspora is so large and the community is so well-established that we are in a position now where, in many cases, the community wants to bring friends and family. Because they want to bring friends and family, they want those individuals — they want to give them a boost when they come, so they are open to having those individuals live with them in their homes. Under the current situation, because we are under housing pressure — no, I think we're in a less vigorous debate now than in Question Period — we know that this is a national issue, and every city in this country is under that same — under levels of pressure. The conversations that we're having, we're saying that, look, if we can make sure that friends and family first is where we go, they're going to have an easier ability to move into our community, they're going to have an easier time transitioning into the Yukon, and they're going to have a good, appropriate, and supportive environment. I think that's the other thing I would just share with the House, because that's our thinking at this time. We're going to try to make sure that we're very strategic with the community.

I made that commitment with the community, for the community — making sure that we take advice from the community. I just received — there are requests for more discussions around that.

With that being said, we'll come back. We'll give you those allotments. We have seen steady growth, and yes, we are at that point now where we're reaching full use of our allocation for our Yukon nominee program.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** I look forward to getting that report, because it sounds like the allocation amounts fluctuate. If we're subscribing so quickly in two months, it's going to be a run in the next few.

The minister just mentioned the huge influx from the Philippines. Of course, we're all aware of the Filipino community in Yukon. In 2019, the Government of Yukon and the Government of the Philippines had been collaborating on a memorandum of understanding to improve this system of recruitment and employment of Filipino workers. We know that a new agreement was just signed last month. So, can the minister please describe how this agreement will be implemented? Are we getting financial compensation from Canada directly for this new MOU that is being put in place?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I would just like to start by stating that, during Question Period, someone in the opposition had asked if I would provide the document publicly. There are two things I want to share to be very open. We signed virtually, so when we signed it, one document was formally signed. The labour secretary was in New York at the time, had just left Toronto, and I was in Vancouver, so we signed and then mailed each other the original copies — or couriered them. I just signed off this week on the other copy. Then we will make sure that we get permission, and when we have permission from the government — then it is something that I feel absolutely should be shared. What we have talked about in the House is very consistent with the language that is in the document. Really, there is an interest from the Philippine government to work with us. On March 18, we had that opportunity to do the work.

The key parts of the MOU improve the ability for Filipinos to be identified and recruited through our process. That is one thing. There is that constant back-and-forth. That comes down to our ability to go back and clarify the interaction between the Yukon nominee program and the Philippines for a pre-screened and vetted pool of qualified Filipino workers. When people are applying, there is the entity in the Philippines that can provide us with their team and labour mobility. They can look at that information. Sometimes there can be a bit of a language barrier as well. They can go back and vet the resumes and see that. That is one important thing.

Also, what we are hearing from the community is that, when people are coming to Canada, in some cases, they had to go through an orientation program. Sometimes they were getting asked to go through an orientation program that they shouldn't have even had to go through. There seemed to be a mix on the Philippine-government side. Also, we wanted to make sure that the orientation they did before they came to Canada was very unique for the Yukon. So, that is an opportunity. We can build that out. We will probably use it in a video medium — that is what we are thinking — and that will be provided so that everyone will have gone through this process before they come. That can talk about everything from the culture of the Yukon — it can talk about our beautiful negative temperatures in April — you name it. So, all the things you need to think about before you come to this beautiful place we call home. That is a key piece.

Also, it supports the safety of Filipino nominees coming to the Yukon through requirements for the Yukon employers. So, making sure that everybody who comes completely understands their rights as an individual coming here and how they can go and seek help if there is some challenge that they are having with an employer. We think that is very important. It was very encouraging to hear from the consul general that they have never had a complaint from the Yukon to their office. It is not to say that we don't have challenges. Like I shared with the Filipino association here, please let us know — please have people come and reach out to us so that when we are doing our check-ins — which is part of our work in our tripartite agreements — that we make sure that people are being looked after and treated respectfully. Then there are processes that we can use here, if we don't see that, but that is another key point.

It formalizes the Yukon-Philippines cooperation on labour mobility and the Yukon nominee program through the creation of a joint committee. As we have that committee in place, I can come back to the House and report on that — but, again, having representatives from both Yukon and the Philippines there. It also waives existing fees applied by the Philippines to Filipino Yukon nominee applicants. My understanding is that there were fees — I think that it was about \$2,000 — and it would be applied primarily as a fee for people who were coming, but it was really something that got applied normally for temporary workers. But our nominees are not folks who are going through a nominee program. We are getting that fee, and I think that was being put on them and, in some cases, I think we would see situations where the employer paid that as well. That wasn't really applicable when you go through the policy. We flagged that, and we have had that fee removed.

That is the early part of this, but I think that it is also the work — we are in the process now of negotiating implementation guidelines, so I can bring the guidelines back and talk about that when they are ready and speak to the committee and let folks know what the opportunities are there — if it is just government to government or if there can be representatives from the private sector or from the community as well.

That is the sort of genesis of this work, but we are also now hoping for other conversations, and the things that I — you know, I have looked at specific areas — I don't want to get too far ahead of myself. I believe that we have gone out and talked about two or three areas where we really need help in our economy and for workers.

What we've talked about are really innovative ways of delivering education between multiple institutions, and that's something that we will come back to. There are ideas that we have. I have brought my colleagues into those discussions and there is a real interest in that. I can say that, in British Columbia while we were there, there was a very significant conference that took place for health care workers, and it was really about adoption and recognition of foreign credentials and how you can do that. Those are all the things that we're constantly thinking about as we move forward.

That is kind of where things are now. There is lots and lots of opportunity here. This is going to be something that will grow and blossom in perpetuity as this community — I think there are about 3,500 people from the Philippines who now call Yukon their home. I was in Dawson on Saturday morning speaking to a leader in the community there who is another individual from the Philippines who has made Dawson their home. I think everybody here representing a community in the Yukon could reflect and give us an example of somebody from the Philippines who has come to their community, made it a better place, and has been critical in having certain organizations and businesses continuing to move on. We are lucky that this has happened here in the Yukon.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** In that dissertation, I didn't actually hear whether the Government of Canada was involved in any way in helping us to ensure that these people are settled.

The other one was: Is there an application fee that these people have to pay? If they are denied, is that refundable to them? Are we involved in that process, or is that still the border issue?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** No, there is no fee associated with this process. To be very open, this has been a Yukon-driven undertaking. We have to follow the guidelines of immigration in the country, but we have not looked for or discussed with Canada this work. This has been led by the Yukon. No other province or territory has this done. Other countries and other provinces are reaching out to us to ask if they could look at this as a model. Other countries are asking to have the same relationship. But we have not done that. I think that's kudos to the folks in our immigration unit for the work they have done on this.

Again, there are no fees associated with this process.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** We are aware — and the minister has mentioned the Ukraine family support desk that was launched due to the war in Ukraine. Can the minister give us a little more detail on this initiative and how it's going to work? I do know that he mentioned travel documents and all the actions that the Department of Economic Development is taking to ensure the safety and the assistance to people from Ukraine who want to come to the Yukon. As he also mentioned, our housing situation is pretty bleak — whether it's the nominee program or bringing in people from a war-torn country, these are big tasks. How is the department handling those situations?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I will start by saying kudos to the Member for Porter Creek North. A fast actor identified this situation, publicly identified that there needs to be stuff done early on, and then received also — I saw one very nice and kind letter from an individual from the Ukrainian diaspora who lives here and was commending that. I just think that it is important to be noted.

Again, the Yukon absolutely condemns what has happened in the strongest possible terms — Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. These actions are a blatant violation of international law — these actions — horrible what we've seen — on Ukraine's sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the country and on the Ukrainian people's rights to determine their own future.

Shortly after the invasion began, we very quickly — on our side — wrote to the federal Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship minister, Sean Fraser, to express the support for the strong humanitarian response by Canada and to offer our support to include Ukrainian refugees in existing immigration programs. The first thing that we felt was — if you have to build new policy, especially between the territory and the country, Canada, that's an undertaking. How do you use something that's in place already? That was our initial option. We looked at our existing programs that we were involved in for refugees. We looked at other jurisdictions that were also using something similar. We felt that we needed to get a coalition of the willing.

It can be adversarial in here and we are back and forth, but I think that overall, collectively as an Assembly when we work together here, we do some pretty significant stuff for the population we have.

Very quickly — first actors in this country on those discussions about trying to look at these programs that we had. We reached out. We gave some solutions on what we thought we could do. We then very quickly hosted a meeting that took place within days of that — I think it was within 48 hours, as I remember. I did the call in the middle of the Yukon Forum. I took a break at the Yukon Forum at the lunch, just before we started in Carcross. We spoke with Nova Scotia and we spoke with Newfoundland as well, and we got support to see if we could do that.

As the member opposite has touched on, on March 7, we launched a Ukrainian family support desk to help Ukrainians seek residency in the Yukon and Canada. We are working to connect Ukrainians with federal government's employment.

We have had an overwhelming amount of support from people in the Yukon — the member is correct that housing pressure is there — but it has been incredible. A lot of it is just: "We will take a family to move into our home", "We have a family cottage, it's winterized, and we will take a family", "We have a business that is tourism or seasonal but, come September, we will take 10 people or 12 people." It has been extraordinary.

We don't have the numbers yet of how many people will choose to be here or how many people within that community will also bring people. I think it's important to say kudos to the Leader of the Third Party, who, as always, during those discussions at the Elijah Smith Building on a blistering day, was right into it. She was running the PA system, organizing and supporting people that first time we came together. There were also other members from the opposition who were there. It's good when folks come together on these important causes and look for solutions and support.

I'm not as concerned about the housing piece in the interim because of the overwhelming opportunities that people have offered to provide.

Coming into budget debate today, I asked for updated numbers, and the team already had them there. As of April 12, the Ukrainian family support desk has received 95 inquiries, including 22 offers of humanitarian support, transportation, housing, and translation. There have been 19 offers of employment and 15 Ukrainian citizens seeking jobs and relocation to the Yukon. Those are the numbers that we have right now.

On March 17, the Canadian government announced the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel. That will help Ukrainians and their families come to Canada as temporary residents for up to three years while also providing the opportunity to work or study during that time.

Yukon strongly supports Canada's sanctions against senior Russian officials and their institutions that we have seen. When we talk about that process of preparing to bring refugees here, I think that within levels of government — you are preparing and wanting to see if Canada will work with us on our first program, and they quickly rolled out a program that would work for them. But I think the other thing that was much appreciated was that the federal government — as far back as January — started to deploy very specific infrastructure into

multiple locations bordering Ukraine — things that were needed essentially to make sure that we could move folks when appropriate from Ukraine into Canada. I think that today, early this morning, getting ready to come in for work and having a coffee, there was discussion, of course, where the Canadian Armed Forces are now being deployed as part of a transportation solution for Ukrainians. Then we have seen the infrastructure like biometrics for identification and certification and, as well, other consular services that were moving into place in January. That is where we are at right now. That is the desk work. That doesn't mean that it is the only piece of work that we are dealing with.

We have had a number of organizations locally that do this work. They know this work. They understand the challenges for anybody coming into a country from a situation that is war-torn — the trauma. We offered mental health supports early on to the families because we were in a situation where people hadn't slept in days because they couldn't get a hold of their sibling — they didn't know where they were. We are aware — and are listening to subject matter experts to understand — that when you are dealing with settlement services, you are going to be in a situation where you need to have the right safety nets in place for folks.

As well, questions have come up that I have received a bit of communication around. How are we going to look at our health care system? Can you waive a three-month period?

So, some of those pieces we are still working through, or understanding what Canada is doing, working with my counterparts in government here, such as the Minister of Health and Social Services. We have been in dialogue since day one about what we have to contemplate that we will need for folks when they arrive.

It is complex. I did ask officials in a briefing in the last couple of days to bring us up to speed. I have said to the Ukrainian community, "If there are questions that need answering, please continue to reach out." I think that for all of us, that initial shock brought rallies and people there, but I think that it is really important to stay vigilant, consistent, and supportive into the coming months. This has turned out to be — we hoped it wouldn't be, but it is — a very significantly hard and long journey. It will not come to an end quickly. That is where we are at right now.

We are working closely to understand how the programs will work. The desk simply was an ability for us to focus questions and comments to one centralized place where we can collect the data, have folks there and our team at immigration. We used existing resources to do that. It wasn't new resources. It really gave folks a sort of one-stop shop when they're trying to deal with the Government of Yukon so that we can disseminate those requests for information and provide it to the necessary departments across government.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** I thank the minister. He answered my next question, which was how many people were utilizing the new support desk.

With the commercial and passenger rail service that has been discussed many times through the years — an alternate route for goods and services between the coast and Whitehorse,

should the Alaska Highway be incapacitated for some reason — has there been any progress on this? Who are the partners that are involved?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Speaking of rail, there are two different conversations that have occurred over the last number of years. One was this conversation about the A2A rail and interest in the Alberta-to-Alaska rail line. For a number of reasons, that project has sputtered out.

Our role in that was that we provided information, like every government. There were other governments that were investing money. Potentially they — certainly, the Alberta government had one of their MLAs very involved and had reached out to us and wanted to do weekly or biweekly calls about progress on that project. But, inevitably, it was a situation where they were trying to put a bunch of pieces together.

Some of the things that I would share with the Assembly were, when you look at the work they were doing, you would think about things like land planning, for instance. That was the first thing — you're looking at trying to build a rail line through the Yukon north of Carmacks, just south of Pelly, all the way to Alaska, potentially even affecting what was going on with Dawson land planning. You probably should go and bring yourself up to speed on those conversations. You need to go and speak to municipal and First Nation leaders in the potential communities that would be affected.

That was kind of the work that we did. It was really high-level work. It was public service work. It was any project that would come to the Yukon that was talking about significant investment and looking at information, and of course, we work on behalf of this public body, so that's the work that we were doing. That has now seemed to slowly come to an end.

When we talk about our mandate commitments and we talk about where we are in the platform for the election and where things are, really, that pertain to the White Pass & Yukon Route railway — we have spoken with White Pass officials — the officials from Economic Development have — and said, "Are you open to discussions about that line and to revitalizing it?"

In those discussions, we were told that yes, there could be interest in that. Over the last couple of weeks, we have not been happy with the news that we have received about our summer travel. I think, to be open to the House, our focus, at this point, is that summer activity before we would jump into a longer term.

What we have been made aware of, over the last number of years, is that there have been different owners of White Pass. So, I'm going to focus on the White Pass conversation. So, there have been different owners of White Pass. The last configuration or syndicate that owned White Pass reached out — Cobalt, a great Yukon company, did a lot of work on refurbishing some of their cars but also some infrastructure work and rail work for them. They were investing, it seemed, quite heavily and quickly after their acquisition from the previous owners.

One of the things that we were made aware of is there is sort of an obligation — well, there is an obligation, not "sort of" — there is an obligation around tenure and ensuring that the

easement that you have on rail infrastructure leads to your ability to keep that infrastructure in working order.

We're looking at the fact that we're always trying to figure out different ways to reduce emissions. We're always trying to take into consideration that we want to have a vibrant mining sector. We're always taking into consideration that critical minerals are a key to our global future and dealing with emissions. All of those things and understanding that when we think about Skagway as well, the brilliance of that rail line and the previous use of it by mining companies was the fact that you actually had a very efficient way to move goods, and you also — you reduced that traffic, at least at points — that traffic congestion that we saw later on. So, we had mining, of course; we had trucks later on using it, but in the summertime, even this summer, with the bumps that we've had around tourism, you're going to see really extensive traffic between the Southern Lakes and Skagway. It's always difficult if you could contemplate that potential amount of new truck traffic.

That's the pieces that we've thought about. Again, what I would say at this point — my direction to the department will be: Let's put on hold a longer term vision, because, one, there's a brand new deal that's about to close. One of the biggest infrastructure companies in the world is now taking ownership of the White Pass infrastructure. The company, Blackstone — I think part of what we'll be doing is, number one, having a discussion with them: What is your intention? What is your vision for Skagway? They have infrastructure all over the world. Is there an interest? That will be part of it.

The other thing is there are legacy concerns around the tracks and the rail. That's what has been shared to me in my meetings with Carcross/Tagish First Nation. I think that has to be contemplated — what remediation still has to happen and what does that mean? Then on top of that, the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes also, who represents that riding is — a lot of people have made that area their home, and they did it after a time where there was consistent rail traffic.

So, there are all kinds of different views and perspectives by Yukoners — let's say between Carcross and Whitehorse. Those are all things we have to contemplate.

Do I think that this is a conversation and a file that should be looked at? Absolutely, I think it should. Is it complex? Absolutely, but it is something that has some good opportunities in the future for the Yukon. Right now, my efforts in my other portfolio with Tourism have what Economic Development has — really focusing on the now and what the relationship is with White Pass. As we see the conclusion of that acquisition or investment into the greater syndicate, then we will sit down with Blackstone in the coming months, and that will give us a sense if there is an opportunity within this new group to have a collaborative and future partnership when it comes to rail in the Yukon.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** I thank the minister for that update — very interesting.

Now, with respect to exploring the new mineral exploration fund to assist junior mining companies with money to begin exploration work, is the money applied for a grant, a

loan, or will it be given in tax credits? Is a feasibility study ongoing? Complete? And when will it be ready for market?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** On this topic, I am going to give a few points of background, because for those outside of the sector, they may not have as much exposure to this type of concept or this topic.

The department has done preliminary review of a number of fund models since the mandate commitment to create a new mineral exploration fund. This came from — over the years, we do — the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources provides over \$1 million. It has gone up in some of the tougher years, and I think it's at about \$1.4 million — something like that. I will leave it to the minister to talk about that. It started under the NDP government many, many years ago and then continued to be supported in successive governments. It's a good program.

We hear from across the country that it makes good sense. It leverages money from others to match funding to go in and do early exploration. I think it has really been successful in giving us a number of our significant finds. When you think about something like — if I remember, without notes here — the Coffee project, which has just gone through the regulatory process. That was early-stage money that Shawn Ryan would access through one of his entities — GroundTruth — you know, Ryan would need one of his companies at the time, one of the entities, to go out and find this.

Then, of course, the growth you would see — then a company like Kaminak takes over, they fund it, and then it gets acquired for a half-billion dollars by Gold Corp., then Gold Corp. gets acquired by Newmont, and then, all of a sudden, you go through this new journey, and then a project kind of comes to a place where it is on the way to being developed.

The fund, though, is a different vehicle to do similar work. The place that does this best in the country is Québec. Québec puts tens of millions of dollars into their fund. They capitalize it, in some cases, through pension money and government funds. That is how they have done it. That is not something — I will put on the record before Question Period — that we have contemplated at all. We have looked at different fund models.

What we have done is that we have gone out with an RFP. The department is preparing a contract — a feasibility study to determine how the fund model could be structured that would effectively address the needs of the industry, and an RFP has concluded. We have reached out to the other territories, and I think that is an important piece of information. The RFP closed last week and we are assessing the proposals. The reason that we have reached out now to the other two territories on this is because — in order to make a fund viable, you have to have enough deal flow, meaning that you have to have enough opportunities, because what you are essentially doing is that you are taking money from this financial structure and you are allocating it — maybe you're matching — we are going to look at what that looks like. Really, what you are trying to do is incentivize exploration. The model in Québec is that they actually invest and they get a return on that money, and in some cases, it is a grant. Those are all the things that we are looking at to see what would be the best model. But we have also

reached out and asked our counterparts if they would be interested, because we have sat with subject matter experts on it and they said that three, four, or five opportunities a year may not get the interest because you need two things. If you are going to bring in private money, the private investors want to know if there is enough opportunity for them to get a return and, at the same time, folks who want to use the fund have to know that there is enough money in the fund to use it or at least that there is enough money in this to make it viable. So, there is kind of a push-and-pull. We have reached out to our counterparts.

The other thing that I would share with the House that is happening and that we are also going to have to closely watch is that — the Yukon has been talking and industry has been talking about it for a long time and the department has been talking about this — we have seen the opportunity with critical minerals. We were watching this way out, and people were working on it and we were having this discussion.

Two things that we've talked about — ESG — the filters, the metrics, the perspective that one looks at to invest — environmental, social, and governance — we feel that we have those things covered in the Yukon, and so does the Yukon Mining Alliance and so does the sector and so does the investment world and so do the major mining companies that are now here like Rio Tinto and Newmont, the world's biggest gold miner.

On the flip side, we also know that we have a real opportunity on critical minerals. The other idea is: Does that fund allocate a significant portion of what it has toward that type of work? Those are the things that we're trying to figure out. To be transparent with the House, I thought that we would have an opportunity to do this work previously. British Columbia — there was direction or advice from the AME, the BC mining entity and NGO, and they had asked at one point for the BC government to think about this. We waited and we talked to BC government officials, and we said that there's such a close relationship between British Columbia and the Yukon when it comes to mining. Many, many of our companies have offices in Vancouver and some have offices in Vancouver and in Whitehorse. It made sense to be able to have that relationship. Within that, we spoke to the leads in their department of mining or natural resources, and they just never moved on it. In the platform, we put it there — the decision was made. If this is going to happen and if we're going to do the due diligence, we're going to have to go it alone at this point — at least get it going. Then once we sat down beside our experts, we did our due diligence. It was like okay, well, what does this look like? That's where we were told that we might need more deal flow.

At this point, the RFP is closed, and we're going through to see if there's appropriate submissions. We're going to keep our folks in Northwest Territories and Nunavut apprised of what is going on. As I said, the other thing that I was about to say and will say is that we have to watch — Canada just announced last week a \$3.8-billion investment into critical minerals over eight years. So, all of a sudden, like many things we've done — early childcare — we were first actors and all of

a sudden the federal government is moving on it and saying that they want to invest in it. Maybe this is serendipitous; we'll see how it works. We'll go through the work that we've done and maybe there's even a way to work with Canada to capitalize a fund like this. I'm not sure; it's very early days.

We just had the federal minister here, but I think that there is a lot of opportunity for us. Of course, as it is my responsibility, I will come to the House and keep the House apprised as we meet certain thresholds of work on this fund.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** I am not sure if I heard from the minister whether there was a feasibility study. If there is, when will it be shared?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** We have done a lot of early work. In the last mandate, we did some work with a notable Canadian law firm to look at different models. I think we would consider that due diligence. On this project, we did an analysis of funds that are out there in this sector. That was our early work and then that helped us to frame out the scope of a request for proposals. That request for proposals was listed and just concluded last week. Now we are analyzing those proposals to see if they have met the scope. If they meet the criteria, they continue to go on with the work that we have been doing.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** There has been much talk about a flexible field house complex that is to be complete and used for the 2023 Canada Winter Games if our bid is successful. Can the minister update us on the talks happening with respect to all the monies for the Canada Winter Games bid and the progress on projects such as the field house?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I think that it is important to note, just within the structure of the areas of responsibility — I think that I will leave this to the Minister of Community Services to take the lead on the broad discussions of that. I wouldn't want to get in his way on that. That is where there is a constant dialogue happening around the needed infrastructure. Of course, it has been an area of focus sometimes in Question Period.

The field house — the first thing we did — we had sports organizations reach out to us and identify this field house concept. They felt that this could be a great fit for the Yukon.

As of last spring, we were in a situation where — I think that we have a very active population and there is always opportunity for more infrastructure for sport activity. When you talk to folks — whether it's the people who play soccer or people who play basketball or you name it — they will always say that there is a real challenge to try to get gym time and sports time.

Also, folks who are in the world of softball — of course, we have a very strong organization that runs softball. We have held world-class events and they also were looking at different models across the country where there were these indoor facilities. That really was the genesis of that coming into place.

I will share that, with the convention leadership in the community — the Yukon Convention Bureau and others in tourism — the other potential opportunity was around how to host a dinner with more than 365 or 370 people. That has been a real challenge because you get to a certain level of convention and you are maxed out — you can't.

Of course, we continue to need more hotel rooms and new hotel rooms, but at the same time, we have seen investment and more investment coming into that sector, but we need space. So, could you pull this together?

We had a concept. Folks brought that to us.

From there, what we did is that we started our due diligence. We went through a series of different steps. We had members from Community Services and Economic Development fly to Alberta to look at a very similar project that was in Red Deer, Alberta. We have reached out to Prince Edward Island where there is a very similar structure that is built there. We have looked at a structure just like this that exists in Saskatchewan. We have talked to folks in British Columbia about this.

Things that came to mind — durability, feasibility — feasibility to take into consideration: If you have multiple things happening in the space, what is the time? What is the cost to move from one sport to another sport to an event? What does your O&M need to look like? What does your staff need to look like? What is the R-value of the structure? What are our energy costs?

Those are all of the things that we have been doing since last year because we felt we needed to be very informed as we're moving toward a decision. At the same time, the Canada Games submission and application has been, of course, put in and there is deep work into that.

Where we are at is that we feel that we have a strong set of facts and data. We are still understanding what the Canada Games needs. We haven't made any final decisions on any of those pieces of infrastructure yet. That is essentially the work we have done since May of last year.

I think that the department has done good work. We are trying to figure out, based on the all the due diligence we have done, what is the best course of action with that and what are the costs for it, and there have been different costs as well that we have seen. As we move forward, I can come back and update the House.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Thanks for that update on the considerations of the costs and, of course, the O&M that would be left with us.

Still on a sports theme, the Yukon University is very interested in developing a varsity sports team. Of course, they would probably need a helping hand with the calibre that we would need to compete nationally and even internationally. Has the department — or is the department — do they have a role in helping with this initiative and ensuring that we do have a solid program in place in our university?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** This is a great topic. It is near and dear to my heart. This is something where we think that there is a big opportunity as a government supporting Yukon University. Just for clarification, I think that the mindset and scope of sports competition in this would be more of — with the potential to play at a national level, but you're looking at potentially entering into either the British Columbia or Alberta college association level. Some of the things that we have done are — I know that I have sat down and had this discussion, because it has been identified as an area of responsibility for me, as well

as with Community Services. I sat down with the president of Yukon University to have some high-level discussions. The department has drafted a scope of work for a request for proposals for the project, in collaboration with Education versus Community Services, but with Education, Yukon University, Sport Yukon, and the Aboriginal Sport Circle.

The department has contacted the Alberta Colleges Athletic Conference to discuss joining their conference and to make them aware of the project. It's early stages. The RFP is going out in the next two weeks for that work.

While I'm on my feet, this is what I will share with you. We are losing great student athletes from the Yukon every year. We have talked about our first player who has gone on to play professional for the Whitecaps, but we are losing dozens of players for basketball, as one sport, who are continuing to move on to different universities right from coast to coast. We're losing soccer players; we are losing volleyball players, and many of these youth, and many I have spoken to directly, would love to stay home. In some cases, the youth come from small communities in the Yukon, and having good family support and being able to stay here will be a strong recipe for success in their academic and athletic life.

We also live next to a state that has extraordinary investment into sport. We have a reciprocal agreement on tuition with the State of Alaska. You have big centres like Fairbanks or Juneau or Anchorage where student athletes are playing in Los Angeles, Seattle, and Las Vegas at that level in sport, whether it's football, basketball, or volleyball. You have all of that playing out, and a lot of those individuals — after they finish high school, if they don't make it to play division 1 or division 2 in the NCAA or division 3 in the NAIA, they stop. I think a lot of those folks could be potential students at our institution, where we are always still looking to bolster our numbers, and we have these really specific opportunities in research and indigenous governance, in our trades programs — you name it. We have this great institution, the first university in the north of Canada, and we have this opportunity to bring and encourage folks to come. I think our belief is that sport could be a real carrot.

We also have — which we have talked about here — world-class athletes in our community — cross-country skiers who go to the Olympics. We have folks who compete in biathlon. We have all these different athletes, and we have great support from our community organizations. Our thought is that nobody walks into something like a sport program not understanding that there is a potential cost with that, but we also rally in this community around that. We have a great airline in Air North, which always looks after our sports teams. There are ways, logistically, to look at this. That was some of the thinking, as we put this forward.

I can tell you that some of the sport leaders who are out there — just two weeks ago, one of our teachers in the Yukon sent me an e-mail and said, “Wow, I have these two or three people...” — two or three individuals — it was young men — “I have two or three of these young men, and wow, I don't know if they'll move on to play elite sport somewhere else in Canada, and one of them is interested in trades, but wouldn't it be

amazing if Yukon University could give that individual that opportunity to go and play and do something they love, help them become a better individual, a better leader, build their core skills as a human, and get an education at the same time?”

This is something that has been pondered a lot at that institution over the years. It has not been on the radar as much, but the other thing I think I will say to the House is, when you join these conferences, that doesn't mean you have to have an institution involved in every sport. This is — in some cases, you might only have to join two or three different sport groups, so you might be able to say, “Look, we're going to play football, soccer — we're going to play volleyball or basketball, and we're going to have cross-country skiing. That's what we're going to do at this institution.” I think that we have shown, as Yukoners, that we have amazing athletes who can do that. It just adds another level to what's happening there.

Of course, at the end of the day, it's the board of governors at the university that has to ponder their priorities. They just finished their strategic planning. We have to have the right due diligence completed, but I know there are a lot of folks who would be here to provide their support and helping hand. That's a bit broader overview about the thinking, and we'll see what the response is to that RFP that's going out to the public in the next two weeks.

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

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

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

*Recess*

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Is there any further general debate?

**Ms. Van Bibber:** As the minister knows, Yukon agriculture producers aren't able to sell in BC or Alaska. The issue relates to not being part of a quota. The producers are not specifically given an exemption from quota, either.

Is the minister doing anything to resolve this problem for Yukon agriculture producers?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** This work falls under the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources under the Agriculture branch. In my previous role in that work, we had discussions, of course. We worked with the president at the Agriculture branch to reach out to the egg producers of Canada. We also spoke with the Federation of Agriculture and spoke with folks within that.

In the discussions pertaining to likely the proponent that you may have had discussions with — folks in that world, the lead farm — our dialogue has really been around trying to figure out good financial mechanisms that could be used in capital investment. That is the discussion I have had with folks who are leaders in that industry. It has been more around — there are some loan programs that we have.



Again, I will leave it to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources to have discussions on that topic.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** I thank the minister for his responses today and to the officials for being here to help. I will now turn the floor over to the Third Party.

**Ms. White:** I thank my colleague from Porter Creek and look forward to the conversations that we are about to have today.

I was on the website. I don't think it is any surprise to anyone that I find the website nearly impossible to navigate. Where I used to know things used to be for the nominee program, including the tripartite agreement, I can't find those things anymore. The first thing I want to talk about — other than my criticism of the website — is the important announcement that the minister made earlier this year about removing the restrictions for the nominee program in order to be able to support Yukon businesses. I wanted to start with that conversation, knowing that the nominee program, as highlighted by my colleague from Porter Creek North — the minister said that it was fully utilized in 2021 with 300 nominees coming in. Have there been any discussions with the federal government about extending those numbers for this year?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I think it was two parts. One is around some of the requirements that we waived — which was really around advertising — and then it was about allocation and if we have more. I don't think that I was as clear as I should have been in my previous opposition questions.

The Government of Yukon administers two immigration programs in partnership with IRCC and the business nominee program. Our government is utilizing its immigration program to meet the identified needs of Yukon businesses, both urban and rural. In October 2021, IRCC conducted a reallocation exercise for all jurisdictions, and the Yukon received 40 additional base spaces. Previously, we had 300, bringing the total allocation available to 340. The number that I think is important to hear is — between January 1 and February 22, 2022, we had 58 new candidates that have been approved. I think that's quite key.

Partially, what we were trying to do — we've heard good feedback from employers concerning that ability to waive and try to move as many folks in. We talked about that a little bit in the House previously, but that was on February 10 and we announced the temporary suspension of the advertising requirements for businesses seeking foreign nominees through the program. This change will be in effect until June 30.

So, really trying to fast-track the employers everywhere we could — because when you look at where we're at, that was a decision based on a macro view of the Yukon labour force. We're consistently at about 1,300 jobs open monthly. That's before we've gone into some of the seasonal work — and understanding that some employers are not posting the jobs. We know that we've had consistently, year over year, the highest participation in our workforce based on our population. We also have known that we've had extremely low unemployment. At this point, people are just — I'll give you an example. At a sporting event just the other day, I bumped into a contractor

saying: "Please, I just need somebody who can do baseboard work and putting up some trim, and I will pay them \$50 an hour."

We need to have workers, and I think that you are hearing that across the country. People want to pay good wages, and in some cases, folks don't have an interest in working in particular sectors. We also have seen across the country a move out of those areas, so I think that we will probably have some philosophical debate about that. Anyway, that is sort of where we are at on both of those pieces.

I am not aware, at this point, and I will be very open — there hasn't been a noticeable increase in applications since we waived — it was something that employers said — so we haven't seen a lot, but you know that we are also having a very dramatic start to the calendar year in our allocations. We have not been reaching out for new, increased allocations at this time.

**Ms. White:** I thank the minister for that. It was mostly just recognizing the current job market. Everyone is looking and I appreciate that. It is a good time to be an employee, so I think that is a good thing. I'm just making sure that this program could answer that. Even that small expansion is important.

I am not sure if the minister and I have had this conversation, but I recognize that it is viewed as an economic development program by the Yukon government, but I view it as an immigration program when we have people who are applying for service industry jobs and who have degrees from their home countries. It is really a foot in the door, which is why, within six months, you are supposed to apply for your permanent residency, and once that is received, people are able to do other things. I think that this is really important.

It is also why I think that it is important to ensure that nominees, in the positions that they are in, aren't being taken advantage of. It has been a long history to get us to this point now — where those checks are being done in a different way. So, again, I congratulate the department in making sure that we are taking care of people, because I think that our responsibility is to the employees who we bring in from other countries. Not to say that we don't have a responsibility to employers, but there is definitely a power imbalance there.

So, previously, when I could find the documents, I knew what the base rate had to be — the salary that was being offered to nominees. Just as a point of reference — I found a news article from 2014 — minimum wage was definitely not in these points, but they just talked about how the starting wage for quick-service restaurant workers under the Yukon nominee program rose from \$11.75 to \$15 per hour. I know that it was held at \$15 per hour for a long time, but our minimum wage has gone past that now.

So, what is the starting wage now for nominees within those contracts?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I will try to do two things for the member opposite. I will bring back a document that does two things: I will get the highlights of the framework on the trilateral so that you have that, and I will also get the pay scale, as well, and provide that back to you in a legislative return if that's okay.

**Ms. White:** I do appreciate that. I know that there is a program — and I'm struggling to find it — that, in a community, you can have more than one employer. I know that it was a new program.

Can the minister give us an idea of how effective that has been? Is it filling the gaps in those rural communities that we hoped it would? Has it been successful?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** It's the Yukon community program, and that was launched in 2020. That's a new stream for the Yukon nominee program to provide flexibility to employers in rural communities where seasonal and part-time work is a fundamental part of the local economy and essential for local economic development.

Up to 50 candidates can be nominated through the program enabling them to work in one of the participating communities of either Dawson City, Carmacks, Carcross, Haines Junction, Watson Lake, or Whitehorse. Between June 1, 2020, and January 25, 2022, only four candidates have been approved through the program — two in Whitehorse, one in Dawson City, and one in Haines Junction.

I want to touch on a few things with this program. First, I think that it's important to know some of the drivers of this. In many cases, it was — in Whitehorse, sectors like the hospitality sector where they were in a tough position in that they might not be able to offer 40 hours, but if they partnered with another organization, they could provide full-time hours. That was one thought.

In a community like Carmacks — which, to table for the House, it was one of the business leaders that was driving that discussion.

They have multiple businesses all under the same umbrella. They wanted to try to make sure that an individual might work in a hotel and then go work in a retail store, but the way it was structured within our program, this model would work well. So, that worked — the same thing with Dawson. That's sort of at the private sector side; that's where it came from.

Under the policy conversation, what we were seeing across the country was the federal government reaching out to municipalities, and they were doing this. When they looked at the Yukon, they said that, because our one larger city did not have an economic development strategy and department within it, it did not meet the criteria for the Yukon to have an allotment like this. Our team went back to IRCC and said, "Okay, you can't not..." — you know —

Earlier today in Question Period, there was a question about fighting for the Yukon. Of course, we went back, and we're like, "No, that's not appropriate. We need a program that can support our communities." The negotiation and the push that — my vigorous conversation was outside of a restaurant in Watson Lake in the parking lot with the federal minister, in the middle of another chamber meeting, saying, "Yeah, no, we need this. You're not leaving us out of this, and we need it tailored toward our programs, and our communities are having a really hard time with staff."

So, that's where that came from. The team just said we have two more applicants who are coming through right now.

That's where the policy conversation came from. I think it's important as well — and we've talked about this, and I think the member opposite and I talked about it: Does this lead to a situation where folks in that environment do not have the same level of support, or does it lead to maybe not the most appropriate situation?

I can tell you, on Saturday morning — I touched on this before — I talked to one individual who came to the Yukon through the nominee program and was saying to me, "Please make sure that program does not..." — and then the deputy minister and I had a conversation with one of our tourism leaders, as well, on Monday night, and in both cases, folks said, "Please, this is a good program."

The case on Saturday morning was: "I have family members. This would be perfect for them to come and take this. It's a great opportunity where they could work for multiple employers in a small community." That's where we are at right now. I think we will see this as a program that can really help Yukon businesses and provide great opportunities for people in the nominee program.

Again, when you look at those dates, we started it right in 2020 in the spring. That was a tough time. I think now we will really have an opportunity over the next couple of years to see how this will — if this program can flourish and if it can meet the needs of both the individual who is moving here and the individuals who are providing the opportunity to them.

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

Yesterday during Question Period, there was an exchange between my colleague, the Member for Whitehorse Centre, and the Minister of Community Services about paid sick leave. Understanding that the paid sick leave program has been extended until September, I wanted to know what the plan was post-September.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I'm just going to give out a bit of information about the program. As of March 31, 2022, there were approximately 1,490 people who have received \$2,227,112 in paid sick leave through our rebate created in March 2020 in response to COVID-19.

Our phase 1 of the program that ran through to March 31, 2021 paid out \$663,294 in rebates. Our phase 2 program, which was April 1, 2021 to September 30, 2021, paid out \$446,000. Phase 3 from October 2021 through to March 2022 has processed \$1,119,000.

The retail trade sector is the largest user of the program at 23 percent of our funding to date. Health care and social service sector — that includes daycares — is just over 22 percent of funding to date. Construction has been about 15 percent of funding to date, also significant users to the program.

So, I think what we've been doing all along is just trying to monitor and adapt our programs. It has been our mantra. It's what we have done, and that's what we're doing.

What are some of the things that I can see in that? Well, I'm seeing that phase 1 had some really strong numbers. We're seeing phase 3 with some really strong numbers. I think it's fair to say that we don't have the really difficult health risks that we had in the start, but I think everybody in the Legislative Assembly today would say, under the current situation with

COVID — and that's why we extended it — some of you know somebody who is sick. I think that's fair to say.

When it comes to what our current situation is around COVID-19, we're monitoring and adapting that program. That is one stream.

The second thing you touched on was the exchange yesterday. Look, in Question Period, there is only a short period of time for that exchange to happen. Through the agreement between the government and the NDP, that led to some good work that has been done around the topic, and I think that the member opposite would agree — as a person who also was a small business owner, who probably had two or three staff — I can't remember how many staff the member opposite had at the Canada Games Centre — before a decision is made to figure out what the model is, there has to be consultation, and so that is the work that has been committed to.

In my role as Economic Development minister, I agree that we have to do that discussion to lead us to understand what the impacts are. Bigger employers provide, in some cases in the private sector, some sick leave provisions. What has been contemplated in the work, as I understand it, is 10 paid sick leave days. In this case, we have had the government backstop it, and I think that has provided a great opportunity. I will say anecdotally that we have had different things occur, as well, where, in this program, which was built for a particular reason, we have had folks reach out to us and say that, you know — employers — "I think that people are using the program and maybe they are not being as straight up as they should." And we have had employees reach out to us and say: "I had this thing going on in my life, but my employer told me to take the time and just use the sick leave from the government."

So, one of the things that we have discussed is that we need to have a deep dive to understand exactly how this is working, because we have this model right now. What does that mean? We don't want employers or employees — we want this to be something that is there for them. It is a safety net, and it is something that is appropriate. And then I think that what is happening is that it is a really strong, honest conversation with folks in our community, including the business sector, to say: "Hey, what does this model mean to you?"

In my role with this department, I take into consideration a number of factors that are at play. We have talked about inflation. We have a global scenario when it comes to inflation. Yesterday, we saw the Bank of Canada trying to work that through the central bank and they have increased interest rates. What does that mean for the private sector and small business folks who may be carrying debt that they incurred over the last two years? There are so many factors. Those are all things that we have to contemplate when we are talking about what a sick leave program will be.

So, at this point, we're going to monitor. We're going to continue to watch it as we go to September. What we have done all along is that, if that information leads us to say that the program should end or the program should continue, those are all things that we have done in a very agile way. But I think at the same time, there is a bigger discussion that has been amplified in many different lenses by everybody in this

Assembly around: Is there going to be sick leave? Is the sick leave provision, in the future, 10 days? Who should be covering the cost of it? That's where the rub has been.

All I can say is that, in my role today, what I say to my counterpart is there is still fragility that is in place right now. There is fragility around the private sector. They have borne lots of different costs because of inflation, because of COVID. That has to be taken into consideration. We have to make sure that, whatever the model is, it's something that is going to be good for the employee but good for our economy, because inevitably, you have to ensure that business is still there to provide that individual with a good opportunity and a good quality of life and a good job. Those are all the things that we're contemplating.

So, you're not going to get a definitive answer on what happens the next day after this program ends right now, but the same commitment — and the proof is in the pudding — we've continued to watch, monitor, and provided the right opportunities and supports as they have been needed from day one of this COVID process.

I know my colleague is committed to the work he's doing through consultation and post as part of that panel.

**Ms. White:** Although I appreciate the minister's stance, I'm more than able to have that conversation with the Minister of Community Services.

I guess I erred in mentioning Question Period yesterday, but really, ultimately, the question to the minister is: In his mind, is COVID over? Like, come September 30, is COVID done — no more COVID?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** No, I mean, I would again say — do I think it's done? Is it still on? What I will say is what I just mentioned. I think that today almost everybody in the Assembly could say they know somebody who is sick. So, today it's probably not done. I said that we will monitor and adapt.

One thing I've learned through COVID is that there is no solid set of facts around the corner when it comes to where COVID, as an infection, has grown. We know that. I think we have continued to make that commitment to folks that we would monitor and adapt.

Right now, actually, I am going to leave it there. I will let the Minister of Health and Social Services speak to that. I have some of the same information that the member opposite has. I am not party to any particular briefings by any epidemiologists forecasting what's there. I am getting the same information that the rest of us have got. When it's appropriate, the Minister of Health and Social Services will provide that to her colleagues, but at this time, I think what we are all seeing is that things are still challenging. That's what I know, and that is what we'll contemplate, and that's what our budget was built to do: to have some room, if necessary, for challenges — whether they are flooding or COVID — that we might see in 2022-23.

**Ms. White:** Ultimately, it's the same answer. No one has a crystal ball, but as the Minister responsible for the Department of Economic Development, which currently has the paid sick leave program for COVID, is he willing and able

to entertain the idea that, come September 30, if we are still in the middle of a pandemic, that the program will be extended?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Because it's an appropriation in the end, I can't say that I would extend it, because I have to go through a process, and there is a structure to that. I can talk to my colleagues. I can let them know what is happening. I can provide them with the data that's there. Those are all the things that I normally would do to try to get alignment before we have to go into a meeting for that discussion.

We have continued to watch and to monitor, and that's what we will do. In politics, you could say it is an easy answer, but in this, we have just gone through a track record. This team, on this work, we've had a strong track record on all our programs, on when to push, when to pull. Sometimes we were getting some critique on how our programs were running, but at the end of the day, I think we've continued to be there.

I will have to watch what is happening. We are going to have to watch the trends. If you went from the first one to the second phase, you would have said — if you saw me, if I came in at the second phase, based on what we saw in that decrease from phase 1 to phase 2 — if we broke it into three — we were looking at a declining use of the program. With full transparency, we got to phase 3, and we have spent almost as much as we did in phase 1 and phase 2.

It is a program that is being used. It's a program that is being supportive to Yukoners. It was the first program of its kind in the country. It is a program where jurisdictions that are much, much bigger had their policy teams and, in one case, their political folks reach out to us and say, "What is the template?"

We have led the country on this program. We built it quicker, faster. We have delivered over and over again. That is how I will approach it. It's always difficult. I would love to be able to say, "Hey, these are my options", but I think that the member opposite knows — has asked many questions over the years — that I can't in the House today say, "Yes, I will" or "No, I will not." What I will say is that our department has done a great job of providing good data and good recommendations. I have continued to take them and will continue to look at that approach to decision-making as we get into the latter part of this year, moving toward Q2 and Q3.

**Ms. White:** I guess my expectation then is that the minister would advocate around the Cabinet table to extend the paid sick leave program. I think that this is maybe the answer I was looking for — that yes, if we get to September and the pandemic is still raging, the Yukon government won't leave people high and dry. Maybe he can just affirm that he will advocate for that. Maybe he won't advocate, and he can tell me that as well.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** No, that is what I think I mentioned in my last response. I said that what I tend to do is talk to my officials. They provide me with the data. The data then, when necessary, gets put into a Management Board submission. I review that. There is a set of recommendations usually for the group of people around that table to make. I sign off on the package, and then I would advocate, probably even previous to that work, to make sure people are aware. Then at that table, if

I am bringing something forward that I think there should be a decision on and that is where we are at that day, then yes, I would normally be speaking in a positive manner, i.e., advocating toward a decision that then gets made in that confidential process. So, absolutely, that's what I do when I bring a submission forward.

Would I be advocating if I bring that forward? Absolutely, I would be advocating if I bring that forward. When will I bring it forward? After I know the data. When will I know the data? After I see the trends for the next couple of months. Where are we at right now? We're not out of the woods.

So, a lot of hypotheticals. We can go back and forth for a little bit longer, but I'm sure there are other questions you want to answer on substantial issues. I will keep you apprised of data as we go through, if you would like, and we'll see what that decision is as we get to September.

**Ms. White:** Agreed. We don't need to go back and forth anymore on it.

Something that has just been brought to my attention by a person who is heavily involved in the construction field is actually mass timber. It's interesting because we're having this conversation in the House these days about wood availability and the quality of the wood. The reason why I'm bringing up mass timber is because BC actually came out with an entire BC mass timber action plan. It's one of economic stimulus, actually. It's really interesting, and it's about the recognition that, in BC, they are no longer talking about cutting down legacy forests, but they're looking at a way to use smaller products in a more economic way. This might not be the right spot, in which case I will come back in either EMR, Community Services, or Housing, but has the minister taken a look at all into what's happening in the mass timber fields in British Columbia?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I'm going to go out a little bit on a limb. So, I have a little bit of visibility into this. The mass timber process — it's like a multi-floored building where you can, instead of using a steel structure building, you can use wood. BC is really pushing that to support their mill industry and their forestry industry, if I remember. I think it's a very innovative, strong approach.

We haven't contemplated that at this time. We do a lot of stick-built based on our zoning for multi-floored buildings. We have been innovative in the Yukon on that topic, but really, I think it's — without getting too deep into it — for them, they have a complete supply chain available. That's why that makes complete sense. Right from whoever is felling the tree, to the mill, to the delivery, to building this multi-floored structure in downtown Nanaimo, Vancouver, or Victoria — you could keep it in that complete ecosystem, which is that you're adding value along the chain the whole time.

So, the first part is — I know that it has been a storied history of sawmills in the Yukon. We do have some people who have still been entrepreneurial with it, and they have done a great job. There have been challenges, which we have discussed, around supply chain on access, so I think at this point we have not contemplated that, but the key now is just making sure that we support the minister. I was in that previous role,

and I know the challenges there. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources came into that role in May of last year. I had been there already getting ready for the next season, so I know the challenges and where those challenges are with the minister.

I think that on this one, really, we have to get a very clear picture of where our wood supply is going to come from and that is what it is going to take, in order for somebody to make those investments into the next level — to really build — and I don't mean like a small, home-based mill. I am talking a bigger, functioning mill that can actually provide that. We are always trying to look at those opportunities. We have seen folks here who at one point were shipping, as well, into our smaller communities and the US and doing pretty well on it. But at this point, we have an innovation plan that is coming out — our innovation plan is taking into consideration a number of different industries, but — for the House — the mass wood strategy is not one of the things that I am aware of.

But you know what we will do — we will have the department, before we finish up, just take a look at that report from British Columbia and see if there are some good potential synergies, even in parts of it, and would there be — at a small scale, like a micro-system of doing that — could that happen, and what would that look like, and how could that help our economy? There are always great ideas from everywhere in the House, and that sounds like a very interesting one. We will ask the officials to contemplate that.

**Ms. White:** I thank the minister for that. I think that the other part — the reason why mass timber is of such interest, actually, is because of its climate reasons. So, talking about buildings using less steel but also less concrete, so this building product is better for the environment. I had been approached by someone who said: “Do you have any idea where we can access additional funding, like green funding?” — just trying to look toward that.

That actually flows into the next thing. I had a really interesting letter. Actually, so did the minister. We got it on March 5 from a constituent. It was about agriculture possibilities. I know that we are talking about Economic Development, but it does tie in because the conversation was around — right now with the burn piles. We are literally just burning what could be a really valuable resource if it were chipped and actually put into fields. The Growers of Organic Food Yukon have supported this idea. Is this an idea that someone could bring forward to the Department of Economic Development to look at seed funding, for example? It would be a benefit to the Yukon Agricultural Association. It would be a benefit to the climate. Instead of having fire piles, we would have, essentially, compost.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Absolutely. Any concepts and ideas where there are economic opportunities, we will contemplate that at the department. Many different ideas from many different sectors come in. Secondly, if it does meet the criteria that is laid out — which is extremely broad — then we can help folks understand the application process, and we can also help them prepare an application. I'm not saying that they are going to be successful, but hopefully they are. We can walk through it with them. That's the thing. That's the work we want to do.

The innovation just continues in the Yukon in the sense that there are so many great, unique ideas.

I'm just going back to NRCan. There's a 2021 state of mass timber in Canada report. We will have a look at that.

On anything with forestry on some of these projects, there are FP solutions — I believe that's the name. They work hand in hand with NRCan. When I was in the forestry portfolio — I've worked with them on the private sector side. While in the Yukon, we leveraged additional money to take a look at something else with a number of local private sector folks in partnership with a First Nation. They were really good about providing seed money. I know the forestry branch would be aware of that. We can sort of shepherd over that conversation. There are usually good funds out there at the federal level — or the feds have provided to NGOs when it comes to that sort of work, especially when it comes to waste product — is what we would look at.

The concept at that time was understanding that, with all these trucks that were backhauling, there was nothing on the trucks coming out of the Yukon. The individual was looking at the price point because they were in the firewood business. When you walk into these box stores across Canada, they have bundles of kindling or firewood that you can get. The waste wood through what this individual was doing could fit that criteria and we went through the whole process. We had a local law firm and management consultant do a bit of work on it. It didn't look like it was a big enough opportunity — but stuff like that. That group, FPInnovations, and one of my team members then who is now in Economic Development helped to do all that work. We do have someone at Economic Development who does know that group really well.

**Mr. Dixon:** Thank you for the opportunity. I have a few very brief questions about the paid sick leave program.

We have been contacted by a business that applied to the paid sick leave rebate, and they were told that, because the application was received outside of the 30-day period from when the paid sick day occurred, they were ineligible. Can the minister confirm that there is indeed a 30-day limit for the paid sick leave program?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** We are aware of that. I was just getting an update. We are in a situation where it is within the current phase of the program — I think it was a couple of weeks. The owner illustrated, at least in the correspondence that I have been made aware of, the challenges in dealing with a number of things within the business. They were building a strong case. We were searching to see if we could find the flexibility under this phase for it. We can get back. We were just trying to figure out if it was concluded or not, but certainly we can come back and figure out what the status of that request is.

**Mr. Dixon:** I appreciate that. The minister will obviously be aware of this. My colleague, the Member for Porter Creek North, wrote a letter to the minister about this a few weeks ago, and so I'm sure that it's working its way through the system.

But attached to that letter was an information sheet that was provided to businesses about it, and that information sheet made no mention of a 30-day limit. I was curious whether or

not the policy that guides this program itself includes that 30-day limit.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** When we come back to the House — we'll just cross-reference that to see if there was a gap in information or not. I think it's important to say that we're not trying to exclude people from the supports; we're trying to help and be flexible, as much as we can, to support people, because it's a program in a very challenging time. That's our lens.

In some cases, though, as folks know, when we conclude a fiscal year or we conclude the funding on the piece — or it's scoped out very strongly within the Management Board minute, which then turns into the architecture for the scope — that's what we have to do. Of course, we have to adhere to the policies within the government and be respectful of the direction that we've been given.

So, those are the things that we contemplate, but if we have flexibility and it makes good sense and we're trying to help people, that's what we're trying to accomplish.

**Mr. Dixon:** Is there a policy that guides this program?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Yes. There is policy work that guides all of our programs that we have been delivering in the sense that, in some cases, we might have some more fulsome than others. But my sense is, in just checking, that we have a paid sick leave rebate program. I think, even on the website for the Yukon government, you can go through and it lays it out. At the very end on our website, it says: We must receive the application and supporting documentation within 30 days of the claimed sick leave period. So, that's what we provided to the public. That's what's on our site. There is a button there and a link for employers and one for employees.

**Mr. Dixon:** So, the minister answered my first question — that there is a parameter in the policy that says there is a 30-day limit. That's good. But my question was: Is there a policy for this program?

Normally, for the funding programs that exist in the Department of Economic Development, there is an explicit policy for each one. For instance, the community development fund has its own policy. Other funds have their own policies. That's what guides the administration of those funds.

My question is whether or not the paid sick leave rebate program has its own policy.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** What we have are — you can call it a “policy” — program guidelines. That is what we use in these situations, and our program guidelines for this are that you may receive up to 10 days' wages for your full-time or part-time workers or, as a self-employed person, if you stay at home and cannot work because you are sick with COVID-19 symptoms, are required to self-isolate due to a public health order and cannot work remotely, or are caring for another household member due to the above circumstances.

The next piece is: What does this program not cover? Then it goes into that work. Then it asks how many times a worker can qualify for a rebate. Then it goes into — if the paid sick leave rebate does not fully meet your worker's needs — and then there are links there.

Those are the guidelines. I consider that as policy, and that is how folks are informed of it and that is what we have used to

make decisions. Again, we're trying to be as flexible as we possibly can, within our guidelines, to be able to provide appropriate supports in our program.

**Mr. Dixon:** So, there is no formal policy, but there is a set of guidelines and the minister considers that a policy, which I understand.

The next question I have is one about another instance where we have heard from a business that applied for the fund for a sick day that occurred in January. They received a response this week — a number of months later — and in that response, they were told that they would receive payment in four to six weeks — so, that would put them possibly into June — from when the original application went in.

Is there a timing standard that the department tries to achieve in the turnaround for these, and is that a normal experience, or is this person who has indicated this to us an outlier?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** If I can get back to the House — I just want to go back to it. The Oxford dictionary would say that a policy is: “a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by government...” So, that guideline is a policy by definition. We can go back and forth all day, but that is what it is; it is a policy. We have approved operating guidelines and the term used is interchangeable with “policy” if we want to go back and forth. So, let's correct the record: There is a policy; it is the guidelines. So, that would be a wrong interpretation by the member opposite.

Secondly, on a specific case, we are more than willing to help and we can certainly help out. We just need to be aware — I don't know if I should get into a very specific case here on the floor that was mentioned, but in each one of these cases, I am certainly comfortable with casework and I can go back and take a look at it to make sure, from January — this specific situation. I will see if I have any other work, and I can talk about just the claims times from Finance.

Usually, our claims are processed within three to four weeks. Again, there have been many claims since January 1. We processed more than 600 claims that have been approved this month. Earlier on in the questions from phases 1 and 2 — phase 3 of this program has allocated more money than the first two phases combined. So, please be patient with our team. They are processing a lot of claims. If there is something specific — I think all the members on the opposite bench would say that I always try to work and come up with solutions on behalf of the people they represent or folks they are championing causes for, and this would be no different.

**Mr. Dixon:** In the minister's guidelines, is there any expectation that an applicant would expect to receive payment by a certain amount of turnaround time?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** There is nothing specific in our policy around the expectations. I think we have not seen any real challenges. To be up front, this is the first one that has been brought to me. Of course, we have been in a very difficult scenario, because we have had so many claims. I just touched on the 600 that we have provided funding for.

**Mr. Dixon:** I will take from the minister's answer that this is an outlier and we will let this individual business know

that is not the norm and that others who apply to this fund shouldn't expect that kind of turnaround.

Can the minister confirm that it is indeed BID that is administering this program? Can the minister give us a sense of the capacity that BID has to continue to administer this program vis-à-vis all the other duties those folks have to be doing?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I think it's important to just correct the record. The member opposite said that I said this was an outlier or that I referred to it as an outlier. What I touched on was that this is the first time someone has brought this to me, so I want to be factual in that.

That area within Economic Development — BID — that you refer to — right now, there are two people working full time on this. I think that we will monitor this, as we have done. There seems to be a lot of activity right now because of Omicron. That is what we have seen. We will continue to watch that, but nobody has come in and identified in my briefings that there is a lack of capacity to execute. I think that we have allocated — folks have done a great job inside the department of taking on different responsibilities from time to time to make sure it has worked.

To be very open, the department has done a great job at the senior level to make those adjustments. Sometimes they make those operational changes, and I am not always aware of them, but I think that if we hear that there are a lot of applications that are not being processed over a period of time — there is a trend — and if I'm made aware of other situations beyond this one, I will be sure to reach out to our team and find out if there are adjustments that need to be made or things that we have to adjust to make sure that we can still deliver the program appropriately.

**Deputy Chair:** Is there any further general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development?

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

**Ms. White:** Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, cleared or carried, as required.

**Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, cleared or carried**

**Deputy Chair:** The Member for Takhini-Kopper King has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Deputy Chair:** Unanimous consent has been granted.

**On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures**

**Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$26,721,000 agreed to**

**On Capital Expenditures**

**Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$1,106,000 agreed to**

**Total Expenditures in the amount of \$27,827,000 agreed to**  
**Department of Economic Development agreed to**

**Deputy Chair:** The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

**Some Hon. Members:** Agreed.

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

*Recess*

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

The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Is there any further general debate?

**Department of Health and Social Services — continued**

**Mr. Cathers:** I would just like to squeeze in a few questions before we hit the end of the day here.

I think I'll begin by following up on the issue of the bilingual health clinic, which we discussed the other day. I had asked the minister a couple questions regarding it. She indicated that there would be doctors there and that the model for them would be contract.

Could the minister indicate how many doctors they envision contracting at the bilingual clinic and what the dollar value of those contracts will be?

The other question I would ask the minister about is — the budget made reference to the provision of a chief nursing officer being hired and additional nurse practitioners. I would ask her what the role and duties of the chief nursing officer are — or will be, I should say — and how many nurse practitioners are being hired through this and where they will be located.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** With respect to the questions regarding the bilingual health centre, which of course we're very excited to proceed with, my recollection is that — certainly more than one physician. I think we're initially hiring two physicians — attempting to recruit two physicians — for the purposes of supporting the work and the patients' care at that health clinic. I can also indicate that, as I said probably the other day, that clinic will also be supported by other health professionals, including nurse practitioners and others. So, there will be options for care.

Ultimately, it is built on the polyclinic model from *Putting People First*, which means there are intended to be patient-centred wraparound services, including, in future, we hope, social workers and others who will be able to provide services to Yukoners.

With respect to the chief nursing officer, in fact, it is in this year's budget for recruitment of that position. We will be

working with the nurses association and the department officials and other partners to determine the best role and fit roles and responsibilities for that particular position and look forward to recruiting that position in the near future.

Yes, there are additional funds in this year's budget for nurse practitioners — again, I will correct myself, if incorrect — my recollection is at least three. We look that they would be available to initially support the clinic roles, like the bilingual health centre and other clinics across the territory — health centres across the territory. We would be looking to fill those positions — recruit for those positions — and have those individuals working, as best we can, in the places where there is the most need initially.

Nurse practitioners are an amazing resource for Yukon medical care. They are an amazing resource for medical care across the country. They are sometimes the only medical service available in rural communities or remote communities in northern Canada. In northern Ontario, Québec, and other places, nurse practitioners have garnered much favour because of their scope of practice and their ability to provide service for patients and clients — to give care, often including diagnostic skills, some prescribing skills, and the ability to order tests.

Those kinds of services are especially valuable in small, rural, and remote places in Canada where there is no regular medical doctor. They, of course, support medical doctors if they are visiting or if there is virtual care, but I am very pleased about the item in this year's budget for the purposes of dealing with nurse practitioners and increasing our array of staff of nurse practitioners, because they are such a valuable resource.

It is our government's expectation that nurse practitioners would be a valuable resource in every health centre across the territory. I would look forward to hopefully getting to the point where that is, in fact, a service that is provided for Yukoners. It will roll into the concept of a polyclinic, as contemplated by *Putting People First*, because nurse practitioners will often be the front line of service. We expect that, through the evolution of the way in which medical care is provided in Canada and across the territory, it may be that the first person you might see, once an assessment is made with respect to your care, is a social worker. It could be that the first person you see is a lab technician of some kind. It might be that the first person you see is a nurse practitioner. It might be, ultimately, that your matter is assessed that it should go to a medical doctor, if there are limitations, but nurse practitioners are an extremely valuable resource.

We have money in this year's budget to hire more nurse practitioners, as I have indicated. My recollection is that it's initially three, but I will look for that number and provide it to the member opposite or to this Legislative Assembly, because I expect that I will be on my feet again with respect to answering questions regarding this main budget, and I am very pleased to do so.

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

**Deputy Chair:** It has been moved by the Member for Riverdale South 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 for the long weekend.

**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. Tuesday.

*The House adjourned at 5:26 p.m.*

### **The following legislative return was tabled April 14, 2022:**

35-1-41

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Kent related to general debate on Vote 3, Education, in Bill No. 203, *Third Appropriation Act 2021-22* — additional COVID-19 staff (McLean)

### **The following written questions were tabled April 14, 2022:**

Written Question No. 16

Re: Mayo reservoir project (McLeod)

Written Question No. 17

Re: Carmacks arena (McLeod)

Written Question No. 18

Re: request for bids to supply and deliver calcium chloride (Hassard)