



Yukon Legislative Assembly

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HANSARD

Thursday, April 21, 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

NAME	CONSTITUENCY	PORTFOLIO
Hon. Sandy Silver	Klondike	Premier Minister of the Executive Council Office; Finance
Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee	Riverdale South	Deputy Premier Minister of Health and Social Services; Justice
Hon. Nils Clarke	Riverdale North	Minister of Highways and Public Works; Environment
Hon. John Streicker	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
Hon. Ranj Pillai	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
Hon. Richard Mostyn	Whitehorse West	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board
Hon. Jeanie McLean	Mountainview	Minister of Education; Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

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

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

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

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**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, April 21, 2022 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

Bills ordered dropped from Order Paper

Speaker: Before we begin with the Daily Routine, the Chair would like to inform the House of changes made to the Order Paper.

Bill No. 303, entitled *Act to Amend the Education Act (2022)*, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre, has been removed from the Order Paper as it is similar to Bill No. 304, which passed the House yesterday.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Cathers: I would like to ask members to join me in welcoming a number of guests here for the tribute to MLA Mickey Fisher. They are: Mickey's daughter, Lila Nickel; her husband, Rod; and their children, Jamie and Jacob; as well, Gord Steele; former MLA Patrick Rouble; Leo Chasse; and Dale Kozmen.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES

In remembrance of Mickey Fisher

Mr. Cathers: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party and the Third Party to pay tribute to former Yukon Party MLA Mickey Fisher. He passed away in late December at the age of 81, and we are appreciative of his service in the Legislature from 1992 to 1996, representing the riding of Lake Laberge. The riding of Lake Laberge had just been formed under that name and Mickey was the first person to serve as MLA for Lake Laberge.

On behalf of the Yukon Party caucus, I offer our deepest sympathy to his family and friends.

Born on December 22, 1940 in Bearberry, Alberta to Eunice and George Fisher, he moved to Watson Lake as a teenager to join his sister Shirley Charchuk. There he married Marjorie Cole and had two daughters, Adrian and Lila. In 1982, Mr. Fisher and his family moved to Whitehorse.

His election in 1992 was part of the first official electoral victory under the Yukon Party banner. From 1992 to 1996, he served as MLA and a minister in the Yukon Party government under Government Leader John Ostashek.

Mickey Fisher is the first person I ever voted for in an election. I wasn't old enough to vote in 1992, but in the 1996

election, I marked my first X on a ballot for Mickey Fisher. I didn't actually meet Mickey until after I was elected and unfortunately I didn't know him well. He was from a generation a little before me within the Yukon Party and part of the first government to be elected under the Yukon Party banner.

As I stand here to honour his contributions to the Yukon, I know that there is much more to tell about Mickey's life and his service to our territory than I am personally able to say. A friend who worked with him during his time as minister described him to me like this: steadfast, did his job, didn't seek the limelight, and did his homework.

Long-time editor of the *Whitehorse Star* Jim Butler honoured Mickey's work in an article this February and said this about him — and I quote: "He methodically carried out his tasks with integrity and commitment." Mickey's daughter shared this about her dad: "I know he really enjoyed his travels as an MLA. They went to Russia, Sri Lanka, and Singapore, and those trips really stood out for him. He and mom moved to Stewart and worked as the emergency measures officer before relocating back to Faro, where he was on the town council and worked to help get the gas station operating again. I think he was also proud of his contribution in getting the Northern Lights Centre operating in Watson Lake."

Mr. Speaker, after their time in Stewart, BC, in 2007, he and his wife moved back to the Yukon to Faro. He moved back to Whitehorse after Marjorie's passing on April 15, 2010.

I would like to thank Jim Butler for paying tribute to Mickey's contributions to the Yukon in the February 11, 2022 edition of the *Whitehorse Star*. As he notes, Mickey Fisher was well-liked by his colleagues and respected by ordinary Yukoners. Butler wrote: "... Fisher was unfailingly courteous and cordial, with a genuine desire to help others." He recalled how Mr. Fisher was always ready to speak to him as media and willing to chat about any topic, political or otherwise.

Mickey's passion for Yukoners, his riding, and the Yukon Party government that he was part of can be heard during his speeches in this House. Butler described him: a chatty, quintessential Yukoner derived from Alberta roots, a woodcutter, a fly-in cabin builder, hobby farmer, camper, fishing enthusiast, all-round nice guy.

During his time in the Yukon, Mickey also worked in Watson Lake as town manager, as a taxi-cab operator, and for Yukon Electrical.

Thank you for your service to the Yukon and its people, Mickey. On behalf of the Yukon Party, I offer our sincere condolences to his family, his daughter Lila, and his grandchildren Jamie and Jacob Nickel, and our sincere condolences to all his friends as well.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to Lyle Mickey Fisher. Mickey was born in Bearberry, Alberta on December 22, 1940 to Eunice and George Fisher. He passed away this past year on his 81st birthday.

Watson Lake would be Mickey's first stop in the Yukon, having moved there as a teenager to be with his sister, Shirley

Charchuk. This is where he started his family, marrying Marjorie Cole on June 27, 1964 and welcoming two daughters, Adrian in 1973 and Lila in 1974.

During his time in Watson Lake, Mickey worked for Yukon Electrical, ran a taxi company, and was the town manager.

The family also spent a great deal of time enjoying fishing and camping at the log home and fly-in cabin on Meister Lake. He and his family later moved to Whitehorse where he and Marjie owned and operated several small businesses, including a small market garden and woodcutting business.

He was elected as the Member for Lake Laberge in 1992 to 1996 in John Ostashek's Yukon Party government, where he served as the minister for the departments of Renewable Resources, Community and Transportation Services, Yukon Housing Corporation, Economic Development, and Health and Social Services. He and Marjie later moved to Stewart, BC and then to Faro, before coming back to Whitehorse after Marjie's passing on April 15, 2010. Mickey was a proud grandfather to Jamie and Jacob Nickel.

I first met Mickey while he was a councillor for the Town of Faro, but really had the opportunity to build a friendship when he moved in across the street from me in Granger. I was intimidated by Mickey at first and hesitated to engage with him. I wasn't sure how he felt about the big red sign on my lawn when election time came around, but over time, we became friends. He was so kind to my family, and we always made to sure connect over the holidays. I truly appreciated the conversations on current events that I shared with Mickey. Mickey always had the news on and kept up on current events that were happening in the world.

Even as his health deteriorated, I would often come home from a long day in the Legislature to find Mickey plowing my driveway with his best pal, Nemo, sitting by his side.

I will remember Mickey as a tough, intelligent, and caring man.

Applause

Speaker: Tabling returns and documents.

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Speaker: Under returns and documents for tabling, the Chair has for tabling the *Report on Subsistence, Travel & Accommodations of Members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly 2021-2022*, dated April 2022. This report is compiled pursuant to an order of the Members' Services Board.

Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have for tabling three documents today. The first is a CBC article from April 21, 2016, titled "Yukon gov't mum on Whistle Bend facility operation costs". The second is a *Whitehorse Star* article from April 21, 2016, titled "Unknown cost a 'new low in fiscal management'". And finally, an article from the *Yukon News* on April 22, 2016, titled "Government's cost estimate for Whistle Bend facility 'hogwash,' says NDP".

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling four legislative returns.

Ms. White: I have for tabling an editorial written by the Minister of Community Services, dated April 1, 2006, titled "taxpayers build white elephant".

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 Yukon government to take action to ensure that property owners are able to do flood preparation and mitigation work in a timely manner instead of being tied up in bureaucratic red tape related to YESAB and permitting.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Polarettes Gymnastics Club facility

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I rise before the House today to highlight the new Whitehorse gymnastics and climbing facility. I know that today I will hear support for this new facility coming to Whitehorse, as all parties in this Assembly supported the construction of a new facility in the last election.

Mr. Speaker, the Polarettes Gymnastics Club has over 1,000 active members and a wait-list of kids. The club has outgrown its facility at Vanier Catholic Secondary School, and this new facility will allow for more participation and increased programming.

Yukoners are some of the most active people in the country, and rock-climbing has exploded in popularity in our territory and across Canada. Climbing is now an Olympic sport and a sport option in the Canada Winter Games. Climb Yukon Association has coached a youth climbing team in the Yukon for more than 26 years, and since 2008, they have worked as a not-for-profit and now a sport governing body promoting climbing in the Yukon.

The Climb Yukon Association has outgrown the bouldering walls at Porter Creek Secondary School. The new facility will provide increased programming and regular public access to a modern indoor climbing facility.

In 2019, in support of Yukon's sport and recreation groups, we commissioned a feasibility report that explored several options. We settled on a new facility for a gymnastics and climbing gym, as these sports have similar height requirements. We're excited to support the long-term growth of gymnastics and climbing in the Yukon by partnering with the Government of Canada, Polarettes Gymnastics Club, Yukon Gymnastics Association, and Climb Yukon Association.

Mr. Speaker, the Whitehorse gymnastics and climbing facility will be located on Goddard Way. The gymnastics and

climbing facilities will be separate spaces within a common, energy-efficient building. The Government of Yukon is working with Polarettes and Climb Yukon on the design. The tender will open this summer, and we expect that the facility will be ready by the end of March 2024.

This facility will also strengthen our bid to host the 2027 Canada Winter Games. This project joins other recreation projects in progress around the territory, including the Second Haven skate park in Whitehorse and upgrades to Mount Sima. This year, we will finish constructing the new swimming pool in Pelly Crossing; construction will start on the White River First Nation community centre in Beaver Creek.

Our government is building modern, safe, and exciting recreation facilities that are helping Yukoners to live active lives and remain competitive in sports on national and international stages. I want to thank the Government of Canada, the Polarettes Gymnastics Club, Yukon Gymnastics Association, and Climb Yukon Association for moving this important project forward.

Ms. McLeod: I think everyone understands how important recreation is in our territory — not only for adults, but especially for youth. We know that we need to keep our youth busy with positive influences so they don't take a turn down the wrong road. For many Yukoners, whether it is sports, arts, or any other activity, something you try as a child usually carries over into your adult years.

That's why the Polarettes Gymnastics Club is so important. It's definitely a club that has no partisan lines, as witnessed in last year's territorial election. As noted by the minister, all three parties committed to building a new gymnastics centre for the club. I should also mention that Polarettes are very popular in the community. Many Yukon parents have paid close attention as to when online registration for fall, winter, or spring classes are available, and many parents have experienced missing out on registration with their child put on a wait-list.

While it's unfortunate for many parents, it's a good problem to have for the Polarettes. As they have identified, if they had a new facility, they would be able to accommodate more people, so hopefully the frustration of parents who can't get their child into Polarettes will be a thing of the past.

I thank the minister for the update, but there are some items that he left out. What is the budget for the project? How much is the government chipping in? When will the tender close, and when will the construction actually begin? I am also wondering if the minister has taken into consideration supply chain issues and has budgeted for delays and increased costs. As the minister mentioned, this facility will include a climbing wall. Can he tell us how this is worked into the budget and how much he has consulted with the main user of the climbing wall, the Climb Yukon Association, on the wall's planning? Finally, the minister has said that the new facility will form part of their bid for the Canada Winter Games, so can the minister assure us that it will be built to those certain specifications?

This is a project that we are very happy to see being worked on and we will be following its progress very closely.

Ms. White: The Yukon NDP support recreation, and we, like the other parties in this Assembly, met with representatives of the Polarettes Gymnastics Club and Climb Yukon during the last territorial election. We sent a letter of support contingent on funding from the federal government, so I'm glad to know that this project is closer to a reality and that this government has the support of the federal government to move ahead. Can the minister tell us the funding arrangement between Yukon and Canada to get this facility built?

We also are wondering about the plans about the current club facility. Will it still be available as a public space for families who currently use it for drop-in and, if not, what are the government's plans for the existing space? We don't disagree with the other projects that have been highlighted by the minister, especially the construction of a new pool in Pelly Crossing and the community centre in Beaver Creek, but what about recreation opportunities in other rural communities?

Watson Lake has an incredible recreation centre, with a weight room, three-lane bowling alley, seasonal swimming pool, curling rink, and ice rink. Without forgetting the youth centre, community hall, and commercial kitchen, this centre offers a wide range of activities and services for folks in this community. This facility is in desperate need of a roof. Is this a project that the minister is committed to funding?

This type of facility in other communities is what all Yukon communities deserve. We know that recreation is good for physical health and mental health, kids and adults alike. The government's *Putting People First* report states — and I quote: "Yukoners support improving access to health promotion opportunities in their communities, such as nutrition, exercise, and recreational programs. These types of opportunities were noted as key for maintaining and improving health and wellbeing, and for deterring substance use and addiction." So, when will the government ensure that all Yukoners have access to year-round recreational opportunities?

The minister also highlighted that this project would be great for Whitehorse's bid for the Canada Winter Games, but he only has to go back as far as his own editorial that I tabled to be reminded of the further requirements of planning an event like this.

So, can the minister tell me what the housing plan is for the 2027 Canada Winter Games? Despite the minister's criticism in 2006, the housing built for the 2007 Canada Winter Games is a legacy, housing both seniors and students at the university, so we look forward to similar legacy housing investments as part of this bid for the Canada Winter Games.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the members opposite for their remarks this afternoon and their general support for this wonderful facility that we are building in Whitehorse. Our government has worked with First Nation partners, municipalities, local contractors, community organizations, and the Government of Canada to get projects done in communities across the territory.

Last year, I was proud to be at the opening of Whitehorse's newest skate park. That was a \$3.5-million investment in providing youth an avenue to recreate and foster their creativity

in a fun and active environment. In Dawson City, we worked closely with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation to build a 3,000-square foot youth centre that will give local youth and young adults in Dawson an opportunity to pursue traditional activities and education and to make lifelong friendships. We provided nearly half a million dollars for the centre.

In addition, we have begun to build the Dawson City recreation centre that is on track to be completed soon — as early as 2026. We have also allocated more than \$10 million for the new health and wellness centre in Old Crow. The new centre will be the first of its kind in the Yukon, providing both health and social services in a collaborative care model to Yukoners living in and around the area.

In budget 2022-23, we have also outlined our plan to invest in upgrades to the arena in Mayo, build an earlier childhood development centre in Pelly, an elders complex in Old Crow, a health and wellness centre in Carcross, and more.

These are just a few of the examples of some of the community projects that our government is investing in, and we are ensuring that this work is getting completed. I listed some of these projects — really for the Member of the Third Party — because we are investing in recreation activities and really community development throughout the territory. It has been a cornerstone of our government's initiatives. We are doing it in all communities, and we're doing it in consultation — I have adopted the same approach that my predecessor in this role adopted, and that is to go around to the communities and have them prioritize what projects they would like to see developed in their communities.

So, we are taking that advice from the duly elected governments across the territory to advise us on what they think is the best way to invest in their communities, and we are doing that work.

To the members opposite, we do have a five-year capital plan. It actually lists the climbing facility in the five-year capital plan. The budget for that project is \$19 million to \$22 million. I encourage the Official Opposition to use that tool. I know that they do use it quite a bit. I welcome that use, and I encourage them to continue to use that wonderful tool that we initiated a few years ago to actually help communities know what is coming and for contractors to know exactly what is coming down the pike as far as the contracts that they can bid on.

Speaker: This then brings us Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: RCMP funding

Mr. Cathers: This morning, the commanding officer of the Yukon RCMP delivered a stunning indictment of this Liberal government's failure to properly resource the RCMP.

In a CBC Yukon interview, he made it clear that the police force is seriously under-resourced. Despite the Yukon's rapidly growing population and rising trend in criminal activity, funding from this Liberal government has not been sufficient.

When will the Liberal government start properly funding the RCMP in the Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak about the RCMP and our relationship with them here in Whitehorse and across the territory, including all of M Division.

I had an excellent conversation this morning with Chief Superintendent Scott Sheppard. We spoke about the budget items that are in the 2022-23 budget — which are currently before this Legislative Assembly and are being debated — and the opportunities that the passing of that budget will bring with the increased funding to the RCMP.

We also spoke about future opportunities for us to provide resources to the RCMP through our discussions. I look forward to those continuing.

As I said, we had an excellent conversation, and I certainly conveyed our support for the work that the RCMP is doing here in the territory as our territorial policing service. I hope that the front-line officers also hear — we had a few of them yesterday in a very serious situation — our support and the opportunity for Yukoners to support the work that they are doing.

Mr. Cathers: Talk is cheap. The RCMP need money. The chief superintendent made it very clear this morning to CBC Yukon. They have requested more resources and are in serious need of more money and more RCMP positions. So far, the Liberal government and this minister have failed to meet these needs.

Chief Superintendent Sheppard noted that Yukon RCMP have not seen a single new investigative or front-line position since he took over the position in 2016. This is despite the fact that the Yukon's population has grown significantly and the challenges facing the force have too. Despite the fact that there are as many as five organized crime operations in the territory, this government still has failed to provide adequate resources to the RCMP.

When will the Liberal government start taking policing needs seriously and start providing the proper resources to the RCMP?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the vigour with which the member opposite is bringing this question, but there were clear misunderstandings about the concept of the RCMP funding. Chief Superintendent Scott Sheppard and I spoke about those this morning. There has been a 19.8-percent increase in actual spending from the 2016-17 budget for the RCMP to the 2020-21 and a 16.5-percent increase to their spending authority.

We have a number of very significant increases in this budget — the 2022-23 budget that is before the Legislative Assembly — including \$1.1 million to address additional concerns that they have about operations, including things like fuel, materials, and administrative costs that are required. We have a clear commitment to the RCMP for the contractual obligation that we have to fund every position that they have, including the O&M for those positions, and we reconcile the budget for the RCMP every June. We meet quarterly with them to discuss specific numbers and specific budgets. We support their work. We support the expansion of their work in the territory, and we will do so with a budget.

Mr. Cathers: The minister can try to paint a rosy picture all she wants, but she knows very well that most of the increase provided is due to collective agreement increases and to cover inflation. Chief Superintendent Sheppard told CBC Yukon that they are struggling to make ends meet. They have had to pull resources out of other branches to try to keep up with the challenges facing the crime reduction unit.

In a startling revelation, he told media that this year they will be operating at a deficit. What is absolutely clear from the interview is that the RCMP is in desperate need of an injection of O&M funding and of new positions, despite what the minister tries to spin here in this House. None of this will be possible unless this minister and this Liberal government finally start taking Yukon's policing needs seriously.

When will this Liberal government start providing sufficient resources to the RCMP?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I really would hope that the member opposite, and everyone, will listen to the responses that I'm giving, because we have worked to ensure that the provision of professional, accountable, and appropriately funded territorial police services is responsive to the priorities of Yukon citizens, through the Police Council and otherwise.

We have worked and will continue to work closely with the RCMP about the issues that are funding- and resource-related. We can indicate that the historical cases unit, which came about with three full-time positions in 2018-19, has become permanently funded. There are two new officers permitted to the crime reduction unit through the budget that's before the Legislative Assembly now. They will be working primarily on the substance use health emergency. They will be targeting drugs, property crime, and organized crime. I can indicate that there is also a position that has been added with respect to the First Nation policing authority, and I certainly hope that the members opposite will be supporting this budget for the funding for the RCMP.

Question re: Cost of living

Mr. Hassard: Yesterday, Statistics Canada announced another massive spike in the rate of inflation, which was the biggest jump since GST was introduced in 1991. Here in the Yukon, the new inflation rate is a whopping 6.1 percent. That means the cost of living for Yukoners is going up even more. This is clearly the biggest issue facing Yukoners and yet the Liberals continue to ignore it. Their budget was stale the day after it was tabled, and it fails to even acknowledge inflation. The only new measures they have introduced is a trifling \$150 a year to help with electricity bills.

So, when will the Liberal government start taking this issue seriously and start providing real relief for Yukoners who are facing the highest cost of living in a generation?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, throughout the Legislative Assembly this session, we have been rising to our feet to say that — not only in this budget but in every budget since we began — our focus is on making lives more affordable for Yukoners, and we have accomplished that.

We have accomplished that by having balanced budgets before COVID to make sure that we had a massive amount of

money available for Yukon businesses and citizens during some of the most trying times in our generation. We absolutely recognize and we're conscious of the effects of rising inflation and those effects on families, and we have taken actions to address that.

Members opposite don't want to hear that and they're not listening to those answers. Budget 2022-23 invests in housing supply, universal childcare, paid sick leave, and a territory-wide dental plan. Budget 2022-23 is also notable for what it doesn't contain: no new taxes, no new increase to tax rates, and no new increases to fees.

Mr. Hassard: The only thing this government has accomplished is to show just how out of touch with Yukoners they really are. The fact is that the Premier's budget speech doesn't even mention inflation or the cost of living — not even once. There is absolutely nothing in the budget to respond to this growing inflation crisis. They have ignored the issue, hoping it will go away, but unfortunately, it is only getting worse.

Provinces around the country are taking action to address the inflation crisis, but all the Liberals here have been able to do is come up with \$150 per year. They have ignored our calls to cut the fuel tax. They have ignored our calls to support seniors by increasing the pioneer utility grant and homeowners grant.

So, when will the government recognize that Yukoners are struggling and start taking action to actually address the inflation crisis?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, again, for five years now, we have been talking about making lives more affordable for Yukoners. The members opposite can stick their head in the sand if they want, but we are responding to this every year, and we're going to continue to. We have had a plan, right from the beginning, to have balanced budgets. We have not increased any taxes and we have not increased fees.

The Council of the Federation, another example of moving forward, met on March 10 to discuss energy and fuel prices. We don't want to do flashy, politically expedient solutions; we want long-term solutions for Yukoners.

We discussed some strategies locally, as well, and we are going to continue to look at long-term energy solutions for security for Yukoners — not the "flash in the pan" type of parlour tricks from the Yukon Party past, but we're trying to find ways to explore long-term solutions, whether it comes to the things that I mentioned earlier: again, heavy investment in education, housing, extremely important endeavours throughout every single page and every single department of this Legislative Assembly.

As we respond to this, the opposition doesn't take our answers. They accuse us of not answering the questions, but here we are answering the questions, and they're still saying that we're being silent on this issue; we're not. We have a long-term plan when it comes to making lives more affordable for Yukoners.

Mr. Hassard: Unfortunately, it doesn't matter how many speaking points the Premier uses, it doesn't actually help Yukoners.

According to Statistics Canada, year over year, Canadians are paying almost 40 percent more for gasoline this month. It's even more here in the Yukon. Food prices are through the roof. Statistics Canada says that, year over year, prices of food have seen the largest increase in over a decade. Again, it's even more here in the Yukon.

One of the clear tools that the Yukon government has to influence fuel prices is the fuel tax. We have continued to ask the Premier to cut this tax to help the cost of living for Yukoners. Yet the Liberals continue to refuse.

When will they start taking seriously the cost-of-living crisis that Yukoners are facing?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Again, you have heard it from the Premier, and I will echo that: The response to what is happening is that it has been a multi-year response. It is with a long-term view. Just last week, you saw an investment in energy that brings us some of the best energy purchase costs that we have seen in decades to the Yukon. It is a long-term plan to keep energy costs where they should be.

The member opposite talks about how we are not helping folks. Well, please go and tell the 202 Yukon households that are receiving the Canada/Yukon Housing Corporation benefit — to help them with the rental housing — that those folks aren't being helped. This rental subsidy alone is helping a significant number of Yukoners to meet their needs. I hope we'll have support for the budget that we will pass next week, because with that program alone, we are looking at over \$1 million going toward that program to help Yukoners.

The other thing that the member opposite is not saying is that there was an increase in inflation. Of course, that does make things tougher for Yukoners, but what the member opposite did not say is that, when you look at the entire country, again, the Yukon was at the lowest point and is still not on the bottom of that list for the most part. I think it's number four. Again, we are looking at trying to make sure that we control costs. We are doing long-term investment, and we believe that is the best way —

Speaker: Order.

Question re: Opioid crisis

Ms. White: It has been three months since the minister declared a substance use health emergency and two months since she held a summit about how urgent the situation is; yet Yukoners have not seen the real action that they would expect when they hear the word “emergency.” While there is technically a safe supply of opioids, the only place where people can access it is the Referred Care Clinic in Whitehorse, if they even know it's there. For folks living in communities, well, they are out of luck. One solution to support communities is to allow registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses to prescribe a safe supply of opioids.

Is this government doing the work to allow registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses to prescribe a safe supply of opioids?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The short answer to this question is yes. The Department of Health and Social Services is doing the hard work to expand the safer supply opportunities, not only

here in Whitehorse, but further in Yukon communities, offering Yukoners an alternative to the illegal and dangerous drug supply — truly poison. That is known as a “safer supply” and is one — just one — response that the Yukon government is taking to prevent Yukoners from dying due to the toxic drug supply.

In Whitehorse, as noted, clients of the opioid treatment services can access safer supply through prescribing physicians at the Referred Care Clinic on a case-by-case basis. The expansion noted by the member opposite in the preamble to the question requires extensive work with respect to scope of practice for nurses and licensed medical practitioners throughout the territory.

I can also indicate that the safer supply focus — one of the expansion focuses for the Department of Health and Social Services is an education program for medical practitioners and nurses so that they are more comfortable with the concept of prescribing a safer supply of opioid alternatives.

Ms. White: I am relieved to hear the minister is working on it. Unfortunately, like a lot of projects that the minister works on, Yukoners are usually the last to find out.

We have heard from countless folks who share that they were given no information, no leaflets, no contacts, and no support from this government when they tried to access a safe supply at the Referred Care Clinic. Safe supply is virtually non-existent, even in Whitehorse — the only place in the territory where it is supposed to be available.

Will the minister work on making safe supply effectively available in all of the Yukon, as opposed to doing the bare minimum needed to check off the box?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: As always, I will urge members of this Legislative Assembly, should they have an individual or group come to them who has concerns about receiving a particular service provided by government, to contact my office — in this case, the Department of Health and Social Services directly — but more likely, they can come to me. Telephone, e-mail, letter — I would happily address that situation. We do, in many situations — but this one I think is timely and must be dealt with quickly, should an individual not be getting the service, as alleged here in this question.

The illicit drug supply is increasingly toxic and contaminated and unpredictable here in the territory. We are making evidence-based decisions to address the drug poisoning. Any person who consumes an illicit substance in the Yukon is at significant risk of drug poisoning. I take this opportunity to relay that message to Yukoners, because the street drug supply here in the territory can be dangerous. It is increasingly dangerous. We know this from the numbers of individuals whose lives have been snuffed out by the choices, unfortunately, or by the poisoning of drugs, and it cannot continue.

Ms. White: I would like to remind the government that when people bring things to us, they bring it to us because they trust us. Without consent, we can't bring that forward. The minister can say all she likes that they can contact her, but when we write letters on behalf of constituents with concerns and it

takes two, four, six, or eight weeks for a response, that doesn't seem like that's being treated as the emergency that they are.

So, as much as I like that the minister says that she is reachable and people can reach out, it has not proven to be the fact.

Can the minister please expand on how the government is expanding the safe supply of opioids in rural communities? Because right now, it's just not possible to access them there.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I beg to differ with the member opposite with respect to whether or not a service is being provided. I'm happy to address that specifically, and I would encourage that to be the case.

I also can assure the member opposite that, should we receive such a letter where there's a timely requirement for a service, that is given top priority. What I can also indicate is that we are continuing our expansion of the safer supply here in the territory, but actually, more importantly, I will say, on a national level, the conversation is occurring with the federal government, with ministers across the board who are dealing with the concerns of the opioid crisis in Canada across this country.

We must determine a way in which individuals can have drugs, should they be so addicted, that are not dangerous for them. There needs to be an opportunity for us as a country to address this and an opportunity for us to address it in the criminal legislation or in legislation that applies across the country. That conversation is happening inside the Department of Health and Social Services with respect to our response to the substance use health emergency, as well as nationally across the country.

Question re: Land costs

Mr. Istchenko: It comes as no surprise to Yukoners that the cost of land has increased, as well as everything else. A few weeks ago, I wrote the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources about the price of land sold by the Yukon government. In his April 11 letter to me, the minister said — and I quote: "Land sold through the Rural Residential Land Application policy, used for people seeking land for their primary residence, cannot be sold for any less than the appraised value as per the *Lands Act*".

However, Mr. Speaker, the *Lands Act* actually allows for a fair amount of discretion to setting of land prices.

So, will the minister consider reviewing the policy decision that requires that the land be sold for the appraised value instead of the cost of development?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will share with the member opposite that, when the letter came to me and the department provided me with the draft response, I asked them to go back and review it a few times, because I wanted to make sure. So, I did already pose the question about whether this was a legislated requirement or not. I am happy to check in another time and see what the department says, but I will say that, in my experience working with the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources and, in fact, across the public service, they are pretty darn diligent to make sure that they are giving me the best information that is possible.

But, sure, with respect to the request that is being posed here on the floor of the Legislative Assembly, I am happy to check back with the department again to see whether there is another possibility. At all times, we want to make housing more affordable for Yukoners. We have been doing that at every turn, whether that is through Community Services, Yukon Housing Corporation, or Energy, Mines and Resources. So, if there is an avenue that is available to us, I would be happy to explore it.

Mr. Istchenko: I do thank the minister for that.

In the minister's confidential briefing note from last fall on land availability, it outlines how the government sets the price. It says that the Government of Yukon — and I quote: "... sells lots for a value between development cost and the appraised market value." So, it clearly appears that there is an ability for the minister to set the price by regulation somewhere between the cost of development and appraised value.

So, will the minister consider using the cost of development, instead of the appraised value, to make the land more affordable for Yukoners?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, I will just note for Yukoners that the notes that the member is referencing are because we changed the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and we have made our briefing notes available for members opposite, so that is what we are referring to here.

I think that there are two questions that we have to watch. One is the difference between what was written to me about the land, the rural land, and whether that is open, because I did actually pose that very specific question to the department, and I got back a very specific answer. So, again, I will look to pose the question again.

I appreciate what the member opposite is saying; in fact, one of the reasons why I asked the question several times of the department is because the costs looked high. When I asked what the difference was, it was that there had not been an appraisal in recent times, and I was told very specifically that it was a legislative requirement.

At all times, as a government, we follow the law, but as I committed to in my first response, I will go back again and check with the department as to whether or not there is an opportunity.

Mr. Istchenko: So, the *Lands Act* allows for the development of regulations to set prices at which land can be sold. Using market appraisal to set the value of raw land in rural Yukon is keeping prices high and it definitely limits the ability of Yukoners to access land and the ability for our communities to grow and create jobs.

What steps is the minister taking to ensure that land is available and affordable for Yukoners, especially those in rural Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: As I just stated, when the member wrote to me previously and a draft response was made, I reached back to the department and asked, "Are you sure? Because these numbers look high. Is there another avenue?" I was told no. I asked for comparisons with other properties nearby, and I was given a map showing all of those over time. So, I actually did dive into this question.

With respect to how we are doing this overall, we just recently had a meeting between the Department of Community Services and the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources to review all the processes to, number one, see how to reduce red tape; number two, to see how to streamline the process; and number three, see if there are ways in which we can bring the cost down for Yukoners. We are working at all times to find the lowest cost that we can for Yukoners, because we recognize that there is a crunch on housing.

We have invested very heavily. I believe that in this year's budget alone, it's \$26 million in lot development — about half in Whitehorse and half in our rural communities. This is to make sure that we have access to a supply of lots that are as affordable as possible. At all times, we are working to do that, so I thank the member opposite for his question.

Question re: Teacher remuneration

Mr. Kent: Yesterday, we raised concerns about outstanding pay owed to Yukon educators going back three years. It occurred when permanent school-based employees were moved to the same biweekly, year-round pay system as other Yukon government employees.

We have heard from education professionals that this error in calculation has resulted in individual claims for thousands of dollars. The Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission said yesterday — and I quote: "... that the information coming from the members opposite is not accurate."

Can he clarify what exactly was not accurate about our statements?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I really appreciate the opportunity to stand again. Yesterday, when I rose to speak about this — there was a grievance filed in September 2019. In January 2020, there was a decision in favour of the Yukon government, which was not what the members opposite had noted. That would be one of the problems with what the Yukon Party posed in their question.

Then I stated — and I made a mistake — that the matter was heard by the Yukon Teachers Labour Relations Board for adjudication several weeks ago. Actually, it was heard in March 2021. I misread the year — my apologies.

I did check with the Public Service Commissioner yesterday and this morning and was told that it has not yet had a decision issued by the adjudicator. As I stated previously, once that adjudication has been given to us — I offered to table it. I'll offer that again.

Mr. Kent: So, I do appreciate the minister correcting the record with respect to what he said yesterday. Again, he did mention that he understood that the Yukon Association of Education Professionals took this forward for adjudication a few weeks ago. He has corrected the record now to correctly refer to that initial adjudication taking place March 22-24, 2021, which, of course, was 13 months ago.

Can the minister tell us when we can expect a decision to be made on this matter? Can he also tell us how much Yukon educators are claiming that they are collectively owed from this error in calculations?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: As I just stated, this has gone to the Yukon Teachers Labour Relations Board for adjudication. I did speak with the Public Service Commissioner yesterday. I don't have a timeline. I'm happy to inquire of the Yukon Teachers Labour Relations Board for adjudication. I can let Yukoners know that the issue around the pay period was because, in the previous collective agreement for the then-Yukon Teachers' Association, there was a request that we move to this system, as I understand it.

In the current new negotiated bargaining agreement that we now have in place, we've moved back, as per the suggestion — again, as I understand it — from the Yukon Association of Education Professionals. We're working to support them. I'm happy to try to get more information for the members opposite.

Mr. Kent: As we've said, this was an election issue that we heard about on the doorsteps. Yesterday, both the Minister of Education and the Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission seemed unaware of the situation as they scrambled to find briefing notes. We've heard that there were approximately 300 personal grievances filed last school year about this issue. I'm sure that this treatment of our professional educators doesn't help with recruitment and retention efforts in a field that is showing staffing shortages. The adjudication matter was heard 13 months ago.

So, why won't the Liberals just pay the teachers what they are owed rather than dragging them through this long, extended process?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: What I will say is that we will respect the process of the Yukon Teachers Labour Relations Board. I'm not sure if the members opposite are saying that they would not; that would surprise me.

As I noted previously, when the first grievances came, there was a decision in favour of the government's position, so I'm happy that it has gone to the labour relations board. I will, of course, respect what that decision is. We haven't received the decision.

So, I'm not sure — the members opposite are saying that they think that we should just bypass the labour relations board, which we would not do.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 27, French Language Services Directorate, 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: I will now call Committee of the Whole to order.

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

Deputy Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 27, French Language Services Directorate, in Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Is there any general debate?

French Language Services Directorate

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I am going to make a few brief opening remarks and I will make some of them in English and French, and I will make sure to share with Hansard the text, but I want to begin by welcoming two colleagues here to the Legislative Assembly. Bienvenue, Manon Moreau, sous-ministre de la DSF — Deputy Minister Manon Moreau — and my colleague, André Bourcier, directeur de la Direction des services en français — the director of the French Language Services Directorate.

I am pleased to present the French Language Services Directorate budget for 2022-23. I know that we aren't always here very long, but I am pleased to rise. It supports the directorate's operations and the delivery of French language services and information to the public across the government.

J'ai le plaisir de vous présenter le budget de la Direction des services en français pour 2022-2023. Ce budget englobe les activités de la Direction, et les services et l'information en français dans l'ensemble du gouvernement. Nous voulons remercier le gouvernement du Canada pour son appui à la mise en œuvre de la Loi sur les langues du Yukon. Nous entamons la troisième année de notre entente de cinq ans avec le Canada visant à assurer l'offre de services en français jusqu'en 2024-2025. Avec cette entente de 28 millions de dollars, nous pourrions continuer d'améliorer les services en français, et mieux servir et informer le public en français.

I would like to thank the Government of Canada for its ongoing support toward implementing our Yukon *Languages Act*, and we are entering the third year of our five-year agreement with Canada to support the provision of French language services, just up to 2024-25. This is a \$28-million agreement which allows us to build on our previous successes

and keep improving how we serve, inform, and engage with the public in French.

The following estimates include Canada's increased contribution of \$5.75 million for this budget year and our investment of close to \$1 million.

Nos estimations pour 2022-2023 comprennent la contribution accrue du gouvernement fédéral de 5,75 millions de dollars et notre propre contribution d'environ 1 million de dollars.

I just wanted to say a couple more things, and then I will take my seat and see if there are any questions.

Mr. Bourcier just passed me a document that talks about the amount of translation that we do. Generally, over time — over the past several years — it has been increasing significantly. In particular, you can even see during COVID where things increased. This past year, the total number of words is down slightly just because, when COVID first hit, there were a lot of documents requiring a lot of translation, but you can even see the trends in cases. So, when we have more cases and there is more pressure, more policies, and more regulations being brought in, then there is more translation.

Overall, we have been increasing the number of documents that we have been translating, although some of the ones that we have been doing more recently contain fewer words.

I just want to say thank you very much to French Language Services for all of the work they have done to try to make sure that Yukoners were safe during COVID.

With that, I will take my seat and see if there are any questions. I'm living in hope.

Ms. Clarke: Thanks to the officials for being here and for the briefing earlier this Sitting. All of our questions were addressed there, and if we have any further questions, we will send them in writing.

Merci.

Ms. White: Merci. C'est un plaisir d'être ici encore une fois pendant le débat de la Direction des services en français. On sait qu'il y a eu de grands changements dans ce bureau. Grâce à ces changements, on pose peu de questions parce que les choses vont bien. Il y a une grande différence depuis les dix dernières années, les choses ont bien changé. Alors j'aimerais féliciter les personnes de la Direction pour leur travail et tous les documents traduits pendant la pandémie de COVID-19, qui a représenté beaucoup de travail. Donc, merci à la Direction. J'aime être au courant de ses activités. La Direction est entre bonnes mains. J'apprécie le travail que fait la Direction. Il est important que je puisse parler ici en français, grâce à la *Loi sur les langues*. J'ai hâte qu'on puisse parler les langues autochtones à l'Assemblée législative et que nous ayons leurs traductions. Merci et à la prochaine fois.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I just want to thank both members opposite for their remarks and, in particular, the Member for Takhini-Kopper King for her thanks to the department for their hard work during COVID. It is appreciated.

If there are any further questions, as the Member for Porter Creek Centre suggests, we would be happy to answer them.

Deputy Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 27, French Language Services Directorate?

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 27, French Language Services Directorate, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 27, French Language Services Directorate, 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 27, French Language Services Directorate, 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
Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$6,855,000 agreed to
On Capital Expenditures
Capital Expenditures in the amount of nil agreed to
Total Expenditures in the amount of \$6,855,000 agreed to
to
French Language Services Directorate agreed to

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, 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 five minutes.

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, in Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Request for Acting Chair of Committee of the Whole

Deputy Chair: At this time, I will ask if any private member wishes to volunteer to be Acting Chair of Committee of the Whole as the Chair would like to take part in debate on the Yukon Development Corporation.

Member for Takhini-Kopper King rises

Yukon Development Corporation

Acting Chair (Ms. White): Order, please.

Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will make a few remarks today in rising to speak to the Yukon Development Corporation. I will also just begin by welcoming the Deputy Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation, Mr. Justin Ferbey, who has been in the Legislative Assembly many times, and

Mr. Jamie McAllister, who is our senior policy advisor and who is here for the first time. I would like to welcome him. I thank them for their support today.

Earlier in the session — I think a few weeks ago — we had considered having the Yukon Energy Corporation and Yukon Development Corporation here as witnesses. We decided not to — or the Assembly voted against that — but I thought that possibly it would be useful for members opposite to share the opening remarks that they had prepared. So, what I will do is table those here for members so they have a chance to read them at their leisure. They provide some general information about Yukon Development Corporation and Yukon Energy Corporation.

So, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the Yukon Development Corporation's operation and maintenance and capital main estimates for the 2022-23 fiscal year. The Yukon Development Corporation's mandate to develop and promote innovative energy systems, sustainable generation, production, transmission, and distribution of energy in the Yukon is an important topic as we all know.

The Yukon's on-grid electrical generation relies on a hydro system that has existed since 1958, which will continue to serve the Yukon well into the future. These hydro facilities are the backbone of our legacy renewable generation assets. Just yesterday, I was with the deputy minister for meetings in Carcross to talk about the relicensing of the Whitehorse facility.

The Yukon's growing population is putting increasing demands on our electrical infrastructure. That is why this government has made the commitment to invest in additional renewable generation capacity to reduce our dependence on thermal generating facilities. This commitment is clearly outlined in the Yukon's *Our Clean Future* strategy and in the confidence and supply agreement signed by us, as a government, and the New Democratic Party last year.

By continuing to invest in renewable electricity, we are simultaneously supporting economic growth in the territory and meeting our climate change commitments.

We also recognize that the Yukon's changing climate highlights the need to harvest additional sources of renewable electricity, including from wind and solar. Renewable generation can be added through new utility-owned assets or by purchasing power from local renewable energy projects owned by First Nations, communities, or businesses that are situated near the electrical grid or remote communities served by thermal electrical generation.

To help achieve these goals, Yukon Development Corporation's operation and maintenance budget for the 2022-23 fiscal year is \$6.125 million, and we have a capital budget of \$37.29 million. These funds support the development of community-led renewable electricity projects and help Yukoners maintain affordable access to electricity for their homes and businesses.

In our capital budget, the Innovative Renewable Energy Initiative budget has been increased by \$1 million, for a total of \$2.5 million for the 2022-23 fiscal year. The change is due to the increased uptake of this successful program, which began in 2018. This initiative is a solid example of our government's

support for community-led energy projects. Through this program, we are encouraging both public and private sector investment in such technologies as wind, solar, biomass, geothermal, and small-scale hydro generation.

Not only has this program furthered the development of renewable electricity projects, but it has also allowed communities to develop capacity in emerging technologies that can provide both economic and environmental benefits. We look forward to the initiative's continued success this fiscal year.

I will leave my comments about the Arctic energy fund — although I am happy to answer questions.

I will mention that we have allocated \$3.5 million to the interim electrical rebate. This universal subsidy remains unchanged this fiscal year and will continue to provide all residential electrical customers in the Yukon with a rebate of up to \$22.62 each month for the first 1,000 kilowatt hours, and it's based on electrical usage. The rebate continues to help ensure competitive rates for our electrical customers.

The budget also provides the Yukon Development Corporation with \$2.625 million in Mayo B ratepayer support. These funds are the Government of Yukon's annual contribution to the interest payment for the Yukon Development Corporation's \$100-million bond. By providing this financial contribution, interest payments are shared between the Yukon government and the corporation to reduce impacts on the electrical customers in the Yukon. These two programs represent investment of over \$6 million and help ensure that Yukon remains an attractive place to live and do business.

This budget will help the Yukon Development Corporation continue to support renewable energy generation in all Yukon communities and will contribute to the creation of economic opportunities in important sectors, while promoting environmental stewardship across the territory.

I will leave my remarks there. I am looking forward to conversation about many things, including energy rates and some of the projects that we have been working on over the past year, and looking forward to questions and answers.

Ms. Tredger: Thank you to the officials for being here today and helping us out with this conversation, and thank you to the minister for tabling the opening remarks. I think that is a really efficient way of having that conversation in our limited time that we have left, and I think that is a great idea.

I would like to start by talking about the Atlin hydro project — very exciting news last week — or I don't know — very exciting news in the budget, the federal budget, about that. I am wondering what the next steps are and if there are further funding or regulatory hurdles that need to be crossed. I believe that I remember something about some negotiations with the Government of BC that were underway. I am wondering what is next for this project.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I agree that the Atlin project is an important and exciting project. We were very excited, as well, to hear from the federal government about their increased funding, because they had already — through SREP — and I will just get what SREP stands for. They had committed

\$50 million there to the Tlingit Homeland Energy Limited Partnership. This is, of course, a project that is led by the development corporation of the Taku River Tlingit — and through the federal budget, upped that by another \$32.2 million, I think.

We have been in conversation with the Government of British Columbia about whether they would support the project financially as well, so that's an ongoing conversation. There is a portion of the project that is with YESAB right now, so the transmission line, which will be owned by Tlingit Homeland Energy Limited Partnership, would run from Atlin up to Jakes Corner, where it would connect in with the Yukon grid. So, that portion of the project is going through YESAB right now. It may be that it's now into the governments for their decision. I would have to check on what stage it's at.

There is a power purchase agreement that has been drafted between Tlingit Homeland Energy Limited Partnership and Yukon Energy. That is now in front of the Yukon Utilities Board, so that has to be considered. I have previously spoken about that agreement. It's a very good purchase price for energy. Again, it's mostly winter energy that we'll be buying, and if we — there's an amount that is guaranteed, and there's a purchase price for that guaranteed amount. The price drops after a period of time, so it's more in the first several years and then it's lower later on and going off into the future — for decades.

There is also a cheaper price if we want to, or are able to, buy more energy at other — beyond that amount that we're guaranteeing.

So, we have a YESAA process. We have a Utilities Board process. We also have dialogue ongoing between Carcross/Tagish First Nation, whose traditional territory is there, and of course the Taku River Tlingit First Nation — it's their corporation that is putting the project forward, but there's still a dialogue happening across all governments on the project. Those are the next steps, as I understand them.

Just for the folks in Hansard, SREP funding stands for the "smart renewable energy pathways" program.

Ms. Tredger: Just to follow up a little bit, in the dialogue with the Carcross/Tagish First Nation, has there been a discussion on the impacts on Agay Mene Park from the transmission line and whether there will need to be any mitigation — or I guess, what those impacts might be?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: So, the answer is yes. There is a conversation that has been happening. The Carcross/Tagish First Nation has written to us talking about wanting to be careful to protect especially the Southern Lakes caribou herd and minimize any impacts that would be there. As I stated earlier, there is dialogue that is happening between the proponents of the project, led by the Taku River Tlingit — the owners of the project and the builders of it — and the Carcross/Tagish First Nation. There are also conversations with us, as a government.

Ms. Tredger: I also would like an update on Moon Lake, please.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The deputy minister and I have had a few high-level conversations with the Carcross/Tagish First

Nation. As I mentioned earlier, I was just in Carcross yesterday. We were talking about Whitehorse relicensing.

But I think that there is a conversation that happens as well about First Nation-led projects. So, this project is identified as an important project through Yukon Energy Corporation's 10-year renewable plan, but it is our hope that we work with First Nations with them in the lead on this project. We're just in the early days of conversation about the project. I will just leave it there for now. The conversations have been positive and they are ongoing.

The main aspects that we are looking for out of that type of project is that there will be some energy storage because what we have right now is an abundance of energy in the summertime and a high demand for energy in the wintertime, and that's what we're looking for with pump storage. There are a whole bunch of different possibilities that might exist, and so we're in those conversations right now with the Carcross/Tagish First Nation.

Ms. Tredger: Thank you to the minister for that.

I would like to talk a little bit about the independent power producer program. I understand there is an upper limit — I think it's 40 gigawatts — on the amount that can be purchased through that program. I'm assuming that Atlin doesn't count toward that limit. Maybe the minister can confirm that with me.

I'm wondering where we're at with all the projects that have come online since the last time we sat, as well as some of the ones that are in the works to come online very quickly. How close are we to reaching that 40-gigawatt limit?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: So, the notional limit that we have in place is 40 megawatts. I have a challenge all the time — the difference between energy and capacity and these technical things. Sometimes we talk about gigawatt hours, but for the Yukon, I think that we are probably talking about megawatts.

I can also say that Atlin is outside of the independent power producer policy. It is from a standing-offer agreement and it makes sense for a few reasons. It is really going to be baseload winter power. It will get rid of diesel generators — the need for additional diesel generators. I think that four of them — that is the plan.

Sorry, let me just correct that; I am just getting a note. It is 40 gigawatt hours, not megawatts; my apologies.

The only new project — and I think that I mentioned this when I was in Committee of the Whole on Energy, Mines and Resources. There is one new project that has come onstream since we were last here and that is the Dawson Dome solar project. That is the one that is in the old landfill site. There are a whole bunch of projects that are in dialogue and potential planning phases at various stages. There is sort of like a continuum of projects from the concept stage to the heavy planning stage. So, it is quite a range, but the only new one that is now onstream is the Dawson Dome solar.

Ms. Tredger: This might be a difficult number to come up with on the spot, but I am wondering if it is possible to have an estimate — I think that there are seven projects under IREI and another three under the Arctic energy fund from last year. Once all of those come online, where will we be at out of that 40 gigawatt hours? How close to hitting that will we be?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: If we were to look at the pipeline right now of all of the projects and if all of them came to fruition, then we would be very close to the 40 gigawatt hours.

Now, what I should say is that many of these projects change and alter through the development and the planning phases. Some of them grow, some of them diminish, and some of them drop off. So, it's really difficult — I would say that the project list changes, especially at the early stages of planning. But the rough total at the moment, if they were all to go, would be close to the 40 gigawatt hours.

Ms. Tredger: I appreciate that and I appreciate the estimate. I know that lots will change between now and when all those projects come online.

So, what happens when we get to that limit? Does that mean we can't bring on any new renewable projects? What would happen when we get there?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will just clarify — when I said the Dome Road solar, that's the Klondike Development Organization that brought that one on. I just should probably mention the other projects that are there so it's not as if I'm missing them. They are the Old Crow solar project, the north Klondike solar project, and the Mount Sima solar project.

The 40 gigawatt hours was a target that we set under *Our Clean Future*. It was not meant to necessarily be a total limit. It was meant to be: "Let's try to achieve this amount through the independent power producer policy."

I think there are things that we need to think about and consider as this morphs over time. I am sure that we're going to seek more renewables than exist now, even in that pipeline.

But things that we really need to think about are — do we have energy storage? If we have seasonal energy storage, like Moon Lake, it really changes the dynamics of all of the renewables. It makes them much more efficient because sometimes renewables are better in winter, sometimes they are better in summer, sometimes they are more reliable, and sometimes they are less reliable, and storage makes a huge difference. Probably the grid-scale battery will help with that, but so would seasonal storage. There are also the differences around winter and summer and those issues that we have at play. Of course, technology is changing out there and the costs. Solar just keeps dropping in terms of its cost.

So, it is a dynamic conversation. The 40 gigawatt hours was really set as a policy target to try to get to through *Our Clean Future*. We are reaching it, I think — if the pipeline of projects works like the original ones have, then it looks like we are getting there faster than we anticipated, which is, again, all good. I think that we just need to balance things as we move forward.

At all times with energy projects, we are looking to make sure that they are clean, that they are affordable, and that they are reliable. Those are the three qualities that we are looking for. We really appreciate community-led projects. They, for us, are how we want to do this across the territory. I think that it is important for Yukoners to understand that we are making sure that how we bring these projects on is so they will continue to work toward this notion of a more sustainable future for the Yukon. As members of the House will know, we are working

to transition off of fossil fuels on transportation — shifting transportation across — and we are trying to shift heating across. Some of that is through insulation so that you would need less in the first place. But as we put those demands on the system, we also have to provide more renewables at the same time, so it isn't just to provide people access to e-vehicle rebates; it is also to make sure that we are increasing our renewables to match that load shift.

I should also note that we are reviewing our independent power producer policy with government, with utilities, and with proponents. That is all part of how this will change over time.

Ms. Tredger: That is actually a great segue into what I wanted to talk about next, which was this problem/opportunity of winter and summer power, which is of course what is so exciting about the Atlin project: It brings us winter power.

One of the challenges with solar projects — there are lots of benefits, but they also bring us power in the summer when we already have a lot of power for the most part. As I was looking through the list of the projects under the Innovative Renewable Energy Initiative from last year, out of the seven, five are solar and one is hydro, which I assume is also summer power. I am just wondering what can be done to incentivize more winter power production, because solar is cheap — relatively. What can we be doing to encourage more wind, for example?

I will leave it there. What can we be doing to encourage more winter power?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I started to answer this previously when I talked about watching the balance of summer and winter energy projects. I also mentioned it when we were talking about seasonal storage — if we get seasonal storage. Another possibility is if we then go beyond and connect to, say, Skagway — they need summer energy, because they want to get cruise ships to go to shore power, so they would have a big demand in the summer. They have excess winter energy because the town quiets down over the wintertime, and if their energy projection is continuous through hydro power, there is a real good fit if we connect with them. So, those are possibilities.

Grid-scale battery is actually important for all of the intermittent renewables, because that really helps. Grid-scale battery does a couple of things. It shaves the peak off our thermal usage, so we need to have thermal usage typically in the wintertime, sort of early in the morning and just after work is sort of typically done — sort of early in the evening — and people are cooking or running their laundry or things like that.

So, those peaks — if we use the grid-scale battery to provide the energy then, then it will — and then recharge the grid-scale batteries at nighttime when we have more excess energy, then we will also reduce the number of diesel gensets that we need. So, again, it drops it by four.

So, these are all important questions. The answer to the question of: What are we exploring? It's how we balance all of these various puzzle pieces. It's also — we can talk about — in the future, we might incentivize winter power by saying that we would pay more for winter power or more than what we pay in the summer. That would then incentivize the public to move to

choose those types of solutions. Maybe it's that they tilt their solar panels at a higher angle and then they get more return from their panels, which would help us as a territory.

There's a range of ways that we are looking at it. I mentioned earlier that we are reviewing the independent power producer policy with government, utilities, and the private sector. So, there's a suite of ways. I will say that we are very conscientious about this difference of the excess energy in the summer and the need for energy in the winter. It's one of the things that drives a lot of the thinking around planning for the future.

Ms. Tredger: I appreciate there are a lot of pieces to the puzzle, and at the Moon Lake, it would be very exciting for that reason. If I remember correctly — and I can't remember exactly what year it would come online, if it happens; I think it's pretty far from a sure thing at this point; I think we're looking at more than five years away at least, but I would have to double-check the plan to be sure. I guess I'm thinking about more immediate solutions — for example, differential rates. I appreciate everything about that in the future, and I wonder if we could do that sooner — but I will leave that for the moment.

I want to talk a little bit about how we're supporting individuals and groups of individuals to make choices that help us all with our energy consumption. In particular, I'm thinking of a condo in my riding that decided, as a building, that they would have solar panels on their condo — that they, as a condo, collectively own — and then use that power and sell it back and purchase it the way an individual would but collectively, as a condo. Unfortunately, because they're doing it collectively, they're being charged commercial electricity rates, and they're being charged overage charges because they're using a condo-building's worth of electricity, and it's being treated as if it's just one family. To add insult to injury, when the electrical bill rebate happened — that \$150 — they got a single \$150 rebate for the entire building.

I'm wondering what YDC can do to support changes so that, when groups of individuals come together and invest their personal resources into energy projects like this, creating energy-friendly buildings, how can we support that? How can we create a system that supports people to do that?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, I know the building that the member opposite is referring to. It's a pretty great project in terms of efficiency. A few weeks ago, I was invited to go and tour it with the deputy minister. We spent a few hours — a couple of hours anyway — looking at the building and talking through some of the innovative ways that they've done to build a more sustainable building broadly. Then we got to talking about the challenges that are there. It really has to do with some of the situation that currently exists under the rate groups as set out by legislation and by the Utilities Board.

I'm informed that we have a meeting with the condo corporation, and we have them working with the Utilities Board to have a look at whether there is anything that can be done by the Utilities Board. We're in further conversations with them about trying to support this type of project more broadly, and we're looking at other jurisdictions — for example, British

Columbia — for how they have dealt with this similar sort of problem.

I think that when the rate classes were first contemplated and created, no one had thought about a more cooperative building type of — a whole-of-building approach. So, it has been caught up under a system that didn't anticipate it. We will work to see if we can find a positive solution that way.

I just want to say that we appreciated the folks from the condo corporation taking the time to sit down and explain it to us and to walk us through it, and we are working toward solutions with them.

Ms. Tredger: I am really glad to hear that there has been some movement and some work happening on that, because I do think — you know, tackling climate change is going to require us all, and when we penalize people rather than supporting them to make decisions about their homes that support the environment, we are going in the wrong direction. So, I am really glad to hear that it sounds like there is some movement there.

I am just going to highlight that part of the problem for them is that — this is actually a problem for all condos — is that common spaces in condos are charged commercial electricity rates, which just doesn't make sense to me, because if a single house has a hallway and a garage that they are heating, they get to pay individual rates for that, but somehow when we collectively own that garage and hallway, it is different. That just doesn't add up for me.

So, I am going to make another plug — as I have made a few times before a general rate review — and we can address some of this stuff. Actually, I would love to ask about that. We have had a number of back-and-forths about rate reviews. Are we looking at going back to one?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We brought in the interim relief and that was to last for — cover off a couple, few months. We have been in pretty close conversation with ATCO Electric Yukon, and we are working with them on potential relief options for Yukoners, and we are just in the phase now of exploring whether they can happen directly or whether it works through the Utilities Board. So, that will be a next step.

At the same time, we are in this deeper conversation about how to look at rates more generally, and at all times, when I have been meeting and talking with ATCO or with the Development Corporation or with the Department of Justice, which works more directly with the Utilities Board, we are exploring a range of options around rates.

I will leave it there. I am happy to answer further questions. We are thinking of it as a series of steps, some that take a little bit longer — like, if you go for a general rate application, that takes time. That takes typically a year or a year-plus.

So, we are trying to get interim steps in place ahead of that, which will help our ratepayers as they deal with other increasing costs. The other one I can maybe comment on is that we had a rate application that Yukon Energy Corporation had brought forward to the Yukon Utilities Board, which the Utilities Board has now ruled on. There is a compliance report that will come out shortly. That rate application was always designed to not increase the rates for our residential customers.

There are some things to iron out yet on that rate application, but overall, that is the outcome that is coming, so that one is keeping rates steady.

I think that the one that the member opposite is asking me about more is ATCO Electric and their earnings against what they were projected to earn.

Ms. Tredger: I guess I would just make a plug, as we look at those interim solutions and long-term solutions, that whether Yukoners pay ATCO directly or whether Yukoners pay taxes and the government gives them back money to give to ATCO, it's kind of the same thing at the end of the day. I do appreciate that people are going to have lower bills. I think that this is important, but I can't get on board with handing over excess profits to a private company.

With that, I will leave it, partly because I had a really wonderful briefing from the officials and got lots of information about some of the different renewable projects that are going on. There is lots of really exciting stuff. I don't have any follow-up questions on them, so thank you to the officials for their time here today and thank you to the minister. I will leave it to anyone else who wants to ask questions.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Just a couple of things. I will say again that, with ATCO, what happened in the previous time when they were applying for rate — they have to project what they anticipate their earnings to be against things like mining, for example. What happens is that there is an estimation about how much mining is anticipated. As it turns out, mining has done well, so ATCO has done well. What happened is not wrong, but I can say that, in working with ATCO, they have identified that they would like to look for ways to support Yukoners and to help provide rate relief.

I just want to thank them for their work with us to seek those solutions. I think that is about rightsizing it for Yukoners. I'm not sure if the members opposite have more questions.

Okay, perfect. I will take my seat, and I will save my wrap-up for in a moment.

Mr. Dixon: Thanks to the minister for the quick opportunity to ask a fairly brief question. I just want to understand a little bit more about the grant to THELP for the Atlin project. Can the minister describe the amount that the Yukon government is providing for that? Can the minister explain the logic or the background behind the decision to offer the funding to that project as a grant as opposed to a loan?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Whenever we have energy infrastructure projects in the north, what you're typically looking at is that you have a small rate base — the number of people who are able to pay for those projects. With a small rate base, sometimes projects are just not even viable from an economic perspective.

If, in this instance, for example, it was Tlingit Homeland Energy Limited Partnership coming forward with the project — if they weren't able to get a certain percentage of the funding up front, it might not have been a viable project or the margins might have changed for them, in which case it would have come back to the ratepayer or it would have not gone at all.

So, Mayo B would be an example of a project where government paid for the capital side of the project — quite a bit

of the money up front — or the grid-scale battery — I think it's roughly 75 percent.

In this instance, there are loan dollars that are part of the capital expenditure — I think in the neighbourhood of \$50 million. Tlingit Homeland Energy Limited Partnership also put in some capital dollars. We are putting in \$50 million; \$15 million of that is in this year's budget. That was showing our commitment to this project. I think I gave that as a ministerial statement already during this session.

The way we're thinking of it is like a piece of infrastructure that is important for the whole of the territory. An example would be a road. When we build roads, the road — you could pay for the road by asking Yukoners, every time they drive on it, to pay a price, or you could pay for it straight out of the budget. That's what we're choosing to do with the Atlin project. That's one of the reasons why the power purchase agreement has come in at such a good price for Yukoners for the long term.

If we think about the cost of diesel — well, I should say what it was because, up until recently, we were running sort of 19 cents per kilowatt hour for diesel. We know that the price of diesel has gone up very significantly, but with the power purchase agreement, I think it was coming in at 13 cents in the first tranche, in the first several years, and then it was dropping down lower than that in future years. That's winter energy which is so important.

So, I guess my answer is that it is about the two things: to make the project viable and to not impact ratepayers.

Mr. Dixon: My question wasn't why the government is investing in the project. I understand why money is flowing into the project, but my question was about the nature of that money. Why is the \$15 million that we are putting into this budget given in cash as opposed to, say, a loan?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: If money were given as a loan, then in this instance, the proponent — Tlingit Homeland Energy Limited Partnership — would need to pay back that loan. In order to pay back that loan, they would have to charge higher rates to us. It's the same answer that I just gave. If you loan money and the project still goes, the net effect is that it would come back as a higher cost for ratepayers. I will have to get all the numbers together, but there is roughly \$50 million in loans. There is \$50 million in grants from the Yukon government. If you combine the smart renewable energy pathways program and the federal budget, which just came out — a little over \$82 million put in by the federal government — all of those things combined make the project viable, and they keep the rates low for Yukon residents when they pay their bills.

This will be a good legacy project for the Yukon because the price is coming in well under the diesel cost.

Mr. Dixon: I thank the minister for that answer. So, when will the remaining \$35 million of grant money from the Yukon government flow? Will it be next year, or will it be in subsequent years?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: So, depending on all of the other steps we have in front of us — with YESAB, with the Utilities Board, et cetera — the lion's share will be next fiscal year, but there may be some in the following fiscal year as well. It might

be \$25 million to \$35 million in the 2023-24 fiscal year; depending on how much gets spent out in the 2023-24 and how the project proceeds, there might be some expenditures in the 2024-25 fiscal year as well. If I just direct folks' attention to the budget package under the five-year capital plan, it's on page 5.

Mr. Dixon: Can the minister describe the nature of the consultations with the Carcross/Tagish First Nation on this project?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We've had meetings that have focused on, broadly, energy and land planning. We have sat down with the nation, I think, several times now — or I have sat down with them a few times now, but I think that there have been interim meetings as well. It's talking about how to support the First Nation with potential energy projects, whether it be the Atlin project or whether it be energy storage or whether it be other independent power producer projects. They are all in that mix. It's at a government-to-government level but pretty high level at the moment.

Acting Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I just want to thank all the folks who came out yesterday to work on the Whitehorse relicensing project. I think that they are back meeting today, actually.

We had the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, and Yukon government and Yukon Energy Corporation meeting on the traditional territory of the Carcross/Tagish First Nation, which was the host, to set that relicensing work off on a path, and I just appreciated all of the contributions. I was able to be there in person for some of it yesterday, but, of course, I had to come to the Legislature for the afternoon. I just wanted to acknowledge that work and say thanks to the folks there.

Thanks to the questions from the members opposite today. They are very insightful questions, and I appreciate the support from the Yukon Development Corporation staff.

Acting Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation?

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

Mr. Dixon: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, cleared or carried

Acting Chair: The Member for Copperbelt North has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 22, Yukon Development Corporation, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Acting Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures
Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$6,125,000 agreed to
On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$37,288,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$43,413,000 agreed to

Yukon Development Corporation agreed to

Acting 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?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter 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 begin in resuming debate here today — we had some discussion regarding the bilingual health clinic. I just wanted to confirm my understanding with the minister so that we make sure that we have the details clear about whether this is, then, something where there is any prioritization for people based on either urgent need, such as, for example, kids with rare diseases — this has come up as one of the questions we have had from parents who don't have a physician and have challenges getting their health care needs addressed because of that. Is there going to be any prioritization for groups based on need or on language? Or is this simply going to be operated very similarly to another medical clinic, albeit with other health professionals there as well? Also, whether the operation of the clinic is based on a walk-in model — is it appointment-based or a combination of both?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I would like to begin by welcoming the department officials who have joined me here today. We have, from the Department of Health and Social Services, Michael Hale, one of the deputy ministers of that department, and welcome to Rob Ganzer, who is the director of Strategic Finance. I appreciate their support here today.

The question I have now is about the bilingual health clinic. We have been working with the francophone community and other health system partners to delivery primary health and wellness services at a new health centre. We're looking forward to that.

Government continues to make progress on the development of the new bilingual health centre in Whitehorse. That will be integrated into the broader health care system. Most importantly, the priority right now is the physical space that will be renovated for the clinic and for some other

purposes. That physical space is at 9010 Quartz Road, which is beside the Whitehorse Health Centre — that's known to most Yukoners as the "Whitehorse Health Centre". We look forward to that clinic opening. Clients will have a designated primary care provider — either a nurse practitioner or a physician who will liaise with the rest of the clinic's health care team and connect them to additional health services that they may need and coordinate their care. The intention is that Yukoners will be able to receive the right care by the right provider at the right time.

We are in the process of looking for physicians and nurse practitioners who will work at the clinic. The recruitment is ongoing. We are actively recruiting for the positions, locally and nationally. Some positions have been filled with respect to the clinic, but we are still looking for medical practitioners. All the vacant positions are currently being advertised. We will hire nine full-time staff, including a clinic manager, nurse practitioners, a licensed practical nurse, a registered nurse, medical office assistants, a social worker, and we will contract with physicians to provide the service there.

We are working out the process of how patients will become attached to this clinic. We will prioritize not only individuals who prefer, or require, services in French, but also Métis individuals, First Nation individuals, French first-language individuals, and children under the age of nine. The data that we have is that individuals in that group are particularly in need of these kinds of services. The intention is to contract physicians, and they will also be expected to have proficiency in both French and English. The bilingual health centre will open once staff are hired and the physical renovations have been completed.

I hope that answers the question.

Mr. Cathers: Could the minister just clarify how the clients will be selected for the bilingual health clinic?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: That will be part of the negotiations with respect to the physicians and all the clinic staff. When we get to that stage of the process — for instance, if we have — we're looking for the opportunity for this to be new services for Yukoners. If a French-language or French-speaking bilingual individual who currently works in the Yukon as a physician wanted to go and have that position, we will negotiate with no intention that they would also bring all their current patients, for instance. We're looking for new opportunities for Yukoners to have medical care.

Mr. Cathers: What the minister just said — I see what she's saying as far as the new clinic, but that would also mean as a result, if the local physician or physicians being hired for this new clinic — that the minister would consequentially be requiring them to give up all of their current patients. To the best of my knowledge, all physicians who are currently in private practice here in the Yukon have a caseload of patients who depend on their services, and we all know that they can't receive those services elsewhere. So, can the minister confirm: Is she actually saying that if they hire local physicians, they're going to require those physicians to drop all of their existing patients, leaving those patients without service?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: No, that's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is we'll be having negotiations with physicians — it's why we are recruiting both locally but with an emphasis on nationally, so that we can expand health care services for Yukoners.

Mr. Cathers: I appreciate the minister saying that's not what she's saying, but can she explain how the government envisions it working? If they hire a local physician or physicians who are currently presumably as busy as they are prepared to be with the work/life balance, with their current caseload, how does that person potentially move into the bilingual health clinic, create a situation where they can just increase their services? The logic behind this just doesn't seem to be lining up — that physicians or family physicians who currently have busy caseloads — and in many cases, we've heard have such a busy caseload that they're feeling overloaded — how does it — regardless of any negotiations that the minister points to, logically, how does the minister see that it works? Taking a doctor from a private practice, moving them into a public practice, and thinking that you are going to get anything other than a relocation of existing resources with either no new patients being served or current patients being dropped?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I certainly appreciate what the member opposite is saying. That is why the consideration of who might apply for these positions — and that is why we are actively recruiting both locally and nationally to expand services. It will also expand services by having nurse practitioners attached to this clinic — more than one — as well as other individuals who provide health care. The concept of which physicians will be hired will take into account the effect of those individuals coming to work at that clinic. I think that it is definitely a hypothetical at this point because the recruitment for physicians is ongoing.

Mr. Cathers: Well, not to be too pointed on this, but the minister may call it "hypothetical", but it is a very real concern for any person who might lose a physician they already have due to this change. It is not a hypothetical question; it is a very important consideration about whether government is implementing a plan that is going to enhance services for Yukoners who need it or simply end up in a situation where patients who currently have a physician lose their doctor and are just added to the list of thousands of Yukoners who don't have a family physician.

The question is not hypothetical. The question is whether the government's implementation plan actually makes sense or is just going to lead to different people having a problem of not having a doctor.

My next question then is: With the bilingual health clinic, can the minister indicate how many clients this clinic will serve?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I just want to emphasize that the opening of the bilingual health clinic is designed and based, of course, on a different model of care than current privately owned medical clinics. This will be a government-supported and government-managed and -run public health clinic, with

the services of physicians being contracted. It will increase services for Yukoners here in the territory.

The model of care at full capacity should serve approximately 3,800 Yukoners.

Mr. Cathers: I do appreciate the minister indicating that it is expected to serve 3,800 Yukoners, but again, the question that I don't think we have clarity from the minister on is: How will these people be selected?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think that I said earlier that it will be developed as a result of the professionals at the clinic and determining how individuals apply and are prioritized for services at the clinic.

Mr. Cathers: I guess I am not going to get more information from the minister on this right now, but I do just want to highlight the very real concern that I have that it is one thing to announce that a bilingual health clinic is being set up. For government, of course, it was a nice announcement in their budget and a nice talking point, but the very real concern that I have about this is what that actually means when they translate the concept into reality, especially if doctors hired for the bilingual clinic are already people practising here locally.

If those doctors simply move from an existing private practice and give notice to their current patients that they will no longer serve them, based on what we have seen recently with doctors here in the Yukon, it is not something — it certainly can't be assumed that another doctor is going to step in to take their place and take on those patients. There are risks with this situation where the bilingual health clinic is a good news story for 3,800 people, some of whom — maybe all of whom — don't currently have a doctor, but it may result in however many patients a physician currently has losing service or, if some of those people are able to transfer over, it would create a situation where the number cited by the minister is not fully actualized, because it's simply a reallocation of resources.

I'm going to move on from this area for now, but I just, again, would express very real concern with how that's set up and whether it just ends up effectively poaching doctors from current clinics. It's very similar to the problem that my colleague, the Leader of the Official Opposition, highlighted earlier in Question Period around the concerns expressed by the Yukon Chamber of Commerce of how the public sector has grown at the expense of the private sector, making it extremely difficult for the private sector to continue to keep the staff that they need because of the way the government structures it. I would not want to see this become a situation where the government sets up the bilingual health care clinic in a way that doesn't really result in increased services to Yukon patients but instead undermines the viability of existing medical clinics.

I would also seek a commitment from the minister. Is she going to be consulting with the YMA before finalizing the structure of this and giving full consideration to any concerns that they have about whether the model for this destabilizes existing medical clinics or simply takes physicians away from those private practices?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I certainly understand the concerns expressed by the member opposite. I'm pretty sure he's not saying that we should not open the bilingual health clinic or

pursue that model for extended opportunities for Yukoners to have health care. I appreciate the concerns that he has highlighted. They are concerns that we share, which is why the concept of how this will be properly staffed is a part of the negotiations that will take place as we go forward. Consultation with the Yukon Medical Association will, of course, be a part of that.

Mr. Cathers: I appreciate that indication. I will just flag for the minister that we will be watching this very carefully. We are certainly not against the concept of a bilingual health clinic, but we do want to see it done in a way that enhances our health care system and helps more Yukoners and not done in a way that simply results in other Yukoners losing their family doctor and in impacts to other providers within the health care system that would be negative and affect other Yukoners negatively. Doing this right is extremely important.

I will move on to another area here in terms of the obstetrics and gynecology program. There have been issues in the past and a wait-list. We understand that the program that is currently set up for two doctors is running with one OB/GYN and locums.

Could the minister indicate what the plan is for that position that is currently being covered by locums? Secondly, we have heard from physicians that there is consideration being given to expanding this program to better meet the needs that are there to include potentially a third OB/GYN. Could the minister indicate what work is ongoing in that area?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the question. Our obstetrics and gynecology specialists are based at an independent clinic at the Whitehorse General Hospital. That is currently where they are located, and Yukoners must be referred to an obstetrician and gynecologist by their primary care provider or other medical care provider, if it were an emergency-type situation — well, not emergency, because that would be obviously dealt with in the emergency department. Currently, Yukon has one obstetrician and gynecologist, with two more expected to be in place soon. We are actively having conversations with the experts and the obstetricians and gynecologists. There is currently a second locum — obstetrics and gynecology specialist — supporting the system until two additional permanent specialists can be brought in. The conversations are regarding a three-OB/GYN model, where three specialists would be employed to work at the Whitehorse General Hospital clinic and provide services to Yukoners.

The wait time to access non-urgent obstetrics and gynecology services at Whitehorse General Hospital back in February of this year — we can get some updated numbers if it has changed — was approximately 10 months. Wait times for obstetrics and gynecology supports are triaged according to the level of need, and the most urgent care needs are addressed first of course.

Obstetricians and gynecologists are highly specialized care providers who require dedicated clinic space and resources, and they are provided, as I have said, currently at the Whitehorse General Hospital.

Mr. Cathers: I do appreciate that indication from the minister and answer about the OB/GYN program.

I would also just note, in follow-up to the questions that I asked about the bilingual health clinic, on a related matter — related to the walk-in clinic. Again, the concern and question that I have there is based on what the minister had described earlier. It sounds like we are not seeing new family doctors come to the territory but are instead relocating existing resources to a government-run facility or relocating some of them to there.

Can the minister indicate, as the government is working on this and plans may be evolving: Is there any increase in physicians practising in the territory that is going to result from the establishment of the walk-in clinic, or is this just a case of getting doctors who already have a full patient load to provide care at a walk-in clinic?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the question. I think that the assumption in the question is that medical practitioners who will come to work on a scheduled basis or a roster basis at the Whitehorse walk-in clinic, which will be supported initially by government, will have a full caseload. They may not; we don't know. This project started as a result of, of course, work at the Department of Health and Social Services to consider options and from conversations with local physicians who came forward to say that they also saw a need and wanted to participate in filling that need, along with support from the department, as I have said, to initiate that. They have initiated a list or roster of individuals who are prepared to come there and provide medical care on a walk-in-clinic basis for the purposes of filling that need.

They will, of course, be remunerated properly through their contracts for service for care with the Yukon government, but I don't think that we can assume that those individuals are walking away from a day at their own clinic. That is completely up to them as to how they manage or want to serve there if they have signed up to be a participant at the walk-in clinic.

I think that it is important to note that the conversations came about quickly and were very supported by the individual medical practitioners who saw the need for individuals to be able to have a walk-in clinic where they can go for services if they are not requiring acute care services like they would have, or need to have, to attend the Whitehorse emergency department at the hospital. We look forward to expanding the services in this way.

I want take the opportunity to say that none of these solutions, on their own, are the ultimate answer. We must have many, many solutions to provide services to Yukoners.

Of course, always the opportunity for doctors to come, to be recruited and retained here in the territory to have private clinic-style hours and provide services to patients, but we are also in a very transitional phase of health care here in the territory, having adopted and accepted *Putting People First* for the purposes of seeing the future of health care here in the territory. I'm very pleased that many medical professionals are supportive of that route and ready, willing, and able to help support providing new services here in the territory.

Mr. Cathers: Again, I do appreciate that there is some action being taken by government to try to address the issue of access to physicians, but it is very important that it be gotten

right, particularly when one of the issues that this government has seemed not to recognize — especially since committing to adopting *Putting People First* and particularly the polyclinics, without actually having a clear sense of what that would mean — that it creates uncertainty for doctors who are considering moving to the territory.

Whether you're fresh out of medical school or looking to relocate from somewhere, if you're considering more than one jurisdiction to locate in and one of the options, that being the Yukon, says that they're going to change the structure, but you don't know what that's going to mean, it's not very likely that many people are going to be as eager to buy a house in that jurisdiction, much less invest in buying into an existing medical clinic or setting up a new one, if they don't have clarity about what the future is going to mean.

In that area, it's not dramatically different from individuals choosing to purchase a home or any investor in any potential business area, if there is uncertainty created by government that leads to people typically making a decision not to risk their money and their family's financial future by making large investments in a jurisdiction that is in a period of change, which they have indicated, but have not actually provided clarity about what that change is going to mean and particularly whether, if someone chooses to set up a new practice or invest in an existing one, whether they can be confident that the financial situation will be stable enough that they can be confident that they will have a path forward to repay any mortgages that they take on related to that.

I just want to highlight that fact, especially with two clinics being set up by government — one bilingual, one walk-in — it is very important that the government work closely with the Yukon Medical Association — and not in a way that pays lip service to their concerns, but actually understands the impacts that this creates, including whether the government's plan will actually make things better or make things worse.

In my question about whether it would simply result in doctors who are currently practising reallocating their time to the walk-in clinic and dropping other patients as a result or having less time to serve them as a result, the minister indicated it would be up to them. It's important in this situation to not look at it through a siloed approach or with blinders on, but actually to understand what the impacts of government decisions are going to be. It's not enough to say, "We're doing our best." It's important that government listen and get it right in this situation.

I am going to move on to another couple of areas, and I will start with one where government's plans have not gone right and did not work out very well, which is the announcement the government made just over a year ago about regulating midwifery. We have now just passed the one-year mark where government brought in regulations that were intended to see midwives practising here in the territory, publicly funded and regulated. In fact, what has happened in the Yukon is that midwives who were practising previously — who were not regulated or licensed, since there was no regulation or licensing in place — were prevented from providing services over the last year. It has now been over a

year and counting, and Yukoners don't have midwifery services.

I am going to ask the minister two questions. Why has the government set up a structure that excludes the possibility of a midwife operating in private practice? Why have they created a situation where midwives are required to practise for a year outside the territory where, in the case of one midwife who was practising here until last year is now in a situation where she is fully able to provide midwifery services in BC, but not able to provide them here in the Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am going to just go back for a second before I move on to the midwifery topic.

The member opposite has indicated that things have to be done right, and I appreciate that. I just wanted to note that, with respect to the comment that there is uncertainty being created by adopting *Putting People First* — or elements of *Putting People First* — I actually don't agree with that. Certainly, there will be change. Certainly, there will be adjustments to be made, but I think that it is important to remember that, if we are talking about the concept of a health authority that is new to the Yukon, of course, but there is a health authority in virtually every other jurisdiction in Canada — with the exception, I think, of Nunavut — there are polyclinics across Canada. They are a growing opportunity for individuals to be at the centre of the health care process and have wraparound services, including a number of services, including those that deal with mental health issues or other personal issues, such as those that a social worker might be able to help with. Polyclinics are not just here.

I am confident, and I know that the experts who work in this field are confident, that the Yukon provides a lifestyle and well-paid medical practitioners.

They can be confident that they will be well paid. They can also be confident that — if they were coming in the hypothetical, noted by the member opposite — if they were coming here as new practitioners, their patient load would quickly fill up and their business would be successful. We have amazing hospitals here in the territory, and we certainly are relying on the professionals and working with our partners to provide a number of different kinds of services.

There will be change, as I have said, but we have been very clear, and the report *Putting People First* is an excellent road map. Does it have every detail of programming or policy? Absolutely not. Are we working with our partners to make sure that is the case? Yes, absolutely — with Yukoners at the top of mind and at the centre of the care that should be provided.

I am going to come back to the midwifery question. I think that, quite specifically, why midwives would not be permitted under the regulations to open a private practice — the midwives themselves, in the consultation and engagement with respect to how to develop a midwifery program, indicated that they wanted to be employees — that this was a model that was appropriate for service here in the territory and that they had favoured. I can tell you, with respect to why individuals are required to have a certain number of hours, that it is, of course, to ensure safety and to protect clients in the regulation of midwifery.

I note that the one individual who, I think, is being referred to by the member opposite — although I don't want to guess — was supported by the Yukon government to have the bridging education funding provided for that person to achieve that bridging, but the total number of hours required was something that members might recall is an element of the regulations that were developed in consultation with experts in the field for the purposes of properly providing a midwifery program that protects patients.

I am really pleased to speak for a moment about the importance of integrating midwifery into our health care system as a free, regulated, and accessible health care service in the Yukon. I don't know if anyone can recall the last time — we have been trying to recall the last time — that a new medical service with this kind of scope and importance was integrated into the health care system. I welcome an example, if anyone has it, because it has certainly been a very, very long time, if ever.

This time last year — and it was mentioned by the member opposite — we passed and adopted the regulations for the profession. I'm very pleased to take a moment to discuss this today because there seems to be some misunderstanding about what that action meant about adopting the regulations.

Installing midwifery regulations was a significant hurdle that needed to be cleared, but it was not the flip of a switch. It was not that midwifery would happen overnight. It was the beginning.

The regulations allowed us to build the program and the services to integrate free, regulated, and accessible midwifery services into our health care system. We worked with local and national midwives and midwife organizations. We relied on their expertise and their advice on how to build our program.

Just some of the steps that were required involved integrating hospital privileges, and that required changes to the Yukon Hospital Corporation bylaws. There were changes to other government regulations that were needed. We had to obtain appropriate and renovate physical space and accommodations, and we had to recruit staff and professionals for the service to be integrated into the current health care system in the Yukon.

We have completed each of these important steps to build and to integrate midwifery into our health care system. The program, as designed with the expertise of midwives, requires that there be a minimum of two midwives to open our clinic. One has been hired, as individuals may have heard. We are actively dealing with the opportunity to hire an additional midwife. It's important that we have the appropriate staff ready to go when the clinic is opened.

We are currently in negotiations around a concept of what to pay midwives, which I think is an incredibly important concern. The Public Service Commission classified midwives at a lower pay rate than we all determined, at the Department of Health and Social Services, to be appropriate, and so the Department of Health and Social Services challenged that classification and the process is ongoing.

The Public Service Commission, in the interim, approved a market adjustment for each position of \$12,000.

I don't pretend to think that is necessarily the appropriate figure, but also, that market adjustment was challenged by the Yukon Employees' Union. There has been quite a bit of media, I believe, around this idea. My conversation recently with media indicated that could be a concern. It also could be a concern for individuals that the classification is lower than it should be, but we are working actively to have that amended and to work through that process so that we can have an appropriate professional fee available to employees, and of course, they will receive benefits.

We are currently in negotiations with the Yukon Medical Association and the Yukon Employees' Union, so I won't say more about that other than the fact that I am looking forward to those negotiations being completed so we can focus on the recruitment and retention strategy with Yukon medical professionals and go forward for the purposes of continuing our work together to benefit Yukoners.

Mr. Cathers: It is concerning to me that the minister seems to actually believe her words when she said that they haven't created uncertainty around the physician situation. It is disturbing in that it would suggest that the minister doesn't actually understand the file and doesn't appear to have talked to physicians about it. This type of change coming down the road, if somebody is looking at making a long-term investment that would require them to borrow money to set up a medical clinic or invest in one, any risk or uncertainty about the future is something that is a very real factor.

I will move on from that, but I would encourage her to actually reach out to the Yukon Medical Association and talk to them about that.

Also, I would just note, in the area of midwifery, I do have to remind the government that the Liberal government has spent more than four years committing to doing it; then they announced that they were regulating midwifery and have spent the past year-plus since regulations were put in place acting as if it has been a success and acting as if a new health service has been added, but Yukoners are still waiting for that to actually happen.

I am going to move on to another area that the government has committed to and talks about as if it is already in place, and that is the dental program that is pursuant to the Liberal government's confidence and supply agreement with the New Democratic Party.

Could the minister indicate and explain what this program is actually going to do? What will be covered under the program, who will be eligible, and what services will be available? Will there be a certain number of procedures or a maximum number of things that will be covered or a list of things that will be covered or won't be covered? Could the minister please explain? At this point, we have heard high-level descriptions, but no specifics.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am certainly not interested in getting into a battle of words with the member opposite, but I actually do believe what I say. I have come to this Legislative Assembly for the purposes of providing accurate information that I have available to me. While we are all entitled to our opinions, including the member opposite, I do actually see the

provisions of *Putting People First* and focusing on patients — not just doctors, but patients — through that process as key to our success going forward as a territory.

We, of course, recommend regularly the relationship that we have with the Yukon Medical Association and with individual medical practitioners in the territory. It is the basis upon which we will be able to make these adjustments. They, too, are very concerned about Yukon patients and the availability of medical services. I know this; I have had those conversations personally. I certainly respect their position and their expertise in the area of providing medical care and how we will do so going into the future for Yukoners.

The question now is about the dental program. Recommendation 5.8 of the *Putting People First* report includes “Create an income-tested, payer-of-last-resort public plan for extended benefits.” It is speaking about dental benefits. In response to the *Putting People First* report’s recommendation and, as part of our commitment under the 2021 confidence and supply agreement — which I note that the Yukon Party leader publicly indicated support for just last fall — we are working on implementing a territory-wide, income-tested, payer-of-last-resort dental program within the year of 2022.

As outlined in the confidence and supply agreement, \$500,000 was budgeted in the 2021-22 main estimates as an initial investment to develop this program.

We have used these funds to contract public dental health specialists and to modify and ready our internal systems to be able to support this work and this program.

There is an increase in the 2022-23 main estimates of \$1.3 million to continue the work on this initiative, and we are committed to ensuring program implementation in the 2022-23 fiscal year that provides dental coverage for low-income Yukoners who have no other form of insurance. Sorry, I might have said “earlier in the 2022 year”. Clearly, in the 2022 budget is the first amount — and the second amount — I stand corrected — for completion of the program in the 2022-23 fiscal year.

Many Canadian jurisdictions, including the Yukon, provide some dental coverage for lower income families or social assistance clients, and it is important to note that Yukon provides coverage already in certain ways for Yukoners. Yukoners who are registered in the pharmacare and extended health benefits program or social assistance clients or non-insured health benefit clients, as well as children from kindergarten to grade 8 in Whitehorse and in kindergarten to grade 12 in communities currently have access to dental care. The *Canada Health Act* does not include dental care as an insured service, other than through a hospital or emergency-type situation or perhaps oral surgery.

On March 22, 2022, the Liberal Party of Canada and Canada’s New Democratic Party also reached an agreement. *Delivering for Canadians Now: A Supply and Confidence Agreement* is the title of that agreement. This agreement includes launching a new dental care program for lower income Canadians, and we look forward to hearing more details of that program in the future and, of course, working to integrate the

program that will be initiated here in the territory, along with the federal one, so that they can complement one another.

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

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 10 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?

Ms. White: I thank my colleague from Lake Laberge for sharing the floor today. It’s nice to see the officials — 50 percent plus one of the officials back. I look forward to having, at one point in time, the opportunity with the other deputy in the House as well, as mentioned before.

The last time we were here, we spoke about All Genders Yukon and, you know, my three-part question, I think, before it was time to leave this Chamber, but I want to talk about senior services, actually.

So, on March 28 of this year, when speaking about services for seniors, the minister said — and I’m quoting: “... the completion of an internal review of seniors services and adult protection services to ensure that these services continue to be effective and accessible.”

I just want to start off with — I just want to know: What happened to seniors services?

So, we’ve been hearing from seniors that, where once there was a social worker who could provide assistance with navigating the many programs for seniors — including housing, home care, drug coverage, dental coverage, financial support, et cetera — that position no longer seems to exist. In fact, from the best of their knowledge — the stories that have been told to us — it’s now called adult protection services.

What happened to seniors services?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I want to be clear that we have absolutely no information that services to seniors have been reduced as a result of the review or of any other reorganization or work in the Department of Health and Social Services, but we are certainly prepared to get more information about a particular social worker position that you have made reference to, because it is not something that I am aware of or have been briefed on with respect to that. I would like to note that we are working toward a person-centred, holistic, and integrated health care system and social services system. There are a number of supports available for seniors. I am not sure if the member opposite will be asking about these. I appreciate that the first question was with respect to the individual social worker position.

As I have said, we will confirm that information and get more details, but I am happy to speak about the pioneer grant,

the extended health care services, or pharmacare, et cetera, but I will perhaps await further questions or take the opportunity to do that. We do have some information that the service the member opposite is referring to is offered through the seniors information centre and it is still available, but again, I will make sure that this is exactly the same question as is being posed by the member opposite. I will look at the Blues and review her wording and make sure that we have that accurate information for her.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that.

Is it possible to see that internal review of senior services and health protection services?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I will certainly look to see it myself. The date of completion — it has not yet been forwarded to me for a briefing. Of course, both Deputy Minister Hale and Deputy Minister van Randen are relatively new to the department, and it's an opportunity for us to review that and to provide a copy to the member opposite or table it if it is appropriate to do so. I don't want to commit to that on the floor of the Legislative Assembly right now because, for instance, I don't know whether it includes personal names or some sort of information about personnel and their positions and that sort of thing. I have not reviewed it myself, but I will do so.

Ms. White: The opposition is used to getting many documents highly redacted, so if there was any personal information, I'm sure it could be removed in the redacted fashion as government documents often are.

The minister just mentioned a seniors information centre. Can she please expand on that? Where is the seniors information centre? Is it run by government? Is it run by a not-for-profit?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I understand that it is run by the Yukon Council on Aging.

I do have some information about seniors services and the expansion of those and, of course, the *Aging in Place Action Plan*.

The Yukon Council on Aging is the organization responsible for the seniors information centre through partnerships, of course, but I don't have much detail about that, but I am happy to return with it.

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

In my recollection, in my meetings with folks at the Yukon Council on Aging, is that a lot of what is done there is on a volunteer position. There used to be a person within seniors services, where there was a social worker who would help link people up to services that they need. I am sure that anyone in this Assembly has tried to help people navigate and understands that it can be quite complex. You know, often when talking about seniors — whether I am talking about it through housing or health — is that there — I do think that we have a responsibility to folks who have chosen to age here to make sure we support them the best that we can.

I will just put that out. I am concerned that there used to be a position that was really critical for folks and now it doesn't exist in the same way.

The minister did mention the pioneer utility grant, so I will jump right into that. So, can the minister explain to me how the pioneer utility grant works?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am just going to look for one note that I think is here. I do have some information. The pioneer utility grant assists Yukon seniors with the cost of heating their homes, whether they own or they rent, so long as they are not living in social housing which is subsidized. The heating can be oil, electricity, wood, propane, or wood pellets — any form of heating. Yukoners must apply every year for the pioneer utility grant. Yukon seniors who are 65 or older, in the year that the grant is available to them, can apply. To be eligible, seniors must live in the Yukon a minimum of 183 days every year. Three months of the 183 days must be winter months and those are defined as October through March. I think that is a bit optimistic, but October through March, individuals must reside in their residence for 12 months prior to applying for the grant. Individuals are not eligible to receive the grant if they have received a housing subsidy, as I have said. The application goes in to government and is assessed on an annual basis.

I thought I had an additional note about what is sometimes called the "PUG". I will look for that and see if I can provide any additional information, but that's the criteria in a basic way.

Ms. White: So, two questions: Is that program means-tested? Is there a maximum amount per household — so, whether it's a couple or an individual?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I have statistics or numbers from 2020. The 2020 maximum grant payable under this program, before income testing, was \$1,126 if you live within Whitehorse city limits and \$1,209 if you live outside of Whitehorse city limits. We base the grant on income, marital status, and residential address, so everyone's grant amount is different.

The Canada Revenue Agency notice of assessment determines an individual's income. Seniors with low income will receive the full grant, while those with higher income will receive less or may not be eligible, depending on their income.

Ms. White: Are the amounts of the \$1,126 for urban or \$1,209 for rural — is that per household or per individual?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I don't want to delay this. I have looked at the information that I have in my hands. We have sent a message to determine if that is the case. I think that it is per household, but I could stand corrected. I will get the correct information and provide it. I just don't want to wait any longer, as there may be further questions that we could proceed with.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that. The reason why I am bringing this forward is that I have been contacted by seniors. The reason why they reach out is that they ask me, "Does it cost any less to heat a house if only one person lives in it?" The reason why they highlight that is that individuals who apply for the pioneer utility grant are paid less than couples. That is my understanding. The reason why they highlight that as a concern is, again: Does it cost a single person less to heat a house than it does a couple? My hope in highlighting that is just that, at some point in time, I believe it is important to look through programs to see if they are doing what should be done.

I know that Seniors Action Yukon is a great organization full of many retired public servants who would be happy to participate in that kind of program review, but it is just important to make sure that, when we talk about services for seniors, we take into account those things.

Where I live, there are two condo corporations that are just down the road from me, and it is all 55+ living. They are one-floor, fully accessible units. Does it make sense that a person stays there as opposed to applying to Yukon Housing Corporation? Absolutely. But if it becomes unaffordable because they are not given the same benefits as the couple next door, it becomes more challenging. I am going to move on, but I am open to more information, as the minister has it.

I actually want to talk about COVID logistics. I realize that COVID restrictions ended March 31, but I still have questions about how everything went down. So, can the minister walk me through the incident command structure that I believe was put in place for COVID logistics that we saw for those two years?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you to my colleagues for a few moments to turn my mind that far back to the COVID responses.

Let me first speak about the pioneer utility grant, just for a second, to say that it is clearly designed — I have heard the comments from the member opposite, and I appreciate them — to assist seniors, so we will be looking to the response to determine whether or not we are properly applying the criteria or in a fair way applying the criteria.

Let me move on to say that the incident command structure is an opportunity to approach a process in a certain way. What I can indicate is that a COVID response unit was set up with individuals, rather than following a strict incident command structure. A COVID response unit — or something known as the “CRU” — was set up early on in the process with experts from across government who managed and co-operated the COVID response through a central-type agency. It was connected very closely to the chief medical officer of health’s office and through other departments in government, including Health and Social Services.

Our government worked collaboratively on the approach to COVID-19 to adapt to the ongoing changes. Back in August 2020, we began work to establish the COVID response unit. As I have noted, a temporary branch of government was set up. As I said, it was known as the “CRU”. That provided ongoing operational support to the office of the chief medical officer of health. This unit replaced the Health Emergency Operations Centre.

As we transitioned into the next chapter of COVID-19 response, our high vaccine uptake allowed us to begin treating COVID-19 as a vaccine-preventable disease. I think we are partly there but of course not completely at that place yet. We can ultimately, hopefully, transition away from a formal structure.

The COVID response unit was somewhat dismantled and pieces were taken into the Department of Health and Social Services back in September 2021.

During the months of August and September 2021, the COVID response unit was folded — I suppose that is the proper

word — into existing branches of the Department of Health and Social Services, including testing, contact tracing, self-isolation capacity, and supports for vulnerable populations, so they have all been maintained. Those are all important elements and pillars of *Forging Ahead*. Yukoners can be assured that we remain committed to our COVID-19 response and to ensuring the health and safety of Yukoners.

I hope that answers some of the questions regarding the incident command centre approach to COVID. That is the way in which it was managed from, I want to say, mid-2020 when those responses were required by government, and it was managed through late 2021 in that way.

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

It is my understanding when doing all sorts of reading about incident command system structures that they are supposed to be short-term emergencies. We see them in wildland fire. We see them in flooding. I am just trying to figure out if the incident command system structure that was used under Health and Social Services was used for a longer period of time. If so, why was that structure the one that was followed?

The reason is that I am just trying to understand how it works, because until there was the drive-through testing facility up at the car wash at Centennial Motors, my understanding is that there was a team doing rapid-test delivery, so they were couriering between communities, as required. So, I am partly trying to get an idea of how those positions were staffed. Were they auxiliary on call? Were they casual or term positions? Were contracts put in place? I am trying to get an idea about how all that worked out.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think some of the details of this question, and maybe the one before that, could be added to by the Minister responsible for Community Services and the Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission when the opportunity is there for those questions.

First of all, let me just say that I think the member opposite is correct about the incident command approach or structure. Those are used. First of all, they require specialized training for the leaders of those incident command processes. I, too, have been reading more recently, but back in the beginning of the pandemic, about the determination of how we could and should respond. The incident command structure requires professional training and professional individuals who usually carry out that kind of work. They are well-used for responses to things like fires, floods, and other disasters.

COVID-19, in the very early days, certainly looked like maybe such a disaster, but it very quickly became evident that it was not and it would be an ongoing situation, despite our wishes that it be otherwise. When I say “our wishes”, I mean probably everyone in Canada.

We take some time to thank the individuals who responded through the public service on a regular basis — not only the front-line health care professionals, not only the public service front-line workers who went to work every day at grocery stores and every day on our highways or every day to keep our community running smoothly and keep individuals in good health and in care.

We often staffed the positions — the vaccine clinic is one example. Of course, people needed to have professional skills and were called to come and work at a clinic like the vaccine clinic that was here in Whitehorse. We often put a call-out through the Public Service Commission — the questions might go to those ministers — and the call-out processes often allowed us to staff. They were staffed almost exclusively on temporary assignments. So, obviously, when we stood up — maybe not obviously — let me say it this way: When we stood up a testing clinic or when we stood up a vaccine clinic, the individuals who could come and work there would have temporarily left their other positions, whether they be in government or outside of government, to come and participate in providing those services to Yukoners. Many of those individuals, based on the current need and the current strategies going forward to respond to COVID-19 — and they are certainly ongoing — have returned to positions that they had otherwise or perhaps gone back to jobs outside of government.

I can also indicate that another good example of this might have been the enforcement provisions agency that worked through Justice. Those individuals came from other places in Justice, other places in the government, or outside of government, as I have noted. The temporary assignments would have been supplemented by auxiliary-on-call individuals or perhaps by casual people who came in that status to work. Many of those individuals, as I was saying, have returned to their other jobs or back to their jobs, but I note that our response to COVID-19 has made it clear that we might call on them again, should the need be there, and those individuals, of course, would be the first people we would contact because they have experience and they would have the opportunity to gain the skills in those temporary assignments or those temporary jobs.

My point about us often thanking them — it is just an amazing feat to see the individuals who chose to put aside their everyday current positions to come and help in this way.

Many of them were medical professionals. Many of them staffed the emergency response teams that would go to a community, if need be, to do an investigation to seek out individuals to be tested and to provide those tests and/or those vaccines. Some of them were folks who worked at, perhaps, the testing distribution that we've had recently — and that we will have until the end of April, actually — at the tourism building here in Whitehorse. They may have had jobs with those kinds of skills, or they might have had jobs where they were required to be nurses, for instance, at the vaccine clinic and those kinds of things. So, that's the way in which those positions were primarily staffed.

Ms. White: I do appreciate the intention behind the thanks, but it's my understanding that quite a few of the folks who staffed some of those front-line positions were actually casual employees and that — I'm trying to figure out the way to say this — communication wasn't great on the ground about what the expectations were. For example, folks didn't know that positions were ending at the end of March and that they just stopped.

It is also my understanding — I'll put this out there, and hopefully people within the department can sort this out — that there are people who are still owed money, that people worked hours that they haven't been paid for, and that they are missing cheques because everything was two weeks behind. I'm urging folks within the department to make sure that those front-line people who we had come in — those casual positions, those term positions, those AOC positions — to do that work, to work in the testing centres, to do the delivery of the rapid tests and who were there for us are fully reimbursed for the work that they did, because that is a concern that I have.

I'll leave it there in hopes that it can be addressed and that it doesn't involve me filing ATIPPs soon. I'll put that out there.

I want to move on to the shelter. The minister has said previously that the intention has always been — that there was always the intention that the shelter would be run by an NGO. Can the minister tell me what the status is of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the comments by the member opposite. I just want to note with respect to casual work or the concern about an individual not being paid up to date — or properly, if that is the issue — I am aware of one situation that came to my attention. We immediately looked into it in the department. A resolution was reached where the person was ultimately paid, but we will still look into it to make sure that this was the case. That is the information we have at the moment — that it was resolved. If there are any others, I would appreciate knowing about them, of course.

In the case that I am aware of, there was some misunderstanding about the classification of the person having the job — whether they were moving to an AOC or moving into something else. I don't want to speak too much about it because it is a private matter and also because I don't want to be incorrect. I am aware of one matter, and it was properly resolved, I hope. I would be happy if the member opposite brings any other specific cases. We try to resolve those almost immediately.

I am actually happy that the member opposite mentioned ATIPP. Yesterday, I was here in relation to the budget debate regarding the Department of Justice. One of the last questions involved an ATIPP application or process. The member opposite had some documents. I wanted to have the opportunity but didn't yesterday to say that if these are documents that are otherwise going to be released or going to be provided, please ask the department or ask my office about them before the necessity of going through an ATIPP process.

I had the honour of previously being the Information and Privacy Commissioner for this territory. It is advice that I gave to departments on a regular basis. It is advice that I gave to individuals seeking information on a regular basis, and that was always to just ask. Ask if you can have the documents. I think that the process for ATIPP is much improved, but I appreciate that it is sometimes cumbersome and there may be an opportunity for a delay because the department might have up to 30 days to respond and have other work responsibilities.

I just want to provide that piece of advice to the member opposite because I recall that the document that she referred to

yesterday would have been provided to her probably quite quickly — or could have been. I am happy if that were the case.

I can speak about the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. Work is underway for us to have an NGO — or a combination of NGOs — to work and manage the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. It is the reason — and the conversations that are ongoing — I will say they're ongoing; I don't think I can say much more about that. Individual organizations have their own responsibilities in that conversation, and I think it's important that we respect that in an ongoing way.

But that is the reason that there are currently 37 approved term positions at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — now this is back on April 20 — 35 of which are currently filled. The term positions represent the majority of the employees at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter immediately. They receive full benefits. They are eligible under our benefits plan through Canada Life, and this includes health, dental, life insurance, and accidental death and long-term disability benefits. Through the work that they are doing — and the intention is — and they are fully aware that the term positions are structured as they are because of the ongoing conversations about the responsibilities of who will manage the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter.

I should note that the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter additionally employs a roster of on-call employees to cover shifts, when needed. Certainly, there has been an important opportunity during COVID for us to manage staff. I don't think it's any secret that staff have been affected. All workers have been affected from time to time, particularly during this last part of COVID.

I also think individuals are taking seriously the need to stay away from work if they are unwell, and that will reduce the spread of COVID-19 as well. We hope that is just one of the ways in which we can do that. We have worked to expand the existing staff complements at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, including our management and supervisory team, to ensure that staff and clients are well-supported. Any staff member, including the AOC positions — the auxiliary on-call positions — that are involved in a traumatic event are provided with supports and access to counselling and services through the mental wellness unit.

I want to note that there is a health care aide position at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. It was COVID-19-funded and was put in place in recognition of the urgent need to support those with complex health care needs who were living at the shelter, or staying there, and particularly with 20 permanent Housing First units.

In March 2022, the health care aide position has been transitioned, and we wound down the COVID-related supports, but going forward, personal care at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter will be provided through the home care program. The Whitehorse Emergency Shelter has been collaborating with Home Care to determine how to best provide services to meet clients' needs. Between January and March 2022, handover assessments were completed for all of the clients who require ongoing supports. As clients' needs are identified, a referral to Home Care is made, and the services for home care clients are prioritized based on assessment and need.

I also want to note that, as part of the response to the substance use health emergency, we have increased other services at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. At the moment, they include the assistance of physicians. I think that it is 1.5 days a week. It includes increased Emergency Medical Services attendance at that location.

I think that we have the licensed practical nurse from the safe consumption site working there partly during the week for the purposes of providing services and also information about opioid use and the serious public health crisis that we have here in the territory. I am very pleased that those services have been increased at the shelter. We will continue to work with the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and the Housing First program as well as with Blood Ties Four Directions to extend the services that are available to individuals. I can note that we have expanded some drug testing into rural communities as a result of the substance use health emergency, and we continue to expand availability in Whitehorse.

One of the opportunities at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter is for drugs to be tested and for individuals to have additional information provided to them there, because developing a substance use harm reduction action plan will include the work that is done at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter.

As well, I'm not sure if those are all the questions or if that helps with some of the information that I can provide, at this time, to the member opposite.

Deputy Chair, seeing the time, I will 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.

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:26 p.m.

The following sessional paper was tabled April 21, 2022:

35-1-41

Report on Subsistence, Travel & Accommodations of Members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly 2021-2022 (Speaker Harper)

The following legislative returns were tabled April 21, 2022:

35-1-42

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. Van Bibber related to a ministerial statement re: COVID-19 testing at border crossings — Klondike Road Relay (Pillai)

35-1-43

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. Van Bibber related to a ministerial statement re: COVID-19 testing at border crossings — ArriveCAN app (Pillai)

35-1-44

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. Van Bibber related to a ministerial statement re: COVID-19 testing at border crossings — Chilkoot Trail (Pillai)

35-1-45

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. Van Bibber related to general debate on Vote 54, Tourism and Culture, in Bill No. 204, First Appropriation Act 2022-23 — Conrad historic site (Pillai)

The following document was filed April 21, 2022:

35-1-65

“YDC / YEC Witnesses Planned Opening Remarks — 07 April 2022” (Streicker)