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HANSARD

Wednesday, October 12, 2022 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2022 Fall 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
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Speaker: I will now call the House to order.
 We will proceed at this time with prayers.

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Under introduction of visitors, the Chair would like to introduce Annette King, the Child and Youth Advocate; Julia Milnes, the acting deputy advocate; Selena Kaytor, the client service administrator; Anya Braeuner, the advocate case worker; and Christopher Tse, the systems analyst.

Please join me in welcoming them to the Assembly today.
Applause

Speaker: Are there any further visitors to be introduced?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I would like to welcome a group of individuals here for a tribute today. They are very well-known in our community and admired by all members here in the Assembly. I would like to welcome Joe Sparling, the president and chief executive officer of Air North; Deb Ryan, strategic planning and alliances manager; Rick Nielsen, chief operating officer; Allison Camenzuli, director of marketing and communications; Amy Ryder, marketing communications specialist; Garry Njootli, Air North Board of Directors; David Atkins, director of business development and regulatory affairs; as well as Carina Poirier, senior business analyst.

Thank you so much for coming in today.
Applause

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I would like my colleagues to help me welcome the Run for Mom organizing committee who are here in attendance with us today. We have Vicky Stallabross, we have Marianne Thompson, and we have Pat Living and Val = Pike. Thank you so much for being here.

Applause

Mr. Kent: I would like the House to join me in welcoming a constituent of mine, Dan Cornett, who is here in his capacity with the Golden Horn zoning committee.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McLean: I ask my colleagues to help me welcome a special guest here today, Tosh Southwick, a Kluane First Nation citizen and Yukon First Nation education advocate. She is here for the ministerial statement regarding the Kluane Kêts'ádañ Kù.

Applause

Ms. Tredger: I would like to invite my colleagues to help me welcome Audrey Provan, who we will remember as a former page of the Legislative Assembly.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Air North's three-millionth jet passenger

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to Air North, Yukon's airline, on its impressive achievement of hosting its three-millionth jet passenger on September 21. Over the last 45 years in business and 20 years of jet service, Air North has provided Yukoners with incredible travel options and unmatched customer service.

Our northern airline prides itself on providing passengers with a travel experience that is uniquely Yukon and has been a hospitable gateway to the north for travellers from all over the globe. With an ever-growing fleet of aircraft, including five Boeing 737 jets, Air North connects travellers with flights to Whitehorse, Vancouver, Kelowna, Victoria, Calgary, Edmonton, Yellowknife, Ottawa, Dawson City, Old Crow, and Inuvik. This spring, Air North expanded its travel network yet again with a new direct service to Toronto.

The expansion not only connects the capital cities of Yukon and Ontario, but further demonstrates the growth of the travel opportunities that Air North continues to provide for Yukoners and visitors to our beautiful territory. It is because of their incredible reputation and unbeatable customer service that it came as no surprise when Air North announced that Anton M. had become the three-millionth passenger of Yukon's airline as he boarded his flight from Kelowna to Vancouver and Whitehorse.

What makes this milestone more remarkable is the pace of growth in passengers. In the first 10 years of jet service, Air North welcomed its 1 millionth passenger and, just 10 years later, that number tripled.

I am truly excited and grateful for all that Air North has done and continues to do for Yukoners.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this moment to congratulate Yukon's airline on the hosting of its three-millionth jet passenger, and I know that the future of this beloved institution is bright and Yukoners will continue to benefit from the high-quality service that Air North, Yukon's airline, provides.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to Air North. This is one of my favourite companies to tribute, and I have done so several times since becoming MLA, but this tribute is for an event that was wonderful for a passenger.

Anton M. became Air North's three-millionth passenger. He is a Yukon resident who boarded flight 540 from Kelowna to Vancouver to Whitehorse, and he was made aware of the

milestone ticket when he checked in at the airport. For this, he was gifted two complementary round-trip airfare tickets.

In the 20 years since the company began their Boeing service, they have succeeded in growing and are truly Yukon's airline. Kudos to Joe Sparling, Deb Ryan and family, and all of Air North's family.

Their down-home care is outstanding, and we continue to hear stories of their good deeds and assistance for many different scenarios. Whether it's a medical story, compassionate travel, or making sure a puppy gets on board, they try to accommodate all requests.

If you haven't checked lately, check out their fly and stay packages, whether for here or outside of Yukon. Air North offers a wide range of options for someone looking for a change and at very reasonable rates.

Vuntut Gwitchin and Air North are partners and, along with many shareholders, continue to be a major driving force in Yukon's economy. We know that Air North supports many local events, and the kindness and generosity shown to everyone is renowned. We see the amazing customer service throughout the company, Yukon spirit through and through, plus warm cookies. They embody the best little airline in the world.

Again, congratulations to Anton M. for being the lucky three-millionth passenger.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Ms. Blake: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate the work of Air North and to congratulate them on their three-millionth passenger.

Air North has, and continues to be, a leader both in business and community support and in reconciliation. As a citizen of Vuntut Gwitchin, I am grateful for the ongoing partnership between the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation and Air North. The Yukon's airline is a critical support for my community of Old Crow. Thanks to this partnership, services that are otherwise costly and almost impossible to coordinate are provided quickly and reliably through Air North, including cargo and food delivery to our co-op, as well as chartered flights for large gatherings like the annual general assembly. Thanks to Air North, people in the communities from the farthest north to the southern cities stay connected.

Air North represents the best of the Yukon. The hospitality, warmth, and comfortable services, not to mention the delicious food from the flight kitchen, are all reasons to celebrate their work.

As Air North marks this major milestone and continues to support Yukoners, we can also do more to support them. Let's make sure that all government transit is booked through Air North, where we know that money is invested back into our communities and workers can enjoy the services we all know and love.

Let's also support connectivity between all communities across Canada by working with the federal government to take a "Canada first" approach to COVID recovery policies for domestic air carriers. With that support, more Canadians will

get to book and fly Air North as they travel across the country. Once again, congratulations to Air North on this major achievement in booking their three-millionth passenger.

In recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to recognize October as Breast Cancer Awareness Month. According to the Canadian Cancer Society, every day last year, an estimated 75 Canadians were told that they have breast cancer. On average, 15 Canadian women die from breast cancer each day. Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer, and it is the second-leading cause of cancer death among Canadian women, but the impacts of breast cancer cannot be understood through statistics alone.

Many of us know someone, or perhaps are someone, who has been diagnosed with breast cancer, so we know that the impacts of breast cancer are also intensely felt by family, friends, and loved ones. I want to take the opportunity today to highlight the amazing programs and initiatives that are working to raise awareness for breast cancer and support breast health in our home territory.

Run for Mom is an incredible initiative that has single-handedly made significant financial contributions and worked for many years to raise awareness for breast health. Thank you to the organizers, volunteers, and participants, whether you're running, walking, or cheering, for your dedication and support.

I can clearly remember the first Run for Mom, and I note that the Run for Mom that will take place next Mother's Day will be the 25th anniversary — what a milestone for our community.

Karen's Fund, which was named after a Yukon woman who died of breast cancer at the age of 37, provides support for people diagnosed with breast cancer. Thank you to everyone involved with fundraising and to those who are working to preserve her memory.

The cancer care program at the Yukon Hospital Corporation is dedicated to supporting Yukoners through their unique cancer journey. Thank you to the staff for your compassion and care. The Yukon Women's MidLife Health Clinic provides women with easy access to important information that supports their health.

I am so proud to live in a place that has so many diverse programs, supports, and initiatives dedicated to raising awareness, reducing the impact, and supporting Yukoners who are dealing with breast cancer. I encourage Yukoners to be vigilant, to be aware and practise the ways that you can detect breast cancer early when it is easier to treat and interventions can be taken. Monthly self-exams are one of the ways that you can detect breast cancer early.

I also encourage Yukoners to get screened with your health care provider and have routine mammogram appointments. In some cases, you can self-refer for a mammogram. Please don't put it off.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize October as Breast Cancer Awareness Month in Canada. Breast cancer represents a quarter of all new cancer cases diagnosed in women. It is estimated that 29,000 women will be diagnosed in this year alone. That number increases each year, Mr. Speaker. It may be that a shocking number that might resonate more is that one in eight women are expected to be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime in Canada. Based on the current population of the Yukon, that would represent over 2,600 Yukon women being diagnosed at some point in their lives.

We have an incredible team of professionals here in the Yukon to help support and treat those faced with cancer. Our thanks to our health professionals and to those who work directly to provide support to families and patients and to help them navigate their cancer journey.

I would like to recognize the staff of Karen's Room in particular, who work to provide a comfortable space to help Yukoners through their chemotherapy treatments. I would also like to thank those who help organize and distribute financial gifts from Karen's Fund to Yukoners undergoing treatment for breast cancer to help them cover out-of-pocket expenses incurred during the course of their treatment. This fund was created in honour of Karen Wiederkehr, who passed away from breast cancer at age 37. Karen's Fund and Karen's Room continue in her memory. Yukoners are able to donate and are encouraged to donate to the fund to help continue Karen's legacy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Ms. Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

I don't imagine there's a single person in this room who has not been touched by breast cancer, whether it be a mother, a sister, a co-worker, a friend, or a brother. We are all connected to someone who has been diagnosed with breast cancer.

When we talk about breast cancer, we need to talk about a full spectrum of supports. We need to talk about prevention. Breast cancer can affect even very young people. There is a spectrum of tools for detecting breast cancer, and everyone should work with their health professionals to make sure they are getting the screening they need.

For people being treated for breast cancer, there are many health care providers who come together to help them. I want to thank all the doctors, nurses, pharmacists, hospital staff, and more who do this work every day. I'm thankful that in the Yukon, with one phone call, we can schedule our own mammograms through the Whitehorse General Hospital.

I want to thank the community members who come together to provide support and care. I think of all the people and groups who have raised funds for the Yukoners cancer care fund and Karen's Room. I think of Run for Mom, Mardi Bras, Stix Together, Paddlers Abreast, and many more. Thank you to everyone who supports your fellow Yukoners living with cancer.

Cancer changes your life. For the survivors of breast cancer, our community care can't end when they are discharged. Thank you to everyone who provides ongoing support to their neighbours, families, and friends.

Finally, I want to honour the Yukoners we have lost to breast cancer. They are missed, they are mourned, and they are celebrated. Thank you.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Ms. McLean: I have for tabling a report and an executive summary completed by the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office. It's titled *Responding to Sexualized Abuse in Yukon Schools — Review of Policies and Governmental Response*.

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling two letters. The first one is a letter dated December 14, 2021 from the Town of Watson Lake regarding COVID-19 relief funding.

The second is dated July 4, 2022 from Ted Laking regarding COVID-19 relief funding.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I have for tabling two legislative returns.

Ms. Van Bibber: I have for tabling the October 6 agenda for the Municipality of Skagway meeting that deals with the Government of Yukon's investment in the port.

Ms. Blake: I have for tabling, as requested by the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, a letter from the Vuntut Gwitchin Government regarding accountability for failure to protect indigenous women and girls from violence, which I was forwarding.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees? Petitions.

PETITIONS

Petition No. 13 — received

Clerk: Mr. Speaker and honourable members of the Assembly: I have had the honour to review a petition, being Petition No. 13 of the First Session of the 35th Legislative Assembly, as presented by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin on October 11, 2022.

The petition presented by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin meets the requirements as to form of the Standing Orders of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

Speaker: Accordingly, I declare Petition No. 13 is deemed to be read and received. Pursuant to Standing Order 67, the Executive Council shall provide a response to a petition which has been read and received within eight sitting days of its presentation. Therefore, the Executive Council response to

Petition No. 13 shall be provided on or before October 25, 2022.

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Petition No. 14

Mr. Kent: In October 2020, the Golden Horn zoning committee undertook a questionnaire regarding a review of the Golden Horn development area regulations. Recommendations were provided to the Yukon government's Land Planning branch and residents were provided survey results by mail in May 2021.

Due to the pandemic and lack of community consultation, the zoning committee undertook further community consultation with the following petition in September of this year.

The petition reads as follows:

To the Yukon Legislative Assembly:

This petition of the undersigned shows:

THAT titleholders residing within the Golden Horn Subdivision on RR1 and RR2 zoning want to amend the Golden Horn Local Area Plan and the Golden Horn Development Area Regulation to reduce the minimum lot size to two hectares, as has been done with local area plans in the Whitehorse periphery such as the Mount Lorne Local Area Plan, Hotsprings Road Local area plan and the Ibex Valley Local Area Plan and Regulations;

THEREFORE, the undersigned ask the Yukon Legislative Assembly to:

(1) reduce the minimum lot size to two hectares for rural residential properties within the Golden Horn Local Area Plan; and

(2) amend the Golden Horn Area Development Regulation, to allow for a two hectare minimum lot size for rural residential properties within our area.

Mr. Speaker, the committee believes that amending the regulations will support land and housing challenges that exist within the Whitehorse area, and the 90 signatures collected between both sides of the Golden Horn area in my riding, as well as the riding of Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes, show that 67 percent of title holders are in favour of a two-hectare minimum lot size.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 16 — Second Act to amend the Legal Profession Act, 2017 (2022) — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I move that Bill No. 16, entitled *Second Act to amend the Legal Profession Act, 2017 (2022)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 16, entitled *Second Act to amend the Legal Profession Act, 2017 (2022)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 16 agreed to

Bill No. 19 — Technical Amendments Act (2022) — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I move that Bill No. 19, entitled *Technical Amendments Act (2022)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 19, entitled *Technical Amendments Act (2022)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 19 agreed to

Bill No. 21: Carbon Price Rebate Amendments Act (2022) — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Mr. Silver: I move that Bill No. 21, entitled *Carbon Price Rebate Amendments Act (2022)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. Premier that Bill No. 21, entitled *Carbon Price Rebate Amendments Act (2022)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 21 agreed to

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT it is the opinion of this House that reproductive health care is essential to the health, freedom, and the social and economic futures of women and girls and that the right to an abortion in Yukon and access to abortion services in the territory need to be protected.

Mr. Istchenko: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to not charge camping fees for Yukon senior citizens.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Environment to cancel the Yukon government's planned campground fee increases for Yukoners.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Community Services to provide communities with nearby garbage-disposal options by taking the following actions:

- (1) keeping the Silver City solid-waste transfer facility open;
- (2) pausing plans to close other solid-waste facilities; and
- (3) consulting with affected businesses and communities and First Nations before making a decision to implement fees or other changes at solid-waste transfer stations.

Ms. White: I rise to give notice of the following motion:
THAT this House expresses its support for all Yukon employees striking for better working conditions.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to redress the harm and trauma that has been inflicted by the Yukon territorial release order of a Vuntut Gwitchin citizen by implementing the following actions, called for by Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation:

(1) offer a public apology to Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation citizens and the community of Old Crow on their traditional territory;

(2) conduct a public inquiry into the factors that contributed to and resulted in the release order made by a Justice of the Peace of the Territorial Court and the role of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation traditional territory historically and today in the ongoing crisis of violence against women and girls;

(3) provide community wellness supports, counselling, and aftercare on a permanent and ongoing basis for any Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation citizen affected by the release order;

(4) maintain commitments to opportunities for the well-being of citizens equal to those of other Canadians and to provide essential public services of reasonable quality to all;

(5) end discrimination against children, women, girls, and LGBTQ+ people of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation and their families, including full implementation of Jordan's Principle and the orders of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal in guaranteeing a level of essential services for all Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation citizens that is at least equal to those available to other Canadians; and

(6) commit to fairness and respect for Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation law and self-determination including the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation's responsibilities for maintaining peace, safety, and security and administering justice in the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation traditional territory.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Kêts'ádañ Kù project

Hon. Ms. McLean: I would like to start by acknowledging Chief Bob Dickson and members of his community who are listening in to this ministerial statement today.

I rise today to provide an update on the Kêts'ádañ Kù project in Burwash Landing. Kêts'ádañ Kù, which means "House of Learning", is the Southern Tutchone phrase for the word "school". To support indigenous language revitalization, our government is choosing to also use Southern Tutchone when we talk about the Kêts'ádañ Kù project, honouring the wishes of the Kluane First Nation.

In September, I was honoured to join the Burwash Landing community at a celebration to recognize some of the steps made to replace the aging Kluane Lake School in Destruction Bay with the new Kêts'ádañ Kù in Burwash Landing. While I recognize that we still have much work to do, some steps that we have taken so far include: a memorandum of understanding signed in June 2020; a commitment of between \$20 million to

\$28 million in funding under the 2022-23 five-year capital plan; a Yukon asset construction agreement signed this year; and a joint funding commitment announced last month of more than \$22.5 million from the Government of Yukon and the Government of Canada, with support through the Investing in Canada infrastructure program.

When I was in Burwash last month celebrating this milestone with the community, it was so special to hear the voice of the Kluane First Nation citizens, including Chief Bob Dickson and Elder "Gramma" Lena Johnson. I saw first-hand the joy and excitement of the students of the Kluane Lake School as they danced and sang songs in Southern Tutchone and how the children spent the afternoon playing and laughing while we all gathered in the community hall.

Gramma Lena spoke about the community's history with colonial education and residential schools, but also emphasized how "we are all built the same" and she doesn't "see colours". Gramma Lena said that "our skin may make us look different but, in our hearts, we are the same." She said that this new Kêts'ádañ Kù, to be built closer to home and in the heart of their community, is an opportunity for us to work together to — and I quote: "... teach children to do our best, to help each other out, and about community — both sides."

I am humbled and honoured to play a part in helping Kluane First Nation and the Burwash Landing community move their decades-long advocacy for the Kêts'ádañ Kù, which will ensure students in Burwash have access to a modern learning facility for years to come.

Shaw nithän. Thank you.

Mr. Istchenko: It seems like this government likes to talk about projects that are delayed and behind schedule. Yesterday, it was the Faro fire hall and public works building; today, it's the Burwash school. I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the official name of the new school, the Kêts'ádañ Kù, which, as the minister mentioned, means "House of Learning" in Southern Tutchone. In my opinion, it is the perfect name.

A bit of a history lesson for the members on the other side of the House — the previous Yukon Party government first got the ball rolling on this in 2015. As we all know, the Kluane First Nation has been asking for a school in Burwash for generations, and I was pleased to start this process. As MLA for Kluane, I originated a meeting with the then-minister and the local First Nation, and we signed an MOU. When the current government took office in 2016, this project was put on the back burner. Year after year, I saw money for the Burwash school planning in the budget, but sadly, that money wasn't spent and no work was done on this important project on behalf of the Kluane First Nation.

It wasn't until 2021 that the planning process really got started. I do have to mention that it was an honour for me, as the MLA for Kluane, to sit in on the planning session via Zoom with the First Nation and the community. It was great to hear the vision for the school from the community and especially from the kids who participated.

This new school in Burwash will be a boon for the community and will finally fulfill the long-lasting request from the Kluane First Nation. Now the real work needs to get shovels in the ground and it needs to begin, but there are some outstanding questions. First off, we haven't heard much in the way of timelines for this project — both at the funding announcement and the ministerial statement. So, can the minister tell us how the design and construction will play out?

Is the design work underway? What are the tendering and construction timelines? I know this is a question for Highways and Public Works, but the Minister of Education probably has a pretty good idea about the timelines for this project. So, will the government meet with the residents of Destruction Bay to gather input about the future of the old Kluane Lake School? Does the government already have plans on what the old school should be used for? Does the government plan on tearing down this school, or will they renovate and repurpose the old school? Has money been set aside to deal with the old Kluane Lake School?

The Burwash school should have been dealt with a long time ago, Mr. Speaker; however, I am personally pleased that this project is finally moving forward, thanks to lobbying from the local First Nation, Kluane First Nation, and myself as the MLA. I'm very happy for the Kluane First Nation Chief and Council that finally, after decades of asking for a new school in Burwash, their request is finally being fulfilled.

I look forward to the day when the kids from Burwash and the surrounding area can attend this school in their community. Thank you. Günilshish.

Ms. White: I'm delighted to stand in celebration of the long-awaited school construction in Burwash Landing, Kets'ádañ Kù.

This has been a long wait and it has taken more than 100 years to get us to this point. So, congratulations to the Kluane First Nation who will soon have back what they have fought so hard to have: the ability for their children to learn in their own community. The NDP, long before my time, have long championed a school in Burwash Landing because that's what we were told was needed by the Kluane First Nation. I remember my first visit to Burwash Landing after being elected and there were signs on all of the government buildings highlighting the century-plus long wait for a school. This is a topic that has been raised by leadership on each and every visit I've had in the community.

The school is a result of decades of unwavering dedication from the Kluane First Nation. When I think about those years of work, I reflect back on a CBC interview in 2004 when Mary Easterson, a Kluane First Nation elder, was talking about a petition that was tabled in this very Assembly for a school to be built in Burwash Landing. She talked about the many petitions over the years that asked for a school. She said — and I quote: “The community wants input into the education of their children. We want elders involved with the teachings of values and language with our children.”

Finally, that day is getting closer, and for that, we thank the citizens, the elders, and the leadership of the Kluane First

Nation who never wavered in their desire to bring education back to their community where it belonged.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleagues, particularly the Leader of the Third Party, for the comments here today. I think that the member for the Yukon conservative party needs some history lessons as well here today, which I am going to endeavour to give.

Our government is investing in schools to support the Yukon's growing population and to provide modern learning spaces for every Yukon student. After years of inaction by the Yukon conservative party and their lack of investment in Yukon's education system, we are now just beginning to create a modern, inclusive education system. That has been one of my primary focuses as minister and the previous minister before me.

Last year, I was pleased to be at a land blessing at the site of the new Whistle Bend elementary school with the Member for Riverdale North, First Nation members, and local contracting company Ketz Construction. Truly, we put our tent into the building of that school as well.

More than \$25 million is included in this year's budget for the construction of the school, which will be the first new elementary school in Whitehorse in more than 25 years. The Whistle Bend school will be able to accommodate 425 students and is expected to be completed in 2023-24.

I take note of the questions that the member asked here today, and I will work with the Highways and Public Works minister to bring back those details to the House.

In addition, over the next five years, we are investing in a number of school projects, including over \$45 million for the replacement of the École Whitehorse Elementary School, over \$6 million for structural upgrades to the Ross River School, more than \$2 million for the Robert Service School modular addition, and \$1.6 million for experiential learning spaces across the territory.

Mr. Speaker, for 14 years, the Yukon Party ignored the problems in our education system and resisted change. They ignored the more than 100-year-old request by Kluane First Nation for a new school in Burwash Landing, even while the community had an MLA in Cabinet. The Yukon conservative party's approach to school infrastructure was a failure; it just simply was a failure. They built an elementary school to replace a high school. They alienated the local contracting industry in the process. They ignored the Yukon's francophone population and wasted millions of dollars fighting the francophone school board. It took years for our Liberal government to repair relationships with the contracting industry and the francophone community and to get things back on track.

That is why I am so pleased to see the Kets'ádañ Kù project move ahead. Earlier this year, the community was consulted on the conceptual design and the best options for moving forward. The building is now in the design phase. We will continue to work with the Kluane First Nation to discuss a design and construction of the school. The tender and the completion date will be confirmed, as I said earlier, once additional project planning is complete.

I want to thank our partners in this project, including the Kluane First Nation and the century-long dedication to ensuring Yukon learners in their community can receive high-quality education.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Health care services

Mr. Cathers: Earlier this year, the Minister of Health and Social Services promised Yukoners that a new walk-in clinic would be opened in Whitehorse.

A CBC article from April 8 said, “Her department is looking for space for the first government-run clinic in the territory, which she said will be staffed with local doctors and nurses.”

The minister told media that the new walk-in clinic would be opened in the spring of 2022. This was welcome news to the thousands of Yukoners without a family doctor who currently have no other choice but to seek care from the emergency room. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, it is October now and there is no walk-in clinic in sight.

Can the minister explain why she didn’t follow through on her promise to open a new government-run walk-in clinic in Whitehorse?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am happy to rise to speak to this issue. I spoke at length to media yesterday. The member opposite may have availed himself of that information or not, but I am happy to repeat it here on the floor of the Legislative Assembly today.

The Government of Yukon is committed to working with our partners to increase Yukoners’ access to primary health care providers. Just one way in which that could be happening is having services provided at a walk-in clinic. It is just one of the many projects that we are working on to meet the recommendations in *Putting People First* and moving and transforming Yukon’s health care system.

We are working with physicians, nurse practitioners, and other health care providers to think creatively and to seek their guidance with respect to how we might meet the challenge that we face on how to best take action to meet the need. As I have said, one of the needs might be the services of a walk-in clinic to alleviate some of the patients having to go to the emergency room for particular —

Speaker: Ten seconds.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: — health care concerns, and I certainly look forward to future questions.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister may try to dismiss the question, but yesterday, she was asked about a commitment that she had made. When she was asked by local media why she failed to live up to her own commitment to open a new walk-in clinic in the spring of this year, the minister seemed to blame local doctors. She said that the department had offered to help with set-up costs and some administration costs, but local doctors turned her down. She said — and I quote: “Those doctors ultimately chose not to pursue that business model.”

Instead of seeming to blame local doctors for her broken promise, why doesn’t the minister try to actually engage them in a meaningful way to deliver on her promise to open a walk-in clinic in Whitehorse?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The member opposite does know what I said yesterday about the explanation for the walk-in clinic. There was no blame. We have continued. The issue here is access for Yukoners to medical services. We have continued to work with the Yukon Medical Association and the members of the Yukon Medical Association and our nurse practitioners here in town to come up with creative ways that we might offer the walk-in type of services or a walk-in clinic. That work is ongoing. It is a top priority and it continues and has continued, though somewhat delayed over the summer months by the negotiations that were happening with the Yukon Medical Association, which resulted, of course, in a new Yukon Medical Association agreement between the Government of Yukon and the Yukon Medical Association for three years that will take us through to 2025. That includes a new attachment and attraction program. It is just one of the ways that we hope to work together to help Yukoners access primary care needs. It does include in that attachment and attraction program incentives, financial and otherwise, for Yukon doctors to increase —

Speaker: Ten seconds.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: — their patient care load. We look forward to the implementation.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, the minister can attempt to sidestep this question all she wants, but the government has been very slow to act on the health care needs of Yukoners, and despite the minister herself making a specific promise in the spring that a walk-in clinic would be open very soon — she said that it would be open in the spring — the Minister of Health and Social Services has changed her position. Yesterday, when asked by media for a date when a walk-in clinic would be open, she couldn’t provide an answer. Many Yukoners who are without a family doctor had been holding out hope that a walk-in clinic opening in the spring would mean that they would no longer have to seek health care from the emergency room.

When can Yukoners expect the Minister of Health and Social Services to live up to the promise that she made earlier this year to have a walk-in clinic opened in Whitehorse?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The discussions regarding the process of opening a walk-in clinic, or walk-in-clinic type of services, are ongoing on a daily basis with respect to how we might find a solution. It is a top priority, as I have noted.

Dr. Ryan Warshawski, the current president — or I guess maybe not, maybe now the past president — of the Yukon Medical Association said, in relation to our negotiations and the agreement ultimately designed, is — and I quote: “... a robust and well-functioning health care system is integral to the health of Yukoners. The Yukon Medical Association is optimistic that this new agreement will promote access to primary, speciality, and hospital-based care ... It has dedicated funding to promote equity and diversity at the individual, office, and organizational level. I believe that this will make Yukon one of the most competitive and desirable places to practice medicine in Canada ... The agreement recognizes both the unique and

integral role of physicians in both health care delivery and leadership ... The Yukon Medical Association is committed to working with the Yukon government as a partner in health care moving forwards.”

Question re: Support for seniors

Ms. McLeod: Seniors on fixed incomes are finding the inflation crisis difficult to deal with. Last spring, the Yukon Party asked for action to help seniors this year, but the government could not provide a single item in the budget specifically introduced with seniors in mind. Now we are hearing from some seniors that their pioneer utility grant, or PUG, will be used up on just the first delivery of home heating fuel.

Will the government commit to doing more for our Yukon seniors who are going to struggle financially this winter?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Making seniors a top priority with respect to how they receive support here in the Yukon Territory is a priority for our government. We have worked very closely with seniors organizations, met with them over several years — the last few years in particular with respect to how COVID is affecting seniors and seniors organizations.

With respect to the utilities grant situation, you may well know and members of this Legislative Assembly may well know that we have determined that one of our inflationary measures will be to provide a 10-percent payment to each individual who receives the pioneer utility grant of 10 percent. That will come in the new year once the individual amounts that people receive can be calculated — I think in late November. Thank you.

Ms. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Now the minister has stated, or at least strongly suggested, that a one-time 10-percent payment to PUG recipients is sufficient, but it doesn't help seniors address rising costs and, even worse, they won't receive it until next year.

This falls far short of the Yukon Party suggestion to double the PUG last spring so that seniors could receive it this year. That would mean an extra \$1,173 if you live within the City of Whitehorse and \$1,257 if you live outside of the Whitehorse city limits.

Will the minister commit to double the amount of the pioneer utility grant and get it out of the door immediately?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: As I've noted in the previous answer, Mr. Speaker, assisting seniors and supporting them through this difficult time of high inflation across the world is a top priority for our government. We're helping low-income Yukoners and seniors — in particular, those on social assistance and caregivers of children in out-of-home care — and introduced a range of measures to help those in need, including a one-time payment to social assistance recipients of \$150. In addition to the note that I made earlier here regarding the pioneer utility grant of a one-time 10-percent additional payment to those recipients, a one-time payment of \$150 is also going to Yukon seniors — those who receive Yukon seniors income supplement and those recipients.

In addition, a six-month extension of our \$500 per month to caregivers of children in out-of-home care has been done. Also, \$100,000 has been provided to the Food Network Yukon to continue its support for food security across the territory.

Yukoners — seniors, in particular, and those on social assistance and caregivers of children — are of concern and likely our —

Speaker: Order.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you.

Ms. McLeod: The Liberal government is leaving many seniors out in the cold this winter, and they need more support. One of the programs that could make it more affordable to live in their own homes is the homeowners grant. The homeowners grant reduces the amount of property tax you pay for your principal residence. Eligible individuals 65 and older can receive up to 75 percent of the property taxes owing on their residence to a maximum of \$500.

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

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, as we have said a few times as we have risen to our feet here in the Legislative Assembly, our budget is always designed to making life more affordable for Yukoners. We will continue to monitor international crises and also local issues when it comes to making life more affordable for Yukoners.

We have heard the opposition with some of their suggestions as far as what we could do in the short term and the long term, when it comes to inflation. With the release of the interim fiscal and economic outlook, there are some bright days ahead, as far as inflation, and as far as that goes, we will continue to monitor the situation with inflationary short-term relief. We'll also continue to monitor the situation with COVID and provide businesses and individuals with relief when it comes to fighting the pandemic.

Outside of these extraordinary situations, everything we do is to make sure that we make life more affordable for Yukoners. We will continue to listen to some good advice from the members opposite as well, as we do believe that good ideas come from all political stripes, and we'll continue to monitor the inflationary situation, as we have with the over \$5 million that we committed a month ago and also the announcements that my colleague, the Deputy Premier, just mentioned, when it comes to specific relief for our seniors.

Question re: Hospital staffing

Ms. White: After hearing repeatedly from Yukon nurses about chronic understaffing at the Yukon Hospital Corporation, our office inquired with the corporation to find out just how short they are, and the answer was shocking. The Yukon Hospital Corporation does not know how often or exactly how short-staffed its departments are on an ongoing basis. Being short-staffed means that patients are not getting the care that they need when they need it, and it means that nurses who are on shift have to work harder and for longer to fill the gaps. It means that Yukon nurses are burning out faster and faster.

Will the minister commit to tracking staff shortages at the Yukon Hospital Corporation and ensure that nurses have the support that they need to do their jobs?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: What the issue here that is being asked about is our support for medical professionals — nurses in particular, but medical professionals across the territory — and absolutely, the support of those individuals and the world pandemic that they have just led us through on the very front lines is a top priority for our government.

I noted yesterday in my response to the budget speech that it is almost unimaginable to determine how many and how those professionals in particular led us through the pandemic on a daily basis. They were there night and day, particularly the nurses at the Yukon Hospital Corporation, but the nurses at our community health centres were also required to be on call and at the response to community issues almost 24/7. They all deserve support. They all deserve relief, which is why we have seen some shortages, because we insisted that they take some time off. They all deserve our respect and the honour that —

Speaker: Ten seconds.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: — we hold them in high esteem for the work that they do to keep and protect us.

Ms. White: So, my question was particularly about tracking staff shortages at Yukon hospitals. We got lots of words but very few answers to that one.

Emergency medical service shortages have also been a chronic problem under this government, both in Whitehorse and in rural Yukon. These shortages can be the difference between life and death. Whether it is a car crash, a heart attack, or a child swallowing something they shouldn't have, Yukoners expect that there is always an ambulance at the ready.

According to standard procedures, the department is supposed to document how often there is a shortage of paramedics and the duration so that they can adjust staffing levels appropriately. A recent access-to-information request shows that this is not the case. The government has no idea how often or for how long emergency medical care is not available for Yukoners. For a government that says that they make evidence-based decisions, it seems that the actual evidence has been —

Speaker: Ten seconds.

Ms. White: — missing all along.

Will the minister commit to tracking and publicly reporting on ambulance shortages?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am very pleased to rise again to speak about looking after the individuals who look after us. In particular, there is a wide range of those individuals. They are nurses, they are nurse practitioners, they are physicians, they are EMS staff, and they are nurses and the support workers who work in our community health centres. We have worked extremely hard to make sure that those individuals are looked after.

The issue noted in the question involves keeping track of the kinds of shortages that we have and when we are not able to provide the full breadth of care — or a full shift, for instance. The member opposite might be asking about some very rare situations where we have had to have additional support

brought into community health centres, et cetera, or into hospitals where we regularly use travel or staffing nurses to meet those models.

Speaker: Ten seconds.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the third question because there is much more information to provide to Yukoners.

Ms. White: I would have preferred to hear a commitment from the Minister of Community Services, the person responsible for EMS. Health care workers, after two and a half years of giving everything they have, are struggling to bear the workload put upon them by this government. A nurse working in long-term care recently said that it was a good day because they were only short a few nurses. E-mails from hospital staffing managers urging nurses to come in to work have called it a “crisis”.

We know that there is a shortage of health care workers in this territory. The nurses on the floor know it, the paramedics at the station know it, and the Yukoners who wait for hours to access care and critical life-saving services know it. We also know the old saying that you can't manage what you don't measure.

So, this minister needs more than words to show her respect for the health care professionals. She must commit to ensuring that they are not working short shift after shift. Will the minister tell Yukoners what she is doing to retain health care professionals and prevent further burnout?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I don't agree with everything in the preamble to that question, but I actually agree with quite a bit of it. There are shortages in some places on some days, and we must know the details of those — which we do. We must be able to support the individuals who are required to work under those conditions.

In particular, Yukon hospitals are working hard to employ innovative solutions, as we are in community health centres, to ensure that staffing models are well-planned and sustainable.

There is currently a national and global shortage of health care providers, which I think bears repeating. Contingency plans have been developed to deal with staffing shortages at all three hospitals here in the territory, including moving staff when needed. Long-term recruitment strategies are underway to address shortages, both at the Yukon Hospital Corporation and at Yukon Health and Social Services, because we have different professionals working in each place, and we are continuing to work with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to develop a joint recruitment strategy. Short-term recruitment strategies have been implemented, such as the use of agency nurses, as I mentioned, incentive programs, accommodation, et cetera.

Question re: Whistle Bend development

Ms. Clarke: Last week, I highlighted how the Government of Yukon sold lots that fronted onto what are called “green streets” in Whistle Bend. Despite contractual commitments made by the Government of Yukon through the sales agreements, they broke the contract and did not provide what was promised to these homeowners. Instead of

apologizing to these homeowners, the minister pointed fingers and tried to blame the City of Whitehorse, but documents show something different. The Yukon government's own contract registry shows a contract for almost \$1 million that was awarded by the Liberals for a job titled "Green street paving, Whistle Bend subdivision 2022".

Why did the Government of Yukon start paving the green streets without talking to residents first?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: What I said last week and what I'll say again this week is that we work with the city. So, whatever we have, our municipalities, we ask the municipalities what they would like to see designed, and we will continue to work with the city.

I believe that last week there was a meeting with residents, and it included the city and, I believe, our officials. So, we take the direction about what should be designed based on our partnership with municipalities. It is Community Services that does the development work, and then it is Energy, Mines and Resources that sells those lots. We're happy to keep working with the city, and we're happy to sit down and talk with residents.

I understand that there are further meetings set up. I reached out to the mayor right after the question was raised. There's an ongoing dialogue with us. We have letters going out to respond to the neighbours, the residents.

Again, I make the offer that if the member opposite has other concerns and questions, that she raise them to us directly so we can follow up with those residents.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Clarke: Here are the facts: The Government of Yukon sold lots saying that they would front on landscaped green walking paths. In April, the Government of Yukon awarded a million-dollar contract to put a 20-foot-wide road over top of these green walking paths without consulting the homeowners they sold the lots to.

Last week, months after the paving already started, the Liberals agreed to finally talk to homeowners. The problem is that the government is not acting in good faith. Less than one day after the so-called "consultation", crews from the Government of Yukon contractor were back on the green streets conducting more work.

Will the minister agree to immediately halt work on the green streets and start working in good faith with residents?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Listen, it's unfortunate to hear the remarks from the member opposite. I believe that our public servants are acting at all times responsibly. I have not been led to believe anything different. There are concerns being raised by some residents. We're meeting with the residents to talk to them about those concerns. We have work which is ongoing at all times in the development — for example, of Whistle Bend, but across all of Yukon communities — to do work. There are times when there are concerns and they are raised. I just never think that we should sit here and cast aspersions toward those public servants who are doing what I think is a really great job.

So, I am saying here on this issue that it has been raised to our attention and that we will work with the residents; we are working with the residents. We are working with the City of

Whitehorse. The normal course of action here is that the city does the planning work and designs what they wish to see developed. It is Community Services that executes on that development work. It is then Energy, Mines and Resources that sells those lots. That is the appropriate working arrangement, and we will work with residents.

Ms. Clarke: So, here is what has occurred so far. The government sold lots promising walking paths. The government then awarded a massive contract to put a road over top of the walking paths. Once paving started, homeowners were rightfully concerned and flagged this issue to the government. The Liberals halted work to have a pretend consultation. Then, to add insult to injury, less than one day after the consultation began, the Government of Yukon sent their contractor who is tasked with paving the green streets back to start doing more work.

Is the minister at all concerned that his government is not living up to its legal commitments made in the sale agreements to my constituents?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, what I will say is that each time that I have ever — and it is not exclusive to this specific issue — but that I have ever talked with the department about the integrity of the work that they bring in support of Yukoners in helping to develop and sell land and to follow the wishes of the municipalities in the planning and design, it has always been of the highest quality. I have no questions about their integrity and the work that they are doing.

I will check back in again with the department. I will work with the city. I will work with Community Services. I will make sure that we are taking the time to hear from residents and I will say to the members opposite that, of course, we are investing in these expensive contracts because we are developing lots, which is so critical for housing here in the territory. We will continue to invest in the development of lots and land across all of our Yukon communities because it is incredibly important for all Yukoners.

Question re: Yukon Water Board role and responsibilities

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, last month, Victoria Gold brought the Yukon Water Board to court, alleging that the board's decision regarding their required security payment was unfair. As a result, the Yukon Supreme Court has paused part of the security payment. However, the judge also made a number of concerning comments about the Yukon Water Board. According to an article from CBC Yukon, she said — and I quote: "Although the water board claimed to take no position, its submissions amounted to clear opposition to the application. It sought to take on the role it believed Yukon or Na-Cho Nyäk Dun should have played.

"In doing so, it overstepped its mark and became too partisan. The water board must be careful: it is not an adversarial party and should not act like one."

These are extremely strong words from the judge.

What is the government doing to keep the Water Board from overstepping its mark?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, a few things. First of all, I am not going to comment on the specific case that is in front of the courts at this very moment. I can say that we have done ongoing work with the Yukon Water Board around security assessment, just making sure that we are aware of each other's work and trying to see if there are ways to streamline the process. I can say, for example, that I was in conversation with Eagle Gold today. I talked to the president of the company not on this issue, but on other issues. We have an ongoing dialogue with Eagle Gold. When it comes to the Water Board, I respect their jurisdiction and their responsibility to assess securities. There are times, of course, when we have come up with different numbers. What we will always do is try to find out how to make sure that the process works as well as possible. I won't be speaking about the specific issue in front of the court right now.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, I can appreciate that the minister doesn't want to speak about the specific court case; however, these were very strong words from the Yukon Supreme Court Judge. According to the CBC Yukon article, she says clearly that the Water Board has been overstepping its mark and, in her words, "became too partisan." She goes on to say that she will consider the board's submissions going forward with caution because its approach has been "overly adversarial."

This is very concerning to the mining industry as the Yukon Water Board is a very important part of the process of developing and operating a mine in the Yukon. So, what is the Yukon government doing to rein in the Water Board and ensure that it is not behaving in an overly adversarial way?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, again, I will not comment about the specific case that is in front of the court; it is not appropriate for me to do so. I have said and will say again that we continue to work with the mining industry about issues like security and we always will. We will continue to do so. I and the Minister of Economic Development met recently with the Chamber of Mines this morning. I spoke with the president of the Chamber of Mines. There is always dialogue that is ongoing.

What I can say is that we have assessed the securities for Eagle Gold mine to go up by \$30.8 million. My understanding is that is security that is being paid. We will continue to work with the Water Board. We have had ongoing conversations with the Water Board about how to do that work with them. It's not specific to their ability to assess on a specific instance, because we respect the authority that they have to carry out that work. It's about process and how to streamline it.

Mr. Kent: I'm not asking for the minister to comment on the case itself. My concern is with what the judge has said about the Yukon Water Board. In 2018, the Government of Yukon entered into an MOU with the Water Board, which was meant to support a constructive working relationship and clarify roles and responsibilities between the Yukon Water Board and the Yukon government.

Now, in the words of a Yukon Supreme Court Judge, the Water Board is trying to take on the role that it believes the Yukon government should play. It's clear that the view of the

Yukon Supreme Court Judge is that the Water Board is overstepping. The judge said, according to these local media reports, "Although the Water Board claimed to take no position, its submissions amounted to clear opposition to the application."

So, will the Government of Yukon use the powers available to it in the MOU to rein in the Water Board and ensure that this confusion about roles and responsibilities does not negatively affect other mining projects in the territory?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite just talked about how we are working with the Water Board to address these situations. That is exactly what is happening. By the way, why listen to the media reports? Why not just go get the judgment directly? I have read the judgment; fine. It just seems incredible to me that the member is talking about a specific case which is in front of the courts and I will not comment on it.

What I will say, and will continue to say, is that both the Yukon Water Board and the Government of Yukon have the responsibility to assess and set securities for our mines. That is what is happening, and we will continue to work with the Water Board to make sure that process is efficient and streamlined.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

OPPOSITION PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 436

Clerk: Motion No. 436, standing in the name of Mr. Cathers.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Lake Laberge:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to ensure that territorial policing resources are not diverted to assist in the implementation of the Government of Canada's gun buyback program.

Mr. Cathers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce this motion on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition caucus. The motion is, of course:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to ensure that territorial policing resources are not diverted to assist in the implementation of the Government of Canada's gun buyback program.

Now, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to emphasize four things. It is important to take an evidence-based approach rather than one guided by emotion. Public policy based on fear is not the right approach to take.

Second, the so-called gun "buyback" program is actually the proposed confiscation of lawfully acquired property from Canadian citizens.

Third, it is clear that diverting public money and police resources away from dealing with serious issues, including

organized crime, would actually make the Yukon and other parts of Canada less safe.

Fourth, the National Police Federation, which is the union representing RCMP members, agrees that the federal Liberal approach diverts police resources away from where they are needed most.

The National Police Federation issued a position statement about the matter of the Trudeau government's firearm legislation and the so-called "buyback" program in which they clearly and specifically stated that those measures actually — I quote: "... diverts extremely important personnel, resources, and funding away from addressing the more immediate and growing threat of criminal use of illegal firearms."

Mr. Speaker, it is clear to anyone who looks closer at the evidence that the Trudeau government is proposing to divert police resources away from where they are needed most and instead would target licensed firearms owners and forcibly confiscate their lawfully acquired property. The Liberals' actions are politically motivated and are also contrary to the advice of RCMP members and other experts on public safety.

Here at home, the Yukon RCMP have publicly made it clear on several occasions how strained their resources are in dealing with an increase in crime. This summer, they reported that organized crime is becoming entrenched with at least five organized crime networks operating here in the Yukon, consisting of more than 250 individuals. Their resources have not grown enough to meet the increase in the Yukon population, much less this surge in organized crime.

This is a serious problem. When the Yukon RCMP announced that information this summer, they also told the public that the severity of organized crime in our territory includes not just drug trafficking, but also human trafficking and weapons trafficking. Diverting police resources from going after organized crime would not make Yukon safer; it would make the Yukon less safe — and make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, that is what the federal government is asking this government to do through supporting the implementation of gun confiscation.

The federal Liberal government has asked provinces and territories to help it confiscate thousands of lawfully acquired firearms from licensed owners through its so-called "buyback" program. Three provinces have already refused that request. The Justice ministers of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba have all publicly come out in opposition to the federal government's gun confiscation plan. They have also made it clear that when provincial and territorial ministers of Justice meet with their federal counterpart, Minister Mendicino, they will be delivering a strong message on behalf of their governments, urging the federal government to cancel the gun confiscation plan. This territorial Liberal government has a choice to make: They can listen to RCMP members — and again, I encourage all members of the government to read the position statement issued by the National Police Federation, the union representing the RCMP. They can listen to RCMP members and Yukon firearms owners and join those three provinces in opposing the federal gun confiscation plan, or they can side with the federal Liberals.

In my letter to the Minister of Justice earlier this year, as the Yukon Party Official Opposition Justice critic, we urged the government to oppose the federal gun confiscation plan and proposed a list of alternate actions focused on actually improving public safety while also respecting licensed firearms owners, and many of those measures are based on the suggestions of RCMP members through the position statement of the National Police Federation.

I tabled the letter previously — my letter dated June 8, 2022 — but I also just want to quote from part of it here for the purposes of debate and so that it's clearly reflected in Hansard what we have suggested.

In my letter to the Minister of Justice, I said the following: "On behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition, I urge you to contact your federal colleague Minister Mendicino to oppose Bill C-21.

"While more action is needed to address gun violence in Canada, it is important to take an evidence-based approach to this problem rather than one guided by emotion. Public policy based on fear is not the approach to take.

"We strongly encourage you to read the position statement by the National Police Federation (which is the union representing RCMP members) on the matter of gun control legislation. While their position statement on the current state of gun violence in Canada was issued in November 2020, it is directly relevant to this new legislation, as it addresses matters including the so-called 'buy-back' program proposed by Mr. Trudeau, and the federation's own priorities.

"As stated by the National Police Federation, 'Effectively addressing the threat of Canada's growing illicit firearms market and related increased gang violence requires the urgent, efficient, and effective deployment of law enforcement expertise, personnel, and financial resources.'

"The union representing RCMP members goes on to state: 'Costly and current legislation, such as the Order in Council prohibiting various firearms and the proposed "buy-back" program by the federal government targeting at legal firearms owners, does not address these current and emerging themes or urgent threats to public safety.'"

I went on to note in the letter: "We urge you to listen to the expert advice the National Police Federation provided in that position statement, and recognize that most of the gun control measures currently proposed would actually divert important personnel and resources from where they are needed most.

"Last year, the Toronto Police Service indicated 86% of the guns seized in connection with crime were illegally obtained from the U.S. black market and across the country, most gun violence is connected to organized crime. The focus of any serious, responsible plan to address gun violence in Canada must target organized crime, and guns smuggled across the border from the United States. It is also important to tackle the causes of crime, including diverting at-risk youth from becoming involved in gangs.

"I would note that we do see value in the proposed 'red flag' and 'yellow flag' provisions aimed at individuals who may pose a risk for others. While we encourage you to seek expert advice and consult with Yukoners on how these

proposed new measures compare to provisions already in the Criminal Code for this purpose, we support in principle strengthening the ability to take proactive action to prevent crimes such as domestic violence and homicide.

“The Yukon Party Official Opposition suggests the following specific actions:

“1. Appoint a Chief Firearms Officer for the territory, reporting to the territorial government. This would make the position more accountable, speed up the process of PAL renewals for law-abiding citizens, and also allow for faster suspension of a licence if required.

“2. Lobby the federal Liberals to cancel the proposed ‘buy-back’ program, repeal the May 2020 Order-in-Council, and allow law-abiding firearms owners to keep their legally acquired property. As stated by the National Police Federation, the ‘buy-back’ program actually ‘diverts extremely important personnel, resources, and funding away from addressing the more immediate and growing threat of criminal use of illegal firearms.’

“3. Prioritize crime reduction, gang diversion, safe communities, secure borders, Canadian enforcement agency integration, and cross-border safety of the public and all police officers. This was called for by the National Police Federation.

“4. Lobby for increased funding to the RCMP Border Integrity Program, to enable dedicated proactive RCMP investigative weapons enforcement activity and the dismantling of gang and organized crime firearms smuggling. This was called for by the National Police Federation.

“5. Help law enforcement properly address crime prevention rather than focusing funding and resources towards the ongoing monitoring of unrelated restrictions on licensed and regulated firearms owners. This was called for by the National Police Federation.

“6. Prioritize and lobby for increased resources for the federal policing program of the RCMP. In 2018, the Yukon — like other jurisdictions — actually lost police positions used for investigations into matters such as drug trafficking and organized crime due to federal cuts to this funding. That funding should be restored, and enhanced.

“7. Lobby for Gun and Gang Violence Action funding from the federal government to be able to be used by provinces and territories for policing.

“8. Work with all orders of government to address the root causes of organized crime, including early identification of at-risk youth, diversion programs, and job-skills training to help at-risk people find opportunities and productive alternatives to becoming involved with a gang.

“We believe these alternative measures would be a more effective approach to dealing with the real issues facing Canadians, and improve public safety while respecting the rights of law-abiding firearms owners.”

So, Mr. Speaker, as I noted, we have called on the territorial government to oppose Bill C-21 and the gun confiscation plan, deceptively referred to by the federal Liberals as a “buyback” program.

In her response to my letter as well as in Question Period yesterday, the Minister of Justice appeared to try to sit on the

fence and claimed to both support licensed firearms owners in the Yukon while simultaneously avoiding saying anything that might even slightly offend the federal Liberal government.

But, Mr. Speaker, Yukoners don’t want to hear non-answers or see a non-position from the government. This is a very important issue to many Yukoners who own firearms.

Like with the former federal long-gun registry, they expect the Yukon government and the Yukon Legislative Assembly to be willing to take a position on it on their behalf. I do want to remind this House that, during the days of the long-gun registry, this Legislative Assembly twice passed motions unanimously opposing the long-gun registry. The first motion was tabled by the then-Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, the late Johnny Abel, and the second by myself.

The long-gun registry was eventually scrapped after going massively over its original budget and wasting billions of dollars, according to the Auditor General’s report. Likewise, the Liberal government gun confiscation plan is already predicted by independent experts, including the Parliamentary Budget Officer, to cost vastly more than the Liberals originally said it would. Estimates by the Fraser Institute predict the cost may actually balloon to several billion dollars. That money would be better spent on actually targeting organized crime, and that is the heart of the motion here today.

As members may be aware, we have seen three provinces come out in opposition to this plan and giving similar direction to that which this motion seeks. Mr. Speaker, I want to just briefly quote from what those Justice ministers said, and I will quote from national news coverage. For Hansard, I will provide them with links to those articles after I have concluded my speech here this afternoon.

The *National Post* noted that Alberta was the first to oppose the federal buyback program, with the province’s Justice minister calling the program wasteful and unnecessary: “It’s important to remember that Alberta taxpayers pay over \$750 million per year for the RCMP and we will not tolerate taking officers off the streets in order to confiscate the property of law-abiding firearms owners.” This was said by Tyler Shandro, the minister in Alberta.

Moving on to Manitoba, the Hon. Kelvin Goertzen, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, noted and was quoted by the *National Post* as saying this in a statement: “Manitoba has consistently stated that our approach to gun violence is to focus on those who use weapons in crime, not law abiding gun owners.”

“On September 13th, I wrote the federal Minister of Public Safety, The Honourable Marco Mendicino, regarding the ‘buy-back’ program for guns that federal Liberal government is enacting. In that letter, I stated the following: ‘We feel many aspects of the federal approach to gun crimes unnecessarily target lawful gun owners while having little impact on criminals, who are unlikely to follow gun regulations in any event. In Manitoba’s view, any buy-back program cannot further erode precious provincial police resources, already suffering from large vacancy rates, from focusing on investigation of violent crime.’

“We will be bringing those concerns, along with the shared concern of Saskatchewan and Alberta, directly to the federal government next month in meetings of Ministers of Justice and Ministers of Public Safety.”

I would note as well that those meetings, of course, are something that the Yukon’s Minister of Justice will be part of and has the opportunity — if the government does the right thing — to take a similar position to that of those three provinces and oppose the federal government’s plan in this area.

Moving on to Saskatchewan — as quoted by CTV: “The Sask. government doesn’t want the RCMP in the province participating in that program in any way. ‘These firearms that we are talking about in Saskatchewan belong to legal firearms owners and they’re licensed, they’re heavily vetted and monitored by the firearms office,’ said Christine Tell, Minister of Policing and Public Safety.

“Minister Tell has sent a letter to the head of the Saskatchewan RCMP. In the letter she stated that the government will not ‘authorize the use of provincially funded resources of any type for the federal government’s buyback program.’”

Further, the *Regina Leader Post* quoted that same minister as saying the following:

“‘As the federal government continues to plan for their confiscation program, it is important to make clear to you, the Commanding Officer of our provincial police service, that the Government of Saskatchewan does not support and will not authorize the use of provincially funded resources for any process that is connected to the federal government’s proposed ‘buy back’ of these fire arms,’ she stated.”

Again, to summarize, what we are calling on the government to do is very similar to what three provinces have already done.

I would note, as well, that, in the Yukon context, as I mentioned yesterday, in the most recent year-end review that the RCMP released, they reported a 90-percent increase in drug-trafficking offences, a 25-percent increase in robbery offences, and a 43-percent increase in violence in relationship offences.

RCMP report that organized crime here is becoming entrenched, with at least five organized crime networks and severity here, including human trafficking and weapons trafficking, in addition of course to drug trafficking. So, it is important to emphasize once again that diverting police resources from going after organized crime will not make the Yukon safer; it would, in fact, make it less safe.

So, we again urge the government and indeed all members of the Assembly, including the Third Party, to join us in urging the federal government to cancel the gun confiscation program and to join in our call urging the minister to carry that message loud and clear to the federal minister at the meetings that they’re having this month.

Mr. Speaker, I also just want to briefly talk about the principles of the matter at hand. For the health of our society, it’s important for people to feel that, while they may not agree with the government of the day, generally speaking, the

government is trying to protect their rights and is looking out for them. It’s important for everyone to remember that we need to respect what our fellow Canadians value, even if it is not important to us.

In this particular area, the right to own firearms for purposes including hunting is very important to a great many Canadians, including Yukoners. It’s important to people across the Yukon who use firearms for hunting, including subsistence hunting, as well as for self-defence and defence of animals and livestock. For an urban voter in downtown Toronto, the possibility that you might have to defend your animals from a predator, if you live in rural Yukon, is not something that is well-understood, but I know that many people in the Yukon have had to do that. If you have a bear on the prowl near your home, having a firearm is one way of keeping yourself and your family safe.

It’s important, when talking about the issue of the federal government’s proposed confiscation program, for people who are not aware of it, to keep in mind that the past practice in Canada for many decades has been that if firearms laws were changed, previously legal firearms that were no longer legal to sell were in a situation where the owners of those firearms could keep them but simply not resell them. The change and the step across the line into what has been called a “buyback” program is, in fact, confiscation and is a major change that is deeply disturbing to many Canadians who value property rights. It’s a gentle-sounding term for what it really is: the forced confiscation of private property.

For many Canadians and many Yukoners, the principle of that is not acceptable. For people who live in urban areas, or even for some in the Yukon who have not grown up with firearms or had them involved in their life, if they have not — if firearms use for hunting, target shooting, and those types of usages had not been part of their lives, they may not fully understand why other Canadians value firearms in their lives and why some depend on them as part of feeding their family. But as I noted, it is important, if our society is to be truly healthy and our democracy to be healthy, to try to respect what our fellow Canadians value and the things that are important to them.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just — in summarizing here, the approach that’s being proposed by the federal government is costly. It is not an effective use of resources, and again, as I noted, it is not just us but, in fact, also the union representing RCMP members who have said that it diverts police resources from where they are needed most.

Again, just in conclusion, I want to note that the National Police Federation said that the so-called “buyback” program — and I quote: “diverts extremely important personnel, resources, and funding away from addressing the more immediate and growing threat of criminal use of illegal firearms”.

Yesterday, the minister chose to dismiss what RCMP members said as assumptions, but I hope the minister will understand that, when it comes to making predictions about what this program will do, we have a lot more confidence in RCMP members than we do in the minister herself.

It is an opportunity, when the minister meets with provincial and territorial counterparts and the federal minister, to carry the message to the federal government that the federal government is down the wrong track and to urge them to cancel this planned confiscation of firearms program, which is, as I noted, a politically motivated approach that RCMP members say diverts resources from where they are needed most.

So, Mr. Speaker, the territorial Liberal government has a choice to make: whether they will listen to RCMP members and Yukoners calling for police resources to be used for going after organized crime and other serious criminal activity, or whether they will take their lead from the federal Liberal government and divert some of those resources toward confiscating licensed firearms owners lawfully acquired property.

With that, I will conclude my remarks, and I would urge all members of the Assembly to support this motion. As I mentioned before regarding the long-gun registry, this Legislative Assembly on two occasions unanimously sent a message to the federal government with a united position in support of the rights of Yukon firearms owners. I'm hoping that we will see that united message again today.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am pleased to rise today to address the topic of this particular motion brought by the member opposite. It must be said that it can't go without saying that I do not agree or appreciate the snide remarks and the comments of his characterization of things I have said here in the Legislative Assembly or positions taken with respect to this particular issue. I will rise to the occasion and speak directly to the motion, as the member opposite didn't do many times in their submission, but I am happy to do that.

The federal, provincial, and territorial ministers responsible for justice and public safety are, in fact, meeting today through until Friday in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. There are almost 40 agenda items on that agenda. They include RCMP and contract policing. They include First Nation and indigenous policing programs and discussions about RCMP staffing issues. Of course, they include the topic of firearms and Bill C-21. They also include gun and gang violence initiatives — initiatives to combat gun and gang violence — and indigenous policing legislation, to name just a few of the many topics on that agenda for the purpose of collaborating and coming together as ministers responsible for justice and public safety and having a true conversation with my counterparts across the country. I joined that call from here at 5:00 a.m. this morning and was able to participate in almost all of what was this morning's agenda. It will be a packed agenda tomorrow, as well, beginning at about 4:00 a.m. our time, and then again a further full agenda on Friday.

These meetings are incredibly important. I think that the member opposite maybe even noted that in their comments about the importance of, firstly, having federal and provincial ministers meet and then, secondly, the federal team of two ministers — both Justice and Public Safety, Minister Mendicino and Minister Lametti — join. A large part of today's agenda — which would have been the afternoon in Nova Scotia and the morning here for me — involved

unbelievable input, conversations led by national indigenous organizations who are invited to that meeting as well.

These are extremely live issues for all provinces and territories — Bill C-21 and the potential buyback program of concern to all provinces, it's safe to say — all provinces and territories. We heard some of the details of that from the submission that was made earlier here in the House in speaking to this motion.

I'm really pleased to hear that the member opposite is supportive of our policing programs here in the territory. I personally, and with the very talented team at Justice, work very closely with the M Division leadership. M Division is the name of our Yukon Territory team of RCMP officers. We work very closely with the leadership, as well as work hard to build relationships at the community detachment level when we are out in communities, because I think it's incredibly important for officers on the front line, many of whom — certainly, the detachment process I worked with for years through my career and work in the courts — but I think it's incredibly important for them to know that, at the ministerial level, we are concerned about what concerns them. We have those conversations and then I follow up with the issues that are brought to my attention, because I think doing any of the jobs that we are required to do in these roles — it's all about relationships and those relationships and the workers that we have on the front line.

I was asked earlier today about nurses and doctors and other people I have the honour of working with on the front line. They need to know that we are listening to them and they need to know that we hear their concerns. Of course, there are official channels to do that, but I think building relationships with the communities — and we have all visited communities throughout the last months since May when the House adjourned, and building those relationships is absolutely key for us.

The motion that is before this Legislative Assembly is:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to ensure that territorial policing resources are not diverted to assist in the implementation of the Government of Canada's gun buyback program.

In the Yukon, I have spoken to Minister Mendicino. I think I said that earlier, maybe last Thursday in the House. I spoke to Minister Mendicino about this issue back last Wednesday, I think, and the details of that conversation were in preparation for the fact that I could not be in Nova Scotia this week because I have responsibilities here. I indicated to him, much as I had indicated in a written response to a letter that I had sent to him earlier in the summer, and I conveyed the same message in the letter of response that I tabled yesterday that I had written to the MLA for Lake Laberge — I am just reading off of the letter — in response to a letter that he had written me earlier in the summer as well. That is that we do not have the resources — and I will get to what kind of resources might be discussed in this motion; it is not clear to me what they are — but that we do not have the administrative resources, the personnel resources, or the financial resources at M Division to participate in what might be conceived of as a buyback program. I say "might be" because the scope of that program and the details of

that program have not yet been designed and not yet been released — certainly not to the ministers' table. That will be a conversation that will happen no doubt tomorrow about what it is we are looking at. But I can tell you that my conversation this morning with respect to provincial ministers was that the scope, the details, and the concepts of that program would need to be available to us before decisions can be made about how that might be implemented.

That said, I have taken the opportunity to speak to the federal minister about implementation should such a program be designed and brought forward to us. I expect it to be the case, but any implementation would require the Yukon Territory to be provided with additional financial and/or other resources depending on how we might be required to implement that.

Important to remember is that federal legislation is federal legislation, so it is paramount to our territorial legislation, depending on the issues tackled. Of course, federal government has jurisdiction with respect to crime, crime prevention, public safety, and issues such as the ones dealt with in Bill C-21.

What I spoke about in my correspondence — the one I'm referring to and to the MLA of Lake Laberge — are details about our current situation here in the territory. I expressed that, despite our small population here in the territory, we have seen an increase in violent crime and homicides, with many of these crimes involving firearms and many of them being connected to organized crime activity and domestic violence.

Everyone in the Legislative Assembly will know that very recently we had an RCMP member of M Division shot in the City of Whitehorse. There was a suspect also shot during that incident. We know about the tragedies in Nova Scotia back in 2020, and as we approach the one-year anniversary of the tragic events of Faro last year and the ongoing gun violence across the country, it really has highlighted the need to limit access to handguns and assault weapons while not impeding the lawful use of firearms.

I think that often what occurs is that answers or comments that I might provide are only half-quoted, because what is absolutely critical to Yukoners is that there is no impediment to the lawful use of firearms.

The Yukon continues to be a jurisdiction where lawful gun owners are respected and lawful gun owners must be respected. We have never, ever changed the position with respect to providing that information of that position to the federal government, whichever federal government it may have been, to deal with any concepts affecting the rights of lawful gun owners in the Yukon Territory, that they must be done in conjunction with consultation with this government and Yukoners.

It may come as a surprise to some, but the Yukon has the highest per capita rate of possession and acquisition licences for both prohibited and restricted firearms in the country. That is an incredible statistic. There is a disproportionate impact of crimes affecting indigenous communities, in terms of homicides involving firearms and firearms-related violent crimes. Our government remains committed to finding a balance that counters the adverse impacts of illegal firearms, while recognizing that legal firearm ownership and use are

important parts of subsistence hunting and traditional lifestyles here in the Yukon Territory. It absolutely must be respected.

We remain supportive of the implementation of legislation that will help make our communities safer, while we continue to support the lawful use of firearms by Yukon homesteaders, Yukon hunters, and Yukon farmers. Now, the member opposite will characterize that as some sort of fence-sitting. I characterize that as a real balance with respect to addressing what has been described here so far in debate with respect to this particular motion as a community that is being impacted adversely by crime — by serious crime, by gangs, and by violence that includes firearms. We must try to address that, but we also must respect Yukon homesteaders, Yukon hunters, Yukon farmers, and all Yukoners who have and lawfully use firearms to support their lifestyle and their families.

We continue with our intergovernmental conversations about the logistics of the federal buyback program and the specific needs of the Yukon. That conversation has been happening at my tables and in my phone calls with both Minister Mendicino and Minister Lametti. It has been happening at the officials level, at the deputy ministers' tables, for many months, and it will continue to happen.

We continue to convey the absolute same message: that the Yukon is unique. And we anticipate that a partnership with the federal government for any resources to administer a new program — which is, may I say, not around the corner, perhaps months off — the member opposite and certainly conversations we had this morning convey that some provinces are not supportive of the legislation itself and then ultimately, therefore, not supportive of the buyback program, as part of that Bill C-21. But I think it's fair to say that, as I've mentioned, this is a live issue with respect to each and every jurisdiction. I can say there's probably some consensus that how we might get to implementing this — if we get to implementing this program — has to come with federal government resources to support that way in doing so.

One of the points I made this morning in relation to speaking to my counterparts was that the Yukon does not have — for instance — other public safety officers here in the territory. We don't have an office with respect to public safety — in particular, border crossings. I'm not sure what other areas or administrators might be available to implement such a program. I'm going to say, although I appreciate that there will be some criticism — well, there's just always criticism — but some criticism from the member opposite, whose motion has been brought to the floor, that this is somehow not taking a real position, but I am not in the habit, nor am I in the habit of asking my Cabinet to support decisions with respect to something that has not yet been designed. So, I think that's just the way we're going to have to proceed, and criticism come what may.

I can note that, back in May 2020, the Government of Canada, of course, banned assault-style firearms and introduced the proposed — the concept of a proposed — buyback program to ensure that the firearms that were being banned are safely removed from Canadian communities.

I appreciate that, in the Yukon, this comes with much concern, and I have the same concerns as Yukoners about this,

but I also have the ability — I wish it wasn't just to conceive of places like Toronto or Montréal or Vancouver where the streets and these kinds of firearms are much more prevalent, because I don't have to just imagine that. We have them here in the territory. We have way too many of them here in the territory, and we have to strike that balance.

The Government of Yukon is continuing to explore the logistics, waiting for the logistics, of the buyback program. As I have said, it has been on all federal deputy ministers' tables and ministers' tables and provincial and territorial ministers' tables. The government truly remains committed to finding a balance that counters the adverse impacts of illegal firearms with recognizing that legal firearms ownership and use are very important parts of subsistence hunting and traditional lifestyles here in the territory and other lifestyles here in the territory.

We have discussed at the federal ministers' tables, and particularly today at the federal and provincial table, about how this might go forward and how, in the event that it does, everyone is agreed that current — I mean, let's just go here for a second. Current police resources, despite the fact that we are working very closely with the RCMP, are always a topic of conversation. So, the idea of entering into some sort of program that would divert those resources from the work that is done on behalf of Yukoners by M Division is not something that I would support, and I know it's not something that our local RCMP would support.

I would like to note that the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, back in June of this year, issued a statement regarding Bill C-21 and firearms. I won't read all of it, other than to convey the idea — it's certainly available online from their annual review — that the Canadian Chiefs of Police believe the proposed legislation recognizes that stopping gun violence requires a lot of different responses.

This motion is specific, and I appreciate that. But in introducing this motion, and in debating this motion, there has been a lot of conversation so far about how it won't achieve the goals of making communities safer. I'm not going to debate that here today because it has been debated and will continue to be debated in a lot of arenas. What I think is important to note is that the discussions here today act as if this particular bill, Bill C-21, is the only possible response to try to achieve better safety in communities and in cities of this country with respect to the use of handguns and assault weapons that have been determined to be inappropriate for the streets of our cities. It is not — and as the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police notes, they do support the implementation of the new firearms-related offences and intensified border controls and strengthened penalties to be part of a program that helps with respect to how we can make communities in the Yukon safer.

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police supports — and I will quote here: "... improving safety for the public and front-line police officers. Reasonable requirements on responsible firearm owners need to be balanced with protective measures to help mitigate the impact of the worst outcomes of firearms. While we agree with the proposed changes of Bill C-21 in principle, we must now focus on what these mean

in practice and clarify the role police services are expected to play in enforcing these new regulations."

I think that really sums up the situation. Conceptually, maybe this will work. Do we know yet? No. We don't know what the program will look like, we don't know what resources mean, but the message has been clearly delivered that our M Division resources must be currently allocated under the operational plan under the guidance of the policing priorities that are given through me to the RCMP annually, but those policing priorities don't come necessarily only from me or from the Department of Justice. They are woven together with priorities of the government and the Department of Justice, but they come from Yukoners through the Yukon Police Council, which travels every year around the territory. During COVID, they did so by way of community outreach at communities through virtual options — Zoom and other types of meetings. Other ways they did it was a survey during one of the years of COVID to make sure that they had input from Yukoners. Because you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and all Members of the Legislative Assembly should remember that there has been guidance provided to us as a result of the Silverfox inquiry that led us to strike a unique Police Council here in the territory to connect with Yukon communities to find out what their policing priorities are for their own communities and to integrate those into recommendations that they provide to me annually as the minister.

I annually have the Department of Justice work with my office to determine if those priorities are the only ones or whether we are going to add to them, but I can tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that they almost always align and that Yukoners are telling us what we have thought about might be the priorities — of course, that decision is not made until we hear from the Police Council — and we go forward with those policing priorities to M Division. M Division is responsible for implementing the work and operationalizing the work to make sure that we are responding to Yukon communities.

I assure you that Yukon communities have access to the chief superintendent, Scott Sheppard. Yukon communities have access to the inspectors who are in charge of the communities as well as the City of Whitehorse and all of M Division. They make sure that the M Division is responsive to those police priorities, because they ask about them and they come back to them. The next year, when the Police Council is out and about, those questions are conveyed to the RCMP or they are brought through my office, and we have questions that we respond to all the time about making sure that the tough questions are asked and the tough questions are answered.

The policing priorities are unique in the Yukon, as far as I know. The Police Council setting those community priorities and making sure that those are conveyed to our police services here in the territory — they are incredibly important, in my experience, and incredibly important and supported by our government — and, I know, by leadership at M Division and leadership by the officials of the Department of Justice.

I've noted that there's a disproportionate impact of crimes that impact indigenous communities, in terms of homicide and involving firearms and firearms-related offences here in the

territory and violent crime. Back in 2018 — this is another topic on the agenda that we haven't yet addressed — addressed partly, but not yet with the federal government — through the gun and gang violence action fund, the Government of Yukon received five years of funding to support projects that contribute to enhancing efforts to prevent, disrupt, and combat gun and gang violence and the increased awareness and understanding of those related issues. That's incredibly important, as we've had communities seriously impacted by such gun violence and gang violence.

Amendments to the Government of Yukon's *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act* was passed back in the fall of 2021, adding illegal possession of restricted and prohibited firearms and explosives and firearms trafficking, as special use, in the definition of "special use" under the act. It's my recollection that those amendments to what's known as the "SCAN act" — *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act* — were not supported by the Official Opposition, the Yukon Party.

I can note that in May 2020, we were talking here about the regulations — reclassifying certain types of firearms as prohibited — and certain prohibited devices came into effect. At that time, as well, an amnesty order also came into force on the same date as part of the regulations.

That amnesty order has now been amended to be in place until October 30, 2023 to protect lawful owners of what would be now prohibited firearms from criminal liability, while they take necessary steps to comply with the law. So, time to do that. Although it will need to be extended, if the scope and details of a buyback program are not known to Yukoners or to individuals, and they may — they will be able to make a decision about how they want to proceed themselves.

I also can indicate that we currently, at the RCMP, have a — just find the details of that, if I can — certainly something I believe I spoke to in the letter to the MLA for Lake Laberge about, but I certainly did speak to Minister Mendicino about. We indicated, as much of what I've already said here, but I indicated that the Yukon does not have very much of an in-territory infrastructure that exists, as it does in most provinces, to receive firearms. On occasion, individuals want to turn in firearms to the RCMP, and we have a very small response to that. There are individuals who are permitted to do so under federal law. While we may do that on one or two, maybe three, occasions a year, certainly there is no ability for that particular skill or position to be a place where surrender and storage of firearms — and storage is an issue, as well — would be available at M Division here or at the Whitehorse detachment here.

We noted that Yukon will require additional support to acquire and maintain sufficient storage space so that surrendered firearms could be securely stored until they can be transported elsewhere for disposal, because we don't have access to that ability, either. I noted for the minister that currently Yukon sort of funds these activities, if individuals want to turn in a firearm on an ad hoc or an as-needed basis, and that is currently sufficient to deal with the sort of handful of individuals who might come to do this, to the RCMP, but

certainly we anticipate that any required work outside of that current service — a partnership — would have to be funded properly, would have to be brought forward with details of the scope and the way in which a program is perceived.

I note that I received a letter prior to that one from Minister Mendicino. He noted — this was in June of this year, I believe — that the federal government is — and I quote: "... finalizing the development of a buyback program to ensure these prohibited firearms are safely removed from our communities." He went on to note that an amnesty is in place until October 30, 2023.

He also indicated that he would — and the question to me — it is always important in the correspondence to find out what is the ask, what is being asked. He indicated that he would appreciate the opportunity to discuss further and explore opportunities for partnership and collaboration that support a safe rollout of this program in our jurisdiction. I certainly take that to mean that input is not only suggested but required in order for us to have a partnership that will work in this jurisdiction.

I think it is important to note that ultimately we will not be supporting this motion. It is, at this stage — while I support much of what the concept is here, I think that it is simply speculative at this point and it seeks that the Yukon government will ensure that territorial policing resources are not — and it's in quotations — "diverted" to assist with the Government of Canada's buyback program. What it doesn't say, for me, which is an issue, is what sort of resources are contemplated. I don't know if it's financial resources; personnel resources could be also an issue, administrative resources.

We have a program that is not yet designed. I have spoken very clearly in this Legislative Assembly to all the members who are here and through the members who are here to the Yukon public. I have spoken and widely reported, presumably — or widely sent out into the community through that — that Yukon RCMP resources are a topic of discussion that I have on a regular basis. It's the top priority to make sure that the RCMP here in the territory are properly resourced. We do that through a territorial police servicing agreement. We have a 20-year agreement. It was written in 2012, and it goes to 2032 as a result, but as all members of this Legislature should know — and anyone who looks at our Yukon budgeting — we have increased amounts that are given to the RCMP to achieve those policing priorities I spoke about.

We have raised funding, or increased funding, to the RCMP M Division. We have worked diligently with them on the beginning plan that was stagnant for almost seven years — six or seven years — before I came into this job, to replace and repair and remodel detachments across the territory. I have spent more than 30 years of my own personal career working closely with the RCMP in other roles. I respect the work they do. I support the work they do, and I know that they provide Yukon with a safe community. I know that, on a daily basis, I could speak to the chief superintendent about what new resources — financial and personnel — that he would like to have or could have. I don't expect that to change anytime soon, because as the responsibilities grow, as the policing priorities

grow, as the demands of our Yukoners grow, they rest on the shoulders of that chief superintendent and his team of officials and senior leadership at M Division.

They have our unwavering support, and we work closely with them to achieve new funding arrangements, new programming, new options that serve Yukoners.

That being said, should, if, and when a buyback program comes forward as a result of the Bill C-21 amendments, then we will require additional resources if and when the RCMP is chosen or agrees, through our *Territorial Police Service Agreement*, and there are dispute resolution provisions in both the territorial policing agreement and the provincial policing services agreements, so clearly, the conversations around these important issues will continue.

They will continue tomorrow and the next day with federal ministers — with my counterparts across the country and the federal ministers — and I look forward to those ongoing discussions. I truly look forward to figuring out how this will be resolved at those tables and how ultimately everyone who is at those tables is interested in protecting Canadians and finding the balance necessary for this particular issue.

That said, I think and I hope my message is clear that I won't be supporting this particular motion, because I think that it is asking for something without clear definitions, but I certainly have expressed to the federal minister, who, by virtue of the comments made earlier, seemed to be imposing this. I think that I have made it clear that they have asked for partnership and collaboration. We have asked for partnership and collaboration. We have asked for the RCMP to be involved in those conversations, should that be the mechanism for this programming, but I think that is truly still all up in the air. As a result of the knowledge that I have being at those tables, I support both the Yukon RCMP not having any less resources than they currently have and, in fact, having more, which my Cabinet colleagues will hear from me about shortly — about how we might be increasing the services and the resources that our M Division has to operationalize on behalf of Yukoners and their safety. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak to this today.

Mr. Istchenko: I'm happy to speak to the motion of my colleague, the Member for Lake Laberge, here today, which reads that this House urges the Yukon government to ensure that territorial policing resources are not diverted to assist in the implementation of the federal Liberal government's flawed gun buyback program. It's so important for all Yukoners. Crime is on the rise, and we need our RCMP resources fighting it.

The federal Liberal government's buyback program is just a politically motivated confiscation — that's pure and simple — and one that will do nothing to make the Yukon a safer place or to reduce the criminal misuse of firearms. I do not, and will not, support the initiatives of the Liberal government that only impact those who acquired the targeted firearms legally — the law-abiding, RCMP-vetted hunters, sport shooters, ranchers, farmers, trappers, and others who use firearms for lawful and good reason.

Although the RCMP is a national police service coming under the direction of the ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada, the agency may also provide police services at the provincial, territorial, and local levels, pursuant to the police service agreement negotiated between the federal government and Yukon. I believe the funding is a 70/30 split.

In the Yukon, for example, RCMP M Division currently provides policing services based on the *Territorial Police Service Agreement*. Under such agreements, the territory sets the policing priorities.

So, is the buyback program one of the priorities set out in the agreement? No, it is not. There are many more areas of concern that RCMP and communities have identified that are important to Yukoners. In my riding of Kluane, I have two Canada Customs agents who work with local RCMP. This is an integral part of public safety — interrupting the flow of illegal firearms crossing the border and many other issues that the RCMP deal with when they work with Canada Customs.

Our RCMP in rural Yukon have a vast area to cover and resources are spread thin. In my riding and in many other ridings, there are many out-of-territory travellers who often need RCMP resources — highway accidents being the number one reason in my riding.

Our vast area often has — we have a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Kluane National Park, and the surrounding area often has search and rescues. Of course, the RCMP are the initial contact for search and rescues.

As I said earlier, crime is up. There will be thefts and drug dealings that they will deal with. These are where our policing policies need to be.

Right now, my community is grieving, and I say this because the RCMP is working so diligently, trying to solve a crime so that our community and family members in our community can have some closure. So, the RCMP do not need to be putting resources toward politically motivated priorities of the federal Liberal government. This House needs to support the RCMP putting their resources toward the priorities of Yukoners and fighting rising crime in our territory.

I didn't have a lot to say today, but I wanted to get something on the record, so thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Member for Lake Laberge for bringing forward this motion today.

I first want to speak more from a personal perspective in terms of how I was raised, and as an indigenous person, hunting and firearms were a part of everyday life almost, in terms of the way that we were raised and how important hunting was to sustain our family, and I think that is true for many northerners and Yukoners specifically. I have to mention, of course, that my husband spent a great deal of his life as a guide, outfitter, and running guide outfits in northern BC — and definitely a priority for him.

From an indigenous perspective, I think that it's definitely — the safe use of legal firearms is part of our life. I just wanted to make that statement first off. The issue of gun violence, though, and its impact on our territory is very important and a

very serious issue. In my role as the Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate, I am acutely aware — always — of the impacts of violence on women and girls in the territory, along with the many organizations and initiatives underway to address these impacts.

I would like to speak to these for a moment. We know that gun violence disproportionately affects women and girls, and our territory is not immune to that. The Yukon has rates of gender-based violence that are three times greater than the national average. I say this often. For an indigenous woman — it's three times higher yet, if you're an indigenous woman living in the north.

To prevent and respond to violence, the Women and Gender Equity Directorate supports community organizations through the prevention of violence against aboriginal women fund, and we also have funding for indigenous women's groups. Our government created a new indigenous women's equality fund. That's \$600,000 in operational capacity development funding for the three women's indigenous organizations of the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society, the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle, and the Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council.

Further, in this year's budget, the Women and Gender Equity Directorate has allocated \$2,075,000 for equality-seeking organizations, each working in their own way to prevent and respond to violence.

We appreciate, absolutely, all of these organizations and how important their work is to our territory. Many types of gender-based violence are vastly under-reported to police — especially sexualized assault. I will talk a little bit about sexualized assault expansion in a second, but I wanted to speak about some of the work that has happened nationally. We all know that violence against indigenous women and girls is a huge issue, and it has been one of the main focuses of my department since I became the minister in 2016. The result of a national inquiry resulted in a report entitled *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*.

It's notable that 2,386 people across our country participated in this; 1,484 family members participated in this, and it resulted in 231 calls to action or to justice. I did a search just when I was getting ready to do this — to speak to this particular motion today — and just put in “gun violence”. So many stories came up. I listened to a lot of the stories personally across the country and, for sure, in our territory. I spent a little bit of time reading some of those stories and the relation to gun violence. It was impacting. I really encourage the members opposite, particularly from the Yukon Party, to take some time — if you haven't — to put some time into reading even the summary of this report — but to read some of those stories. I think you'll be very impacted by them. If you're not, then I have other comments that I'll withhold about that right now.

The national inquiry resulted in — we were the first jurisdiction in Canada to respond, and members of this Legislative Assembly, including all of our Cabinet ministers and all levels of government in the Yukon, signed a declaration in December 2020 to implement this important strategy. We're

close to finishing, completing the implementation plan, but we have released some initial priority areas that we think our partners, as the advisory committee for missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, would feel that would be priority areas that they could work on immediately to address the violence against indigenous women and girls.

Ultimately, what I know is that, as we address and implement this strategy, it will have deep impacts for all women and girls and two-spirit-plus people and that the strategy, when implemented, will change the lives of all women and girls, and I think that is important and notable. I know that, as we went through the development of this strategy and as we go through the development of the implementation plan, we test every single action with: How does this address, or end, violence against indigenous women and girls and two-spirit-plus people? That is something that we ask ourselves repeatedly, so I know that every action and implementation action has that test, and I think that's really important.

There are a number of actions — all actions, as I've stated — to work toward ending violence against indigenous women and girls. Notably, 2.2 in the strategy is the evaluation of *Sharing Common Ground — Review of Yukon's Police Force — Final Report*, which happened over 10 years ago now and is an actionable item within the strategy to actually go back and see how we've done in terms of the implementation of that.

Under the pathway for community safety and justice, 2.1 speaks to working with all Yukon communities to conduct a community safety assessment and develop a plan for each community. Our government has invested in a program that is being administered by Justice to support communities to do that work. A lot of good work is underway within the strategy.

In May of this year, we hosted our first accountability forum. As I've stated, we released our first priority areas, and we will have the full implementation plan available for our partners and for families and Yukoners soon.

I want to take a moment and just talk about some of the national plans that have also been developed, because I think the point I'm making here is that we need to address the systemic issues that cause this type of violence against — particularly from my view from the position that I am in right now — women and girls and those who are vulnerable.

So, I want to just make that point clear in my submission here today around this important issue and our support for really addressing the systemic issues that are underlying the violence that, I believe, as a country, as a territory, and as communities, we need to address in different ways. I definitely, 100 percent, support the police and the work that they do on our behalf each and every day. I worked very closely with the RCMP for much of my career in working on the front line, particularly with First Nation communities, developing innovative approaches and helping to negotiate the implementation of the *Sharing Common Ground* and so many other initiatives — and also worked hard to negotiate the justice agreements that are within the *Umbrella Final Agreement* and final agreements for First Nations.

As a result of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, the Government of

Canada released a national action plan on addressing the issues that were pointed out in the final report. This national action plan was released in June 2021. When you look at the plan and strategy, it resembles the Yukon's strategy, so I really believe that Canada saw a lot of value in how we structured our strategy and brought all partners into it.

I will just make a couple of notes about this, but I think it's worthwhile for folks to really look at it to ensure that they are aware of these types of key strategies that we are working with in Canada. The four main themes are: justice, human security, health and wellness, and culture. They are very much connected also to the national gender-based violence action plan and we are definitely working closely with Canada.

We have a strong partnership with the Government of Canada to address the needs of organizations and our territories and provinces in addressing this national action plan on ending gender-based violence. Bilateral negotiations will begin this fall to determine territorial priorities, especially those that align with the Yukon's missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and two-spirit-plus strategy and the related funding needs. We look forward to working with our partners in Canada and our partners across the country in preventing and responding to gender-based violence.

In the national action plan, there are five pillars: support to survivors and their families; prevention; promotion of responsive legal and justice systems; support for indigenous-led approaches and informed responses; and social infrastructure and ending enabling environments.

Unfortunately, I am not going to be able to be in person at the federal/provincial/territorial ministers' meetings on women and gender equality that is happening early in November, but we are definitely following the work and have been a strong ally and supporter of the national action plan.

The sexualized assault response team was established in Whitehorse in March 2020, and we are now engaging in conversations with partners to expand services to communities. I think that this is, again, a very important initiative for the Yukon, and we had some very good discussions just last week with our indigenous partners to talk about what the consultation could look like, as we work to expand. This was one of the initiatives that we — when we first took these positions — worked very collaboratively together with the Women's Directorate, at the time, and Health and Social Services and Justice to bring a one-government and a one-Yukon approach, really, to addressing sexualized violence and assaults in our communities and to address them in a different way.

In closing, we know that gun violence disproportionately affects women and girls, and our territory is not immune to that. The Yukon has rates of gender-based violence three to four times higher than the national average. Violence against indigenous women is more common and more severe. To prevent and respond to violence, the Women and Gender Equity Directorate will continue to support community organizations. I support the comments of my colleague, the Minister of Justice, as she went through very carefully in her submissions about the state and the stage of the program that is being discussed today. I agree with her comments. That's her

submission. My submission is that I will not be supporting this motion today.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Mr. Cathers: To begin with, it is disappointing, but not entirely shocking, that two Liberal ministers rose to indicate that they won't support this motion. The Minister of Justice tried to suggest, in her comments, that it's unclear what the impacts will be — or whether there will be impacts — on policing from the so-called "buyback" program.

Again, I just want to reiterate in closing that it is not just the Yukon Party saying this, nor is it just three provinces that are also saying it through their ministers of Justice, but it is, as I have noted repeatedly, something that the union representing RCMP members have said.

While the government members are unlikely to change their views on this, I would note in closing that the heart of this issue comes down to not whether you personally own a firearm, or your views on firearms ownership, but in fact, based on the evidence and the fact that the union representing the RCMP, the National Police Federation, has been very clear about the fact that the order-in-council by the Trudeau Liberal government and the proposed buyback program will divert police resources from where they are needed most.

The issues that the last speaker, the Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate, spoke to about the rates of violence within the Yukon are directly relevant to this point. The issues around existing crime — whether it is domestic partner violence or organized crime here in the territory — is precisely where the Yukon RCMP should be focusing their resources. If they are forced to focus on going after licensed firearms owners to enforce the federal Liberal government's gun confiscation program, that will take them away from more urgent areas that they should be focused on — that, even for those who may not share our views on the importance of property rights and not being deprived of that property without due cause for such action, it's important for people to recognize that the advice of the National Police Federation, on behalf of RCMP members, stating that the Trudeau government's approach is diverting resources from where they're needed most is something everyone should be concerned about.

I'm just again going to very briefly quote, since I've read parts of it earlier, but I do want to summarize and point out that the National Police Federation's position statement that was issued in November 2020 is directly relevant to the new legislation, as it specifically refers to matters including the so-called "buyback" program that was proposed. The National Police Federation stated — and again, I quote: "Effectively addressing the threat of Canada's growing illicit firearms market and related increased gun violence requires the urgent, efficient, and effective deployment of law enforcement expertise, personnel, and financial resources."

The union representing RCMP members then went on to state: “Costly and current legislation, such as the Order in Council prohibiting various firearms and the proposed ‘buy-back’ program by the federal government targeted at legal firearm owners, does not address these current and emerging themes or urgent threats to public safety.”

Again, I urge all members of this House to listen to the expert advice the National Police Federation provided in that position statement.

I do have to comment on two things just briefly. The minister repeatedly refers to an increase in the budget that they provided to the RCMP. What she failed to note today is what the budget itself showed earlier: that almost all of the increase in funding from this territorial government to the RCMP is directly due to an increase in the collective bargaining agreement with the RCMP, whose members, for the first time ever, negotiated an agreement collectively after being allowed to form a union.

So, to suggest that they have increased resources for the police when, in fact, they have simply provided the funding necessary to meet the obligations of the pay increase to unionized RCMP members — it is quite misleading by the Minister of Justice to make those comments.

The minister also, while attempting to be on both sides of this issue, said at one point that she has asked the federal government for partnership on this program. Mr. Speaker, it appears that the bottom line is, after all the dancing around on this issue, that the territorial Liberal government supports the federal government’s buyback program, which, in fact, is gun confiscation by a friendlier name. It is the confiscation of lawfully acquired private property from owners who have done absolutely nothing wrong by a friendlier name. I would remind members that even territorial Liberal MLAs in the past have joined other parties in voting unanimously against the long-gun registry and standing up on behalf of Yukoners.

Finally, in conclusion, as I sit down, the question also comes down to Liberal ministers who are running for the leadership of their party and what position they wish to take on this issue — whether they will stand up for Yukoners or whether they are more focused on being very, very sure that they give absolutely not even the slightest offence to the federal Liberal government.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Disagree.

Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

Ms. Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 11 yeas, seven nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion No. 436 agreed to

Motion No. 437

Clerk: Motion No. 437, standing in the name of the Member for Watson Lake.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Watson Lake:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to provide funding to Yukon municipalities to help them address the financial impacts of the public health restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic which included loss of municipal revenue and increased operational expenses.

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, throughout the pandemic, municipalities in our territory have done a lot of the hard work to keep our communities safe. This included undertaking the work to implement the public health orders imposed by the Government of Yukon. These public health orders included things like requirements for social distancing all the way to the outright shutting down of recreational activities. While municipalities were happy to do their part to keep the community safe, it did come with many unanticipated financial impacts. These unanticipated impacts include additional operational expenses and also loss of revenues as a result of enforcing and supporting the COVID-19 restrictions imposed by the Yukon government.

Without a doubt, throughout the pandemic, many organizations were impacted by these public health restrictions, in particular, the private sector. While these sectors have received several rounds of relief and support, municipalities have only received one round of support, and that was well over a year ago. As you know, Mr. Speaker, the government-imposed public health restrictions on municipalities continued for long after the last round of relief, and this brings us to my motion today.

While the main point of this motion is to gain relief for municipalities, it is also a question of fairness. When industry and the private sector continue to receive supports for their losses due to Government of Yukon-imposed orders, so too should municipal governments receive supports. Perhaps, at

this time, it is important for me to highlight examples of how municipalities had increased costs and lost revenues.

In the area of revenue losses, municipalities experienced revenue losses particularly in the following categories: recreation facilities and fees were either prevented or reduced; a reduction or outright prevention of the ability to rent halls and meeting spaces; a reduction to the number of people using or able to use transit; and property tax and utility defaults due to the economic downturn.

In the area of unanticipated increased operational expenses due to the Government of Yukon-imposed orders, additional costs include: increased costs due to the provision of bylaw enforcement; additional sick and special leave; overtime paid for employees who were required to cover for other employees who were forced to isolate or were sick; extra staff being required to be hired for the disinfecting and cleaning of spaces; extra fuel and wages for staff, as social distancing requirements required that not as many staff could share the same vehicle; janitorial and personal protective equipment supply costs; increased mental health supports for staff; new infrastructure and recreation equipment to provide safe outdoor options in our communities; supply chain interruptions, delays, and increased costs related to infrastructure projects; and increased costs to support working from home.

These are just a few of the many ways in which municipalities saw an increased financial burden as a result of the Government of Yukon's imposed orders.

Mr. Speaker, you may ask why it's important to provide relief to municipalities. The reason is simple. Municipalities are not allowed to run deficits. Municipalities really have only one way to make up for the shortfall, and that is by increasing revenues through taxes and fees. Obviously, at this point in time, that is extremely undesirable, as residents are already struggling due to economic and inflationary concerns.

In my view, if the Government of Yukon does not come through and provide relief, they are effectively downloading these costs onto taxpayers and forcing municipalities to increase those taxes and fees. This is a very concerning and important issue to address. While municipalities have submitted many requests on this topic to the Government of Yukon, so far these requests have fallen on deaf ears. Requests for another round of support for Yukon municipalities date back to December of last year, when the Mayor of Watson Lake wrote the minister to request further financial relief for municipalities.

To quote from the December 14 letter from the Mayor of Watson Lake — and I quote: "It is our understanding that Yukon government's relief programs such as the Vaccine Verification Rebate and the Yukon Emergency Relief programs do not support municipalities. Although we are very much in support of these programs, we feel that there should also be financial support available to municipalities to offset additional operational expenses. Our council does not feel that it is fair nor acceptable to rely on our taxpayers to recover these expenses."

Just for the members' information, I did table that letter earlier today.

On March 1, 2022, the former president of the Association of Yukon Communities wrote to the minister with the same request. Then in May, the current Mayor of Whitehorse wrote to the minister with the same request, with further details on the losses experienced, which they estimated at over \$5 million. In July of this year, the new president of the AYC wrote the minister again with further details and repeated the request of these other community leaders.

To date, the minister has not provided any details or even assurances that the money is coming. So, with the passage of this motion, I think we can help move the minister along and get toward making communities whole to make sure that they are not forced to increase taxes or fees to cover the costs of the Government of Yukon's public health restrictions.

So, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this is about doing the right thing. This is about respecting our municipalities and recognizing the important role they played in responding to the pandemic.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I would like to begin by thanking the Member for Watson Lake for bringing forward this motion. I appreciate it. I think it's incredibly important that — I think she began her remarks today by talking about how hard municipalities work. I completely support what she has to say about that — and not just during COVID, but especially during COVID. I think it was tough on all orders of government. I recall when COVID first hit, we started off — I think it was three-times-a-week meetings with municipalities and First Nation governments and local advisory councils to try to talk through what was happening. It was, of course, a very challenging and turbulent time. I had the responsibility and the opportunity to witness the hard work that municipalities did. First of all, my kudos to all of the municipal governments.

I would also like to say that the Member for Watson Lake — when she was talking about the motion, one of the things that she mentioned was that there was a one-time infusion for municipalities, but that for businesses, there were multiple programs. I'm going to try to talk about those a little bit, because the letter that she tabled today from the Mayor of Watson Lake references some of those programs.

So, just in round numbers, the municipal dollars that we did that one time — I recall writing to municipalities — I think at the end of 2020, and I think that the money flowed in early 2021 — but it was over \$4 million — it was \$4.35 million, I think. I can sort of break that out a little bit, because some of it was specifically for transit, but we worked with municipalities, with the Association of Yukon Communities, to come up with the formula for that, and it was really based on the comprehensive municipal grant apportioning, and those dollars flowed. That was the one time that happened.

I know that there has been correspondence back and forth with the Minister of Community Services, and my understanding of that correspondence is there are still questions going back and forth to try to ascertain what the net cost is to communities — to try to learn what it is. I will talk a little bit more about that in a few minutes, but just to begin with, in the letter from Mayor Irvin, the Mayor of Watson Lake — as he

wrote, he talked about — he gave examples of the vaccine verification rebate that was a program that I think went to businesses to assist with verifying vaccinations, should there be a requirement to be vaccinated during that period when we were requiring that for some settings, and that support was up to \$500. So, that was per business. Maybe the municipality would have a few outlets where they were trying to verify vaccinations possibly, but you know, the relief was up to \$500. So, it is not really comparable to that one-time relief of over \$4 million.

As well, the other reference that Mayor Irvin put in his letter was talking about the Yukon emergency relief program, which was really about event cancellation and which did happen to municipalities, where they were putting on events and where they were cancelled. Again, the dollars that are in that program are, I think, up to \$10,000 per event and a total of \$30,000. Those are real numbers and meaningful relief for smaller organizations, but I think for municipalities, we are talking about bigger things.

So, I don't think that those are particularly good examples about where we could get support, so I don't think that it is about counting the number of times. I think that it is totally about looking at the impact of COVID on the municipalities and trying to make sure that they are supported to do the hard work that they do.

The member opposite listed off quite a few possible areas. Just to go over some of those, there were recreation fees, hall rentals, property tax defaults, bylaw enforcement, people being sick from COVID or to support people who were sick — even if they were sick during COVID, we asked that people stay home, because maybe it is a flu, but you want to be careful. We even have the same sort of motion here. There was cleaning municipal buildings and infrastructure — disinfecting. She mentioned, as well, about the additional costs of fuel. She mentioned working from home. Actually, there is a good example to start with — working from home.

The costs around working from home usually was right at the very beginning, where you had to put in place systems for how to do reporting, staying in touch with your staff, and supervision — those sorts of things — but once that was in place, then usually the costs were in the positive sense. Now, it depends on the size of your municipality, of course, because you may not be able to free up any other spaces, but if you have people working from home often, from a business perspective, that can be advantageous for the employer. So, it's one of those things that, following out of COVID, we are still looking at as a potential tool. I think that municipalities will make their discretionary call about it, but it gives an indication that we have to try to get to that net balance about what the costs are.

As an example, if we talk about recreation facilities and that there are fewer people there, but you need the same number of staff, then yes, if you are charging at the door, it depends, because some of our recreation across the territory is free to residents, and some of it is charged on a per-use basis. It really depends, but if there is a charge and you are getting fewer people, and if the number of staff that you have there to manage that is the same, then yes, you are going to lose on it, but if, on the other hand, you are losing revenue for the rental of your

halls, but you didn't have to provide the staff for that, because you have closed the facility, then that may be different. Then it gets complicated, of course, because if you haven't been able to reallocate people, depending on the situation, it may be fixed, so you just really have to look at it in the aggregate and try to look at the net costs.

I can say, for example, within my own community of Marsh Lake where we saw a lot less revenue in our recreation facilities — but our costs went down quite a bit as well. So, that's the balance that I think it's important to look for.

During the pandemic, one of the things that I will talk about is that we put in several orders to try to support on the municipal front. For example, we had an order around supporting electronic meetings. We had an order that we put in saying that there could be a deferment to property tax, and we also said to municipalities that, if there's a cash-flow issue, we'll support you. So, those were things that we did.

I want to point out that, during COVID and in all that time when we were here in the Legislature, I heard criticism from the Official Opposition about putting in those orders, and yet those were ones that were there to support municipalities. I have always said to please let us know which orders you didn't like and we could try to talk about those. But that's an example of where I think we were supporting municipalities during that time.

Earlier today — I'll just reference — the Member for Porter Creek Centre was saying that, hey, you should listen to residents. What I kept saying is that, yes, we should be listening as well to the municipality because we take direction on the design of the development of lots from municipalities. So, I think it's important to note that we should be listening to municipalities. I think we need to hear the whole story.

Part of the motion — I'll just bring it up again here, Mr. Speaker. I think that public health restrictions cover some of what happened, but the member, in her submission to us — the Member for Watson Lake — was talking about people home with COVID and that it was a cost. Well, that's not a public health restriction; that's someone being sick. So, I think she actually may be thinking that this should be broader, and again, that's fine. I think those are costs we can try to consider.

The member talked about the ways in which municipalities generate revenue and, except for Whitehorse, she missed the biggest revenue source for our municipalities and that is the comprehensive municipal grant.

When we think about the comprehensive municipal grant, this is a way in which the territorial government transfers dollars to our municipalities to try to support them so that they don't have to increase their tax base. It's a way to help them offset that tax base.

In some of our communities, the comprehensive municipal grant — for example, in Carmacks — is very significant. I would have to look up the actual numbers to be sure, but it is sort of going to be in the 70 percent or 80 percent of the revenue range — or plus — for our smallest communities. For our medium-sized communities like Watson Lake and Dawson City, it is less, but I still believe it is more than half, and in the City of Whitehorse, it's much less than half. If we are talking

about the communities, we need to think about the comprehensive municipal grant.

I know, from my time in the role of Minister of Community Services, that we renegotiated the comprehensive municipal grant. That grant originally, in my time on city council here in Whitehorse, had been somewhat stagnant. It wasn't stagnant everywhere, but it really was not increasing. When we renegotiated that municipal grant with municipalities, we formed a working group and we took their direction again, trying to listen to municipalities about how we can be supportive of them. One of the points was that we needed to get it unstuck. We needed to get it increasing. I think we were even trying to move it more than inflation, for that matter, again acknowledging the very hard work that our municipalities do.

I just looked back to try to see what the comprehensive municipal grant is projected to be for this year. I think it's just over \$21 million. When I started in the role of Community Services in late 2016, the 2017 grant was just over \$18 million, so effectively it has seen about a 15-percent increase over the past five years. I know that it was a big jump at the beginning and then a little bit less, but it is definitely increasing each year.

That is a significant amount. I am not suggesting for a moment that this was intended to cover off the costs of COVID, but I am suggesting that we do need to look at how we support our communities and to understand where their revenues are coming from.

There are just a few more things that I would like to talk about.

First of all, I have mentioned the money that we gave. It was in the order of \$4.3 million; I think it was \$4.35 million. The distribution, as directed by municipalities, was as per the comprehensive municipal grant. There was a little bit of money that went toward transit. That was one of the items on the member's list of suggested concerns — it was around transit — and, as I was trying to research for today's debate, I looked up some national investigations around the issues of transit and, in general, impacts on municipalities. What I read was that there was a big hit in the first year and that it has been diminishing. Really, the only municipality where we have public transit that we are talking about here is Whitehorse, but I think that there has been an impact and it's important to track it.

The member also talked about property tax and not wanting to raise property tax, but I think that it is interesting because my quick read on property tax is that revenue has been increasing not because municipalities have raised the mill rate for properties but rather because there has been development in our municipalities. I didn't have enough time since we were alerted about this motion yesterday to look up what has been happening with respect to property taxes across each of our communities, but I do know that there is a lot of new housing going in across the territory. Generally speaking, that leads to an increase. I don't think that we could count that as COVID and I'm not suggesting that we should, but on the other hand, I think it is fair to say that there are some elements of revenue that have been increasing for municipalities.

So, my suggestion around this motion is that I support the intent of it. I would look for a little bit more clarity, but it isn't

just looking at what the costs are. I think we need to be broader than just thinking about the public health restrictions, because I think that there were other issues around COVID that could have led to cost. But I also think it's important and fair for our municipalities that we look at the net — that we work with them to try to understand what the bottom-line impact has been. I will say that back when I was in the role as minister and we were first coming up with those numbers — the \$4.35 million — and I wrote to the municipalities — sorry, I'm just trying to pull it up, Mr. Speaker; I'll get it here.

Well, I'm just looking for it, but what I will say, Mr. Speaker, is that when I wrote to municipalities, I first of all said to them: You should try to do some assessment after this to try to see what the actual impacts were from COVID-19 — to your costs. So, hopefully, there was some of that work done and there could be some analysis based on that.

Second, I said to them that this is the amount of money that we're getting from the federal government. We were cost-matching it, so there was over \$2 million from the federal government and \$2 million from the Yukon government. What I heard from municipalities at that time was that they thought that it was very generous — that the amount was more than they saw as their initial cost. Of course, there will be a lot of work done between then and now over the past couple of years to try to look at what those actual costs were. I look forward to that.

What I saw with the letter that the Member for Watson Lake tabled from the president of the Association of Yukon Communities is that it presents what are costs, but not where there were any potential cost-savings. So, I think it's important to try to get a little further in.

Again, I really appreciate the motion being brought forward today from the Member for Watson Lake. I look forward to more debate on the motion today and to see where we get to, but in principle, I think the point is correct that, if our municipalities had a net-negative impact by COVID beyond the \$4.35 million that was already given to them, then we should work to try to support them because we appreciate the hard work that they are doing.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. White: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am rising to speak to the motion that was brought forward by my colleague, the Member for Watson Lake.

Just to put things in context, there are numerous letters that came from the Association of Yukon Communities. One was sent to the Minister of Community Services on March 1, 2022 that I think highlights what was going to be forecast in the future, and it says — and I quote: “While we support the Government of Yukon's emergency relief programs, the programs do not support municipalities and there needs to be financial support available to offset the additional operational expenses and revenue loss that all Yukon municipalities have incurred. Yukon municipalities have experienced significant revenue loss in the following categories: recreation, hall and meeting space rentals, transit, bylaw, property tax and utility defaults, interest earned.”

It goes on to say some other concerns that the municipalities had, and that was sent by the then-AYC President Gord Curran, again, on March 1, 2022.

Then, again, the newly elected president of the AYC sent a letter to the Minister of Community Services on July 4, 2022, acknowledging a response that they received on April 27, and it says — and I quote: “The Association of Yukon Communities is pleased to provide more detail on the significant financial impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic on Yukon municipalities.”

Attached to that is actually the projected losses from Yukon municipalities. The highest amount is from the City of Whitehorse at \$2,452,348, and it goes down from there — the lowest being from Teslin for \$441,572.83. So, when we take the addition of all the shortfalls that have been identified by municipalities, it comes out to \$6,452,362.39.

Mr. Speaker, as you may recall, the government has told us that they have kept \$10 million aside for COVID-specific reasons, and so this \$6.5 million really falls well within that established amount. So, we think that it is important actually that the Government of Yukon makes sure that there are no shortfalls. I would hesitate to say, as has been suggested by other members here at different times, that Yukon municipalities actually made money during COVID. I don't think that this is accurate at all.

Although I do have concerns with the wording of the motion — and by that, I think it's really important to say that the public health measures that were put in place during the pandemic, they were important. They are important. They have been important, and I would hate for there to be a misunderstanding about that.

We know that, as the motion reads right now, it says that this House urges the Government of Yukon to provide funding to Yukon municipalities to help them address the financial impacts of — and this is where it says “the public health restrictions”. Well, you know, I support the motion. The only part I have concern about is the line there: “public health restrictions during”.

Amendment proposed

Ms. White: I move:

THAT Motion No. 437 be amended by deleting the phrase “the public health restrictions during”.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King:

THAT Motion No. 437 be amended by deleting the phrase “the public health restrictions during”.

The amendment is in order.

The motion, if amended, would then read:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to provide funding to Yukon municipalities to help them address the financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic which included losses of municipal revenue and increased operational expenses.

Ms. White: My actions today go to prove that you can really learn things over time, and unlike the times I have tried to move an amendment 33 seconds before I have to wrap up my debate, I have moved it with 15 minutes to go, which I will not take.

One of the reasons I brought this forward — we know in this current political — where we are politically in the world right now, the division continues to grow. I don't think anyone would say that folks aren't leaning further out than they ever have before on all spectrums of the political continuum. For that reason, I actually really want to get the support to the municipalities that I believe they deserve. One way I see us doing that is by removing any of that language that can be construed as pushing us further one way or the other.

I want to remove the partisanship. I want to remove the politization of — it's a good thing Hansard can correct that word — I want to remove that part from this debate. I just want to talk about the support for municipalities. So, I believe, by removing the line “the public health restrictions during”, that what we're really doing is getting to the heart of the problem, which is, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, municipalities have shortfalls. Again, I reference a letter sent on July 4, 2022, from the president of AYC to the Minister of Community Services. What I would really like to see is those municipalities get that money that they've identified that they're short. I believe by removing that, we're going to get us closer on all sides to getting to the real core of the issue, which is making sure that municipalities are supported.

Ms. McLeod: I want to thank the Member for Takhini-Kopper King for bringing forward this amendment. I have no problem at all with this amendment. I and my colleagues will certainly support it. I'm looking forward to moving the discussion along further.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I'm standing up in support of the amendment, as well. As I had identified the motion, I think that this actually broadens it, because I think that there are things beyond just what we could construe under “public health restrictions”. We get away from the arguments about what was a restriction and what was not, but I think we just focus on the issue of COVID. I still have some other concerns around — like, for example, I appreciate the letter from the Association of Yukon Communities, but there are things in there that I think aren't yet assessed, and I think we need to assess them all. I think it's important that we do that diligence work.

I look forward to trying to get the support for municipalities. I think that this amendment, as proposed by the NDP, helps broaden the motion, as it's in front of us.

Speaker: Is there any further debate on the amendment to Motion No. 437?

Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

Ms. Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 18 yeas, nil nays.

Speaker: I think the yeas have it.

I declare the amendment carried.

Amendment to Motion No. 437 agreed to

Speaker: Is there any debate on the main motion, as amended?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am pleased to rise this afternoon to respond to Motion No. 437, as amended, standing in the name of the Member for Watson Lake.

In this discussion, I will touch upon several themes. First, I will discuss briefly a survey of some academic literature pertaining to revenue impacts and the increases in operational expenses for municipalities stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, I will elaborate on some of the services the Department of Highways and Public Works provided during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As Pagano and McFarland have demonstrated in their article for Brookings Institution entitled “When will your city feel the fiscal impact of COVID-19?” They cite who will rely on revenue sources that have been more stable in the last year, such as property taxes and utility fees, which have been at least partially insulated from the economic damage of the COVID-19 pandemic so far. In stark contrast, local governments that are highly dependent on tourism, direct state aid, or volatile sales taxes have had their revenue particularly negatively impacted.

Determining the full scope of COVID-19 losses is challenging and hinges on subjective decisions around what constitutes a COVID-19-related loss and how it should be prioritized.

A growing number of studies examine revenue forecasting during the COVID-19 pandemic at varying levels of government. For example, a survey of county and municipal

governments in North Carolina at the beginning of the pandemic found that most local governments anticipated budget shortfalls, and more than 20 percent expected a shortfall of greater than 10 percent. However, Chernick, Copeland, and Reschovsky in 2020 demonstrated a wide variation of revenue shortfalls across cities and towns, depending on differences in revenue structures and the respective states’ fiscal conditions going into the COVID-induced recession. In other words, the timing and the sum of the coronavirus pandemic’s impact on revenues depended on a municipality’s relative dependence on specific revenue sources for funding their services.

Some studies also indicated that large cities had less tolerance for forecasting errors, which aligns with the concerns that small cities and municipalities lack the capacity to conduct revenue forecasting under such uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Larson and McDonald report in 2020 examined the fiscal impact on county governments in Florida with different and varied scenarios and pointed out the importance of fiscal health conditions prior to the pandemic and diversified revenue structures. It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic presented an immediate crisis that challenged all levels of government, and municipal governments were, of course, no exception. Most of the body of literature currently available discusses large municipalities, but there is also a developing body of evidence regarding the revenue impact results by the size of municipality. In the fiscal year 2021, the percent decline in revenues was positively related to population size with, generally speaking, small cities experiencing lesser revenue shortfalls, while larger cities suffered the greatest impacts.

According to Guo and Chen, cities with fewer than 5,000 residents were anticipated to experience a 3.81-percent reduction in revenues, but for cities with populations greater than 100,000, the reduction of revenues was forecast to be approximately 7.19 percent. Indeed, the average decline is smallest in municipal governments, as I said, with populations of less than 5,000, but there is admittedly a great deal of variation. Given that revenue forecasts for municipalities are quite sensitive to assumptions about their unique economic conditions, researchers Guo and Chen applied different scenarios to analyze the trends that municipalities were facing. They demonstrated that the impact was forecasted to be the most severe in fiscal 2022, with an average revenue decline of 4.02 percent, where half of municipalities were forecasted to experience revenue declines of 3.68 percent or more.

That being said, Guo and Chen added the caveat that forecasting future revenues is a daunting task in the midst of a crisis, has tremendous uncertainty, and rapid fluctuations in public- and private-sector activity render conventional revenue forecasting modelling almost irrelevant.

As indicated by my colleague in his comments earlier this afternoon, I am not opposed to the concept of considering providing funding to Yukon municipalities to address the impacts of public health restrictions, although that is not what the motion says anymore — “the financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic” — but our government is led by evidence-based decision-making. In line with this and with the

comments of the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, demonstrable losses of revenue are crucial to making informed and responsible decisions. The right approach to this needs to be evidence-based, which will identify municipalities that have been the most impacted and thus inform intergovernmental interventions accordingly.

The opposition might attempt to spin this that the Yukon Liberal government does not care about rural Yukon communities. This could not be further from the truth. The motion proposed by the Yukon Party and the Member for Watson Lake, as it is currently drafted, is the opposite of responsible decision-making and carries the risk of disbursing funds with little or no support for the proposition.

Admittedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought on extremely difficult and challenging times for many industries and specifically the aviation industry. The COVID-19 pandemic caused demand to instantly plummet, but I will not go into the support that was provided to that, as it is not particularly germane to this discussion today.

Our government worked hard during the COVID-19 pandemic. Programs through Economic Development and the Tourism and Culture departments kept businesses afloat and, in turn, contributed to supporting municipal revenues. There is no doubt in my mind that the COVID-19 pandemic brought significant hardships and challenges. I would like to reiterate my support in principle to continuing the dialogue with Yukon municipalities to receive — to consider the possibility of receiving documented support for documented losses. I understand that those discussions continue with my colleague, the Minister of Community Services.

I was listening to the Member for Watson Lake, and certainly there was quite a comprehensive list of potential areas that one could fruitfully look at to determine whether additional losses had been incurred, and they included increased support for work from home; a loss of recreation fees; a loss of revenue resulting from a lack of rental meeting spaces; transit — although, as indicated by my colleague, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, transit is really only a meaningful factor in the City of Whitehorse; the possibility that there were material property tax defaults resulting in a loss of revenues for various Yukon municipalities; additional costs that were potentially borne by bylaw enforcement officials asked to step in, in consequence of the global pandemic and some of the restrictions that were put in place by the territorial government; issues surrounding overtime and sick leave; the concept that perhaps there were some extra fuel expenses; as well as additional expenses that may indeed have been incurred by various Yukon municipalities related to janitorial services; and the purchase, acquisition, and deployment of protective equipment.

So, aligning myself with comments made from this side of the House so far, we are open to the possibility of this discussion — well, my understanding, in my discussion with my colleagues, is that this discussion is ongoing and that it needs to be more fulsome with respect to the documentation of losses in areas that I outlined and that the Member for Watson

Lake outlined, and I believe that she had even more categories that one could investigate in exploring possible compensation.

In closing my comments this afternoon, in light of that the fact that we did have a public health emergency that lasted in excess of, well, around two years, I would certainly like to thank all public servants at all levels of government — whether they are territorial public servants, federal, municipal, or First Nation employees — for their valued and immeasurable support to all Yukoners and their fellow citizens in unprecedented times.

I look forward to hearing the additional comments that will arise from debate on Motion No. 437, as amended, this afternoon.

Mr. Hassard: I hadn't intended to speak today, but I have a couple of things that I just wanted to — I am assuming that the Minister of Community Services will be talking to this motion, as amended, so I wanted to get a couple of questions out there before he did, just in regard to things that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources said in his comments.

At one point, he was talking about revenue being down and therefore costs were down. I know that the Minister of Community Services has said in the past similar things or that, in fact, municipalities made money or something to that effect. So, I am just curious, when the minister gets up, if he could explain the difference between municipal governments and the Yukon government. If he thinks — or the government thinks — that the municipalities may have saved money, did in fact the Yukon government save money as well? And if so, maybe he could explain how.

The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources talked about the CMG. Maybe it's my misunderstanding, but if the Minister of Community Services agrees with what the previous minister talked about, maybe he could explain or expand a little bit on how the CMG is relevant to the discussion today when we're talking about specific costs related to COVID. They really have nothing to do with the CMG, in my opinion, I guess, unless I could stand to be corrected.

The other thing that I think was concerning to me was that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources talked about — and I believe the Minister of Environment also touched on this — not knowing all of the costs. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources actually said that he thought it would be best if municipalities could do that assessment and determine what those extra costs were. I don't think that this is fair to put onto municipalities either, because we all know that municipalities are stressed to the max. Their workforce is stretched beyond what it's capable of being stretched already. So, to burden the municipalities with the excuse of — hey, we can't give you any more money until you do a bunch more work and prove to us that you need that money — I think that's a little disingenuous. I think that the government needs to understand that when those municipalities are working on those stressed or stretched resources already, they are going to have to trust them to a certain degree — that if they say they needed X thousands of dollars, it probably is a reasonable ask. I think to ask them to

go back and do that extra work really is rather disingenuous of them.

But those were the items in particular that I thought of while listening to the minister who used to be the Community Services minister. Maybe if we could get some — or if I at least could get some — expansion on those particular items, I would certainly appreciate it.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I would like to thank colleagues who had an opportunity to speak to this today. I would like to thank the Third Party for the friendly amendment. I think it has been a thorough conversation today concerning the impacts that municipalities felt over the last number of years. I think it's important to put on the record a few things that I hope supported municipalities in either a primary way or an ancillary way through the programs that were delivered. I think that all members of the Assembly commented proudly on the work that was done by public servants on a number of different programs. I think our programs were nation-leading in many ways. It has put us in good stead — not to say that there is not some vulnerability right now with municipalities based on the opening comments from the Member for Watson Lake identifying those different revenue sources that certainly were constricted compared to normal years.

As we said in March 2020, the Yukon faced its first major decision point with the cancellation of the Arctic Winter Games as the global COVID-19 pandemic loomed. The decision, of course, was not made easily. Our government recognized that the impacts of the cancellation would be far-reaching. As the Minister of Economic Development, I knew that we needed to step up in support of our community and quickly met with impacted members of the business community to hear from them.

Our team at the Department of Economic Development quickly went to work, taking what we learned from those conversations to build out policies and programs to ensure that we were supporting those facing the financial burden of the cancellation. This was all within a matter of just a few short weeks. These were the things we were contemplating. We were contemplating that a number of organizations had booked time in different public venues — whether it be arenas or halls — but also, not only what the impact would be to those organizations that were hosting their annual event or a national event, but what would that mean to the organizations that own those venues? How would that lack of revenue affect them? So, it was really taking into consideration, very quickly, the magnitude of this domino effect that was about to happen within our community.

So, our team, which I have to say I'm so lucky to be working with — I can't say that enough — through this second mandate, worked incredibly hard throughout the entire pandemic using the approach of monitoring continuously, adapting responsively, and responding locally. I think that's the sense that I'm getting from my colleague, the Minister of Community Services — is continuing to monitor and then adapt responsively to what we're seeing.

I just want to highlight a bit of some of that early timeline for the record. On March 7, the Arctic Winter Games cancellation was announced. I think it was a Saturday morning. On March 9, which would have been Monday — and I could be off — we met with members of the business community, 48 hours later. On March 16, the Premier announced the economic stimulus package. So, as you can see, that timeline — that's not how public policy gets built. That's not the normal timeline for the architecture of this type of pop-up policy, but it was — just a week after meeting with the business community. A stimulus package that was announced was to support Yukon workers through COVID-19-related, 14-day isolation to reduce the negative impacts of COVID-19 by establishing a grant program to: address certain expenses related to cancelled events; stimulate business in the tourism industry by waiving, reimbursing, or delaying government fee collection, such as airport landing fees; relieve financial pressures by deferring Workers' Compensation Health and Safety premium payments and reimburse those paid up front; waive penalties and interest with approval from their board; support the tourism industry with enhanced local advertising efforts; support the cultural industry by honouring transfer payment agreements considered to be COVID-19-related impacts; and continue to monitor the economic impacts of COVID-19 by establishing a business advisory council to gather information and share with the government.

On March 25, we established the Business Advisory Council. On March 26, financial supports announced — paid sick leave and changes, again, to the nominee program that gave us some more flexibility and gave those individuals who were here a better sense of comfort in that we knew they wouldn't be negatively affected in those early periods. We knew that there would be a stall in some of that, essentially, paperwork moving through or response that they were waiting from the federal government on certain issues. So, again, we made that change.

On April 1, we launched a temporary support for events funding program in response to the resulting economic downturn. Yukon was one of the first governments in Canada to launch broad-based programs to support individuals and businesses impacted by COVID-19.

We responded quickly and deployed supports and investments to protect businesses and jobs. Broadly across the Yukon government, we implemented over 40 programs providing direct, indirect, regulatory, and infrastructure programs. These responses were informed by local expertise from industry organizations, including the Business Advisory Council comprised of experts from multiple sectors, including mining, tourism, hospitality, and auxiliary service sectors.

Our Yukon Liberal ministers and MLAs were in regular contact and shared information with municipal governments and First Nation governments about Yukoners' needs and concerns. We coordinated our programs with Government of Canada initiatives to maximize the financial resources available to Yukoners. Through the Department of Economic Development, we delivered nine programs: the Yukon business relief program, the Yukon emergency relief program, the

Yukon Essential Workers Income Support Program, the paid sick leave rebate, the regional relief and recovery fund, the tourism accommodation and sector supplement, the tourism non-accommodation and sector supplement, temporary support for event funds, and the vaccine verification rebate. So, these programs supported businesses and organizations in every community across the Yukon. Since March 2020, over \$32 million has been allocated to ensure that our economy is well-positioned to rebound and emerge stronger than ever.

Just going through a couple of other data points — again, when we take a look at our overall funding by community — I will just touch on a few municipalities and then I will wrap up. I know that there are probably others who want to speak.

Just taking a look at what was delivered, I want to make sure that we put on the record that, when we think about our municipalities, over \$2 million across those programs was delivered to Dawson City. When we think about Faro — again, over \$100,000 to some of their businesses. Of course, this matters in the sense that we wanted to make sure that people were sustainable so that they could pay their taxes to the municipality.

I mean, really, when you think about it, it is fees and taxes that are really the revenue sources for any municipal government, primarily. There are transfer payments from other levels of government, but really, when we think about ensuring that people weren't delinquent on their taxes — that they were whole and that their fixed costs could be covered — that is one of the things that we really looked at, how they were dealing with debt financing from a financial institution that they were dealing with or how they dealt with the relationship with their municipal government.

Haines Junction — about \$1.8 million was delivered to that community. Mayo — about \$60,000. Teslin — almost \$230,000. Watson Lake had over \$1 million, and then Whitehorse had the bulk of that. I just want to put on the record that all along, collectively, all of our colleagues have worked to make sure that, in a timely manner, we identified pressures that any government or business had. We took it very seriously — about building out the proper programs and agile policies that could alleviate those pressures. I think that we have done a good job. Actually, the public servants who do the bulk of the work — basically all of the work on those files — have done an incredible job of building programs that have been very effective.

There is nothing more gratifying — not only that you see the results play out within the overall financial health of many organizations in the private sector and government, but nothing is more satisfying than having a big jurisdiction, such as one in one of the western Canadian provinces, call a year later and ask if they can copy a program. So, a year later, getting it out — and they want to copy it, and you know that maybe five or 10 different public servants in the Yukon in a small department did that great work and now some of these big jurisdictions are just catching on. I think that we have been very receptive to being agile and innovative in our programs. I think that what we are seeing in some of the information that has been shared at the national level by my colleague, the Minister of Community

Services, is that, broadly speaking, there hasn't been the same impact at the municipal levels, and some of the documentation and studies that he has been reviewing and using to advise his decision-making and sharing with me — it shows that, really, in most cases, those revenue sources continued and there was no shortage.

I think what folks are looking at committing to today is having their eyes wide open to what our municipalities are undertaking and going through. It is difficult, even in the Yukon government with all the capacity we have. Having been part of the governing structure in a municipal government, I think the comments from across the way are correct. We are in a position where we ask a lot from many different public servants at that municipal level. I know that my colleagues — and specifically the minister — are looking at the most supportive way to be able to get the accurate information. We need accurate information. We have to be able to do that, but how do we do that in a way that doesn't put too much pressure on folks while they have their normal day-to-day tasks but, at the same time, understanding that all the folks in opposition would be asking us to be accountable? We have to be accountable. In order to do that, we have to have the right data when we make the decisions that we have to make.

With that, Mr. Speaker, thanks to all members of the Assembly for having a chance to speak to this important topic. It is always good for all of us to be supporting our municipal governments and the very, very important work that they undertake for many Yukoners each and every day.

Hon. Ms. McLean: It is my pleasure to stand and say a few words in regard to Motion No. 437. I am happy that my colleagues have all had a chance to bring their perspectives regarding the good work that we did for Yukoners during what was a very trying time for our territory.

The Department of Education took many steps to support the health and safety of Yukon learners in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Educators demonstrated adaptive leadership since the onset of the pandemic. The collaboration, professional learning, along with the skills and strategies used, were key to the psychological safety of educators and students.

The assessment of what was needed in various situations, and the innovative actions implemented, were evident and appreciated. In developing our supports, we worked with the chief medical officer of health, school administrators, staff, students and their families, Yukon First Nations, Yukon University, and other education partners.

Our priorities during the pandemic were to ensure the health and safety of students, ensure that learning continued for all students, provide supports for students with diverse learning needs and those in need of additional supports, and provide supports for students, teachers, and support staff for flexible learning.

Over the course of the pandemic, we provided the following specific program supports for K to 12 students and their families. The Department of Education partnered with Sport Yukon to provide \$250 per each K to 12 student to

families to support additional costs of dealing with COVID-19, including online learning, for a total of \$1.28 million. The initiative supported 4,595 K to 12 students to continue learning at home. The Department of Education partnered with Yukon First Nations — COVID-19 foundation — to provide mobile computing devices to Yukon First Nation students. Both parties committed to contribute up to \$478,000 to this initiative — a total of 712 devices went to First Nation students in the territory. In addition, students who did not have access to personal devices were able to access support through their school, whether in-person study halls or borrowing a school device, if needed, to continue their learning.

A key initiative was the safe return to school funding from the federal government, which provided \$4 million for the health and safety of students, staff, schools and school buses, and continued learning, including program adaptation and adapting field trips, and additional supports to students including student support services, tutoring, and providing additional technology infrastructure specialists to support flexible student learning. A top-up of \$607,000 from Canada under the indoor air top-up of the safe return to class fund was used for the HEPA filter units. By the start of the 2022-23 school year, 559 HEPA air purifiers and replacement filters had been deployed to schools.

We recently released a two-year COVID recovery plan that is notable and something that folks should become familiar with. We worked really closely with all of our partners to support post-secondary learners. We had emphasis, as well, on early learning and childcare supports for families. In terms of these initiatives, I will be happy to speak about them at another time. I note that I would like to give my colleague an opportunity to say a few words as this is directly related to his department.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am really happy to speak to this important issue on the floor of the Legislature this afternoon. I want to be clear that I support the motion's intent to make the municipalities whole. I always have.

Over the last several months, and certainly in the year and a bit or so that I've been in this portfolio, I have been incredibly impressed with the professionalism, with the care, and with the public service of our municipal leaders and our municipalities. It has been incredible to work with them over this last little while and to see how incredibly dedicated they are to their citizens.

I have said many times on the floor of the House that municipalities are responsible for running their affairs. When it came to ATIPP or any number of things, I have been very clear about making sure that municipalities are masters of their own futures and that the municipal leaders that we elect represent their constituents and make the decisions in the best interests of their constituents. They are elected governments and they will make the best decisions that they can for their citizens.

I will also say that I have been very clear with municipalities that I support their work and will do everything I can to make sure that they have the tools and resources to do that job. Before I was a politician, I was a municipal affairs

reporter in the territory. I covered the Association of Yukon Communities as a reporter. I have always had a great deal of respect and have a great deal of historic context about what municipalities do and what they have done in the territory. I have never seen anything like the last couple of years.

I want to thank the Member for Takhini-Kopper King this afternoon for rewording the motion, which contained a thinly veiled criticism of the successful and life-saving public health measures the Yukon employed during the pandemic — the successful, life-saving public health measures we employed.

The pandemic was a generational event. As I said, none of us have gone through anything like it, thankfully. It affected every person, family, business, NGO, municipality, province, territory, and nation in the world. Nobody was spared from this illness that, prior to 2020, had not been seen on the planet. It was a new organism.

We worked hard and fast to save lives and shore up businesses through the public health measures we deployed. Despite this, dozens of Yukoners lost their lives. I empathize with those who lost friends and family, with those who lost their business or their livelihood, and those who struggled — or continue to struggle — with mental illness and physical illness from the pandemic, from COVID-19.

We heard this afternoon that the Yukon reacted quickly to the pandemic. My colleagues deployed nation-leading supports for educators, for businesses — things that had not been seen anywhere else in the country. Our Premier led this effort, and we led the country in our supports. As a result, as I have said on the floor of this House in this session already — it wasn't that we emerged unscathed — we did not see the level of disruption, of death, of the failure of businesses, of restaurants that we saw in other places in the country. That was because of the public health measures and supports we put in place and the quick action. We weren't the only government to do this. We worked really well federally and territorially and provincially across the country. We worked like I have never seen governments work together before. We did it in the best interest of Yukoners and in the best interest of Canadians to save lives and livelihoods.

As the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes noted, this government, through Community Services, handed out millions to municipalities to help with costs. We are not averse to doing this. This summer, I spoke at length with communities about their desire for extra relief funding, and I have told them that I support this in principle. I absolutely support it. There is no question.

I have also had several meetings with the Association of Yukon Communities and its presidents on this topic. Former President Gord Curran — I greatly admire all the work he did holding his community together through the worst of the pandemic and how he guided AYC. Now, with the new president of the Association of Yukon Communities, Ted Laking, we have had conversations about it, we have corresponded by mail, and I have responded to those e-mails and letters. I have responded to him in personal requests. We met on the wharf down on Main Street, and this issue came up there as well. We have spoken about this, and I continue to

speak about it. I know that they have had issues at AYC hiring staff. I think that has slowed down some of the process here. I am more than happy to help in whatever way I can to get the capacity up so that we can actually resolve this issue.

Yes, the current Association of Yukon Communities president pressed this as his organization's number one issue, and I appreciate how important it is and the time and energy he and others have put into it. Again, I agree with the support in principle. I have asked the AYC and the municipalities to work with us on this issue. We know municipalities have claimed costs through COVID, but we also want to see the net savings that they may have seen through the pandemic, as well. We want a full cost accounting of what happened during the pandemic so that we know what we are dealing with. This will also help with the review of the comprehensive municipal grant, which is currently underway.

The grant, as my colleague has noted this afternoon, increases every year and has since 2018, when he refurbished it — when he bolstered it and made it better — another thing that we dealt with that had been neglected for many, many years. It is certainly playing a role in the overall health of Yukon municipalities.

As part of our collective review of the COVID costs, Community Services is also gathering national data on how the pandemic affected municipalities. Recently, with my provincial counterparts from across the country, the national working group examined the effects on municipalities and concluded that federal and provincial grants and cost savings had blunted the economic effects of the pandemic on municipalities. The exception, of course, were municipalities with transit. There, some municipalities experienced some great financial losses.

As I have gone through the territory on my municipal tour this year — I have been to Teslin, Haines Junction, Mayo, Faro, and going to LAC meetings — I'll be at one tonight —

Speaker: Order, please.

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

Debate on Motion No. 437, as amended, accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

The following document was filed October 12, 2022:

35-1-71

Responding to Sexualized Abuse in Yukon Schools: Review of Policies and Governmental Response Completed by the Yukon Child & Youth Advocate Office (McLean)

The following legislative returns were tabled October 12, 2022:

35-1-63

Response to Written Question No. 18 re: request for bids to supply and deliver calcium chloride (Clarke, N.)

35-1-64

Response to Written Question No. 21 re: bid value reductions associated with the First Nation Procurement Policy (Clarke, N.)