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HANSARD

Thursday, November 10, 2022 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2022 Fall Sitting

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Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee	Riverdale South	Deputy Premier Minister of Health and Social Services; Justice
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Hon. Jeanie McLean	Mountainview	Minister of Education; Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate

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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
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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, November 10, 2022 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

Speaker's statement — in recognition of Remembrance Day

Speaker: I have a statement for Remembrance Day.

Tomorrow is Remembrance Day. On this day in the Yukon Legislative Assembly, we remember all those who have served and continue to serve in the Canadian Forces, the RCMP, and all other related agencies, and remember the tens of thousands of brave souls who we lost in the line of service to our country.

Across Canada, Remembrance Day services will be held in town halls, cenotaphs, and indoor facilities to mark this day. This year marks the 80th anniversary of the raid on Dieppe. On August 19, 1942, the Allied Forces undertook a raid on the French coastal town of Dieppe, known as “Operation Jubilee”. Nearly 5,000 of the 6,000 troops that landed in Dieppe as part of the raid were Canadian. There were also 1,100 British and American troops who took part in the raid; 916 Canadian soldiers died during the raid on Dieppe, and 2,400 Canadians were wounded or captured.

Important lessons were learned from the tragedy of the raid on Dieppe. These lessons were put into the planning for the Allied invasion of Normandy two years later.

World War II was a seminal war in the 20th century. Sadly, there were many other wars in that century. With the advent of the atomic bomb, wars now have an ultimate consequence that must be contained. Today, tragically, war is being fought in a number of locations around the world, such as: Yemen, Ethiopia, and Ukraine. Humankind is all too familiar with war and its terrible consequences.

Remembrance Day is about remembering those who sacrificed so much for their fellow citizens and to remember the innocent victims of a war.

Here in the Yukon, many Yukon communities are having ceremonies, with the local veterans and servicemen and servicewomen taking part, to mark Remembrance Day. Visit the website of the Whitehorse Legion Branch 254, or visit the Facebook page “Yukon Remembers” to get more information about these events near you. In our homes, around our kitchen tables, in discussions with family and friends, take a moment to remember if you can’t get to one of these ceremonies. It is our remembrance of the horrors of war and their consequences that makes us all work toward a world that does not see war as a solution to problems, but a terrific failure in the way that we settle disputes.

Lest we forget.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Silver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask my colleagues here in the Legislative Assembly to help me in welcoming a few folks here, in recognition of Remembrance Day ceremonies. I am going to start with the president of the legion and also our Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms, Sergeant, retired, Joe Mewett. We also have with us Corporal, retired, Ian Angus, US Marine Corps; we have Corporal, retired, Morris Cratty; and we have Master Corporal, retired, Paul Brais, and also Paul’s spouse, Melanie — thank you very much for being here — Sergeant, retired, Shane Skarnulis — hopefully I pronounced that name correctly, sir — and Shane is now with EMS, so thank you for your service there as well, sir. We have Jon Trefry, also from EMS, and Major Greg Theriau — good to see you. We also have Sergeant, retired, David Laxton, the former Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. Thank you very much for your service.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, please help me, along with my colleagues, to welcome some special guests here today for a ministerial statement that will come after the tribute today. I have Mark Wedge, Erin Pauls, Melanie Bennett, Christabelle Carlick, and Zander Moore. Christabelle is a daughter to Alyce Johnson, and Zander is a grandchild. We have Elder Annie Bernard and Gayle Ball. Thank you so much for being here today for this incredibly special tribute. Kirk Cameron — did I miss you, Kirk? Kirk is also a council member for the City of Whitehorse. Thank you so much for being here.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Also from the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, a neighbour and a constituent and a past co-worker, Katharine Sandiford — if we could welcome her, too, please.

Applause

Ms. White: I ask my colleagues to join me in doing a couple of welcomes. First of all, Greg Penner is in the audience today. He is a friend and a person I respect and value very much, and has had lots of lessons. I didn’t introduce him as well the other day, but I would like to say a word about Ian Angus, who is also a friend whom I respect greatly and continue to learn from. Of course, there is Mr. David Laxton, who was the Speaker in my first five years here. Through him, I had the real privilege of meeting and learning from a lot of veterans over the years, which has really influenced and shaped my perception of Remembrance Day. Welcome to Ian, Greg, and David, of course.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Remembrance Day

Hon. Mr. Silver: I rise today in honour of Remembrance Day and to pay tribute to all the Canadians who have bravely served our country, as well as those currently serving.

Tomorrow, across the territory, Yukoners will gather for a moment of silence to remember and to reflect upon the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who have been lost to conflict. We will remember those who stand up in the face of those conflicts to uphold human rights, freedom, and peace. We will remember those who return home and those who did not. We will acknowledge and remember the families of everyone who has served and those who are currently serving. They, too, have made great sacrifice.

We will also be remembering those who have lost their lives in ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and elsewhere in the world. We will think of the many individuals still fighting bravely, every day, for their basic rights and freedoms.

Mr. Speaker, as you mentioned in your opening comments today, this year does mark the 80th anniversary of the Dieppe Raid. This raid will become one of the deadliest days for the Canadian Forces during World War II. In August of 1942, thousands of Canadian soldiers landed on the heavily defended French coast. In nine hours, enemy fighters killed 900 Canadians, wounded 2,400, and captured 2,000. Despite this catastrophic loss, important lessons were learned during this raid, which led directly to the successful planning of D-Day, two years later.

On Remembrance Day, we remember veterans from all walks of life, who left the safety and comfort of their homes to fight for freedom and our way of life — individuals who defied expectations and made an impact in resounding ways, including Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, who was the first female member of the royal family to serve as an active-duty member of the British Armed Forces.

I hope that all Yukoners will join me with a moment of silence tomorrow as we remember veterans here in the territory and across Canada. Thank you once again to all of our veterans for all of your service.

Mr. Speaker, lest we forget.

Applause

Mr. Istchenko: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition in tribute to our veterans, past and present, and those who are present here today.

Every year, at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, we gather in memorial parks, community halls, workplaces, schools, and homes to stand in honour of all who have fallen. Together, we observe a moment of silence to mark the sacrifice of the many who have fallen in the service of their country and to acknowledge the courage of those who still serve.

Canadian veterans have served throughout history in a broad range of conflicts and situations, from world wars to peacekeeping missions, or to crises on the home front. On Remembrance Day, we honour and remember all veterans —

those who kept the peace or fought for peace, those who found themselves in supportive roles or in active combat. The Afghanistan war, the Korean War, First World War, the Persian Gulf War, Second World War, South African War — Canadian veterans have protected the rights and freedoms of Canadians and people from countries all over the world through peacekeeping missions, including Lebanon, Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Haiti, Sudan, and others.

Many Canadian veterans have played a critical role in protecting Canadians on the home front, whether from fires, floods, or other threats. These men and women have risked their lives for our safety and protection. We must recognize and support our military families — the fathers, the sons, the mothers and daughters who have endured alongside Canadian veterans.

The exceptional roles and responsibilities that Canada's military and RCMP members undertake while in service can lead to mental health difficulties. As Canadians, we need to understand the toll that serving our country can have on individuals and we need to be there to support them. I would like to thank the compassionate professionals who assist veterans in finding the help that they need. There are numerous programs and services available for veterans and their families to get the help they deserve.

I want to thank all those who put the time and effort into remembering, especially the Whitehorse Legion Branch 254, and legions across Canada. As a young soldier posted in Germany in the late 1980s, and seeing the memorials and participating in Remembrance Day ceremonies at Vimy Ridge in France, I understand the ultimate sacrifices that were made for our freedoms today. We need to recognize the efforts that they made so we can have the freedoms that we have today — the freedom of thought, the freedom of opinion and expression, including the freedom of the press and other media, and methods of communication. That's what makes Canada a great country. We need to remember that and thank those who serve.

As the Premier and the Speaker said in their earlier tributes, it is the 80th anniversary of the raid on Dieppe. There is an old Bell telephone commercial that used to come on nearly every Remembrance Day in Canada. It was the one where a Canadian backpacker was shown walking on the beaches in France with his maple leaf flag sewn on his backpack. He calls his grandfather, and when he speaks to him, his grandpa asks, "How was Paris? Are the women still as lovely as I remember?" He replies, "Grandpa, I'm not in Paris. I'm in Dieppe. I just wanted to call to say, thank you."

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning

We will remember them.

Lest we forget.

Applause

Ms. White: I stand on behalf of the Yukon NDP in recognition of Remembrance Day. Today, I pay tribute to veterans.

As a younger person, had I been asked to describe a veteran, I might have described my grandfather, closing my eyes and seeing older folks with greying hair and deep wrinkles — people who lived in a different time with a different set of challenges, people who would remember the sound of an air raid siren, people who made it home and had families and grandchildren and even great-grandchildren to live on and remember them. These veterans came from a time when their role was easier to explain. These veterans came from a time of clear conflict. The wars that they fought in had clear goals and defined enemies to fight against, but that all changed after the Korean War. Now our soldiers are sent into war zones to keep opposing forces apart, and we call them peacekeepers. Many of these peacekeepers are sent into conflict situations, trying to keep opposing forces apart or as support for civilians in a time of crisis. We are doing what needs to be done.

These folks are sent into unimaginable situations, and then we expect them to come home and reintegrate like they never left, but it doesn't often work that way, because now they often come home with invisible injuries.

The face of today's veteran is very different from the stories that we are taught as children. Mixed in with all that grey hair from long ago conflicts are the faces of many people who are much younger than my grandfather. Some are my age, some are even younger, and some are in the gallery with us today.

Did you know that 1.5 percent of all Canadians 17 and over are veterans? I sure didn't, because that number still surprises me. It is estimated that up to 10 percent of war zone veterans, including war service veterans in peacekeeping forces, will go on to experience a chronic condition that we know as post-traumatic stress disorder, while others may experience at least some of the symptoms associated with the condition.

I want to take a moment to reflect on a lovely afternoon that I had a number of weeks ago and involved Lego, tea, and stories. I think that conversations happen when they need to, but having other things to occupy your hands and your gaze can be helpful. On this snowy afternoon, a good friend, who happens to be a veteran, shared some stories that I had never heard before. They weren't being shared to get a reaction, but because we were discussing the state of the world and current events. He said that it was his experience as a peacekeeper that makes him value everything around him at home, but he finds it frustrating how often the privileges that we have are taken for granted.

That's the crux of Remembrance Day, isn't it? That the privileges we have in Canada weren't free, that people have paid the cost for the democracy and the freedom that we have and enjoy.

Remembrance Day isn't about the political decision to enter wars. Remembrance Day recognizes the men and women who have borne the costs of those decisions. It lets the families of soldiers know that we care about the sacrifices they all had to make. Remembrance Day honours the veterans of the past, it shows respect for those serving in the present, and it fosters hope for the future.

Lest we forget.

Applause

Speaker: I would ask all present to stand as we observe a moment of silence.

Moment of silence observed

Speaker: They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

Thank you, please be seated.

Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Mr. Cathers: I have for tabling a press release issued by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I have for tabling a table comparing electricity prices across Canada to the Atlin hydro project.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 20: Reprinted version tabled

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Pursuant to the November 7, 2022, Order of Committee of the Whole, I have for tabling a reprinted version of Bill No. 20, entitled *Animal Protection and Control Act*. The reprinted version incorporates the amendments agreed to in Committee of the Whole. This bill also contains what I believe to be a true translation into French of the English text of the amendment to clause 34.

Speaker: Are there any further bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

First Nation School Board elections

Hon. Ms. McLean: I rise today to provide a statement on the First Nation School Board elections.

The establishment of the First Nation School Board is a historic step in advancing reconciliation and honours *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow*, the seminal document presented by Yukon First Nation Chiefs to then-Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau nearly 50 years ago.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the First Nation School Board Interim Governance Committee for their leadership over the past nine months. Dr. Alyce Johnson, Erin Pauls, Jocelyn Joe-Strack, Mark Wedge, Melanie Bennett, and Kirk Cameron were appointed to the Interim Governance Committee in February this year. They have worked extensively to launch the First Nation School Board and ensure

a successful start to the school year for schools and students moving to the school board.

Today, we are excited for the next chapter of the First Nation School Board, as the official results of the Yukon's two school board elections declared the election trustees. Twelve candidates ran for five elected positions with the First Nation School Board. Congratulations to Shadelle Chambers, Erin Pauls, Dana Tizya-Tramm, Jocelyn Joe-Strack, and Gillian Staveley on being elected to the First Nation School Board.

The First Nation School Board now governs eight schools across the Yukon through a strength-based community-centred approach. Mr. Speaker, the eight schools are: Chief Zzeh Gittlit School in Old Crow; Ross River School in Ross River; St. Elias Community School, Haines Junction; Johnson Elementary School and Watson Lake Secondary School in Watson Lake; Nelna Bessie John School in Beaver Creek; Takhini Elementary School in Whitehorse; and Grey Mountain Primary School in Whitehorse.

Thank you to all the candidates who ran in the First Nation School Board elections. It is promising and exciting to see such enthusiasm to be involved in the community and education. The Yukon government is committed to the success of the First Nation School Board. We will walk together with the First Nation School Board and its newly elected trustees to continue to advocate and make meaningful changes for all Yukon students. We know that it is through education that we continue the path of truth and reconciliation. Education can benefit all Yukoners with opportunities to learn about Yukon First Nation ways of knowing, doing, and being.

We look forward to seeing the trustees work with their schools over the next years.

Mr. Kent: I am happy to respond to the ministerial statement here today about the First Nation School Board, or FNSB. Congratulations to all those elected, as named by the minister, to the inaugural board. We know that you have hard work ahead of you, but appreciate that you are up to the challenge. I also wanted to take time to congratulate Melanie Bennett and all of the individuals who have worked and advocated so hard over the past number of years to make this a reality.

I do have a few questions for the minister regarding the FNSB that I hope she can address in her response here today. Can the minister tell us the status of the funding agreement between the Yukon government and the FNSB, and when it is expected to be ready?

The minister referenced the eight schools that have joined the First Nation School Board, but, of course, there are a number of schools that decided not to be governed at this time under the umbrella of the FNSB. Will they be provided additional resources by the department to match any additional Yukon government funding that FNSB schools receive?

The minister mentioned, of course, that Takhini Elementary School is now governed under the First Nation School Board. They will soon have a neighbour, when École Whitehorse Elementary is built on the ball diamonds next to the

existing school. So, can the minister tell us if Takhini Elementary School is next on the list of replacements, and, if so, when will consultation begin on design and location?

I look forward to these answers from the minister, and I briefly wanted to take time, before I sit down, to thank and congratulate those individuals recently elected or appointed to the CSFY Francophone School Board and the new Whistle Bend school council.

Ms. Blake: I want to start by congratulating the very first elected members of the Yukon First Nation School Board, and I want to thank all individuals who put their names forward. This powerhouse team has their work cut out for them, as they become the trustees for eight schools scattered around the Yukon. I know that there will be a steep learning curve for these members, but I am excited to see such a variety of skills and knowledge that this group brings to all Yukon students. Backgrounds and skills in education, language, traditional knowledge, and culture will provide an amazing foundation for this first board and for the actions that they determine to take, going forward.

There are many misconceptions out there over what this new school board means: No, it is not just for First Nation students; no, it does not mean that the school curriculum goes out the window; and, no, it does not mean that First Nations get their own schools. The election of a First Nation education board is a big step toward reconciliation. In an education system that has not always been a place where First Nation students felt that they were welcomed or able to succeed, it guarantees that Yukon First Nation history, knowledge, and language are not lost, and it ensures that all students in these eight schools will see their education enhanced by the sharing of so much of the knowledge that First Nations have about the land, the water, the animals, and how we live and share that land, and how we are stewards of this.

It recognizes that there are many ways of teaching and learning to be shared, and it guarantees that all students can benefit from this shared knowledge. This is a good thing. The eight school councils, and the parents and families, who voted in favour of this, recognized that this was an opportunity to enhance the school experience for all children.

I look forward to seeing how the future of all Yukon students will be strengthened by these new experiences and ways of learning. I am excited to see what comes next, and I am hopeful that more schools will choose to join the current eight schools in the near future.

Mahsi' cho.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleagues from across the way for their comments today and for adding their voices to this historic day. I would also like to welcome the other young folks who joined us just after the introduction of visitors. Everything that we are doing is about you. I especially want to point out Zander again, because I think his grandma dedicated her whole life to education for him, and the steps that we've taken, as I have said, are historic steps to establish a First Nation School Board, and

it is a major step in advancing reconciliation. We know that education was used to colonize our people, and that is how we will decolonize our society. I am so committed, and our government is so committed, to these steps.

This milestone is long in the making. As I said earlier, it has been nearly 50 years since Yukon First Nation chiefs delivered *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* and called for local control of schools in the territory. I have to say that these steps could have been taken a lot sooner than they have — in fact, decades sooner. So, I am honoured to be able to help lead this. I acknowledge my colleague, the now Minister of Health and Social Services, for starting the first step in this process. It was an important step — by doing the order-in-council to pass, which was done in February 2021, to start this ball rolling. I thank her very much for that work.

Moving forward with the school board will allow Yukon First Nations and their citizens to assume greater responsibility for the administration and management of education programs for students and their communities. I know that Yukoners are celebrating these efforts that will improve the education outcomes for all of our students across the territory for years to come. So, I think — not to worry, to the member of the opposition. We will make sure that we do our work in an equitable way, and that is what this is about — gaining equity for First Nations.

Our government has an interim funding agreement in place right now for nearly \$13.1 million, which will ensure that eight schools successfully transition, to the end of this fiscal year. This funding represents base funding for the school operations as well as funding for the administration and costs associated with other aspects of the work that the interim governance committee has been doing.

Our government will work with the newly elected trustees on final financial arrangements for the school board to ensure that equitable funds between school authorities are established.

Our government will continue to collaborate with the Chiefs Committee on Education and the First Nation School Board trustees while working on a government-to-government basis with individual First Nations to advance their educational priorities.

I think, just to get to a couple of the questions — we will continue to work with all of our school communities around the infrastructure needs for all of our schools in the Whitehorse area. I want to thank everyone again for everything that you have done. It is incredibly important. It's a historic moment for education in the territory. Thank you so much for being here today.

Applause

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Affordable housing and land development

Ms. Clarke: Yesterday, when asked about the Liberals' commitment to develop and release 1,000 new lots across the Yukon, the minister responsible for housing said this — and I

quote: "... it's important to note that the work being done by the Minister of Community Services and the focus on those 1,000 lots are over and above everything that was identified by the opposition today."

If the 1,000 lots that the Liberals have promised do not include any lots from 5th and Rogers, the tank farm, or the Marwell grader station, how confident are the Liberals in meeting their commitment to reach 1,000 lots by the end of their mandate?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I can say that we are very confident that we are going to get the lots developed. I can say, Mr. Speaker, that we have agreed, since the very beginning, that lot development is a very important subject for the City of Whitehorse as well as for the territory as a whole.

That's why we have increased our budget on lot development to \$30 million this year. That is \$30 million for lot development.

The member opposite, as I said last week, may not recognize this, but in their last year in office, the Yukon Party invested only \$7.7 million in lots. They had to know the trajectory of our lots and that they were lagging. They did nothing about it.

We have made a historic investment in lots in the territory. We are going to continue to do that to meet our objective of 1,000 lots during this mandate.

Ms. Clarke: It has been more than a year and a half since the last election. Can the Liberals tell us how many lots they have released so far?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The member opposite continues to talk about our commitment to get Yukoners more homes — more houses — into the market. I can say that we have increased the budget, as I said in my last answer, to \$30 million this year for new lots. That compares to just \$6 million a year over the last mandate of the Yukon Party — \$6 million a year. We are putting in \$30 million.

We continue to advance the Whistle Bend project as quickly as possible in phases, and we see progress every year, releasing lots by way of lottery for private citizens. Once Whistle Bend is completed, it will include 15 phases, over 2,000 lots, and \$300 million of investment and economic benefit for Yukon contractors and businesses. It provides the foundation for much-needed homes and a growing population.

The contrast is clear. We are investing historic amounts of money in our lot development in the territory. The Yukon Party record on housing is embarrassing. The Yukon Party sat on millions of dollars and refused to invest in affordable housing. We have taken a different approach. We are investing in our houses; we are investing in Yukoners.

Ms. Clarke: With due respect, the minister did not answer my question, so I will ask it again.

It has been more than a year and a half since the last election. Can the Liberals tell us how many lots they have released so far?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am happy to talk about housing and all the work that we are doing on housing in the territory. My colleague, the minister responsible for housing, yesterday, gave some great answers on all the work that he is doing to support

Yukoners and build more housing for them, over and above the 1,000 lots that I am responsible for, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I know that — in 2012, Whistle Bend phase 1, 113 lots; in 2014, 153 lots; 2015-16, 58 lots.

In our record — in 2018-19, 76 lots; in 2019-20, 129; in 2020-21, 267; in 2021-22, we got out 101; this year, we are on phase to put out another 200 lots.

Mr. Speaker, we are working very hard to get housing for Yukoners. The record is clear. We put the money in, we're building lots, and we are going to continue to do that so that Yukoners have houses that they can depend on. We're going to get ahead of the deficit that we inherited back in 2016.

Question re: Alaska Highway corridor upgrades

Mr. Istchenko: So, this past spring, the minister recognized that the north Alaska Highway in the Yukon, particularly the segment of road between Destruction Bay and Beaver Creek, has been most affected by shifting permafrost. Anyone who has driven the highway has seen the increased damage and cracking as a result of shifting and thawing permafrost.

We know that the O&M budgets for the highway camps are stretched and haven't been increased forever. The Liberals haven't committed any new capital money to improving the north Alaska Highway since 2016, either.

Can the minister tell us when urgent capital work will be done on this stretch of road, for the safety of the travelling public and my constituents?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: On November 15, 2021, the US government passed the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*. This act authorizes funding for the reconstruction of segments of the Alaska Highway, from the Alaska border to Beaver Creek, to Haines Junction and the Haines Road, and from Haines Junction to Haines, Alaska — the stretch colloquially known as the Shakwak.

Importantly, the act is limited in process details and does not commit any specific dollar amount to the reconstruction project. On August 11, President Biden at that time announced \$2.2 billion toward the RAISE program, funding for 166 projects to modernize transportation across the country. While the Alaska Highway Shakwak project was not included in this initial list, the Yukon government continues to advocate to ensure that this project moves forward and that funding is granted as soon as possible.

Three projects that are located in Alaska, or related to Alaska infrastructure, were funded; however, those projects were put forward by entities other than the State of Alaska.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to work with the Alaska Department of Transportation to pursue other funding opportunities, including a joint application to the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity program earlier this year. The RAISE grant is a US merit-based discretionary funding program for infrastructure.

Mr. Istchenko: Well, it looks like the government is just waiting on US funding to do urgent work that is really needed on the north Alaska Highway. Hopefully, this will happen.

So, we know that, last year, Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski announced the \$1-trillion *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* authorities, and she said: "Authorizes funding for reconstruction of the Shakwak Highway, the Alaska Highway from the Alaska border at Beaver Creek, Yukon Territory, to Haines Junction in Canada..."

So, up to now, the minister hasn't been able to provide a lot of details; however, we have been told that the agreement is broken down into three phases. So, can the minister confirm this? Can he explain what the three phases are, as well as the dollar amounts attached to each of these phases?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: What I can advise is that I have had a fruitful discussion with the Consulate General of the US from Vancouver, when he has come to Whitehorse on now two occasions, and have made that office very much aware that this is a Yukon priority. The funding allocated to Shakwak for the 2022-23 year totals \$6.3 million. The majority of that — approximately \$4.9 million — is allotted for operation and maintenance. The remaining \$1.4 million is capital funding. So, certainly, funds are being dedicated to Shakwak.

In addition, there are many infrastructure programs occurring in the territory right now. We have the national trade corridors funding for the north Klondike Highway in a multi-year program. We have the Resource Gateway Carmacks bypass project, which made great progress this summer. We have the Whitehorse apron runway improvement, as well. Of course, we also have the Nisutlin Bay bridge, which has also started.

There is a lot of infrastructure programs that are occurring this year.

Mr. Istchenko: As we know, the Liberals have not put capital money into the north Alaska Highway, and it sure shows. The minister lists a lot of capital work on highways, but the lack of investment on the north Alaska Highway is putting travellers in my riding at risk.

So, we have heard that there are three phases of work on the north Alaska Highway from the US Shakwak funding, and since the government is waiting for the funding, what are the timelines for these phases? If the minister was updated, I wish I could get a legislative return. When is this work actually going to commence?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Yes, I can certainly bring back a legislative return with respect to the specific questions that the Member for Kluane has made, with respect to the breakdown of the phases of the funding, and will provide the same to him and to the House.

In addition, as indicated, the Yukon and Alaska jointly submitted an application for funding to the BUILD discretionary grants program in the years 2018, 2019, and 2020. However, none of those applications have yet been accepted. However, there is work that has been done. In 2020-21, we completed the installation of thermosiphons at Dry Creek, kilometre 1841 of the Alaska Highway, near Beaver Creek. The thermosiphons will help to cool the underlying permafrost foundation and stabilize the highway. The thermosiphons project is partially being funded by Transport Canada, under

the Northern Transportation Adaptation Initiative, also known as NTAI.

We are diligently working with our American counterparts. We have not been able yet to access the funding, but we continue advocating, lobbying, and having fruitful discussions with our American counterparts.

Question re: Financial support for parent caregivers of children with disabilities

Ms. White: Across the Yukon, families with children with disabilities and complex medical conditions have been calling on this government for more support. The Yukon NDP has echoed those concerns to the minister.

Through the in-home child care policy, parents only got financial support if they hired someone outside of their home to come in and care for their child. This meant that parents who took on the role of caring for children with complex needs didn't receive the same compensation for the same level of care. After calling for change to this unfair policy this week, we heard from parents that they can now access the funding that they need, and this is welcome news to so many Yukon families.

So, can the minister please share the changes in this program?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is correct. Not only did the Department of Health and Social Services, under the leadership of this government, fix what was clearly an unfair policy with respect to parents and caregivers of children with disabilities, but in the interim, since January of 2022, there has been a program in the interim to assist those individuals as well.

It is certainly a commitment of this government to support the well-being and the inclusion of people with disabilities. Our government has recognized the importance of inclusivity in our health and social services system. I certainly thank the individual family who came forward to us, through my office and then to the Department of Health and Social Services, to point out the discrepancy with respect to the previous service. We have worked with them closely to make sure that their issues have been addressed.

The department offers a variety of supports for children and adults living with disabilities, depending on the need, and we appreciate the important work done by all of our partners, including all levels of government, non-governmental organizations, and others to help.

Ms. White: So, as you can imagine, we are happy to hear that, but after the advocacy from families and from the Yukon NDP, funding was finally made available to the parents who needed it.

We have heard from some parents who have shared how relieved they feel that they can care for their children without the stress of poverty. In a conversation with a parent this week, they were told by the department that the program was actually changed in February. Unfortunately, we have also heard that many families were not informed about this funding when the program was changed eight months ago, and many only

received a letter from the department about the changes this week.

Why weren't parents informed about the program when it was originally changed in February?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think what this issue is about is this government and Yukoners supporting one another through the disability services unit. In August, as of August of 2022, that unit had 224 children and 157 adults who were receiving services, with an additional 30 individuals pending intake assessments. We currently fund eight non-governmental organizations to support individuals with disabilities, for a total value of \$10.65 million. These NGOs, which I think are incredibly valuable to Yukoners, are worth mentioning here: Autism Yukon, Connective, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Society Yukon, Inclusion Yukon, LDAY Centre for Learning, Opportunities Yukon — formerly known as Challenge — Options for Independence, and Teegatha'Oh Zheh. I very much appreciate the opportunity to be able to thank them for their work on behalf of individuals with disabilities here in the territory.

With respect to the specific question, I can assure Yukoners that we sought out individuals who we thought would be in the category to receive the caregiver benefit. We did that on an individual basis, and that benefit was retroactive to February of this year.

Ms. White: I have had conversations with a family this week who didn't know about the program, so that leads to a problem. The concern is that the government took so long to inform Yukon parents about the funding, because they don't know how many families could benefit from it. Although I appreciate that the minister talked to about 224 families, those are families who have been identified.

So, how does the government track families whom they serve — or whom they don't necessarily serve — who aren't accessing those programs?

Without knowing just how many families with disabilities there are in the Yukon, the government risks leaving them behind. The government has a lot of tools at its disposal to identify and support these folks through the education system, through health care, and through social work and more.

Will the minister work across departments to track and support Yukon families with disabilities who may not have been identified?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: If I haven't made this clear somehow, I need to reiterate it. When the department put in place an interim program, we sought out families we thought would benefit from that. The department offered financial support for parents of children with disabilities, including financial supports to families to hire a caregiver when the child's disability prevented them from attending a daycare or other programming.

In early 2022, we launched the Yukon COVID caregiver program, which was the interim program to provide financial supports to parents who could not work due to caring for their child with a disability. We were actively working to enhance our services and to provide permanent financial support to families, which is the new program that has been unveiled. This

will provide financial support to families with a child with a disability who cannot attend daycare, regardless of whether the parent themselves care for the child or they hire a caregiver. This resolved the problem that was unfair and inappropriate.

What I can indicate, as well, is if the members opposite know of someone who might qualify or be assisted by the department, would they please urge them to come forward. We have done everything possible to do that, and we want to continue.

Question re: Teacher staffing

Mr. Kent: I have some questions regarding staffing for the Minister of Education. In the spring, I asked the minister about a letter sent by the Yukon Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology Association to the Public Accounts Committee, where they raised concerns about the number of speech and language pathologists within the department. The letter says — and I quote: “The Department requires additional FTE allocation for...” — speech and language pathologists — “... in order to provide their specialized services in an equitable manner across the territory.”

In the spring the minister confirmed that there have been four positions within the department.

What action, if any, has the minister taken with regard to supplementing the speech-language pathologist positions within the Department of Education, from the four that have been in place for some time?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I think I will start by just taking a moment to thank all of our incredible educators who work within our system to hold them up — and all of their efforts. We have been through a lot of difficult years as a result of COVID-19, and we are working hard to ensure that we are filling all the positions that we have and various vacancies. We have done a really good job of doing that over the last — and with a considerable amount of effort, for sure, from our recruitment staff and continuing to work with all of our partners. I certainly recognize that additional supports are needed in our schools. We have a number of support services for students that make up the whole system, from EAs to learning assistants, to other professionals that we bring into our classrooms to meet the needs of our students, which is done through assessment and through other means. I will continue to build —

Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Kent: So, my question was specific to speech-language pathologists and the number in the department. As I mentioned, it has been four, and the association was asking for an increase to that number.

A few weeks ago, the Yukon Association of Education Professionals raised a significant concern about the shortage of teachers in Yukon schools. While this is a problem for all schools, it is particularly challenging for students who need additional supports. The president of the YAEP said — and I quote: “In any scenario, whether you would be in a rural situation or urban, it’s the vulnerable students that are suffering the most.”

We also noted that next door, in the Northwest Territories, every school started the year fully staffed. So, what is the minister doing to ensure that next year we aren’t as short-staffed as we were this year?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Effective teachers are one of the most important factors in a student’s success at school. We are definitely very committed to ensuring that we have all of the teaching staff in place.

Since September 1, 2022, we have successfully filled 34 teaching positions across the Yukon. We are actively recruiting for a number of other positions that remain vacant at this point.

Across the country, provinces and territories are experiencing similar types of staffing shortages. It is normal for there to be some staff postings and vacancies at the beginning of each year, and this year, there were fewer teaching postings and vacancies compared to the start of the school year last year. We posted an internal round of competitions restricted to current Yukon Association of Education Professionals members prior to posting externally. This supports the retention of staff. We also posted our external jobs sooner to help us to be more competitive nationally. There were a number of other steps that our department has taken, along with our partners.

Mr. Kent: I am hoping for a response on the number of speech-language pathologist FTEs within the department, as well as plans for next year’s staffing and any lessons learned from our neighbours in the Northwest Territories, which did not have any staffing shortages.

However, earlier this year, I asked the government about the significant amount of money that is owed in back pay to Yukon teachers. In some cases, teachers are owed thousands of dollars in back pay that stretches back over three years now. In the spring, the minister told the Legislature that this matter was heard by the labour relations board in March 2021. That means that a result should be forthcoming fairly soon.

My question is: How long will teachers need to wait after the decision is made by the adjudicator to receive their money? Has the government budgeted the money and will it be able to flow immediately? If so, how much money have they budgeted for this expenditure?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will certainly investigate the question and ask the Public Service Commissioner to get me some background information. What I will do while I’m on my feet right now is just take a moment to thank all of our public servants for their incredible work, whether they are teachers, nurses, or folks out there clearing the streets. They do great work. Of course, we want to make sure that our Public Service Commission is working to support them at all times.

Question re: Access to information and protection of privacy

Mr. Cathers: The *Health Information Privacy and Management Act* includes section 138, which says that the minister shall initiate a comprehensive review of the act no later than four years after the act comes into force.

The deadline passed back in the summer of 2020. In September 2021, the Information and Privacy Commissioner issued comments and recommendations to inform that review.

In the most recent annual report of that office, the IPC stated that, while it appears the review is still underway, they have not yet had any response or heard anything more about the review of HIPMA.

Can the minister tell us if there is, indeed, a review of HIPMA underway and, if so, when will it be complete? As well, why has the government, so far, appeared to ignore the recommendations and comments from the IPC?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think the last part of that question was a very broad assumption on behalf of the Yukon Party. That's not unusual. They like to make assumptions and cause concern for Yukoners.

The Department of Health and Social Services provides a variety of resources to connect Yukoners with services and supports. Staff continually work to ensure that Yukoners have access to timely, accurate information and care.

I do want to take the opportunity to note the tremendous hard work of the skilled staff at Health and Social Services.

The review of HIPMA — a portion of the question that was asked — is required by legislation. It is a requirement. I'm not going to make a comment with respect to the comment made on behalf of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. I am sure that this individual speaks for themselves, and their annual report does the same.

With respect to the requirements of our government to review legislation in a timely way, we are committed to doing so.

Mr. Cathers: I am referring to what the Information and Privacy Commissioner has said in the annual report. Perhaps the minister hasn't read it yet.

Over the past couple of months, the Yukon government has had several high-profile breaches involving some of the most sensitive, personal information that government holds. These breaches have happened in several different departments. Since then, privacy regulators across Canada have jointly called for strengthened privacy measures to protect personal health information and increased trust in the health system. I tabled their joint statement earlier today.

Following this joint call, what steps, if any, has the Yukon government taken in response, and will the Yukon government be making legislative or regulatory amendments to address the issues raised in that press release?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The importance of health information and the instigation of the health information act — which isn't the full title, of course — is incredibly important to Yukoners for the protection of their personal and health information — extremely sensitive information — that is protected by this government and the acts that are around that — the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the *Health Information Privacy and Management Act*. The information about available resources and the operation of those pieces of legislation is incredibly important to Yukoners.

I can indicate that we also have a lot of information online that can support Yukoners who are looking for the operation of those pieces of legislation at yukon.ca. We also share information across social media platforms, and Yukoners can, of course, contact the free and confidential 24/7 helpline by

calling 211 to receive support connecting them with programs, resources, information, as well as community supports.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, that wasn't much of an answer from the minister. In the 2021 annual report from the Yukon Information and Privacy Commissioner, the office noted that they had issued four formal reports about the government refusing to provide information. Two of those reports are from Environment and two are from the Department of Justice, for which this minister is also responsible.

The adequacy report notes — and I quote: "... a troubling trend where the recommendations in all four of these reports have all been refused or deemed refused (not responded to in time) by the public bodies in question."

Why has this minister and the Yukon government not lived up to their legislative obligations under the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think what the Yukon Party is referring to is decisions that have been made with respect to requests for information or access to information. Those are properly determined through the process under each of those pieces of legislation. I'm not going to comment on those.

I am going to comment to say that, again, assumptions made by the Yukon Party are opportunities, for whatever reason — they think that they are part of their requirements — as the party sitting on the opposite side of this House has again made insinuations and allegations that I do not agree with. Clearly, this government is committed to making sure that Yukoners have transparent access to the information that they need and that is in the hands of government and, more importantly, perhaps to make sure that their personal and health information is protected.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 19: *Technical Amendments Act (2022)* — Third Reading

Clerk: Third reading, Bill No. 19, standing in the name of the Hon. Ms. McPhee.

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

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

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I have had the honour many times in this Legislative Assembly to say, ensuring that our legislation is accurate, functional, and without mistakes makes up part of the mandate for a Minister of Justice. As minister, I am responsible for bringing technical amendment acts to this Chamber from time to time to correct any errors, fix inaccurate cross-references, and make other technical changes to legislation for the benefit of Yukoners.

Bill No. 19 proposes amendments to three pieces of legislation: to the *Land Titles Act, 2015*, to the *Condominium Act, 2015*, and to the *Corrections Act, 2009*. As mentioned in Committee of the Whole, the specific details of this bill include addressing errors and inaccurate cross-references within the *Condominium Act, 2015*, and repealing regulatory provisions that will no longer be proclaimed. It also includes repealing or revising provisions within the *Land Titles Act, 2015*, to align with the operational requirements of the electronic Yukon land titles registry system. Lastly, it acts to amend the *Corrections Act, 2009*, to support the separation of facility-based corrections and community corrections.

These amendments are important to the operation of the government, groups who use the legislation, and the public. During second reading, and in Committee of the Whole, I discussed the importance of the proposed amendments to each of the three acts within this bill and why they are needed at this time. In Committee of the Whole, the focus of the debate centred on the proposed amendments to the *Corrections Act, 2009*. Concerns were raised with respect to the validation clause contained in clause 27 of the proposed bill.

I wish to reconfirm that validation is a legal tool used out of caution. It is an abundance of caution that provides clarity and certainty and avoids confusion with respect to the director of Corrections position during the period of time that it notes.

As I have previously stated, the purpose of the proposed amendments to the *Corrections Act, 2009*, is to support the much-needed operational changes to the Corrections branch that will enable the branch to be more efficient and effective in providing services to Yukoners. The resignation of the director of Corrections prompted the opportunity to realign the Corrections branch. During this time, the position of the director of Corrections was necessarily filled by a series of acting directors. The text of the *Corrections Act, 2009*, did not contemplate an acting director, or that the director of Corrections might be more than one person. It was determined that clarity in the act was needed, and out of an abundance of caution, that amendment and the inclusion of the validation clause was the prudent course of action.

Over the last year, this government has ensured that there is leadership and oversight in the Corrections branch. It has ensured that members of the public service are supported in their important work. I would like to take the opportunity to thank those who stepped up to continue the important work of the Corrections branch in those roles. It would do a disservice to the dedicated members of the public service and to all Yukoners to leave an important and complex branch, such as Corrections, without direction.

With this legislation and the inclusion of the validation clause, we are ensuring that we continue to support the members of the public service who have stepped up and served in good faith during this period of time that is noted in that section at the Corrections branch. This amendment clarifies the intent of this government that an acting appointment is to be viewed as reasonable and lawful, and that should be the case. Acting appointments allow for the effective functioning of government, and without them, the public service would not be

able to operate. I should also note that it provides individuals with the opportunity to gain experience that they might have to proceed with their career in the direction that they want to take it.

In addition to affirming the acting appointments and that they are authorized, the proposed amendments to the *Corrections Act, 2009*, have given us the opportunity to explicitly clarify how the Corrections branch will be organized going forward; specifically, that there will be more than one director of Corrections. Validation clauses are used to ensure that defects or irregularities are declared valid. The use of this tool does not mean at all, that actions were unauthorized.

In the present case, the use of this clause ensures that the past efforts to secure continuity of leadership in the Corrections branch are validated in the event of a minor defect being found to exist. As such, we are bringing this legislation forward to ensure that it is abundantly clear that members of the public service who have taken on the role of director of Corrections in good faith are fully authorized and supported in their actions.

I am pleased to bring forward this bill to ensure our legislation remains effective, up-to-date, and serves the organizational needs of our public service and Yukoners. I look forward to receiving support from all members of this House for Bill No. 19. I appreciate the opportunity to present this information at third reading.

Mr. Cathers: I would just note — in beginning to speak to this — that I've already spoken to this on prior occasions here in the House. I will not repeat all of my remarks at that time. I would also note that most of the matters in this bill are not of concern to us; however, section 27 regarding the retroactive validation related to the director of Corrections position is one of concern, and the minister's explanation, of course, as you know, does not actually hold water. Had this legislative change been proposed last October before the government made the change and stepped outside of the parameters of the corrections act, we probably would have supported that change. However, the lack of answers and accountability from the minister of when this occurred — the lack of acceptance of personal responsibility, since the appointment of a director at this level under the corrections act does actually fall on the minister to sign off on that appointment, we are disappointed by the continued lack of accountability by this minister, though, unfortunately, not surprised by it.

This is cleanup over a year after the fact of when the government stepped outside of what was authorized by the corrections act, and I would note that is why this act specifically talks about retroactively making things legal back to October 15, 2021. Again, I'll just very briefly quote from section 27 of this legislation — this is section 27(1) — and I quote: "Everything done or omitted to be done on or after October 15, 2021..." — and there is a bit of legalese in the midst. It concludes by saying — quote: "... is declared for all purposes to have been validly and legally done or omitted to be done."

It goes on in the next section to again reiterate the declaration that — and I quote: “... is declared for all purposes to have been validly and legally done...”

No matter how the minister may try to reframe this as a validation — that was her term — this is retroactively correcting an issue where the government stepped outside the authority of the corrections act. I would note what is most concerning about this is that the minister is failing to acknowledge a mistake was made.

I would also note that, as the Public Accounts from this year notes, this minister stepped outside the authority of the *Financial Administration Act* with the Department of Health and Social Services, as noted in the audited reports. In both cases, what is most called for is simply accountability.

Mr. Speaker, because of this and the fact that it is a retroactive correction, we are not able to support the bill in its current form, since this part of it is over a year late. I am sure that the minister will understand our reasons for that.

Ms. Blake: The NDP are in support of moving this bill forward. Mahsi’.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the support from the Third Party with respect to this important piece of legislation.

The section that is of concern to the Yukon Party is about supporting the public service. I’m sorry that they choose not to support the public service. The member opposite, who speaks to this matter, and the Yukon Party is simply wrong about this piece of legislation. The validation clause is a legal tool. It is appropriately used here to support the public service. I am sorry, again, that they will not do so.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Ms. Clarke: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

Ms. Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 10 yea, seven nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it. I declare the motion carried.

Motion for third reading of Bill No. 19 agreed to

Speaker: I declare that Bill No. 19 has passed this House.

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair (Ms. Blake): Order. Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Bill No. 206, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 206: *Second Appropriation Act 2022-23* — continued

Chair: The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Bill No. 206, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Is there any further general debate?

Ms. Clarke: I have one more question for the Premier. Can the Premier please provide an update on the Vimy project? Is there a timeline for completion?

Hon. Mr. Silver: As the member opposite knows, we have an aging population, growing very fast — faster than the national average. I think that, in Canada, the seniors population grew by 2.1 percent between 2006 and 2021. In the Yukon, it grew by 2.9 percent, so it is very important for us to support the development of a wide range of housing options for our Yukon seniors, in line with our *Aging in Place Action Plan*. So, as part of that, the Yukon Housing Corporation continues to work on a partnership with Vimy Heritage Housing Society to support the development of their proposed not-for-profit, seniors

independent housing project. I know that the members opposite will be very familiar with this as well.

When I was in opposition for those five years, I would go to each of their annual general meetings. The commitment was there from them at that time, and it still is right now, for government support for Vimy. It is wide ranging, for sure.

As far as the provision of funding, project manager advice, and an ongoing hold of a Whistle Bend lot to support a future project — some of the actions that we have done. There is a strong business case here as well, inclusive of sufficient capital project and operating funding secured, so we are also providing options to support the project proposal through our existing funding and innovation programs.

As far as a timeline at this point, I don't have anything to add from what the minister and his department have been speaking about as far as this partnership, but I just wanted to give a little bit of context to the work that has been done to date.

Mr. Cathers: In rising today, I am going to start off on the Finance side and move on to other areas. As the Premier will know, we have indicated that, since the government has chosen to move to a pattern of having less individual appropriations for departments in the supplementary, it consequently means that the only opportunity we have to ask questions about departments not seeking new appropriations is in general debate.

As per our practice recently, we have provided the government with a heads-up on which departments we intend to be asking questions about so that they can have officials standing by. Whether the Premier answers or the minister answers is, of course, a choice that they can make, but we have given them a heads-up in the hopes of getting more explicit answers. After Finance, we will move on to Health and Social Services.

I am going to begin with the territorial funding formula. The formula financing grant from Canada represents the largest single source of revenue for the territory. In fact, it represents the majority of revenue for the Yukon. Currently, it's set to expire on March 31, 2024. Can the Premier tell me what steps have been taken so far regarding extending or renegotiating the territorial funding formula with the federal government to go beyond 2024?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I think that it will be no surprise to the member opposite that I disagree with the preamble.

What has changed in Yukon financing as far as how we do our budgeting is that we are doing our utmost to make sure that our budgeting is done in the spring, in our mains — whether that be for operation and maintenance, or budgets for our societies, corporations, or capital builds. It is extremely important to do so under the aspects of transparency and openness. The result of the work of the Financial Advisory Panel — of us really beefing up the Finance department and its work with Community Services and the Department of Highways and Public Works, and others — we are getting accolades nationally for the work that we are doing in budgeting.

What hasn't changed is how the Legislative Assembly happens. In the past, the members opposite — although they

did have much more budgeting in the second term of a fiscal year — did not provide an opportunity for departments without budgets to be asked questions of in conversations after Committee of the Whole. Neither are we. The difference is that there is less budgeting happening right now, to the tune of us getting an A-minus from the C.D. Howe Institute, which is the second-highest rating in Canada. I know that the members opposite did budgeting differently. This is how we are doing our budgeting.

What I would suggest is a conversation at SCREP where we could even front-end load. If we get into a situation like the fall budget where there are departments with allocations, let's put those up before Committee of the Whole. Then, if we get through all those, the Premier can sit here and answer any questions in general. That might even be a better use of our time, but the members opposite have never brought this up in SCREP. They will just say that they want us to change the rules — comparatively differently from the way they did it all this time.

With all due respect to the members opposite, things have changed in that there is less budget allocation. I understand that they might have, in their opinion, lost an opportunity here, but to say that this is their only opportunity to ask questions of the ministers — well, that is simply not true. They can write letters to the ministers. I think the Leader of the Official Opposition wrote four this summer. Again, there are opportunities. We also know that, in the spring, they had full opportunity to grill all of the different departments. They asked me zero questions in Committee of the Whole. They asked me zero questions in the Department of Finance and zero questions in the Executive Council Office.

We will agree to disagree as to the “why” of what is going on here but, ultimately, if we are going to continue to get accolades nationally about how we are budgeting, including a report that takes into consideration how open we are as a government in our financing, I am going to continue to do it this way. I'm happy to answer the member opposite's questions in general debate. I will say, though, if they really do want the answers more specifically and more drawn down — a cased, worked letter from departments that can then spend the time to actually get into the regions of the department, find out exactly what is going on, on a day-to-day basis, and respond — would probably garner a lot more information than asking the Premier, conversation with the Minister of Finance, the questions during a general debate.

However, when it comes to the grants, I'm happy to talk about the grants — the transfers. As the member opposite knows, we receive four major transfers from Canada each year. They are the territorial formula financing, as he referenced as the TFF. There is the Canada health transfer; there is the Canada social transfer, and also now there is the cannabis transfer. On the cannabis transfer, it was my privilege, as a Minister of Finance, to negotiate with the federal Finance minister the federal tax on this — and the agreement in that federal tax — for the provinces and territories.

In December 2021, the federal government advised the Yukon government that the 2022-23 fiscal year grant would be

\$1.174 billion. That was an increase of roughly five percent over the previous fiscal year, which is consistent with the average growth rate of the grant. The grant consists of the territorial formula financing grant minus resource offsets. However, there are currently no related offsets banked to date, although with Victoria Gold in production, we are going to see that change very soon here. In years where there are offsets, the resource revenues represent Yukon government revenues, whether that be forestry, oil and gas, lands, minerals, or water, so every dollar above \$6 million in resource revenues is offset by a \$1-dollar deduction from the grant. So, the first offset in the current forecast is expected to apply in the 2023-24 fiscal year and will be in respect of resource revenues that are earned in the 2021-22 budget year.

As far as what replaces after we expire the TFF and the conversations currently, those conversations are ongoing, but I don't have anything to add right now for the member opposite as far as timelines on that.

Mr. Cathers: I am not going to spend a lot of time here debating with the Premier the rules for debate, but as the Premier should know, if he has read information from the Clerks regarding this subject to clarify when it has come up before, during a legislative Sitting, if members wish to ask questions regarding departments that don't have new appropriations in the supplementary, our only chance procedurally to do so is during general debate. In the interest of providing the government with the ability to have officials from individual departments lined up, we have given them advance notice of which departments we will be calling. Unfortunately, if the Premier is going to choose to dispute the facts, that does not make them less true.

We have had the experience where the Premier has suggested that we just simply case work it to ministers. Well, we have varying experiences of success in actually getting a timely response to that, depending on the minister and the issue. The opportunity to put ministers on the spot in the Legislative Assembly is something that members of every Legislative Assembly in Yukon history have taken the opportunity to do. It is a good opportunity to raise a question and put them on the spot to provide an answer. If the government chooses to not provide those answers or not utilize the resources of officials being able to assist them with it, that is, of course, something that they have to stand accountable for.

I want to move back to the issue at hand regarding the territorial funding formula expiry, and, in fact, the overall grant from Canada. The Premier indicated that conversations are ongoing. Without a little more detail on that, it is concerning. We have heard the indications from the federal Minister of Finance, Minister Freeland, who has indicated that times are going to be tougher in terms of budgetary requests. We don't know at this point — we, as non-government members, have not seen any information from the federal government about what this might mean for the territorial funding formula after 2024.

The question really can't just be addressed by indicating that there have been conversations. We are looking for more specifics about what the Yukon government has requested and

what assurances, if any, they may have received from the federal government that the territorial funding formula is going to carry forward in a manner comparable to how it has in the last number of years, versus potentially being on the chopping block for cuts.

Again, I am not suggesting that the latter is the case. What I am stating, Madam Chair, is that in the absence of information from this government, or clarity about what the federal government has said, there is uncertainty regarding what this oh-so-important financial package that the Yukon receives on an annual basis from the federal government may look like after March of 2024 — and, of course, that is not very long away. We are not so far from the end of this current fiscal year, and after that, there will be just one year left in the current funding formula from the federal government.

So, I am looking for more details in terms of what this government has requested from the federal government, and what letters, assurances, et cetera, that they may have received about what the financial situation will look like after 2024.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, before I get into the TFF, as far as opportunities to reach out to ministers and to get responses and returns, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources has been keeping an awful lot of statistics about the number of returns that we have given in the Legislative Assembly compared to the Yukon Party — you know, the responses that we have given. I think that our record holds up well — comparatively — to the Yukon Party's record. Whether or not there are fewer departments available after general debate for the budget process, I do remember being in opposition in the Third Party and being quite frustrated with members opposite taking their complete 20 minutes, when the Yukon Party was in government, to basically read off publicly available information, so I would, at some points, just basically say, well, here are my questions, and then, see you later, because they are not going to get answered, but anyway, I digress.

When it comes to the formula itself, I would recognize, and appreciate, the members' opposite concerns to make sure that we keep our TFF, especially when, in the Council of the Federation, having conversations with provinces about equalization and those types of things. I don't have any reason, at this point — from any of the conversations that I've had with the federal government — that they're going to be changing the algorithms. Now, at the same time, there is a formula here. This is a complicated algorithm, and the member opposite is quite aware of spending, both here and across the country, and how that basically determines the final amounts that are being dedicated to us here in the Yukon.

The TFF is calculated as a grant that equals the gross expenditure base less fiscal capacity. I don't see that changing — the GEB, that's our base, is an approximation of our annual revenue requirements. It's adjusted annually to account for growth in populations in both the territories and also the provinces — and municipal government expenditures, as well. So, as far as concerns, lots of spending during COVID to make sure that we had healthy people. If you have healthy people, you have a healthy economy.

We have had an awful lot of conversation about fiscal capacity. Again, that fiscal capacity, in terms of the formula, is an estimate of Yukon's ability to generate our own-source revenues, and it's calculated as the total revenue that the Yukon could raise from its largest non-transfer revenue sources, if each source were taxed on a national average tax rate from the source. This formula is complicated. Other than the member opposite speculating that this is going to come to an end, I would caution the member opposite on that. Our economy is extremely important about confidence. I have no reason to believe that our TFF is going to be suffering, as far as the calculation, but the member opposite also does know that it's based upon spending, it's based on populations, and that will continue.

Recent federal updated projected growth for all territories, with respect to the TFF, are well in hand. Canada updated the forecast of the TFF to grow from \$4.6 billion, as I mentioned, to \$5.8 billion — of course, this is for all the territories — by 2027-28. So, again, some of the conversations that we've been having with the federal minister — the member opposite might speculate on the end of the TFF or change therein. I would caution the member opposite on that and say that the changes would be based on population and also expenditures.

Mr. Cathers: The Premier, in rising, first made reference to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources keeping statistics about legislative returns and not time spent in debate. We are aware that the minister does that. I, however, can't miss the opportunity to point out, since the Premier raised it, that the minister's time would be better spent ensuring that Yukoners have the ability to get firewood than on keeping statistics about debate here in this Assembly, since he is also responsible for that area. We are facing something that never happened before the Liberals in the Yukon — a firewood shortage and a crisis here in the territory that is leaving many Yukoners having trouble paying for firewood, and others unable to get it or unable to get it in a timely manner.

I am going to go back to the TFF here. The Premier seemed to be suggesting that I was implying that the territorial funding formula would just end. Of course, that was not what I was suggesting.

However, the certainty in that formula ends on March 31, 2024. What we don't know — and in light of comments made by the federal Finance minister about times being tougher at the federal level — though I can't recall her exact phrasing of it. It does create a situation where there is legitimate cause for concern that, as part of budgetary cost-cutting measures, there could be reductions.

The Premier may recall that the Yukon faced this under Prime Minister Chrétien when there was a reduction to the territorial funding formula. If memory serves, it was a 15-percent cut. That seriously impacted the territory's fiscal capacity over the next number of years. We don't know, at this point, if the federal government plans to continue the territorial funding formula at the current trajectory or perhaps make cuts to it. The key question that I am asking comes down to whether the Premier has raised this with the Prime Minister and Minister Freeland, and, if so, when? Has he done it verbally? If that was

the case, can he tell us when? Has he raised this in a letter and, if so, can he provide it?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, this is a conversation that — not only have we been talking with the federal Minister of Finance about it, but also the Council of the Federation, every time we have an opportunity to speak of it.

I just quoted to the member opposite forecasts that go past the deadlines of the territorial formula financing, which is an indication that the only folks necessarily right now who are bringing this up as a concern that something that happened in the past may happen again — is the Yukon Party. I have no reason to believe that it is so. The member opposite most likely did listen to the fall economic statement from the federal Minister of Finance. It is the fiscal update just released from Freeland — the member opposite would know, if he read it — that has those numbers for the forecast increases for the TFF.

He can speculate all he wants as to the end of that, because the Finance minister is doing her utmost to make sure that she presents a budget that is considering the international conflicts that we are in, the supply chain management issues, and the historic spending to keep our country healthy. I have no reason to believe, from the statements that I have heard from the federal minister, that the TFF is in any dire straits or that they are contemplating any changes.

If any of that changes, I will be the first one to be very vocal with the federal government — if that were to come to pass. I am very confident, at this point, that we are not going to see a change to the TFF any time soon.

Mr. Cathers: On the one hand, I'm happy that the Premier is confident that he doesn't think that there will be changes, but I do have to question whether that confidence is well-founded or misplaced.

The fact that Minister Freeland included growth of the TFF in forecasts does not necessarily equal a commitment to the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut.

The Premier vaguely references conversations, but what I am asking for is this: If he has raised this with the Prime Minister and Minister Freeland, can he tell us when he has done that in person? If he has done this in a letter, could he provide us with a copy of any such letter?

Hon. Mr. Silver: You know, conversations are ongoing on every level, from the Department of Finance right up to the minister. It is great to be the Minister of Finance and also the Premier. You do get to double-dip, as it were, when it comes to conversations with federal ministers. These conversations are ongoing, as they always are.

We mention it every time we have a Finance ministers meeting. We talk about our budgeting concerns, our needs, and necessities, but the member opposite is the one who is paranoid or worried that we are losing the TFF. I'm not. When I go in to talk to the federal minister, I'm not saying, "Are we going to lose our TFF?" That would be an ill-sighted approach when it comes to cooperative federalism, but maybe that is what the member opposite's team does when they are in power, in government.

I will also say, as well, that the member opposite can say whatever he wants about a Liberal federal government but, at

the same time, the Minister of Finance has been very upfront with forecasting how the government is going to move forward. I think that it was heard in the fiscal update, but we have also heard that in past Finance ministers' meeting conversations, where the federal minister has talked — and it has been public, as well — about not necessarily austerity measures coming up, but a need in the post-pandemic situations to rein in spending and be fiscally accountable, as the federal minister — again, never mincing words on those things.

So, again, if there was a forecast, I would think that we would be hearing about it from the federal minister. She has never brought up a concern about the TFF when we have had any conversations about equalization — where there is obviously a whole bunch of concerns. If anything, she has been very forthright with Yukon and very plugged into our needs.

If you take a look at some of the new funding announcements that were made, I would say that there is some good news. Again, this isn't necessarily a budget that the federal minister displayed the other day, but it is a forecast — a forecast as to what is going to happen in the next main budgets in the spring.

Also, in that, we pen letters to the federal minister all the time, as far as what our needs are. We do that exercise with the other two territories as well. We talk about how we can coordinate certain needs and priorities to the Finance minister. Of course, there are conversations about the Canada health transfer that are ongoing with the Council of the Federation. When it comes to specific conversations about Yukon needs, we bring that up every time we have a bilateral meeting as well.

Again, the first chapter of her announcement of making life more affordable — \$4 billion over six years mentioned in an automatic advance to the Canada workers benefit, bringing up forecasting, eliminating interest on federal student and apprenticeship loans, rebuilding after natural disasters. Each of these chapters that the federal minister spoke to have some unique opportunities for all of the provinces and territories.

We will be heading to Ottawa with the chiefs to have conversations trilaterally at Yukon Days, which is a new approach that the Yukon Liberals have put into this government when it comes to how we get the best bang for the buck as far as flexibility in dollars. If anything, as well, when it comes to federal funding, it really has been a great partnership that we have had with the federal government as far as, you know, the pockets that we get everything from — gateway funding to the Investing in Canada Infrastructure program, to Arctic funds — the list goes on and on about the target funding that we are getting from this federal government.

I don't see a need to raise a flag of paranoia — sorry, I apologize for that — of concern. I have not seen any indication that the federal Finance minister or the federal government is considering any changes to the algorithms that we currently enjoy.

Mr. Cathers: Well, the Premier can choose, as he has, to dismiss concerns as unfounded, but I would note that the Public Accounts themselves, tabled by the Premier and audited by the Auditor General of Canada, note on page 9 — they talk about the risk associated in this area. I'm going to quote again

— for Hansard, this is page 9 of the Public Accounts for the 2021-22 fiscal year: "In 2021-22, the Government again received 84% of its revenue from the Government of Canada which was within the range of 81% to 85% that has occurred over the past decade. This ratio is consistently high, indicating a reliance on the federal government to finance the Government's activities."

It then goes on to note that the government, in this case referencing the Yukon government — and I quote: "... has little control over these transfers which poses a risk..."

I am not attempting to suggest that we know trouble is coming. What I am asking the Premier — and he seems to be waiting on the federal government to tell him something — the question that I asked, other than the vague conversations and non-specific references, saying that he has raised it at FPT meetings, what I'm asking is what the Premier has done, or his government has done, to seek certainty from the federal government, so that they can be confident that the provisions within the territorial funding formula are going to continue largely unchanged past March 31, 2024. Has he raised that with the Prime Minister or Minister Freeland? If so, when? If he has written any letters to that effect, will he share them? If he hasn't done either of those two things, will he agree to actually proactively seek that certainty from the federal government that the Yukon can be confident that the TFF will continue largely unchanged past its expiration date?

Hon. Mr. Silver: The rabbit hole that the member opposite is going down is an interesting one. The member opposite thinks that there is a bogeyman underneath the bed — I don't. He has asked me if I have asked the federal minister about the bogeyman under bed. No, I haven't, because I don't think there is one.

The member opposite also selectively quotes from the Public Accounts. If he read the next line — well, his quote was that "... the Government has little control over these transfers which poses a risk..." There is no period there; there's actually a comma, and then it says, "... it also represents a relatively stable source of revenue from the Government of Canada, a senior level of government."

You know what? I am not going to take his advice, because I think what we are doing is working, and the results are in the amount of resources that we are getting from the federal government and how we are able to spend those from Public Accounts to Public Accounts.

So, with due respect to the member opposite, I don't suffer from the affliction of thinking that the sky is falling, which the member opposite seems to have. The algorithm, as far as that uncertainty piece, would be the same type of uncertainty that the Yukon Party saw in the algorithm, but again, that uncertainty is based upon the fact that there are a lot of variables inside of that algorithm — populations are increasing, spending is increasing, and so will the TFF.

Now, all of the discussions at the officials level have been looking at technical amendments from the federal government — not flagging that there are going to be major changes — very minimal impact to date. A lot of the conversations, really, are about making sure that we have mirrored legislation for tax

regimes, as well, to the tune of benefiting to Yukoners more than \$2.5 million per year on their income taxes.

When we take a look at our Public Accounts, we are doing very well with the money that we have, and we are seeing that money increase from the federal government. Again, another criticism from the members opposite of there is too much money — we've heard them complaining that the TFF was this massive budget. So, they can't really have it both ways: it's too big, but we're afraid that it is going to go away.

Right now, we have Public Accounts, and the real story is in the details of our Public Accounts, and also, I am telling him, as the minister responsible, that we don't see an issue with anything other than technical amendments being made, which have very minimal impacts to date. One thing that will impact our TFF is the fact that Victoria Gold is now the largest gold mine in Yukon history and that they are producing revenues. These are now own-source revenues, and, of course, if you are producing that own-source revenue, then that will affect the TFF, but in my six years' experience here now, as the Minister of Finance, I do not suffer from the same affliction as the member opposite, as far as worrying about the TFF.

I also know that the importance of a good economy is stability — confidence in government, in our procedures. The member opposite can continue to ask these questions, but I don't think that it serves any purpose, when we answer the question the first time to say: "No, I don't share his concern." I guess we will leave it at that, as far as what have I done? Well, I work very tirelessly in this job, so does the department, and so do all my ministers.

One real benefit, as well, to making sure that we have targeted funding here in the north is our change of approach, compared to the Yukon Party, when it comes to involving the First Nation governments in our trilateral conversations with the federal government.

Mr. Cathers: Unfortunately, the Premier — well, he can suggest that other members are seeing monsters under the bed, but as anyone who has been in the private sector or has dealt with contracts knows, if you don't have certainty past the end date of the contract, there should always be some degree of concern about whether the other party to that contract may choose to change the terms — especially in a situation such as this, when provinces and territories are in a junior position in dealing with the federal government, in that if the federal government chooses to reduce the territorial funding formula — as happened in the 1990s under Prime Minister Chrétien — if they choose to cut the territorial funding formula as part of a budget-cutting exercise, there isn't much that a territory can do about it, other than strongly object and advocate their perspective to the federal government. Ultimately, the federal government maintains that control. When the territorial funding formula was cut under a former federal Liberal government, it may be fair to say that the Finance minister of the day was not anticipating the cut until it occurred.

I am concerned that the Premier has not gone as far as I believe he should have in seeking certainty of that continued, stable fiscal picture from the federal government after 2024.

Clearly, he seems to see this as the next person's problem, rather than his, so I will move on to other issues.

I will ask the Premier about sustainable health care funding. There was a release from Canada's Premiers issued on November 8. This release, I believe, would be available online for anyone who has not read it. It notes that no progress was achieved at that federal government to ensure sustainable health care funding. Ottawa, November 8, 2022 — and I quote: "As federal-provincial-territorial Ministers of Health meet in Vancouver, Canada's Premiers reiterated their urgent call for a new and sustainable health care funding partnership with the federal government through the Canada Health Transfer (CHT).

"Provinces and territories are working hard to improve the health services that Canadians rely on that have been under heavy strain through the COVID-19 pandemic. Substantive resources are required to support and accelerate this essential work, and provinces and territories need a predictable federal funding partner.

"Premiers are disappointed with the lack of a federal response on the critical issue of sustainable health funding. They continue to call on the federal government to increase the CHT so that its share of provincial and territorial health care costs rises from 22% to 35%, and to maintain this level over time."

Does the Premier agree with this release? Does he share the disappointment of other premiers, and did he sign off on this release himself?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Going back to the previous question about TFF and certainty, there's also, not necessarily from that perspective, certainty on equalization payments, either, but there is a constitutional requirement from the federal government to have these conversations, and these conversations are ongoing. So, it is extremely important to understand the constitutional requirements, and again, we don't seem to agree on whether or not TFF is going to be continuing. Because I don't have the paranoia of the member opposite, doesn't mean that I am downloading this responsibility on to any next ministers or premiers. We've done a lot of due diligence, and we have the best economy in Canada — we have the lowest unemployment rate in Canada, and we have a growing TFF. The member opposite is not asking about that; he's asking: "When is it going to end?" We don't think its going to.

When it comes to CHT, if there's a statement from the Council of the Federation, all premiers sign off on those statements. When it comes to the importance of a Canada health transfer keeping up with the pace of the needs of Canadians, both the federal government and the provinces and territories, agree that the federal government must put more money on the table when it comes to the Canada health transfer. Yukon, Northwest Territories, and also Nunavut are in very unique situations in that our direct funding per capita in the CHT is a huge consideration, but not as big as other things, like the territorial health investment fund — THIF.

In 2021 budget, the Government of Canada announced \$12.8 million over two years to renew that agreement with our

government; previous health transfers spanned four fiscal years. We're seeing two years as a renewal, right now, and that territorial health investment fund is very important. That money sounds like a small amount of money, but it is an extremely important source of funding for us and for the other territories. We are extremely thankful that this funding has provided essential supports to system improvements, to addressing the gaps and challenges and the delivery of health care in northern jurisdictions, and also offsetting necessary medical costs and access to equitable care. We stand in agreement with the provinces. We need to get the federal government to the First Ministers' meetings table — to the FMM table — to have a conversation about what is needed to modernize this system.

Now, I am going to give credit to outgoing Premier Jason Kenney, who has sat both in a federal government and also as Premier. In very early conversations — you know, this isn't my first round of having CHT conversations. In his first year — in talking about his experience as a federal minister in this area, it is really important that provinces and territories also showcase what we are doing to modernize, what we are doing to upgrade when it comes to technologies, and that is where *Putting People First* comes from. That was an extremely important part — to show that we are the best source of information — the Department of Health and Social Services and its partners in health care are the best sources of information — for calculating the need when it comes to changes to the Canadian health transfer.

I know that the department has done an impeccable job of identifying our need to go from — when the Yukon Party was in, we had an acute care system. We are now into a collaborative care system — a full spectrum of care. This comes with new expenses. What also comes with new expenses are the rates of new cancers — specific cancers that are happening in younger and younger populations right across this country. My brother is a radiologist in Nova Scotia and has been scared to death, really, with uses of preservatives in our food and how that affects our health. We are very lucky to live on the land here, as much as we possibly can in the Yukon. We are very lucky to be able to access the land, and we are also extremely grateful to our agricultural community for increasing our ability to grow locally and, therefore, the need to use fewer preservatives. But, again, this is just one specific conversation that is going on — about how important it is that the federal government maintains its part of the deal when it comes to health, because it is a shared responsibility.

Again, it's a letter that the member opposite is quoting from, the Council of the Federation, then he can be guaranteed that every premier, including myself, has signed off on that document.

We need a long-term financial boost, and our funding will help implement the *Putting People First* plan. That took a lot of work. It's leading the country. It is already proving to improve quality and access to care for Yukoners. We do have supply chain issues right now, human resources issues right now — nationally, internationally and locally. We are not alone in feeling the pressures that we face when it comes to health transfers. I have been very committed in working with the

premiers and also the federal government to find ways to support our health care professionals and to ensure that Yukoners get the care that they support and deserve.

I am definitely looking forward to having dialogue among the First Ministers so that our health systems are well-resourced and prepared for future challenges. To help address some of the district challenges, Yukon does receive funding through, as I mentioned, our THIF, which is the territorial health investment fund, in addition to the health care transfer. Those are two separate conversations, thank goodness. That territorial health investment fund enables us to really invest in innovation, which is extremely important, to enhance services in our small and more remote areas and communities.

We have done a lot of work in pre-surgery consultations with upgrading our health care system. I know that early discussions are underway between the federal government and the territorial offices on the next iteration of the territorial health investment funding, which is extremely important as well.

I would also say that the premiers in the provinces — I have to give credit where credit is due. When you think about the politics right across Canada — we have premiers who are NDP, Conservative, and Liberal — the conversations are very respectful and very to the point about what is best for Canadians. That's what I really appreciate about the Council of the Federation — so much so, to see John Horgan, the Premier of British Columbia, try to even — with the blessing of all of the Council of the Federation — go to Ottawa with a sub-bar conversation with a representative of a blue province, a red province, and an orange province — having conversations on behalf of our Council of the Federation with the decision-makers in Ottawa, trying our best to get the federal government to the table to have this conversation because it's extremely important for Canadians. It's time we get on with understanding what level of funding we are going to see from the federal government.

Mr. Cathers: As the Premier knows, the press release from Canada's Premiers noted — and I quote: "For over two years Premiers have been asking the Prime Minister to discuss their number one priority and the number one priority of Canadians in all provinces and territories — health care. Despite repeated invitations and efforts by Premiers to engage with the Prime Minister, he has not engaged in a meaningful dialogue with Premiers on a renewed health care funding partnership."

As the Premier made reference to, the Yukon does get — and, of course, the Canada health transfer funding is important. That funding does not address the unique needs of the north in the same way that THIF, which was originally THAF, was intended to do as a result of the joint effort of the three governments — the Yukon, NWT, and Nunavut — to seek that federal funding, recognizing our unique needs and increased costs due to having small populations and large regions.

The Premier made reference to conversations about THIF, and I am pleased to hear that there has been some work on that. Can the Premier talk about what work is being done currently with the NWT and Nunavut to seek an increase to the THIF?

What request has been made from the three territories as far as an increase to that funding? As the Premier will recall, the actual amount of the funding has not increased much since it was set up roughly 15 years ago. So, are the three territories working together jointly to request an increase to the THIF that the three territories receive? If so, what is the status of that work?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I cannot, but that would be a conversation for the Department of Health and Social Services as far as what their approach is to these ongoing conversations. In general debate, I can say that those conversations are ongoing. As far as the extent and who is involved, that is a question for the minister.

Mr. Cathers: Okay, Madam Chair, I would have hoped the Premier would be more actively involved in that, as Finance minister, just as the initial request for that money actually was made by three premiers jointly on the national stage, but I guess that is his position on it.

So, I want to move on to the issue of doctors. We heard the Minister of Health and Social Services, surprisingly, make a recent statement saying that she isn't convinced we necessarily need more doctors in the Yukon. In contrast, of course, we see that — according to a report that the minister likes to cite — over one-fifth of Yukoners do not have a family doctor, and we know that, as of the most recent numbers that we have been given, over 3,300 Yukoners are currently on the government's wait-list for a family doctor.

So, what is the Premier's view? Does he share the minister's view that the Yukon doesn't actually need more family doctors?

Hon. Mr. Silver: As the member opposite often does, he tries to make it sound like we are not working collaboratively with each other. Again, we are in general debate, and if the member opposite really wants to hear responses about the negotiations that Health and Social Services is doing, then he should write Health and Social Services. But, in general, when it comes to negotiating status, I can speak in general to that to the House. I don't know if the member opposite wants to.

We are calling on the federal government to increase their contributions to the Canada health transfer — we talked about that. But the long-term financial boost is extremely important — we talked about that. I am definitely looking forward to those conversations continuing. As I said, there are some early discussions on the way when it comes to THIF. Again, to add some clarity, as well, we are not negotiating, individually in any province or territory, the Canada health transfer. When it comes to the territorial health investment fund, this is a regional specific funding that we are absolutely moving forward on.

My responsibility is with the Canada health transfer; the minister's responsibility is with THIF. THSSI would be another example of some historical funding. The member opposite mentioned another one, just to add to that conversation. Again, he can make it sound, as his leader does, that I am somehow out of touch.

That is a narrative that they keep pulling on. It is simply not true, and we will just continue to do the good work of negotiating in good faith with the federal government, and

advocating for the unique circumstances of the northern people, when it comes to equal access to health care in Canada and how important that is in the context of — well, in the context of living and doing work here in the north, which is extremely — comparatively to more southern jurisdictions — it is extremely more complex. It gets even more complex as you get into some of the other territories — you know, lack of roads comparatively in Nunavut, as we go east to our brothers and sisters living in Nunavut, compared to Yukon, which only has one fly-in community. Again, trying our best to — whether it is my conversations with the premiers, or the federal Minister of Health Duclos, or conversations with our territorial and provincial ministers, those conversations are ongoing and extremely important.

When it comes to physicians, I also was sitting here listening to the conversations in Question Period, and I stand behind my Minister of Health and Social Services on how she has identified the need, and also identified the global shortages that are affecting every jurisdiction in Canada, and all of the good work that the minister and her team are doing to do the best we can to connect Yukoners to physicians. She spoke of the 1,296 Yukoners who have been connected to a physician through Find a Doctor. I know that the member opposite has a different opinion, and that is his to have.

In the 2021-22 fiscal year, we contributed \$3.31 million to support physician benefit programs, the majority of which are administered by the Yukon Medical Association. Again, since the Find a Family Doctor program was launched, 4,637 unique applications have been received, and 1,296 Yukoners have been connected to a physician through this program. Based upon 2017-18 data, *Putting People First* found that approximately 21 percent of Yukoners do not have access to physicians — comparing that to very similar rates right across Canada.

What the department and the minister are doing to make sure that we connect Yukoners to doctors, I think, is important work. It is bearing fruit. We will always recognize that there are pressures, for sure. Our doctors and nurses — I shouldn't say it that way; it's not a competition — but they were stretched during COVID. They worked extremely hard and were dedicated, like they are as professionals, and we are there to support them, and we will continue to invest in recruitment.

Again, I do agree with the minister, as well, that when folks do arrive here, whether you are a school teacher, a nurse, or a doctor, it's the amazing community that we have — the amazing vistas — and Yukon is the best place on the planet to live. That is the great part of the recruitment tool in general. When you take a look at our communities and the fresh air that we have, coupled as well with how a lot of the doctors who are coming through the education system are looking for balance in their lives. I mentioned my brother earlier. I didn't see the guy for 20 years, because all he did was work, but that has changed now. It's different. Again, working all the time is not necessarily the best way of doing things if you want to balance your life. Understanding that doctors and nurses want to balance their lifestyles, as well, coming to the Yukon, whatever your pursuits are — getting out on the land, hunting or fishing — this is a great place to live.

I would say that I completely have the utmost confidence in the minister and the department in recruiting.

Mr. Cathers: Well, unfortunately, there are a lot of issues here. The Premier suggested that it was not reasonable to expect to know what is happening or not happening regarding negotiating the continuation, and hopefully an increase, to the THIF funding. I have been in the position of being the Health minister before. I find it very hard to believe, considering that, when I was in that role, if I was doing work of that type, not only the Premier, but, in fact, my Cabinet and caucus colleagues would be regularly updated on what work was going on in that area. Certainly, in facing a legislative session, it would be important enough to my colleagues that they would want to know what the answer was to that issue, even if they were not the one being called on to answer the questions.

The Minister of Health and Social Services was quoted by the *Whitehorse Star* on Monday of this week as saying — and I quote: “I don’t necessarily agree that we don’t have enough doctors here in the territory...”

My question for the minister is this: Does he agree with the minister’s statement? Does he agree that the Yukon doesn’t actually need more family doctors?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I completely endorse my minister and her team at Health and Social Services in their endeavours to recruit. I believe the minister was making points of the good work they have done with the Find a Doctor program. I am going to leave it at that, but I will also say that it is interesting that the member opposite, who was a minister of Finance, expects general debate to be the place where the government would make new announcements about any of the conversations that are happening, as we move forward to renegotiate THIF funding. I don’t recall ever, in my five years in opposition, hearing new news being announced in Health by the Yukon Party on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. Except for once, when the Minister of Health and Social Services announced a 300-bed facility in Whistle Bend without government knowing about it.

Other than that, no, it’s not the regular process for the Premier to be stealing the thunder of the department and waiting until general debate for the critic of Health and Social Services to ask a question, and then, okay, perfect; we finally have the opportunity to announce something we have been waiting and holding.

Those announcements will come out as those negotiations are happening with the federal government.

Again, there were meetings with federal Minister Duclos just last week, which our minister was involved with. I completely support and endorse, not only the minister and her commitment to this file, but also the department’s ability, in these very, very trying times, to recruit.

Mr. Cathers: I will begin by correcting the Premier. I was not actually the Minister of Finance, as he stated I was.

I would ask the Premier in this area — he talked about the money budgeted for providing to the Yukon Medical Association for physician recruitment initiatives, but the amount he has budgeted this year does raise the question of whether the government is actually going to provide that

money. I would ask the Premier this: Does he know how much money the government actually provided the Yukon Medical Association in this area for the last fiscal year? Because what they budgeted and what they gave the Yukon Medical Association are two significantly different things.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, what I did say is that, in the 2021-22 fiscal year, we contributed \$3.31 million to support physician benefit programs, the majority of which are administered by the Yukon Medical Association. When it comes to negotiations with the Yukon Medical Association, a new three-year agreement has been announced with the Yukon Medical Association on the new memorandum of understanding. The agreement covers the period of April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2025. The Yukon Medical Association membership ratified the agreement on September 30. This agreement will support a strong, healthy community of primary health care providers. It is going to help increase Yukoners’ access to primary care services.

There are lots of highlights in this new agreement, including new attachment and attraction programs that will work to increase Yukon’s access to primary and specialty care, while also supporting physicians’ operating costs; the creation of an equity, diversity, and inclusion learning program; a commitment to help end systemic racism and discrimination in the health care system through learned behaviour and change; and also a commitment to work with Yukon First Nations’ health system partners and other service providers to support collaborative maternity and early years care.

So, again, this speaks to the commitment that we have to maintaining — to continuing to work with the Yukon Medical Association to implement the agreements, and to contribute to a health care system that provides Yukoners with access to the right providers, the right locations, and at the right time, which is extremely important.

Our new agreements provide incentives for our doctors to take on more patients. So, when you take a look at the negotiations — the money given to the association and all of the sweat equity that is getting into retention and recruitment, I would say that the member opposite is only giving part of the information, whereas there is a plethora of work happening right now. Again, in general debate, I will speak generally about these things, and the minister responsible can articulate more specifics.

Mr. Cathers: Of course, as the Premier knows, if the minister wanted to answer the questions, she could choose to stand and provide those answers here now. It is simply a choice by the government to choose not to answer questions when they are asked.

But again, what the government budgets and indicates at the start of the year, when there is more attention always on the government’s main estimates than there is on the Public Accounts — but what is budgeted and what is actually done by this government are often two different things. According to the Public Accounts, despite having budgeted \$3.5 million for the Yukon Medical Association for the line item entitled, “physician recruitment/retention initiatives”, what was actually provided in the last fiscal year was over \$1.1 million less than

that — \$2.377 million — which is a reduction of about one-third, Madam Chair, from what the government indicated in their budget that they would be providing. That is a pretty significant discrepancy, especially at a time when, if you ask most Yukoners whether the family doctor shortage is a crisis, many would say yes. I can pretty much guarantee you that, of the over one-fifth of Yukoners who don't have a family doctor, most of them would agree that it is a crisis.

If it is not affecting ministers personally, perhaps it is not as top of mind for them, but when the Minister of Health and Social Services, who is responsible for this file, made comments — as she did, as quoted in Monday's *Whitehorse Star* — that suggested that there isn't really a problem, that we don't really need more doctors — that is very concerning to me because I hear from Yukoners all the time who can't get a family doctor and desperately want one.

When the government budgets \$3.5 million and actually only provides two-thirds of that to the Yukon Medical Association, that is something that they should be held to account for, which is what our job is here in the Assembly.

Moving on to the new agreement that they have signed with the Yukon Medical Association — the memorandum of agreement, as, I believe, the Premier referred to it — we are happy to hear that a new agreement has been signed. We have heard feedback from physicians that, in response to years of efforts on our part to prod the government to do more on family doctor recruitment and putting in place modern incentives, there was actually some action in that area.

What we don't have from the Premier, other than a vague listing of topics, is specifics on what the government is actually doing.

Can the Premier tell us here what the government is actually providing under those items that he listed? What do those supports look at and what are the financial amounts, because, ultimately, this is taxpayers' money and people who are desperately looking for government to take action to help them get a family doctor want to see meaningful details from the government on what they are doing. They don't just want to hear talking points.

Hon. Mr. Silver: It is interesting that the member opposite spoke about the differences between mains and Public Accounts. We saw the Yukon Party on a regular basis announce massive amounts of capital spending, and then the Public Accounts would come in and it was not even close — on a regular basis. This is the same government that would then ridicule our five-year capital plan, which really did help to ensure that what we build, compared to what we say we are going to build — the margins have been a lot tighter than the Yukon Party — and a lot tighter than the Yukon Party during a global pandemic as well, I might add.

Interestingly enough, the member opposite talked about the money given to the Yukon Medical Association. He talked about the \$3.2 million actual compared to — I think he said it was the \$2.3 million in reality. He didn't list the rest of the numbers that do flow down from that — the half-million dollars for medical practice insurance, the \$368,000 for education, and also the \$75,000 for medical student bursaries. So, it is more. It

looks like about close to \$1 million more than the member opposite spoke about. Really, there are going to be differences, for sure, from actuals versus expenditures on a regular basis from Public Accounts to Public Accounts.

But, suffice to say, access to prime care is extremely important, and it is a challenge in many jurisdictions. We are all facing these global health human resources challenges. We are working extremely hard; the department is working extremely hard with their partners to respond to these challenges and to explore, in my opinion, very creative solutions to connect Yukoners with primary health care providers. I will leave the details to the department here in general debate.

Strong and healthy communities — that is extremely important, especially communities of primary health care providers. That is extremely essential and critical to ensuring that Yukoners have access to excellent primary health care services, and we are going to continue down that path. We are committed to working with the Yukon Medical Association. We talked about data from *Putting People First*, as far as national averages — averages in each jurisdiction. Knowing that, based upon that data from *Putting People First*, approximately 21 percent of Yukoners not having access to a family physician — that is compared to 63 percent in the Northwest Territories, 86 percent in Nunavut, and 21.5 percent in Québec.

So, again, the member opposite can say that we are not doing enough. I guess that is the job of opposition. I respect that, but I believe that the approach from the department and the minister is bearing fruit, and the pages of *Putting People First* is a great document to guide us in this transition to a health authority and also to better collaborative care for all Yukoners.

Mr. Cathers: The Premier suggested that I was not presenting the correct numbers, but I point out to him that the numbers are coming from page 196 of the government's Public Accounts, audited by the Auditor General and tabled by him. Under that item — under the heading "Yukon Medical Association — physician recruitment/retention initiatives", it indicates that in the main estimates — also commonly known as the government's mains or the budget — the total was \$3,518,000 that was budgeted for the line item "physician recruitment/retention initiatives". Right next to it, it indicates the amount in the revised estimates being the same, and then it indicates in the next column that the actual expenditure was \$2,377,705, so, again, a drop of — on that same line — \$1.1 million-plus from what was mentioned and what was actually delivered.

Now, we are hearing from physicians as well that physician burnout is an issue. We have heard Yukon doctors indicate that, as quoted by media at their annual general meeting, referencing that as an item of high concern. The *Whitehorse Star* noted in their article from November 7 that — and I quote: "Burnout, recruitment and government collaboration: those three issues are the most pressing for the territory's doctors, if the Yukon Medical Association's (YMA's) annual general meeting was any indication."

The Premier doesn't seem to like me raising the minister's comments and is trying to walk away from them while claiming to support the minister. But, on the one hand, we see Yukon patients, who want a family doctor and can't get one, numbering in the thousands, according to the government's own wait-list — wanting to see more family doctors in the territory, and doctors themselves citing burnout as a top issue. Hearing the Minister of Health and Social Services publicly state that — and, again, I quote: “I don't necessarily agree that we don't have enough doctors here in the territory...” It is a concerning statement, because it suggests that the Minister of Health and Social Services is completely out of touch with both patients and physicians here in the territory. She is not understanding the severity of the need of Yukoners who can't get a family doctor or the fact that doctors here in the territory are citing burnout as a serious issue.

We also heard physicians expressing concern about wait times and noting that it is becoming a more serious problem. I raised this issue previously in Question Period. I tabled a motion regarding it. We got a non-answer from the minister on this topic where she went on to talk about completely unrelated things to surgical wait times, reading off — it would appear — the wrong briefing note.

The question that I have to ask the Premier is this: Does the government recognize that this is a growing issue of seriousness? Yukon physicians are raising this as a problem. Yukon Hospital Corporation witnesses, when they have appeared here in the Assembly, have specifically noted their concern with the length of wait times for a long list of procedures and said that they are not meeting the national benchmarks or medically accepted benchmarks. The question for the Premier is this: Does he understand this issue?

Are they actually committed to doing something on this by working with our health care professionals to develop a wait-time reduction action plan, or is he going to dismiss the issue, as his minister did?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I have heard my minister speak a lot about burnout, recognizing that, right across the health care continuum, including doctors, nurses, and others as well, that this is a real and pressing issue in Yukon communities, in British Columbia communities, right across the country, and right across the world — absolutely. The member opposite can hurl insults and then conveniently take partial quotes, if he wants, but I have heard my minister speak about the necessity to recognize burnout as an extremely important part of us providing not only the programs and services for Yukoners, but actually the care and support for those who are providing that care — folks like community nurses, for example, working tirelessly to provide Yukoners with health care services. They play an integral role in our ongoing response throughout the whole pandemic; wait-lists were created by that pandemic.

I hope the member opposite would give a grain and recognize that these things are happening right across the world. I would hope he would also recognize the important work that the department is doing with its stakeholders and the Yukon Medical Association, and the work that we are doing to make sure that we continue to mitigate the increased pressures

resulting in local, national, and global shortages of health care providers. It is trying times, absolutely.

The Department of Health and Social Services has undertaken a lot of different actions to attract and retain both doctors and nurse practitioners, registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, registered psychiatric nurses, and health care aides right across the communities.

As far as national standards, we talked about the comparison to other jurisdictions with Yukon, as far as percentages. As concerned as we are here, there are bigger concerns in other jurisdictions, as well. I think that the department and the minister are doing an exceptional job of doing their best to retain and recruit in some extremely trying times, nationally and internationally.

Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Bill No. 206, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Is there any further general debate?

Mr. Cathers: So, continuing on with the questions that I was asking the Premier, again, we are asking — first of all, I should remind the Premier that we are asking questions on behalf of Yukoners who are concerned with these issues. We didn't dream up the issue of Yukoners who want to get a doctor and don't have one. That is something that, for thousands of people, that is their reality, and some of them are in situations where they are concerned about their health and need access to health care that they are not getting.

As well, we have heard those concerns coming from physicians around burnout. At the Yukon Medical Association's meeting, as noted by CBC Yukon in an article about it, posted November 7 — and I quote: “Physician burnout and growing wait times for care were common themes at the Yukon Medical Association's annual meeting this weekend in Whitehorse.” — ending my quote from the article there.

It further goes on to note that the president-elect of the Canadian Medical Association said — and I quote: “... close to 50 per cent of physicians reported wanting to take a step back and reduce their clinical hours, according to a recent survey carried out by the CMA.” Further in the article, it notes that this was raised, as well, by local doctors — and I quote: “Those wait times...” Actually, I will step back just a line, Madam Chair — and I quote: “Growing surgery wait times” — it says: “Those wait times were brought up at the YMA meeting during time allotted for questions with...” — and then it uses the name of the Minister of Health and Social Services; resuming from the article — and I quote: “‘We're currently struggling to keep up with giving Yukoners the surgical services that they need,’ Dr. Alexander Poole, a surgeon in the territory, told ...” — and then again, it has the name of the minister.

So, Madam Chair, this is a real concern for us, and a real concern for Yukoners. Again, as I noted when I raised this issue with the Minister of Health and Social Services, the issue of long wait times, she read talking points that were only very loosely related, at best, to the topic at hand.

This government, unfortunately, has a pattern of confusing talking points with action. We often hear a narrative from them that suggests that everything is wonderful. The Premier cited comparisons to the number of Yukoners without family doctors in the other two territories and seemed to be suggesting that things were fine here. But, Madam Chair, for thousands of Yukoners who are waiting for a family doctor, the situation is not fine.

What we are looking for are specifics about what, if anything, the government is doing. I would ask the Premier for more information about what tangible numbers are addressed to the items he referenced in the new agreement with the Yukon Medical Association.

The second issue that he also did not directly address is the issue of surgical wait times. Is this government prepared to recognize that more needs to be done and commit to working with Yukon physicians and other health care providers on a surgical and specialist wait-time reductions action plan? Will they commit to doing that, in partnership with Yukon physicians, other health providers, and key partners, including the Yukon Hospital Corporation?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Madam Chair, it probably won't surprise you that I will disagree with a lot of the preamble from the member opposite, as far as our care — both our health care and our urgent necessity as ministers. I will respectfully disagree with the member opposite, and also in terms of his characterizations of me and the minister, as far as not giving full responses. I will do my best to talk about this issue with the member opposite here in general debate, and then ask again, if there's anything left from the conversation — more than able, the member opposite — to write any specific questions to the minister. We talked today about how our government is absolutely committed to increasing access to primary health care services. We don't take this lightly at all, contrary to what the member opposite would have you believe, and also to working with our physician partners. We believe, on this side of the Legislative Assembly, that access to primary health care is a challenge in many jurisdictions.

He could say, because I say that, that I am somehow trying to belittle the need here — we are one of those jurisdictions. So, he is wrong in that accusation. This is, again, faced by global, health human resources challenges that are happening right across the planet — definitely in every jurisdiction in Canada — and, again, including Yukon. We are working with our partners to respond to these challenges as best as possible, and, again, we spoke today at length about how we believe that there are very creative solutions that the associations here, together — the partners in health are working together to connect Yukoners with primary health care providers.

I spoke today about how it's important to have strong and healthy communities, and a strong healthy community of primary care providers — that's extremely essential. So, we're

not belittling this at all. We need to ensure that Yukoners have access to excellent primary health care services, whether it's in times of pandemic or in general — it's tough living in the north, and the federal government has an obligation to provide health care to every Canadian, and there are some unique circumstances about living in the north.

I did mention some rates — comparatively — of the two other territories. I guess I'm not allowed to do that, in the member opposite's view, but yet, at the same time, he's saying, why don't we do what the Northwest Territories does? So, he can compare, but I guess, I'm not allowed to. That's fine.

We are extremely committed to continue to work with partners like, for example, the Yukon Medical Association. We talked about the negotiations there — they're successfully concluding — and that's great to see. We talked about how, in 2021-22, we did contribute \$3.31 million to support physician benefit programs, the majority of which are administered by the Yukon Medical Association. The member opposite said that, when it comes to another dollar value, as far as money in the Public Accounts given to the Yukon Medical Association, we give them an allotment. If they don't spend it all, then again, a lot of this time is because of the services provided. It's better to have more money and have them spend less. This public accounting is the accurate accounting of how much of that money that was administered through the Yukon Medical Association was spent. We talked a bit about data, about national averages, and the percentage differences with us compared to the territories. I think that's important information to talk about.

Another thing that I can add — again, because we do take this seriously and numbers do matter — is that physician counts, according to Scott's Medical Database, are extremely important numbers. We take a look at Yukon's supply of resident physicians increasing by 13.1 percent from 2015 to 2021. We have seen that between 2015 and 2021, in calendar years, the Yukon's supply of resident specialists — not just necessarily physicians, but specialists — increased by 81.8 percent. During the 2021 calendar year, the Yukon was supported by 69 residential physicians, 20 specialists, 69 visiting physicians, and also 69 visiting specialists. The numbers are going up.

We know that when it comes to bursaries, financial supports are available to medical students through the department's medical education bursary program. This is valued at \$5,000 per applicant each year, for a total of \$20,000 over four years. Those recipients who enter a medical residency can receive an additional two years of funding that is valued at \$7,500 per year, for a total of \$15,000. Based on recent applicant numbers, the number of bursaries is meeting the current level of interest, which is great to see. Yukon residents who are studying medicine or intending to study medicine can apply to other funding programs that are administered through the Canadian Medical Association, through the First Nation Health Programs at Whitehorse General Hospital, and also the Yukon Foundation.

When we are talking about medical walk-in clinics, we are committed to working with our partners to increase Yukoners'

access to primary health care in this pursuit as well. We are working with physicians, nurse practitioners, and other health providers to think creatively about the challenges that we face and how to best take action to meet that need. All options are on the table when we work with our health care community. New attachment and attraction programs were mentioned today with the Yukon Medical Association as just one way that we hope to work together to help Yukoners access the primary health care that they need. We hope that this new program will help to attract new physicians to the territory and also help to support existing family doctors as well, to increase their patient caseloads.

We are going to continue to connect Yukoners to primary and specialty care through that Find a Family Doctor program and support private health care practices and explore walk-in clinic options.

We talked today about the negotiations with the Yukon Medical Association — a three-year agreement — fantastic to see that concluding and ratified in September. We talked about some of the main highlights of that, including the attraction and retention programs, the creation of an equity, diversity, and inclusion learning program, a commitment to work with Yukon First Nations and health care partners. We spoke today about our commitment to working with the Yukon Medical Association to implement the agreements over the next few years and to continue to build that health care system that provides Yukoners with the access to the right provider, the right location, at the right time.

As far as options, in consideration of accessing, since 2016, we have increased the number of in-territory residents — pediatrics, orthopaedics, psychiatric support, as well as an expanding scope of practice for pharmacists. Again, the Find a Family Doctor program, in partnership with the Yukon Medical Association, connecting Yukoners to family physicians — over 1,000. We are continuing to increase the number of nurse practitioners across the Yukon — supporting nurse practitioners to use their full scope of practice to increase access to primary health care services in all communities, and exploring options for nurse practitioners to take on their own patients, their own patient rosters. Primary care is also provided through our registered nurses and working in an expanded scope of practice in rural communities that don't have hospitals.

We are definitely doing a lot and, again, identifying that there are pressures. It is not optimal, but, at the same time, there is an awful lot of work that's going on here with the minister and the department — working to open up a bilingual health centre, now known as the Constellation Health Centre, which will be serviced by a number of health care providers, physicians, and nurse practitioners.

Yukoners who require care may access supports through the general hospital here in Whitehorse — the emergency room, which offers a fast-track program from Mondays to Fridays to assist patients with less acute care needs. So, again, working with what we have now — trying to make best practices with what we have while still working on recruitment — again, all within a national and global shortage of health care providers.

It's a huge challenge that we are working on with all of our partners to deal with and address. We are also working with other governments to identify and implement solutions. No one approach would be the solution to this challenge. We need to have a whole bunch of different approaches and be creative in the approach.

We did provide \$50,000 to the Yukon Medical Association to financially support a physician locum recruiter.

When it comes to specifically working with our community partners, we are working with our partners to expand access to primary health care services in communities. In April of last year, the previous resident physician in Haines Junction, serving communities along the north highway, did not extend their contract. While recruitment was underway, two contracted Whitehorse-based physicians — again, trying to solve problems within the system as we have it — providing virtual care to residents at least twice a week, as well as supplemental in-person visits to the community.

In October of this year, a new resident physician joined the Haines Junction community. This physician is based in Haines Junction at the health centre and provides services to the communities along the highway. This is, again, fantastic news and contrary to the member opposite trying to make it seem like we're not taking the situation seriously and that we're not doing as much as we possibly can to make sure that Yukoners have the access to nurses and doctors that they deserve, and, at the same time, knowing that there is burnout. We have recognized that as well. We have a priority to address the service needs of Yukoners, so that is extremely important.

Our investments have resulted in improving wait times for multiple specialist services, including ophthalmology, pediatrics, psychiatrics, and orthopaedics. Managing hospital occupancy and ensuring patients receive the care at the right place and the right time — that remains a daily priority for us.

In this fiscal year, we are investing \$442,000 in an ophthalmology program. This represents a 75-percent increase over our commitment during the 2021-22 fiscal year. In July of this year — 2022 — a total of 124 cataract surgeries had been completed in the fiscal year. The program is on target to completing 570 cataract surgeries this fiscal year.

July 1 of this year — a total of 15 hip and 12 knee replacement surgeries have been completed, addressing a backlog because of the pandemic. The program is on target to complete 100 total joint replacements this fiscal year. In July of this year as well, the cast clinic has supported 566 visits in the fiscal year.

Let's talk about our MRI. The hospital is following national guidelines in triage of MRI referrals to ensure that those with the highest needs are supported and that they receive that support first. Again, as of July 1 of this year, a total of 652 MRIs had been completed. Also, urgent MRI cases are completed within less than seven days. For semi-urgent MRI cases, the aim is to support as close to 30 days as possible. Again, as of July 1 of this year, semi-urgent cases were being completed within 22 days. Non-urgent MRI cases — we are attempting to support as close to a 90-day window as possible.

When we did the statistical analysis in July, non-urgent cases are being completed within 105 days.

The Hospital Corporation is using a combination of part-time locums and casual technologists to ensure that acute and time-sensitive exams are completed in a timely manner.

Let's talk a bit about obstetrics and gynecology, which are based at the independent clinic in Whitehorse. In partnership with resident OB/GYNs, we have recruited a second resident specialist who started in August of this year, and we are working to explore options to increase the access to obstetrics/gynecological services to three full-time OB/GYNs.

Again, these are some great examples of the work that we are doing to make sure that Yukoners have the care that they desire and that they deserve. The wait times for non-urgent services in the OB/GYN world — approximately 10 months. With this second resident OB/GYN specialist in place, we are anticipating that this wait-list will steadily reduce, which is extremely important as well.

For ophthalmology, in 2019, we implemented a two-year plan to successfully reduce wait times for cataract assessments, as I mentioned. This plan has been extended to the current year, supporting wait times.

We are meeting our target of completing those cataract assessments within four months. Targeted wait times for cataract surgery is six months and currently is 15 months. So, the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the Department of Health and Social Services are partnering with the ophthalmologists and currently on track to having this wait time within target by the end of the fiscal year. So, a lot of effort is being done between the minister, her department, the Hospital Corporation, our partners over in the Yukon Medical Association as well — extremely important.

I will mention one more — again, the member opposite is trying to make it sound like we don't care, or that we are not doing the work, so it is important to get this information out in the Legislative Assembly. Orthopaedic specialists — in 2017, we introduced the resident orthopaedic program in Whitehorse. Today, this program is supported by three resident orthopaedic surgeons.

In 2017-18, a total of 28 joint replacements were performed, only allowing for knee replacements in the Yukon. In 2021-22, the first in-territory hip replacement surgery was performed, and this year, the program is on track to complete 100 joint replacements. The current wait time is coming down, as well, for knees.

So, again, respectfully to the member opposite, to characterize this government as not using its resources and not caring, just because we are identifying that we are in a global human resources situation, is just simply not accurate. I try my best, in the time that I have available today, to talk about some of the initiatives that the Department of Health and Social Services and the Hospital Corporation are doing to work in these trying times to increase access to services for Yukoners.

Mr. Cathers: I thank the Premier for his long speech, and just for the record, that is sarcasm, but I note that his response to the literally thousands of Yukoners who are on the doctor wait-list is basically to shrug his shoulders and say

everything is fine, the government is doing enough. Madam Chair, the government is not doing enough.

Those thousands of Yukoners — over one-fifth of the population, according to the government's own estimates — do not have a family doctor, and this is causing serious issues for our fellow Yukoners who do not have a family physician. The government is not doing enough. The approach of the Premier and his Minister of Health and Social Services is somewhat reminiscent of the famous story of Emperor Nero fiddling while Rome burned.

In contrast, let me point out where the government has actually cut supports for Yukoners in this area. The Premier talked about the medical education bursary being \$5,000. Madam Chair, when I announced that bursary as Health minister 16 years ago —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Chair: The Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes, on a point of order.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We just passed rules here in this House about non-gendered forms of address, and I think the members from the SCREP committee — so, I believe we are no longer using the term that he used for you, as Chair.

Chair: Member for Lake Laberge, on the point of order.

Mr. Cathers: The report allowed discretion in addressing the presiding officers, contrary to what the minister said. As for me, if any Chair or Speaker wishes me to use a non-gendered form, upon request, I will certainly do that.

Chair's ruling

Chair: I am fine with being addressed as "Madam Chair".

Please continue.

Mr. Cathers: So, back to the medical education bursary. That was an initiative that, when I was Health minister, we announced in 2006. Sixteen years ago, that bursary was \$10,000. In the last term that we were in government, we increased it by 50 percent, to \$15,000. Under the Premier and his colleagues, that has been cut to one-third of what it was over a decade and a half ago. In comparison, costs — including the cost of education — have gone up dramatically. The government support for Yukoners seeking education in health fields has been cut.

Moving on to the Constellation — oh, actually, I'll first mention that I will give the government credit, as the Premier mentioned reducing wait times for cataract procedures — I do give the government credit for acting on that, but as the Premier knows very well, that was after many months of me and my colleagues raising that issue with government, on behalf of Yukoners who were waiting for years to get necessary eye surgery, so that they could see. That was affecting my constituents, and others, were contacting us, and it was having a very serious impact on their quality of life. The government did eventually listen, but it took them long enough. They were slow to act in that area.

The Premier touted the new Constellation clinic that has been opened. Madam Chair, that clinic has been opened with no doctors. We don't know when the government is actually going to hire doctors, and we don't know whether they are going to hire new doctors from Outside — increasing the number of physicians — or are they planning to poach doctors from existing private practices — which would simply reduce services to other Yukoners.

The minister has refused to tell us how applicants will be prioritized. We have many Yukoners — I forget the exact number the government cited — who are on the wait-list for this clinic. Many of those people are probably some of the same people who applied for the government's Find a Doctor program. They were forced to apply again, because the government wouldn't simply recognize their registration with the first program, forced to provide personal medical information, and have yet to be told on what basis government will prioritize who can actually get into the clinic. So, there are no doctors for this, and we have no clarity from the government on when there actually will be doctors for that.

Can the Premier answer that question? What is the government doing to actually get doctors for that clinic? Since the last time he spoke, he chose to use his full time. I guess I would better add some other questions in here, so that the Premier doesn't simply talk out the afternoon, filibustering his own budget bill, and I'll move on to the issue of nurses in communities.

We know that this is a serious issue in Yukon communities. We know the minister herself said that the vacancy rate in community nursing is up to 40 percent. We understand, as well, that there are shortages within the management group within the department, and vacancies there as well, though we don't have the figures on that, and I would welcome hearing that from the Premier. We know, as well, that this is a dramatic increase from what the numbers were at in vacancies in community nursing between 2017 and early 2020, when, according to a confidential briefing note prepared for the minister that we have, it said: "For example, between 2017 and early-2020, there was a 5% vacancy rate among Primary Health Care Nurses within the Community Nursing branch. During that period, no agency nurses were required."

Under this government, that number has ballooned to 40 percent. They may try to blame it all on the pandemic, but there are other factors at play, including that they cut the Yukon's nursing bursary, just like they cut the medical education bursary, and that we have seen the minister, instead of working cooperatively with the union, picking a fight with them publicly, rather than working together on coming up with a common approach and an agreed solution to try to address this critical shortage in our communities.

We know that 40 percent of community nursing positions are vacant, according to the minister. Can the Premier tell us which communities — provide us with a breakdown of which communities are without the community nurses they need?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I guess there's no winning with the member opposite. If I give short answers, then I'm not taking it seriously enough. If I give a comprehensive answer, well, you

heard the narrative from the member opposite on that, too, so I will try my best to answer the questions and avoid the barbs and personal attacks that the member opposite is famous for.

The member opposite is saying that, in the past, they did certain things a certain way and we should do it that way. I disagree. I think that we successfully transitioned away from acute care, which was the bread-and-butter of the Yukon Party, which also was really scrutinized and criticized by the Office of the Auditor General at the time, resulting in the Peachey report, when the members opposite were building hospitals — necessary hospitals, but not with any considerations about operation and maintenance, or what the programming was going to be. So, I am not going to take direction from the Yukon Party when it comes to some of the most important spending that we do, which is for health care.

I will say that, as far as medical education and training, from 2014 main estimates, which included \$49,000 for new recipients of medical education, nursing education, health care benefits, and bursaries, this was provided to a maximum of 12 recipients. Currently, these bursaries are valued at \$89,000, and they are available to up to 16 new recipients, so an increase, counter to the member opposite's argument of a specific program that he keeps heralding, as far as us expanding our abilities to hit more recipients with this cash, and increasing the money as well. We have increased additional pathways for individuals to access education, while increasing the likelihood that individuals will deliver services in Yukon once they complete their education.

Yes, it's a different approach from the Yukon Party, and an approach that I'm going to be on record saying is a better approach.

The member opposite can, again, talk about a particular program in an acute care world that they lived in. We could talk about how we are expanding the spectrum, and that is extremely important.

The member opposite asked me a question about the bilingual health centre. This fiscal year, we budgeted \$1.7 million for the development of the Constellation Health Centre. The centre will offer services in both English and French as well as other languages through virtual care options. It will be staffed by 9.0 FTEs, with two contract physicians. Staff include a clinic manager, a nurse practitioner, a registered nurse, a licensed nurse practitioner, a social worker, and a medical office assistant. While no physicians have been contracted to service the clinic yet, that recruitment is underway. As far as client applications, Yukoners can now apply to become a client at the Centre de Santé Constellation Health Centre, or CSCHC.

We are aiming to connect as many Yukoners with primary health care services as possible, equitably and balanced client onboarding is the goal. There's a thoughtful approach to launching an onboarding to ensure that all clients accepted will receive high-quality care.

Also, a new separate application process was set up by Constellation to ensure that all Yukoners wanting the opportunity to obtain primary health care services have the

chance to provide relevant information and give their informed consent, which is extremely important to us.

There will be an ongoing, rolling intake for the coming weeks and months as we continue to recruit primary care providers and eventually move into the permanent space at 9010 Quartz Road. As far as the applications — applications will be reviewed and prioritized by a team of professionals at the clinic, and acceptance or wait-list status will be based on current capacities as we continue the recruitment plan of the clinic's primary care providers, alongside pre-established determinants as well.

The population health determinants include a number of considerations, such as current attachments to a primary care provider, complexity of care needs, French as the primary language, and others. We are working through the system. If somebody is not initially accepted, they will be added to the wait-list and notified when the space becomes available. Any openings created as a result of patient movement can be filled through the Find a Family Doctor program or other avenues as well. That is extremely important.

Again, it is important to recognize here the model of care. *Putting People First*, learning from the Peachey report — that was very scathing on the Yukon Party's approach to building assets — and working with health care providers, First Nation governments, and locally with all of our stakeholders, and looking at best practices around the world — around Canada. The centre uses an interdisciplinary team-based model of collaborative care, allowing clients to access a range of different care providers, depending upon their needs. So, it's a different approach and a different program from what the member opposite is used to, but, again, it is extremely important that we modernize and move forward, especially, in these — hopefully — post-pandemic days.

The member opposite talked about primary health care in the communities. As of September, of this year, 14 out of 22 primary health care nurses in the Community Nursing branch — as far as FTE count — 15.2 community health nurse positions are filled, out of a possible 18. There is also one nurse practitioner servicing Mayo and Pelly Crossing as well.

In the context of a global pandemic and the after-effects of such, with strains on human resources right across the planet, I still believe that the department and the minister are doing their utmost to have the professionals in the positions necessary, in models of care that are modern and looking at program launch and space moving forward, staffing and recruiting moving forward — very well underway with the positions that are already filled — and making sure that we have flexibility in the programming now and anticipating how we would then change that, as more of these very necessary professional human resources become hired.

Mr. Cathers: Well, the Premier repeatedly talks about transitioning away from acute care, but, unfortunately, what we are seeing is that he seems to think that making a move toward more primary care simply makes the acute care problem go away. It does not. For people who need that acute care, if the system isn't providing it, they see the impacts in their lives. That is shown by the long surgical wait-time list, which, as I

noted, has been raised as well. It is not just us raising the issue; it's Yukoners and Yukon physicians who are expressing concern — from the article that I quoted where a local surgeon was talking about how difficult they are finding it right now to meet the needs of Yukoners in that area.

Now, we don't disagree with the idea of having a collaborative care clinic, but I would remind the Premier that the government talked about doing this for years. The Premier acts like it has transformed the health care system. The clinic opened on Monday. We don't yet know how successful it will be. They don't have physicians yet. We appreciate everyone who is working at the clinic, and we do hope that it will be helpful to Yukoners who need care. But for the Premier to suggest that they have transformed the health care system in some way is simply out of touch with reality and with the needs of Yukoners.

The numbers that the Premier just gave on community nursing are quite at odds with what the minister herself indicated, where she indicated a 40-percent vacancy rate. As I mentioned, the Premier didn't address in his response that we also understand that, within the department in Whitehorse, in fact, they are short-staffed and relying on auxiliary-on-call positions to backfill for vacancies there. That would seem as well to feed into the overall strain on community nursing.

I want to just talk briefly about notes that my colleague, the Leader of the Official Opposition, passed on to me, based on an e-mail that he had received from a concerned Yukoner who wrote to him to express a deep concern with the nursing shortage and the enormous impact that it is having on our health care system: I urge you to recognize how vital nurses are to the future of our health system and do what is necessary to help fix the issue. I have seen how difficult it can be to access health care in our community. People in communities across Canada face the same problem. I fear that the health system is failing us and I am not very confident that my family or I will get timely access to care when we need it. I see patients facing longer and longer wait times.

It goes on to note as well that health care providers are finding serious illnesses in patients that should have been diagnosed much sooner.

Again, in the notes passed on to me by my colleague, the person who contacted him asked specifically that government work to address the nursing shortages and the impact that it has on our ability to access health care services, noting the need to invest in retention strategies to keep current and new nurses in the workforce, safer working conditions and adequate mental health care for nurses, training and educating more nurses, expediting and facilitating the recognition of internationally educated nurses, and better data collection in health workforce planning.

Again, unfortunately, what we see is that — instead of taking a collaborative approach to working with health care professionals to come up with a solution to address this crisis affecting rural Yukon and shortages affecting Yukon communities — the Minister of Health and Social Services, instead, chose to pick an argument with the union in public and take issue with their own public statements and make some

assertions about that, which I won't repeat here in the Assembly. It's not a productive approach to dealing with this crisis in rural Yukon.

Recognizing the shortage of time that we have here, I want to just move on to another issue that is important to — and is contributing to, in fact, based on what we are hearing from Yukon physicians — the Yukon's challenge in recruiting family doctors, and that is physician payment delays. I have heard the concern from local doctors and from the YMA directly that, while the doctors who are practising here find the delay long and frustrating, their biggest concern is its impact on the ability to get locums to fill in for Yukon doctors when they are either on vacation, on parental leave, or away for some reason. I have had several doctors say that this has been an issue with newly graduated family physicians who have come up to the territory on a locum and have waited, in some cases, three or four months — according to those physicians — to get paid. It left them with the conclusion that they don't want to come back to the Yukon to work as a locum or to move here because they find the payment system significantly different from other jurisdictions and, for some of them, the most frustrating one that they have dealt with.

So, can the Premier indicate, is the government going to do something about this issue, and if not, do they not recognize how this is discouraging family doctors, who have come up to the territory for a few weeks or a month to practice on a locum — how it is causing those physicians, in some cases, to say, "I don't want to come back to the Yukon to work, because you don't get paid in a timely manner." Of course, every recent graduate of Canadian medical schools has bills and debts to pay associated with their education.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I will reverse engineer, starting with nurse practitioners and recruitment, but if the member opposite knows of some locum doctors who have said to him that they're not coming back, then, please, if he could pass the contact information on to the minister, we would love to reach out to those doctors and talk directly to them — and again, work with the medical community to address needs, as they come up. That would be wonderful, if he could share that information. I would really, truly appreciate that.

When it comes to the recruitment of our nurses — and, again, the member opposite read again about a concern from a Yukoner, and again tried to portray that as us not caring. I think I spoke a lot this afternoon about the care that we are putting in to recruitment and to burnout, and also recognizing the extreme pressures that the medical community is under. So, again, all personal attacks aside, I will disagree with the member opposite, and just say that we are taking this seriously.

When it comes to recruitment of nurses, the department has undertaken several different actions to recruit nurses to the community nurses branches; widespread job advertisements across websites and social media platforms; targeted outreach to organizations and individuals; and shifting schedule structure to allow many nursing positions to operate on a part-time, rotational basis. They have been developing a dedicated recruitment webpage to attract and to retain health care providers by addressing common inquiries related to job

application process and showcasing what the Yukon has to offer. We are anticipating the launch of this in a couple of weeks here, heading into December, which is very important.

We recognize, and I've recognized here in the Legislative Assembly several times, that there are shortages. There are shortages, again, based upon result of local, national, and global shortages of health care providers — some community health centers temporarily reducing services therein, and we're seeing that, again, across the world. Now, making that statement does not, in any way, mean — as the member opposite tries to attach a lot of words like: It seems because you're saying that you don't care. No, we're just giving you the statistics and giving a little bit more reality than what the member opposite would allow you to hear in this conversation in the Legislative Assembly on this fine Thursday afternoon.

In February 2022, the Carcross health care community centre, and also the Teslin Health Centre — they were required to reduce some services, and that's never good. Also, in June, we saw some reductions in services in areas like Ross River, and Carcross as well. We've seen a reduction of services in various periods of time in Pelly Crossing, in Carmacks, Carcross, and Mayo. During these service disruptions, the department works very closely with allied public safety agencies, including EMS, physicians and health care partners, and programs to try our best to mitigate the impacts on communities and ensure continuity of emergency care through these disruptions.

Service disruptions are anticipated to continue throughout the remainder of the year. These are a result, and a fact, based upon the global situation that we're in. To characterize that as us not caring, or that we don't want to compare to other jurisdictions, I think it's important for us to put into context the work that the departments are doing to make sure that we have policies in place to help out — triage, if you will — in extraordinary situations, whether that be because of our lack of human resources globally now, or the lack of PPEs that we saw across the country, and across the world, during the pandemic, but it's also good to give context of — compared to other jurisdictions, we are more than holding our own when it comes to disruptions, and also, providing the care that's necessary to people as they need it in these really trying times.

As far as payment on locums, this is an issue that has been corrected by the department. I don't know if the member opposite knows that or not, or if he would use his contacts with these locum folks to tell them that this has been corrected, or maybe even pass on the names of these doctors to us. The Yukon Medical Association now — we just had a quote last Friday from the former Yukon Medical Association president saying that this is the best place in Canada to practise medicine. The member opposite is saying that his experience from the conversations that he has had with locums is that it's a lot more dire.

We had seen a dire prediction with the TFF to start today's conversation. Again, we see this fear from the member opposite. I would love to know the names of these locums who he's talking about; if he could provide that information today in the Legislative Assembly, or maybe send an e-mail to me or

the Minister of Health and Social Services — but, again, the payment of locums has been corrected. That issue has been corrected.

Mr. Cathers: It is unfortunate that the Premier is choosing to dismiss my questions on behalf of Yukoners as somehow being unreasonable. I would note that I have not heard directly from locum doctors. I have heard from resident physicians who live here that this has been a problem for them, and that locums who they have dealt with have told them that they are not interested in coming back to the Yukon because of the delays in payments. The Premier is partially correct. My understanding is that the payment problem is not as bad as it was at the worst, but I have heard clearly from physicians that this problem is still an issue, particularly for locums.

One of the things I would just note for context, as well, is that I have heard from resident physicians that they are used to dealing with the payment system, and it's not as frustrating for them as it is for locums, who are not used to dealing with it. What I will do is pass this one to the Yukon Medical Association and individual doctors, who can choose, if they wish, to follow up directly with the Premier or the Minister of Health and Social Services on that, regarding the names of the locum physicians who they have dealt with in this area, but as the Premier should be aware, once someone has had what they consider to be a bad experience when dealing with a jurisdiction, being contacted by the minister or the department may not be enough to fix the problem.

I want to move on to a few other issues. The issue of vaccinations has been one that has been a topic of discussion for a number of Sittings here in the Legislative Assembly, due to the impact on the public vaccination programs for tetanus, pneumonia, et cetera, as well as children's vaccination programs, and that it created an impact for Yukoners needing to get those for their children.

We have heard, in the past, requests from pharmacists who are interested in stepping in, if government was not able to resume that through public health programs, as well as the Hummingbird clinic, which has also expressed interest in that. We believe that, if government is not able to offer vaccinations, that finding a solution, through working with other health partners, is certainly something that should be considered, if government can't do it themselves. I have urged the government to look at this for things such as travel, tetanus, et cetera.

I understand that there has been some progress on this. There is an expanded scope of practice for pharmacists that is coming into effect on December 28 of this year, to allow pharmacists to assess patients with minor ailments, provide a prescription to treat these conditions, prescribe appropriate travel vaccines and medications for travel, and other schedule 1 medications listed in the amended regulations.

We also understand that the Yukon Pharmacists Association has written to the Department of Health and Social Services, seeking consideration of changes to the professional fees associated with their work, and that they are looking for clarity about — for some of these items that are covered by the expanded scope of practice, they have not yet received any

clarity on how, or if, they will be paid by government for those services.

This is coming up in just over a month — I guess, about a month and a half — that these changes are taking effect. So, I just wanted to put that issue on the Premier's radar. I doubt that he has the answer to that one at his fingertips, but I do just want to note, and as well, advise him that I did write to the minister about this matter. This is time sensitive. It is important that pharmacists receive information, so that they know what the payment schedule will be, because one can safely predict that, for some pharmacies, if they don't know if they are going to get paid by government for providing a service, they will likely choose not to provide that service until they receive clarity from government.

Madam Chair, I am just trying to find the next item on my list here. I want to ask about the issue of the substance use emergency that the government declared last year. We have a situation where, tragically, families and communities in the Yukon are dealing with the loss of loved ones due to drug overdoses that have occurred at a higher rate than even in British Columbia, which has been one of the worst in the country.

The government's actions to date have focused heavily on harm reduction and have not seemed to put enough emphasis on prevention, treatment, and enforcement. My questions regarding this begin in the area of substance use. Since the declaration of the substance use emergency last year, what, if anything, has the government done to increase treatment spaces for addictions and mental health, and expand their availability, both in Whitehorse and communities? There also continues to be concerns around the lack of aftercare for people in this area.

Again, as I have noted before — but just to make it crystal clear for the minister, lest he try to suggest otherwise — we do recognize that effective harm-reduction programs are part of the picture, but continue to be of the belief that the number one priority of any substance use action plan in response to an emergency should be trying to help as many people as possible become free of their addictions and live healthy lives where they are not dealing with that addiction problem.

We also see the situation where, in the same fiscal year that the government declared the substance use health emergency — according to the Public Accounts on page 153, actual spending on the line item “Mental wellness and substance use services”, compared to the previous year, actually decreased by hundreds of thousands of dollars. Operation and maintenance funding, compared to the previous fiscal year, dropped by \$338,000. When factoring in the amounts for capital, the total reduction in spending, comparing the fiscal year in which they declared the substance use emergency to the previous fiscal year, government's actual spending on mental wellness and substance use services dropped by over half a million dollars. That is concerning. I would appreciate an explanation for that drop.

I would also, again, ask the Premier, as I have asked the minister previously: With regard to the substance use emergency, what tangible steps has government actually taken to increase addiction treatment spaces and expand availability?

Have they increased any addictions treatment spaces either in Whitehorse or in the communities since declaring a substance use health emergency?

Hon. Mr. Silver: That's a lot. We don't have a lot of time left here today, but I would be remiss if I didn't try my best to answer all of the questions here from the member opposite. He started with vaccines. We mentioned this earlier today — as far as community nursing and vaccines as well. As we are not at full complement in our staff in community nursing, there is pressure. Especially when you see the success of the vaccination programming, this would be added pressure. As we work to support several complex vaccination campaigns and deliver routine public health programming on top of that, these folks do extraordinary work. They are very professional as well. Our immunizers continue to deliver an unprecedented number of vaccines throughout the Yukon.

Through ongoing investment in preventive treatments and vaccines, we are reducing the overall cost to the health care system while supporting the health and well-being of all Yukoners. There are a couple of interesting facts as far as our immunization efforts — as of August of this year, Yukon health providers administered an estimated 24,962 vaccines — just under 25,000. In 2021, health care providers administered an estimated 106,466 vaccines. That is really close to 107,000 vaccines. Those are unbelievable efforts from our immunizers.

Now, over 1,000 COVID-19 vaccinations have been administered since January of 2021, and CanAge ranked Yukon as the most improved Canadian jurisdiction in the 2022 adult vaccination report. That's commendable in this environment that we find ourselves in. With global shortages and stresses on our community, it's worthy of making these stats available today in the Legislative Assembly and thank our dedicated immunizers for their impeccable work.

Now, the member opposite talks about access to vaccinations. As capacity permits, staff are offering regular immunization through the Whitehorse Health Centre. Vaccination priority is informed by guidance, of course, by the chief medical officer of health, and also staffing capacity and the evolving demand for COVID-19 vaccinations. So, it is just really important to put those stats in there.

We are continuing to work with pharmacies to expand what publicly funded vaccinations are able to offer. So, that's really important. Just a little bit on flu vaccinations — seasonal influenza vaccinations, again, being available through the Whitehorse central vaccine clinic, the community health centres, pharmacies, and delivered directly to residents of long-term care homes. As of October 24, of this year, flu shots became available to high-risk Yukoners, seniors and elders over the age of 65 — and then as of October 31, of this year, flu shots are available for the general public. So, if you don't have your shot yet, now is the time, folks.

During the 2022-23 seasonal influenza vaccination campaign, Yukon will be offering three publicly funded products for all of our citizens — long-term care citizens and individuals over 65. Just one more stat here is that, in the 2021-22 seasonal influenza campaign, we did more than 13,000 flu vaccinations. So, again, fantastic work being done by the

department and the folks who are doing the immunization. I definitely want to give that shout-out to those folks.

The member opposite was talking specifically about pharmacists — a holistic, person-centred, and integrated health care system absolutely relies on our pharmacists. Since 2016, our government has worked with pharmacists to integrate the profession into our health care system by expanding their scope of practice as well. So, through regular meetings, we are discussing our shared goals and enhancing the supports that are available to Yukoners and identifying opportunities for pharmacists to participate in the health care system. They have played an extremely important role in our coordinated response to COVID-19 and also in the substance health emergencies that the member opposite mentioned.

Again, we have put a lot of effort into mental wellness and substance abuse over the years. My work on the national stage — Premier Scott Moe and I co-chaired an initiative “Promising Practices”, a podcast series that went in and took a comparison of all different regions across Canada — best practices — Saskatchewan and Yukon leading that initiative. If you haven't heard the podcast, Madam Chair, I suggest that you do because it's really great. You hear from international academics, and then you hear from amazing people like Allison Kormendy, for example, in Dawson City — local talent and local professionals, all in supporting our approach of listening to those people who are in our communities and have the best knowledge about what we need locally, but also taking a look to the nation to see where the best practices are in play. That is just the work that we are doing on the Council of the Federation side of things.

The department, however, has been doing extraordinary work within the government since the declaration in January 2022, in response to the increasing number of Yukoners who were being poisoned by a toxic drug supply. This is an extremely important conversation. We have run out of time here today, but it is definitely something that is extremely important to us on this side of the Assembly — and the extraordinary work that we have put into this.

Again, to go from two mental wellness nurses for all of rural Yukon when the Yukon Party was in power, to four mental wellness hubs with over 20 dedicated professionals right across the spectrum — we have put in an extraordinary amount of time and effort into this issue. There is a lot more to be done — absolutely — but we continue to work with our partners, and we continue to invest heavily, including a direct investment of \$3.4 million this fiscal year to address the substance use health emergency in addition to the millions more being offered in related programs.

With that, Madam Chair, seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Klondike that the Chair report progress.

Are you agreed?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 206, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2022-23*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

The following sessional papers were filed November 10, 2022:

35-1-74

Bill No. 20, *Animal Protection and Control Act*, reprinted with amendments (Clarke, N.)