Yukon Legislative Assembly

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HANSARD

Wednesday, October 28, 2026 — 1:00 p.m.

Whitehorse, Yukon

Speaker: The Honourable Yvonne Clarke

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
2026 Fall Sitting

Speaker: Hon. Yvonne Clarke
Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committee of the Whole: Patti McLeod
Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole: Tyler Porter

CABINET MINISTERS

NAME	CONSTITUENCY	PORTFOLIO
Hon. Currie Dixon	Copperbelt North	Premier Minister of the Executive Council Office; Finance
Hon. Cory Bellmore	Mayo-Tatchun	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the Yukon Lottery Commission
Hon. Linda Benoit	Whistle Bend South	Minister of Highways and Public Works
Hon. Brad Cathers	Lake Laberge	Minister of Health and Social Services
Hon. Jen Gehmair	Marsh Lake-Mount Lorne-Golden Horn	Minister of Economy, Tourism and Culture; Public Service Commission; Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation
Hon. Wade Istchenko	Kluane	Minister of Environment
Hon. Scott Kent	Copperbelt South	Government House Leader Minister of Education; Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation
Hon. Laura Lang	Whitehorse West	Minister of Justice; Minister responsible for the French Language Services Directorate; Women and Gender Equity Directorate; Workers' Safety and Compensation Board
Hon. Ted Laking	Porter Creek Centre	Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources; Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation

GOVERNMENT PRIVATE MEMBERS

Yukon Party

Doris Anderson	Porter Creek North	**Yvonne Clarke**	Whistle Bend North
Adam Gerle	Porter Creek South	**Patti McLeod**	Watson Lake-Ross River-Faro
Tyler Porter	Southern Lakes		

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

New Democratic Party

Kate White	Leader of the Official Opposition Takhini	**Lane Tredger**	Official Opposition House Leader Whitehorse Centre
Carmen Gustafson	Riverdale North	**Brent McDonald**	Klondike
Linda Moen	Mountainview	**Justin Ziegler**	Riverdale South

THIRD PARTY

Yukon Liberal Party

Debra-Leigh Reti	Leader of the Third Party Third Party House Leader Vuntut Gwitchin

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Allison Lloyd	Clerk of the Legislative Assembly	**Logan Ockenden**	Acting Deputy Clerk and Clerk of Committees
Bhreagh Dabbs	Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel	**Joseph Mewett**	Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Karina Watson	Sergeant-at-Arms	**Deana Lemke**	Hansard Administrator

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Wednesday, October 28, 2026

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Under Introduction of Visitors, it is my pleasure to introduce Child and Youth Advocate Annette King and several individuals from her office, including Julia Milnes, Kīsikāw-Pīsim (Torin Haslam), Andrea Vaags, Rachel Daigneault-Kraun, and Mark Rutledge.

Are there any other visitors to be introduced?

Visitors introduced

Speaker: Tributes.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Statement — Small Business Week and Yukoner Appreciation events

Adam Gerle: Last week, I had the pleasure of attending several Small Business Week and Yukoner Appreciation events hosted by the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce. I was greatly impressed by the large turnouts, thoughtful conversations, and infectious energy on display throughout the week. My favourite activity was visiting participating businesses, some for the first time, and experiencing the bustling shops, busy restaurants, and great shopping opportunities. I returned home with armloads of merchandise from bagels and books to winter boots.

I was particularly impressed by the strong sense of community. Everywhere I went, I saw Yukoners stopping to visit with friends and neighbours while exploring the wide range of unique local businesses our territory has to offer. This is an experience you cannot replicate by clicking a button online. I encourage everyone to buy local and support our incredible Yukon businesses.

Statement — Accessibility of House proceedings

Brent McDonald: I rise today to speak about the importance of accessibility to the proceedings of this House. Currently, Yukoners only have video recordings of our work until Question Period ends but not the rest of the afternoon, which includes debate on bills, line-by-line budget scrutiny, and the votes that shape their lives.

Municipalities already do this. The City of Whitehorse records complete council meetings, and Dawson City residents can join their meetings by Zoom. If our local governments can do it, so can we.

Most people simply can't afford to visit us here during working hours, especially those outside of Whitehorse. Recording the full Sitting gives all Yukoners access to our proceedings on their own schedule. Transparency builds trust and trust builds engagement. Let's make this Assembly accessible to every Yukoner.

Statement — Vuntut Gwitchin wellness drop-in initiative

Debra-Leigh Reti: Today, I wanted to speak about an initiative that takes place every few months at the Whitehorse Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation office on Hanson Street. The Whitehorse wellness drop-in is a day of wellness, connection, and community offered by Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation to its citizens currently located in or visiting Whitehorse. The day includes traditional food, home remedy activities, massage and energy sessions, and meaningful healing activities like a letting-go wall and grief supports. You can come for a smudge or start a beading project and, most importantly, spend the day connecting with fellow citizens from Old Crow in a warm, supportive, and welcoming environment with plenty of snacks and good company.

I have had the pleasure of attending one of these days, and I can tell you that it is an amazing wellness outreach for our citizens to be able to access. The traditional food, the company, and the wellness initiatives are such important things to offer, as they help our Old Crow citizens feel close to home despite not actually being there.

Màhsi' to everyone who is involved in putting these days on.

Statement — Whitehorse Lions Club auction

Hon. Scott Kent: This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Whitehorse Lions Club auction, a Yukon tradition that has supported local projects and community organizations for generations. The auction will take place on December 5, with all proceeds going directly back into our community.

Over the years, the Whitehorse Lions Club has supported initiatives such as the Whitehorse splash park, the 551 Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron, Special Olympics Yukon, Girl Guides, and Yukon Foundation bursaries. None of this would be possible without the generosity of volunteers, donors, and local businesses who support the auction. Guided by their motto, "We Serve," the Whitehorse Lions Club continues to make a meaningful difference in the lives of Yukoners.

I encourage everyone to consider supporting this year's auction as a donor or a bidder. It is a great opportunity to do some Christmas shopping while supporting a worthy cause. I ask people to visit whitehorselionsclub.com for more details and thank the Whitehorse Lions Club for 70 years of service to our community.

Statement — Youth-led landmark climate court case

Justin Ziegler: I rise today to pay tribute to the 15 young Canadians in the first youth-led climate trial in Canadian history and particularly to Leandrea Reeves of Whitehorse. Leandrea is a member of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation. This week, she will take the stand in federal court in Vancouver. She will tell the court what the land means to her. Colonization and residential schools took much of her culture from her family. She has worked to bring it back through berry-picking, hunting, and trapping, but the plants and animals her people rely on are becoming harder to find.

In 2010, I joined politics because I was worried for the planet. Leandrea and the other youth have carried the same worry all the way to a courtroom.

To all members of this House: Protecting the land means protecting the generations after us, including the children and youth of today.

To Leandrea and all 15 youth: Whatever the court decides, you are speaking for the land that takes care of us. The Yukon is proud of you.

Statement — Local art and craft markets

Hon. Linda Benoit: Today, I rise to recognize the many local craft markets that take place across the Yukon and the individuals who make them possible. Local artisans showcase their creativity and skill while helping to preserve traditional skills, Indigenous art forms, and northern craftsmanship. Their work enriches our communities, brings people together, and highlights the remarkable talent found in every corner of our beautiful territory.

As we enter the busy holiday market season, I encourage Yukoners to visit local markets, meet the people behind these products, and discover the unique stories woven into their work. By purchasing locally made products, Yukoners support small businesses, strengthen local economies, and help sustain families throughout our territory.

I would like to thank all of those who dedicate their time and talent to creating and sharing their work with Yukoners and visitors alike.

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Speaker: Under Tabling Returns and Documents, the Chair has for tabling the annual report of the Child and Youth Advocate Office.

Hon. Currie Dixon: I have for tabling the *Yukon Public Accounts 2025-26*.

I also have for tabling a report on the financial results of the Government of Yukon's employee group insurance plan with Canada Life.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Tyler Porter: I have the honour to present the *Fourth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees*.

PETITIONS

Petition No. 3 — Utility billing — response

Hon. Ted Laking: I rise today to respond to Petition No. 3 regarding concerns about Yukoners' electricity bills in the last year and asking for greater transparency in billing by public utilities in the Yukon. I want to thank all Yukoners who signed this petition. We recognize the frustration that Yukoners have experienced with electricity billing issues over the past year. Families and businesses deserve accurate bills, reliable service, and confidence in the systems used to calculate what they have used and what they owe. We agree that the issues with respect to billing need to be thoroughly looked at.

The key question comes down to: Who should pay for that investigation? A Yukon Utilities Board investigation comes with a cost. We do not believe those costs should be passed on to Yukoners through their power bills. We also do not believe the answer is simply to pass those costs on to the same Yukoners through their taxes via a government grant.

The principle here is simple: Yukoners should not have to pay to investigate problems they did not create. That is why we required ATCO to retain an independent third party at ATCO's sole expense to conduct a comprehensive review of its billing practices, systems, and processes. That review is expected to determine what went wrong, how many customers were affected, what needs to change, and how we prevent it from happening again.

As I stated, our expectation is that the cost for this investigation would not be passed on to ratepayers through a future application, and we are prepared to use legislative and regulatory tools to ensure that it is not passed on to Yukoners. Further, if we are not satisfied with the outcomes of this investigation, we still reserve the powers under the *Public Utilities Act* to take further action. Whether as ratepayers or taxpayers, Yukoners should not be asked to pick up the tab for ATCO's mistakes — ATCO should.

Speaker: Are there any petitions to be presented?
Are there any bills to be introduced?
Are there any notices of motions?
Is there a statement by a minister?
This then brings us to Question Period.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Question — Canada-Yukon housing benefit

Kate White: Madam Speaker, during debate on changes to the *Residential Tenancies Act*, I asked the Minister of Community Services what supports exist for a tenant who can't afford a rent increase. She said — and I quote: "There are … options for folks who aren't able to afford their rent through the Yukon Housing rental subsidy program." Many tenants don't currently qualify for the Canada-Yukon housing benefit program, including mobile home owners, people on social assistance or long-term disability, and seniors whose assets disqualify them.

The next day, I asked her about supports for those excluded from the Canada-Yukon housing benefit program. She was unable to name additional supports or explain how the benefit program works. Instead, she said those questions should be directed to the minister of housing.

To the minister of housing: What other subsidy or support programs exist for renters who don't qualify for the Canada-Yukon housing benefit ?

Hon. Scott Kent: I appreciate the question from the Leader of the Official Opposition. As we talked about briefly yesterday, the Canada-Yukon housing benefit program was updated to provide enhanced support for low- to moderate-income households facing housing affordability pressures, particularly families with higher rental costs. We made changes to this program earlier this year.

Previously, the program set a fixed amount between $200 and $800 depending on a client's income. However, that benefit amount in the rent subsidy stream had not increased since 2020, while rents in the territory have increased about 32 percent over that exact same period. Changes to the rent subsidy stream were implemented in June of this year, and now the maximum benefit for a four-bedroom house is $1,403.

We appreciate the support of the Government of Canada in being able to provide this program to Yukoners who need it, and we look forward to it continuing and providing these additional benefits that are a result of our changes that we made in June.

Kate White: The Minister of Community Services told renters that if they faced rent increases they could not afford, they should turn to Yukon Housing for help.

In debate on Bill No. 8, I noted that mobile home owners aren't eligible for the Canada-Yukon housing benefit because they own a home, and based on the listed eligibility criteria, people on social assistance or long-term disability and seniors with assets over the cap can't access it either. Last week and again just now, the Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation said that the benefit has had some changes. But those changes don't help Yukoners who are currently excluded from the program. The government's answer to unaffordable rent increases has been to direct Yukoners to a program that many will not qualify for.

Will the minister review the eligibility criteria for the Canada-Yukon housing benefit?

Hon. Currie Dixon: Over the course of the last few weeks, we've seen the NDP try to develop alternative positions on this and try to come at it from different angles. But really, what we're trying to do with the changes made in the *Residential Tenancies Act* is to create a more balanced rental housing market. It has become deeply imbalanced because of the flawed policies they brought forward in the confidence and supply agreement starting in 2021. They brought forward those changes without consultation, without any evidence supporting them, in the back door with the Liberal Party at the time to implement that by regulation. There wasn't even a debate on the floor of the Legislative Assembly when they brought those changes forward in 2021.

We're moving to correct that. We think it's going to improve the rental market as a whole. A healthy rental market is good for tenants, it's good for landlords, and it's good for Yukoners.

Kate White: That was disappointing, because I was clearly asking about supports for Yukon renters who don't qualify for existing programs. In a CBC interview, the minister said — and I quote: "I suspect that there could be people who fall into having a little more trouble paying their rent…" In debate, the minister said Yukoners who are struggling could access Yukon Housing, the residential tenancies office, and shelters. Then the minister made a commitment — and I quote: "We will continue to assess housing needs and adjust programs and supports as required to help Yukoners and maintain stable housing." She said she would do this with Yukon Housing.

This bill comes into force on December 1, and the Yukon Party has said nothing about what they will do to adjust programs and expand supports. What is this government doing to prepare for the increased demand on Yukon Housing wait-lists, subsidies, shelters, the residential tenancies office, Safe at Home, and every other housing support organization in the Yukon?

Hon. Currie Dixon: Everything listed by the Minister of Community Services is accurate. I think she accurately portrayed the landscape right now. But what we intend to see in this, with the changes made to the RTA, will be a more balanced rental market where we see the ability for prospective landlords to make investments to bring units into the housing market. For years now, they have been discouraged from doing so by the prohibitive policies that the NDP brought forward in 2021. Unfortunately, that has led to some landlords removing their units from the market and creating additional pressure on the rental market.

Now, because of those flawed policies, we've had to act. We've had to act swiftly, and we've made those changes now through the amendments to the *Residential Tenancies Act* that we think will create a more balanced rental market for everyone. We think that's the right course of action for Yukoners. We think having a healthy rental market is good for renters, it's good for landlords, and it's good for all Yukoners.

Question — Recycling services

Justin Ziegler: Since November 2025, residential recycling in Whitehorse runs under the extended producer responsibility or EPR program. Companies that sell packaging and paper in the Yukon pay fees to an organization such as Circular Materials, and that money pays for collection. EPR shifts the operational and financial responsibility for waste management from the taxpayer to the companies that produce and sell packaging and products.

This means there is money coming in from these companies that pay for curbside pickup for Yukoners, yet not all benefit. Curbside pickup remains unavailable for those living in housing complexes with more than four units.

When will residential recycling pickup be available to all Yukon households?

Hon. Currie Dixon: The Department of Community Services is working with a range of different municipalities around the delivery of recycling services across the territory.

But as we know and as we've found over the course of the last year, the EPR system that was brought in by the previous government has some pretty serious flaws. Its sustainability on an ongoing basis is questionable, and the weight of pressure that it puts on a small number of businesses makes it a challenging issue for implementation. That's why we've brought forward in the budget the funding that we have to work with the business community to alleviate some of that pressure.

But a bigger concern exists here — that is the flawed system that we've inherited. We have to work with all municipalities. We have to work with all stakeholders and find a path forward here. That's not going to be easy. None of us want to be subsidizing businesses when it comes to recycling. But the system that we've inherited is deeply flawed, and the member is quite right to point out that it applies differently in different parts of the territory. We need to find a more long-term solution, but in the meantime, we'll continue to deliver the services that are existing today.

Justin Ziegler: The Raven Recycling centre stopped accepting soft plastics in 2023. When curbside pickup was introduced, soft plastics were also not accepted in this recycling service. As of today, Yukoners are expected to put their soft plastics in the garbage.

Circular Materials told Yukoners that soft plastics, glass, foam, and aerosol would be collected starting in 2027. On September 10, this government issued a new permit to Circular

Materials that delays this addition until January 1, 2029. That is two more years of soft plastics going into Yukon landfills or even people's basements.

Why did this government push the deadline to 2029, and will the minister work with Circular Materials so that Yukoners can recycle soft plastic before 2029?

Hon. Currie Dixon: The member is right that soft plastics are an important component of our recycling issues, but they're certainly not the only problem. There's a much broader problem with our recycling system in the Yukon today, and I would say that the financial sustainability of it would be one of those serious problems. We've identified that there are big problems with the EPR system writ large, not just when it comes to one particular material but all materials.

We need to work with municipalities, we need to work with the AYC, and we need to work with recyclers and other stakeholders in the business community to try to find a way to untangle this web and fix this problem. But it's a difficult one, and that's what resulted in us having to work directly with the pros and the business community to try to find a patchwork to keep things moving in the interim. In the long term, we're under no illusions that the current system is going to be sustainable, and that's why we need to find a solution for it.

Justin Ziegler: EPR presents both economic and environmental benefits by diverting materials that would otherwise go to the landfill. However, when some communities or households are left out of curbside pickup or certain materials are not collected, community landfills are filling with material that should be recycled. Every year of delay sends more recyclable materials to these landfills. The clock is ticking, and every year that recycling goes into the landfill is a bigger bill from municipalities.

What is this government's broader plan to make sure communities don't have overflowing landfills and that municipalities are not left with a huge bill?

Hon. Currie Dixon: Our plan is what I just said, which is that we need to find a solution to this problem. It's a very big problem. Our EPR system that we've inherited that was brought forward by the previous government is a flawed one. It's not financially sustainable. It's not going to be one that is going to be able to continue in its current form for the long term.

We need to work with municipalities. We need to work with the Association of Yukon Communities. We need to work with other stakeholders to find a solution to it.

We've found ways to patch the system in the near term, but when it comes to the long term, we need to have a broader conversation in this territory about how we do recycling, because we know that the current system that the previous government brought in is not sustainable. There are going to be some challenges. This issue is not going away, but we'll work with municipalities to find a solution.

Question — Whitehorse Emergency Shelter

Debra-Leigh Reti: I have questions about the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. The 405 Alexander Advisory Committee includes representatives from the Government of Yukon and Yukon First Nation governments. It works on things like shelter operations, service delivery models, and opportunities for improvement of services.

When was the last time the advisory committee met, and when will they be meeting again?

Hon. Brad Cathers: I don't have the precise information that the member has asked for at my fingertips. I can indicate to the member that representatives from Connective, Health and Social Services, the City of Whitehorse Bylaw Services, Justice and Highways and Public Works, the safer communities and neighbourhoods unit, and the RCMP met earlier this week to discuss ongoing concerns on Alexander Street, including the ones that the member raised in Question Period earlier with me. They are working together to identify and implement concrete solutions to improve safety in the area, maintain cleanliness, and encourage people gathering outside the shelter to access indoor services and supports.

Debra-Leigh Reti: The Government of Yukon has agreed to go to market by early 2027 to seek expressions of interest for the future operation of emergency shelter services. The current shelter operations contract only runs until March 31, 2027.

When will the expression of interest be released, and what rules will it contain pertaining to the operations of the shelter? Will it say that the facility will be operated with a high-barrier model, for example?

Hon. Brad Cathers: As I've indicated previously, contrary to the assertions that have been made by some members of the Opposition, the shelter right now allows people to access services if they are intoxicated. However, if they are causing disruption to others or safety risks to other clients or staff, they may then be asked to leave. It does not require them to be sober to enter the facility. We do not envision a future contract requiring sobriety as a condition of entrance. But as with the current contract, substance use inside the facility is not going to be accepted, and there will be provisions in a future contract to protect the safety of vulnerable clients in the facility as well as staff. However, to go much beyond that in terms of what will be in the future contract — the expression of interest that is just being finalized to go out to market to select an operator or operators for the services currently provided at the shelter, including housing, food services, and emergency shelter services — it would be premature for me to get too far into details about what that will include in the expression of interest, because it has not yet been finalized.

Debra-Leigh Reti: During last year's election campaign, the Yukon Party promised to conduct a comprehensive review of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and its operating model and consider alternative locations and options for sheltering services. It also promised to review and consult on alternative uses for some or all of the current Whitehorse Emergency Shelter building.

Have either of these reviews begun or been completed, and can the minister share the results of those reviews publicly?

Hon. Brad Cathers: As the member made reference to, there was reference in our platform to considering alternative locations and uses, and that is what we are doing. As I mentioned in response to previous questions in the Legislative Assembly, we are proceeding to go to market to select an operator or operators for the services currently offered at 405

Alexander Street, including housing, food services, and the emergency shelter services.

As I indicated, we are considering relocating the emergency shelter services to a different location or locations. Before that would occur and be finalized, of course, there's work involved with other governments, with the 405 Alexander Advisory Committee, and discussions with people in any area that shelter services might be relocated to would also be required. But again, we're actively exploring changes to the model.

We are following through with what we said to Yukoners in our election platform, and as I mentioned, the reason that the contract with Connective was extended to the end of March was at the united and specific request of First Nation leadership and the 405 Alexander Advisory Committee. When the Premier and I met with them this year, we listened; we did that, and that is intended to give time for development of the expression of interest to select an operator or operators —

Speaker: Order.

Question — North Klondike Highway projects

Brent McDonald: The North Klondike Highway is the only route for more than half of Yukoners living outside of Whitehorse. Residents, tourists, and trucks carrying essential supplies depend on it every day.

The Village of Carmacks estimates the proposed new thermal power centres will add another 10 to 15 fuel tankers every day. Carmacks has requested a road safety assessment covering winter conditions, highway design, past collisions, the Takhini River bridge, and emergency response. Dawson City also supports this request. These communities are not opposed to the project, but they want the risks identified and the highway prepared before more heavy trucks are added.

Will the minister complete the assessment requested by Carmacks and supported by Dawson City before additional fuel tankers are added to the North Klondike Highway?

Hon. Ted Laking: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for raising these issues on behalf of his constituents and also those two municipalities that he referenced. We respect the concerns. Obviously, the North Klondike Highway is an important artery for the territory, and the safety of those that use it is of the utmost importance. I've written back to the municipalities and indicated that the best place to ensure that these concerns are heard and integrated into the project planning is through the YESAB process. Of course, the Yukon Energy Corporation is the proponent on this project, and I've been assured by them that they have done, to date, some traffic analysis, and they will continue to do that as they work through the YESAB process to help mitigate any potential impacts on this important highway.

Brent McDonald: I appreciate the answer.

The Casino mine estimates that its project could add 144 trips each day to the North Klondike Highway during mine operations. That's about one additional vehicle on the highway every 10 minutes. The Coffee Gold project and possible restarts at Minto mine and Eagle Gold mine will also add significant heavy truck traffic, including vehicles carrying hazardous materials. The government must consider their combined impact and ensure the highway is safe and reliable before that traffic arrives.

What highway upgrades and additional maintenance are planned to safely accommodate this increased heavy vehicle traffic?

Hon. Ted Laking: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and once again, thank you to the member opposite for asking about the North Klondike Highway. When it comes to the planning or the assessment of the number of the projects that were listed by the member opposite, these impacts and cumulative impacts will be looked at through the environmental assessment process.

When we talk about the Casino project, we know that's going to a panel review, as I understand it. There's a significant amount of information requests already at this point in time from YESAB in preparation for that, and the company has been working with them to go through that. Many of these questions will be about the impacts on the road or the access points to a mine like this. In many ways, this is how we get good information, and this is why we are proud of the environmental assessment process in the Yukon, because it does help get this type of information in front of decision-makers.

Brent McDonald: The Casino mine also estimates that its transportation network will carry up to 45 loads of LNG, diesel, explosives, blasting agents, or cyanide every week. They recognize the need for driver training, spill kits, and vehicle monitoring.

The Yukon Government must show the same foresight in preparing our emergency responders. Carmacks has asked for emergency response to be included in a road safety assessment, and Dawson City also supports that request. A hazardous materials incident on this long, remote highway requires special equipment and training.

When would the minister work with experts to develop a hazardous materials response plan for the North Klondike Highway?

Hon. Ted Laking: I really appreciate these questions today about the safety of the North Klondike Highway and the impacts of several projects that are proposed along its corridor.

As I indicated in my first response, right now, the Yukon Energy Corporation is going before YESAB with respect to the Whitehorse Power Centres project for both the north and the south locations that they are proposing, and it will really be in that process that these concerns will be able to be considered by the assessor and then any information requests that they have based upon the feedback of the various departments of the Government of Yukon and the federal government and any other folks who want to provide input into the process.

We will then get a very thorough and well-thought-out recommendation from YESAB, and then it will be at that point in time that we determine the best ways in which we could mitigate these concerns.

Question — Highway maintenance

Tyler Porter: Just like many Yukoners who have travelled the Alaska Highway for decades, I know first-hand how important proper highway maintenance is for the safety and reliability of those who depend on it. Many businesses in my riding rely on our highways for the safe and efficient movement of goods, supplies, and staff. Strong highways are

essential to supporting economic activity, tourism, mining, resource development, and supply chains across the territory.

Maintaining this infrastructure is an important commitment of this government, but with such a short construction season, it can be challenging to complete all the work that is needed. I understand approximately 76 kilometres of the bituminous surface treatment resurfacing was completed in 2025.

Can the Minister of Highways and Public Works please update this House on roadwork completed this year?

Hon. Linda Benoit: I'm pleased to update the House on the work our highway maintenance crews and contractors completed this year. Bituminous surface treatment or BST helps extend the life of our roads, improve driving conditions, and reduce long-term maintenance costs. Crews nearly doubled last year's resurfacing work, increasing from 76 kilometres in 2025 to almost 152 kilometres in 2026. This included 69 kilometres on the North Klondike Highway, 45 kilometres on the Alaska Highway, nearly 10 kilometres on the South Klondike Highway, and more than nine kilometres on the Robert Campbell Highway as well as 10 kilometres of community roads in Watson Lake, Mayo, and Carmacks.

Yukon highways are the backbone of our economy. They connect communities, support tourism, mining, and local businesses, and help keep goods and supplies moving across the territory. Continued investment in maintenance protects these vital transportation links, supports supply chains, and helps avoid more costly repairs in the future.

Tyler Porter: Most of our highways span long, isolated stretches of the Yukon. Combined with dark winters, challenging terrain, and the presence of wildlife, visibility can be limited.

Can the minister please update this House on work this year on brushing along Yukon roadways?

Hon. Linda Benoit: Vegetation control or brushing is an important service delivered by contractors across the territory. Brushing improves sightlines for drivers, increases visibility of signs and intersections, provides safer places to pull over, and helps reduce wildfire and drainage risks. This year, our government invested approximately $2.3 million in vegetation management. Contractors completed brushing work on 1,276 kilometres of roads compared to 502 kilometres in 2025 and 597 kilometres in 2024.

Brushing contracts are intentionally broken into manageable sections to maximize opportunities for Yukon businesses. This means more small- and medium-sized local contractors can compete for and carry out this work while supporting jobs and economic activity in communities across the territory. That is a significant increase in maintenance activity, and I thank these crews for their dedication and hard work keeping Yukon's roads safe.

Tyler Porter: Yukoners deserve highways that are safe, reliable, and well-maintained. While resurfacing and brushing are important, they are only part of the work required to keep our transportation network in good condition.

Can the minister update the House on other highway maintenance work completed this year, including pothole repair and line painting?

Hon. Linda Benoit: That is correct. Maintaining our highways requires year-round attention and a wide range of maintenance activities. On the North Klondike Highway alone, crews repaired more than an estimated 7,000 potholes this construction season.

When it comes to line painting, crews completed 841 kilometres of centre and edge lines across the territory, up from 588 kilometres in 2025 and 603 kilometres in 2024. That work required approximately 69,000 litres of paint and represented an investment of more than $1.14 million. These efforts may not always be the most visible projects, but they are essential to improving safety, protecting infrastructure, and supporting the movement of people and goods throughout the Yukon.

While we are proud of this year's progress, we know more work remains, and our government will continue investing in highway maintenance to keep Yukon roads safe and reliable.

Question — Airport security screening

Debra-Leigh Reti: I have a question for the Minister of Highways and Public Works about airport security. Old Crow is the only fly-in community in the Yukon, so pretty much everything comes in on the plane. If you fly south out of Whitehorse, you go through security screening. On flights north, you just check in and get on with no screening.

I am urging the Government of Yukon to work with Transport Canada to put security screening in place for passengers flying to Old Crow, Dawson City, and Inuvik. The goal is straightforward: Try to reduce the amount of drugs coming into my community.

Is the government working on this issue?

Hon. Linda Benoit: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for their question. I have been lobbying Transport Canada since this spring on this very important issue. My officials and I are aware that this represents a sizeable security risk in Old Crow. I've been working with my counterparts in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut to also forward this with Transport Canada, as they have the same concerns and the same situations in many of their communities. I recognize that other agencies need to be involved here, and I'll continue working on this issue.

Debra-Leigh Reti: As we know, this is not a new issue, and I did raise it with the government in our first Sitting in the fall of 2025 and again a year later. We haven't seen anything take place, but I'm grateful to hear what was being moved since the spring. I'm grateful for that, but one way to reduce the flow of alcohol and drugs in my community and other northern communities such as Dawson and Inuvik would be to introduce this security screening before passengers can simply walk on the plane with drugs in a backpack, which happens on a regular basis.

Is the Government of Yukon in favour of putting these higher security measures in place as soon as possible?

Hon. Linda Benoit: As the member opposite is likely aware, airport security screening only takes place in Whitehorse currently at the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport. It is done with the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority or CATSA. It does passenger screening. That screening is not necessarily for alcohol or drugs but rather for items that may represent a risk to airplanes, as I'm sure we all know from flying.

There is significant work to be done with both Transport Canada and Public Safety or Justice at the federal government level in order to implement some different type of screening in these northern airports.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I do recognize that this is a complicated issue. However, it's not a new issue, as previous MPs and MLAs have brought this same issue forward in the past. As the operator of the Dawson and Old Crow airports, this government certainly does have a role to play. Setting up security screening would certainly act as a deterrent to anyone thinking of flying contraband into Old Crow.

What steps is the Government of Yukon taking to ensure that this does become a reality?

Hon. Linda Benoit: In my last correspondence with the federal Minister of Public Safety, Minister Anandasangaree, they had indicated that they would be willing to set up an officials-level committee to look at this issue. I've just recently responded again to the minister wondering if any of this has started to see any action yet. I would be happy to update the member opposite when I hear back.

Question — Mental health services

Linda Moen: In 2024, Yukon had the highest suicide rates in the country. The Yukon also continues to see rates of self-harm and self-injury that exceed the national average. September marked Suicide Prevention Month, yet far too many Yukoners continue to struggle to access timely mental health and crisis supports.

Can the minister tell this House what actions this government is taking to reduce the rates of suicide, self-harm, and self-injury in the Yukon?

Hon. Brad Cathers: We have taken a number of steps in this area. As I've reminded the House earlier, on August 19, along with the federal Minister of Health, we announced a federal commitment of $6.6 million to strengthen and expand access to integrated mental health and wellness supports for youth and young adults aged 12 to 30 across the Yukon. This is delivered by BYTE—Empowering Youth Society and the Yukon Integrated Youth Services project and is intended to bring together health, social service, education, and community partners to create a more coordinated and accessible approach to youth mental health care.

We have also, along with provincial and territorial partners, lobbied the federal government for continued funding for mental wellness through Working Together. As I mentioned to the House earlier, one of the things that I heard from the Minister of Health in Ontario at the FPT Health Ministers meeting was that they believe that the youth hubs of this type that they implemented in Ontario have been quite effective. We hope that we'll see results as well.

We are also working on other related services in the area of addictions treatment, including expanding options regarding aftercare and recovery.

Linda Moen: Evidence-based initiatives such as the Mental Health Commission of Canada Roots of Hope model have shown promising results by focusing on safety, public awareness, specialized supports, training, and peer networks. These community-based approaches have been recognized as important tools in reducing suicide risk and supporting mental wellness.

Will this government commit to working with mental health professionals, community organizations, and people with lived and living experience to implement evidence-based suicide prevention measures?

Hon. Brad Cathers: I can certainly consider the member's specific request. I would note as well that although mental wellness supports are not necessarily suicide-specific, improved access to mental health services and better supporting people, including youth and young adults, does play an important role in reducing the likelihood that someone considers suicide.

As I mentioned, we welcomed the federal commitment in August of this year of $6.6 million for mental health and wellness supports for youth and young adults aged 12 to 30 across the Yukon that will be delivered by BYTE.

In addition to that, another example of steps we've taken is that Health and Social Services has committed $2.3 million over five years to the Planet Youth pilot project — which includes the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation, and Selkirk First Nation — and is aimed at preventing youth substance use by strengthening protective factors such as family, community, and cultural connection. I certainly will consider other suggestions that come forward, including from members opposite. We will, of course, have to work with the health professionals in this area to determine which potential solutions should be prioritized. As I have mentioned previously, we need continued commitment from the federal government for long-term funding in the area of mental wellness, not just a one-year bridging agreement.

Linda Moen: We know too well that suicide is often the final cry for help. People living in rural and remote communities face a higher risk of suicide and self-harm. Yet many Yukon communities continue to experience challenges accessing consistent health and mental health services. Rural Yukoners have raised concerns about reduced services, health centre closures, and barriers to accessing care closer to home.

What is this government's plan to ensure rural and remote communities have access to mental health, crisis, and community supports needed to reduce suicide and self-harm?

Hon. Brad Cathers: I did speak to some of the steps that we're taking in this area. There also continue to be mental wellness hubs in communities that deliver services regionally.

The member made reference to health centres, so I will also note — as the member may have noticed or perhaps did not catch the news coverage — the Member of Parliament announced Yukon's new Working Together agreement with the federal government. Under that, we identified as one of our priorities using it to make some targeted and specific investments in strengthening community nursing and trying to reduce gaps in coverage in rural Yukon. That will include new supports and new nurses for community nursing, which has not seen an increase in such since 2018. We look forward to those occurring.

But again, I do have to remind the members that this is another area where we are dealing with the nine years of neglect under the Liberals and the Liberal-NDP, and we are stepping in

to take action to improve services in rural Yukon, including more supports for Community Nursing aimed at keeping those health centres open and reducing gaps in coverage.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 187 — Fixed election date

Clerk: Motion No. 187, standing in the name of Patti McLeod.

Speaker: It is moved by the Member for Watson Lake-Ross River-Faro:

THAT the Members' Services Board review whether the first Monday in November should be the fixed election date in section 50.01 of the *Elections Act*.

Patti McLeod: I rise to speak to Motion No. 187, which the Speaker has just read out for us. Now, I brought this motion forward because the current fixed election date, the first Monday in November, was decided by the previous government and implemented without consultation with or input from all parties. The date on which an election is held affects each of us and our constituents, and we should have the opportunity to weigh in on that date.

As a rural Yukon member, I do a lot of travelling both to and from my own community and within the riding. Since the electoral boundaries have changed, my riding now includes three communities. Travelling between my home community of Watson Lake and the farthest community of Ross River via Whitehorse is almost 900 kilometres, and that's 1,800 kilometres round trip. Now, I enjoy driving, but as winter starts to settle in and conditions change, there's a period of time that I would prefer not to be travelling on any highway, and I know many Yukoners would agree.

I made a point of talking with constituents and hearing what they had to say about the timing of the election last year, and two takeaways I have from those conversations are: One, many people would rather not leave the house in the cold to vote, and if they did not take advantage of early voting, there is a very big chance that they will not want to leave the house on election day.Two, people do not enjoy having to open their doors to talk with politicians in frigid temperatures, and I can absolutely agree with them.

While I have my own thoughts about the timing for elections, I'm interested in hearing what others think around this. I'm not asking for a decision to be made here on the floor today. I would encourage all members to refer the question to the Members' Services Board in order to review the fixed election date. This would provide all parties the opportunity to weigh in and contribute meaningfully to a discussion that affects all parties and all of our constituents.

Justin Ziegler: We're debating the first Monday in November. That's the debate topic. November is a month that French poets have always had a lot to say about. Verlaine wrote in *Chanson d'automne*:

Les sanglots longs
Des violons
De l'automne
Bercent mon cœur
D'une langueur
Monotone.

It says that the long sobs of the violins of autumn cradle my heart with a monotonous languor.

In June 1944, those same words were read on BBC radio to tell the French Resistance that the landings in Normandy were about to begin. The second half of the line meant: It's time; let's move. It was also the signal to start sabotage. Let me just reassure everybody here, Madam Speaker: I'm not planning any sabotage this afternoon. We will be voting in favour.

I think whatever the Members' Services Board decides, Yukon elections will probably stay in the fall. In the spirit of Verlaine, I would say: It's time; let's move.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I will be supporting this motion. I support having a fixed election date for Yukon elections. Fixed dates mean Yukoners know when they will be voting and provide certainty for all the folks who make an election happen at Elections Yukon. Whatever comes out of this review, I would not support moving away, though, from a fixed date.

That said, I am open to looking at the date itself. Early November in the Yukon can be hard on voters and on the people who run elections. The days are short, the weather can turn, and travel in and out of our communities is not always easy that time of year. In Old Crow, fall is a busy season for families on the land, and getting people, ballots, and staff where they need to be takes real planning. An earlier date in the fall may make some of that easier. It would also more directly conflict with the hunting season, though.

I hope this review stays focused on simply picking a different date and keeps a fixed date itself firmly in place.

Hon. Currie Dixon: I'll be very brief in my comments today, but I simply wanted to weigh in support of the motion that's before us by my colleague from Watson Lake for some of the reasons put forward by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, and I can't say for the same reasons as the Member for Riverdale South. I haven't read that particular French poet, so I don't know his comments, but I do know that it's really awfully cold in early November — and it was a struggle in the last election — and I know that we heard from volunteers, from candidates, and from voters individually that it would be a beneficial thing to consider moving that date a little bit earlier. That's exactly what I would urge the Members' Services Board to consider.

I've never really personally thought we need a fixed election date, but I appreciate that's not a debate we're going to have here today. It'll simply be about moving the date to an earlier time to be more accommodating for the Yukon weather, and so my particular view would be sometime in mid- to late October, but I will leave it to the Members' Services Board to take those things into consideration and go out.

I would simply also note that I believe that changes to the *Elections Act* are something that should be done through an all-party committee and not done in the way the previous government

did, which was to bring those forward unilaterally, which is what the previous Liberal government did. I think that going through this all-party committee is a useful process and allows all parties to have a say in the process before ultimately bringing forward, perhaps, at least a proposal to change the date, which would then be debated here on the floor of the Legislative Assembly.

Kate White: I couldn't resist when the Premier indicated the number of elections that I've run in different times of the year, to add my two cents. I'll note that the worst campaigning that I ever did was a by-election in the middle of December in 2010. That was pretty horrific. I was optimistic in 2021 that an election in March with an election date in April could be pleasant, and it was nearly as bad as December. I was elected first in the middle of October, October 11. I would suggest that was quite a lovely time, probably better than November 12, I think, which was the last go-around.

I don't disagree that this can be a conversation for Members' Services Board, but I'll note that Members' Services Board is one of the two legislative committees of this Assembly where minutes are not available to the public. I just heard the Premier say: Unless they make them public — and I will note that I have been working on that, and it has been point 9 or sometimes even 10 on the agenda, which we have not quite made it to. I think when we talk about things like changes to the *Elections Act*, this is when it's important that Yukoners know the conversation or, for example, what's being discussed.

I don't disagree that it should go to Members' Services Board for review and a decision should be made there about how to proceed, but I will note at this point I've participated in elections in many months of the year, and I will definitely say that December was my least favourite, maybe followed by April, and the rest have been somewhere in between.

I agree actually with my colleague from Vuntut Gwitchin as far as Elections Yukon is concerned. Having a fixed date or a target is important, and so I guess I will be having those conversations in the very private Members' Services Board, where minutes are not available to the public.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Patti McLeod: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I just want to thank my colleagues for their comments today. I look forward to this discussion moving forward.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Are you agreed?

Motion No. 187 agreed to

Motion No. 188 — École Whitehorse Elementary School site development

Clerk: Motion No. 188, standing in the name of Tyler Porter.

Speaker: It is moved by the Member for Southern Lakes:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with the City of Whitehorse to advance the development of the Valleyview site for the construction of a new École Whitehorse Elementary School.

Tyler Porter: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to bring forward this motion urging the Government of Yukon to work with the City of Whitehorse to advance the development of the Valleyview site for the new École Whitehorse Elementary School. I think we can all agree that our children deserve safe, modern, and welcoming schools where they have the opportunity to learn and succeed, and really, that is what this motion is about.

École Whitehorse Elementary School has been a part of the community for more than 70 years. Since opening in 1952, it has served generations of Yukon students and families. But the school is aging, and the needs of the students and educators have changed considerably over the years. The need for a replacement school has been recognized for quite some time, and I think we can all appreciate the importance of moving this project forward.

There has been a lot of ongoing discussion about where the new school should be, but earlier this year, the Government of Yukon undertook public engagement to hear from students, parents, educators, and the broader community. According to the June 2026 "what we heard" report, more than 2,200 people participated in the engagement process.

One finding that stood out the most to me was the feedback from students themselves. Of the 263 students who participated in a dedicated engagement exercise, just over 70 percent preferred the Valleyview location near the Canada Games Centre. Students highlighted the opportunities for outdoor activities, access to nature, and nearby recreational facilities. School staff and the school council also expressed support for the Valleyview location. Of course, there were differing opinions throughout the engagement process, and I believe it is important that those perspectives continue to be respected.

Following the engagement and a detailed assessment of potential locations, Valleyview was selected as the preferred site. There are some clear benefits to this location, including access to trails, recreation facilities, and opportunities for outdoor learning. It also means students can continue attending their current school while a new facility is being built. There is still work to be done. The site requires municipal planning, further assessments, and continued conversations with the community. That is really the purpose of my motion today: encouraging the Government of Yukon and the City of Whitehorse to work together to move this project forward while respecting the processes and responsibilities involved.

As a Member for Southern Lakes, I understand how important schools and community infrastructure are to families, whether they live in Whitehorse or rural communities. When we invest in education, we are investing in our children and the future of the Yukon. I know there may be different views about how we got to this point, but I think we can agree the focus now should be on what comes next.

The school community has waited a long time for a new facility, and I believe it is important that we continue to make progress. With that, I encourage all members of this House to support this motion.

Hon. Scott Kent: I rise today to speak as the Minister of Education on this extremely important project for students that currently attend École Whitehorse Elementary School and those who will be attending the school in the future.

I just wanted to maybe take a step back and talk a little bit about how we got to where we are today with respect to this

project. For those members that were here in the previous Assembly, including two members of the Official Opposition, the Leader and the current House Leader, they'll recall that back when the Liberal government of the day first made an announcement on a location for the school, they chose the Takhini Educational Land Reserve, which most people would know is where three of the Takhini softball diamonds are just next door to the existing Takhini Elementary School.

I think that the Liberals felt that was the best choice, but the choice that they made was to not consult with anyone ahead of time of putting that school in that location, and they were met with quite a bit of resistance — resistance from ourselves as the Yukon Party Official Opposition, resistance from the NDP in their role as the Third Party, including the leader, whose riding the school would have gone into.

We made a commitment in last year's election campaign to revisit that decision and not build the school there. Shortly after being elected, that's what we embarked on. We narrowed it down to three potential sites that we would consider and go out to public consultation on. One of them, of course, is the existing site in the downtown area where the school currently is. A second site would have been across from the Kopper King on the east side of the Alaska Highway, and the third site is in behind Valleyview but directly across Hamilton Boulevard from the Canada Games Centre.

Again, we launched an extensive consultation and we heard back from 2,200 Yukoners with respect to that. The Member for Southern Lakes talked about what was said by the school community and the overwhelming support by that school community for the site across from the Canada Games Centre — I'll just refer to it as the "Valleyview site".

The most common choice among online survey respondents was the downtown site, but I'll acknowledge and reference what the Leader of the Official Opposition has said publicly since then — that she felt many of those individuals would not have voted for that downtown site had they known that we were still committed to a downtown school, which, of course, was the subject of a motion earlier on in this Legislature that we voted on and passed unanimously to continue with a downtown school if the Whitehorse Elementary School were to move out of that downtown area.

I appreciated those comments from the Leader of the Official Opposition at the time, and so the second most popular of the respondents was the spot near Valleyview. It came in at 35.3 percent of overall respondents, and then the Kopper King site was in third as the preferred site for 13.9 percent of the respondents to that online survey. Just to reiterate, the overwhelming choice for the school community itself was the Valleyview site.

What was embarked upon then was a technical review. The Government of Yukon used the firm that was on board earlier on in the process when the Liberals had it. It was Kobayashi and Zedda Architects Ltd. along with a multidisciplinary consultant team. They conducted a desktop site assessment to objectively evaluate three candidate locations that I've already mentioned — the Kopper King, Valleyview, and downtown areas. The options were evaluated across architectural, functional, geotechnical, traffic, and civil criteria.

I'll just speak briefly to how the three sites ended up scoring in that ranking. This report, by the way, is available online if members or other Yukoners who are listening want to take a look at it.

The Kopper King site scored 155 out of 270 and came in at a class D estimate of $87.2 million, approximately. It's a 25-hectare parcel. It was the largest option and offers the best integration with natural environments. It's located in a highway commercial zone, making it less preferred during public engagement. Due to severe topographical variations, only approximately 4.3 hectares of that entire site are buildable. However, that size would allow for great flexibility for expansion and growth. It requires significant traffic upgrades such as highway signals and improvements to the Whitehorse corridor of the Alaska Highway in that area, and it provides limited active transportation connectivity.

Site B, which was Valleyview, scored 179 out of 270. It was the highest score. It came in at a cost of approximately $84.4 million. It's a 2.67-hectare site. It's the most financially economical option of the three. It provides an excellent balanced transit environment directly across from the Canada Games Centre, and it's located in a suburban area with nearby natural surroundings supporting 21st century learning. Its unorthodox triangular shape, loose sandy soils, and potential sloping risks present moderate design and foundation challenges. However, its size still allows for meaningful expansion, and its recreational and natural adjacencies are unmatched.

Then finally, the downtown site scored the lowest of the three at 137 out of that 270. It came in at the highest price tag at $88.3 million. It's a 1.7-hectare site in the downtown core. As I mentioned, it featured the lowest technical evaluation score and the highest cost. It is the most urban site of the three options but farthest from the highest-growth subdivisions. It offers superior pedestrian grid access and immediate utility compliance but is tightly constrained with minimal staging area. Expansion would be possible but with limited landscaping, playground, or outdoor space. As I mentioned, that was just some excerpts from the executive summary of the report, and the entire report is available online.

Based on that work and the overwhelming support of the school community, in September of this year, we announced that Valleyview was selected as the site for the new school. In the news release dated that day, there is a quote from the principal of the École Whitehorse Elementary School, and I'll just read that out — quote: "Our staff, students and school community are excited that École Whitehorse Elementary School will be moving to its new home in Valleyview. Our students were proud to take part in the engagement and see that their voices can help shape decisions affecting their community. With nearby trails, recreation facilities and outdoor learning opportunities, this location will offer many benefits for our students. We look forward to this new chapter for our school community."

I'm extremely pleased with the work that all of the officials did and all of those that responded. Obviously, there are some concerns that I've heard from residents of Valleyview. I've had a couple of letters come in stating those concerns, but I've also met with representatives of the Valleyview Community Association.

We're happy to include one of those individuals on the project advisory committee that is being set up for the planning of the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary School. What it will do is facilitate collaboration and the exchange of ideas between key partners, stakeholders, and the Department

of Education. Feedback gathered from the PAC will inform the design, functionality, and flow of the school.

Some members of the PAC will include Whitehorse-area First Nations, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, representatives of the school community, a representative from the Valleyview Community Association, as well as someone from Sport Yukon will be invited to attend on top of officials from Education and the Department of Highways and Public Works to provide technical advice and expertise to that project advisory committee.

As the Member for Southern Lakes mentioned, the next steps now are municipal steps. I've met with the City of Whitehorse, the mayor and council, on a couple of occasions with respect to this project — one very early on before we launched the public engagement and then one just prior to our announcement of the Valleyview site. Our officials from Highways and Public Works will be leading this work of rezoning and changes to the official community plan that are required at that site. My understanding from municipal officials at a recent meeting is that the process may take six to 12 months. Of course, there's quite a bit of work that we can do in the meantime as well to prepare for this.

We're hopeful of a positive decision, and I think that's perhaps what this motion that's here before us can do. If all members of the House agree on this and we pass this motion unanimously, I think that will send a strong message to the City of Whitehorse that there's support across party lines for this location. Of course, there are still obviously some concerns from the residents of Valleyview that we'll do our best to mitigate through the planning process and the design process. I know that in that meeting with the Valleyview Community Association, they're happy to participate in the project advisory committee, and we look forward to kickstarting that right away. We look forward to getting in front of the City of Whitehorse as soon as possible to continue to move this project forward and replace the oldest and largest elementary school in our community of Whitehorse and indeed in the territory.

Of course, there still is another important consideration for the downtown school, and I know that's extremely important to the Member for Whitehorse Centre. We'll continue to advance that work as well, and I believe with hopefully unanimous support for this motion that's before the House today, we can send that strong and positive message to the City of Whitehorse and the school community itself that we're committed to relocating Whitehorse Elementary to a new home and being in such close proximity to the Canada Games Centre and Mount McIntyre Recreation Centre and the Whitehorse Nordic Centre and all of the recreational amenities. I know that the school themselves are extremely excited about those opportunities to utilize those services extremely close to home.

I recognize, obviously, there'll be other discussions about traffic and those types of things, and that will be taken care of through the planning process and any additional documents and planning that needs to take place, including pedestrian crossings. That work will continue.

Again, I thank the Member for Southern Lakes for bringing this forward, and I hope that all members of the House will support this motion today.

Hon. Laura Lang: I'd like to say thank you to the Member for Southern Lakes for those well-articulated words as well as to the Member for Copperbelt South for his remarks on a very beloved iconic landmark in our territory and also what the future of the program that currently exists within that landmark is intending today to do.

Today I rise not as the Minister of Justice but as the MLA for Whitehorse West, who has also had the true pleasure of being part of that school community for many years. In fact, I had the pleasure of being not only on school council for 16 years as a member, but I was also the chair for many years.

I can confirm that of those 16 years, the conversations around: What are we doing with the school? Are we going to renovate or are we going to rebuild it? occurred probably every month of those 16 years, if not more, as we saw all sorts of challenges happening within our beloved school, and I can confirm that we heard a lot of intentions and a lot of commitments of what the future would look like, yet nothing ever happened. I can also confirm there was a lot of frustration.

All to say that the school and what is now happening with Whitehorse Elementary is remarkable, and I celebrate the fact that we all sit here today in our Legislative Assembly talking about Whitehorse Elementary School with the intent of progress and there's action that is being applied to it.

When I think about this, I think also about the French immersion program itself. I meant it the other day when I said I don't believe anybody thought that the French immersion program in the Yukon would be what it is today. I am certain that Madame Henderson envisioned it would be grand but perhaps not this grand.

Within its grandness, that dear school is bursting at its seams so substantially that the school can no longer congregate as a school community in the gymnasium, and I applaud the teachers for how they have worked very diligently to find creative ways so that kids are able to not only have a gym that functions as a gymnasium for their athletic pursuits and their gym classes but also to bring kids together in ways that may not be all the kids in the gym at the same time, but there'll be different grades or they will have the gym open and then they'll use the outside as well. I've also been very aware that the teachers have worked to bring the kids more often outside for activities, including exploring of the clay cliffs and down by the riverfront, because that simply is needed if we are going to have all kids have access to gym.

From that lens of just having an active community, Whitehorse Elementary administration and teachers have gone above and beyond to make this a reality for those dear children, and so I celebrate this new move, the move to a new school that will actually incorporate physical activity, and the attachment to both the school but also the venues that are around that area in Valleyview. Again, as I said, of course, I'm very attached to the school. She is 70 years old, if not older than that, and has seen countless generations of Yukoners go through. It's time for her to do something new. I realize that, and I'm so excited for the kids who will get to learn French immersion in this new location while we explore opportunities for our beloved school.

Again, I thank the Minister of Education for being the first minister who has kept his word out of all the ministers I've ever spoken to and actually seen this through and is creating this new opportunity for Whitehorse Elementary, and I appreciate that we still have a bit of a road to take, but at least action is certainly happening. Thank you.

Linda Moen: I would like to speak on Motion No. 188. I'd like to speak to this motion both as the Yukon NDP official critic for Education and as the MLA that represents Mountainview, which includes the community of Valleyview.

I had the opportunity to attend a number of the public engagement sessions held by the government regarding the relocation of École Whitehorse Elementary School. I know the government also engaged with the school community, and it was through this engagement that the location was chosen. When the government moves forward with changes in any community, it is so important that those affected by those changes be involved in this process so they can provide insight, feedback, and solutions can be addressed and found.

I appreciate the City of Whitehorse is included in this motion, and I want to take the opportunity to speak to whom else this government needs to work with in this planning process. The parcel of land also lies adjacent to the parcel of Kwanlin Dün First Nation settlement land, and it is important that Kwanlin Dün First Nation be engaged in this planning process.

I know that the Valleyview Community Association has raised a number of concerns both to myself and to the Minister of Education and to government officials through that process. Some of those concerns include the traffic and the loss of their green space. As this work moves forward, I want to ensure that their concerns are heard and addressed from the very beginning.

Amendment proposed

Linda Moen: Madam Speaker, I move:

THAT Motion No. 188 be amended by adding the phrase ", Kwanlin Dün First Nation, and Valleyview Community Association" after the phrase "with the City of Whitehorse".

Speaker: The amendment is in order.

It has been moved by the Member for Mountainview:

THAT Motion No. 188 be amended by adding the phrase ", Kwanlin Dün First Nation, and Valleyview Community Association" after the phrase "with the City of Whitehorse".

Linda Moen: The Valleyview Community Association and Kwanlin Dün First Nation will both be neighbours to this school. The development of this school will have effects on them and their communities. It's essential that this government involve them in the process to ensure that when concerns are raised, they are heard and addressed.

I do acknowledge that I did understand that the Minister of Education said that there would be a PAC committee or a project advisory committee through the planning phase, but I believe it is essential from the very start of what this motion means that all partners are included from the very beginning. It makes sense that they are — the need for shared information and to have the ability to address issues as they arise, not during and not after.

We know that Yukon schools need successful schools, and that starts from the very planning. This amendment will work to support the success of the school, and I believe that the most successful projects happen when done respectfully and in collaboration. I raise this amendment to ensure that the perspectives of Kwanlin Dün First Nation and my constituents of Valleyview, who will be most affected by these changes, are included as this government moves forward.

Hon. Scott Kent: I appreciate what I would consider a friendly amendment by the Member for Mountainview, obviously representing her constituents in that area.

I spoke briefly during my remarks to the motion prior to its amendment about the project advisory committee. I'll put on the record who the members of that project advisory committee are. There are two members from École Whitehorse Elementary staff, two members from École Whitehorse Elementary School Council. One École Whitehorse Elementary student will sit as a member at large. There is a member from the Valleyview Community Association. I mentioned Sport Yukon will have a member. There is also one member each from Kwanlin Dün First Nation to Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and the City of Whitehorse.

While I believe that this amendment will strengthen the original motion, I'm just curious why the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council wasn't mentioned by the member opposite. But that said, as I've mentioned, they are included in the project advisory committee. I don't have the time to do a subamendment with respect to this. But that said, I'm just curious why it would only be Kwanlin Dün First Nation and not Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. They also have settlement lands in the vicinity, not directly next door to where the school is going to be.

But that said, we're prepared to support this amendment. But just curious about that omission, if the member could perhaps speak to that when she closes debate on this amendment.

Lane Tredger: I just wanted to speak to the member opposite's question. In this motion, we included the parties that have land directly neighbouring the school area, but we absolutely would like to see Ta'an Kwäch'än Council at the table as well. Please understand this amendment to the motion as a beginning and not a closed list.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question on the amendment?

Are you agreed?

Amendment to Motion No. 188 agreed to

Speaker: Is there any debate on the motion as amended? If the member now speaks, the member will close debate.

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Tyler Porter: I would just like to note that based on the tone and the temperature of how this legislative session has been going, I just want people to know that I created two versions of my closing remarks just because I wasn't sure where this was going to go. But with that, I'll just say I look forward to this project moving forward and thank you for supporting this motion.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Division

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Order.

Speaker's statement — Order and decorum while the Clerk is polling the House

Speaker: With the recorded division, I would like to remind all members of the expectations for decorum in this House.

The Speaker has a responsibility under Standing Order 6 to preserve order. While some members may have strong feelings about the matter before the House, there has been ample opportunity for debate, for questions to be asked, and for members to express their views. When the time comes to vote, every member must be afforded the opportunity to vote as they see fit. This principle lies at the very heart of our parliamentary democracy: the right of members to cast their vote freely and without interference.

I will not allow heckling or any disruptive noise while the Clerk is polling the House. It is important that each member's vote be heard and clearly understood. Standing Order 6(5) specifically states that "When the Speaker is putting a question, no member shall enter, walk out of or across the Assembly, or make any noise or disturbance."

Thank you.

We will now proceed with the division. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Currie Dixon: Agree.
Hon. Scott Kent: Agree.
Hon. Brad Cathers: Agree.
Hon. Linda Benoit: Agree.
Hon. Ted Laking: Agree.
Patti McLeod: Agree.
Hon. Laura Lang: Agree.
Hon. Jen Gehmair: Agree.
Hon. Wade Istchenko: Agree.
Adam Gerle: Agree.
Doris Anderson: Agree.
Tyler Porter: Agree.
Kate White: Agree.
Lane Tredger: Agree.
Brent McDonald: Agree.
Linda Moen: Agree.
Carmen Gustafson: Agree.
Justin Ziegler: Accord.
Debra-Leigh Reti: Agree.

Clerk: Madam Speaker, the results are 19 yea, zero nay.

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

Motion No. 188, as amended, agreed to

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS — GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 190 — Special Committee on Electoral Financing orders of reference and reporting deadline

Clerk: Motion No. 190, standing in the name of the Hon. Linda Benoit.

Speaker: It is moved by the Chair of the Special Committee on Electoral Financing:

THAT the terms of reference for the Special Committee on Electoral Financing, as established by Motion No. 77, be amended to include that the committee examine third-party spending and the administration related to electoral financing; and

THAT the deadline for the committee to report its findings to the House be changed from October 31, 2026 to before the end of the 2027 Spring Sitting.

Hon. Linda Benoit: It's my pleasure to rise today as the Chair of the Special Committee on Electoral Financing to support this motion. This motion was agreed to unanimously by the committee. I wish to thank the members of this important all-party committee for all of their work over the past months. While we will have an interim report ready to table shortly, we have found some matters that require a more in-depth look. I thank you all for your consideration today.

Carmen Gustafson: I just wanted to rise to say thanks to the committee members and the Clerks of the Legislative Assembly Office for their work on the committee. The motion does reflect the work that we've done and our agreement to continue to do some of that work to consider electoral financing.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?
Are you agreed?

Motion No. 190 agreed to

Hon. Scott Kent: 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: Order. Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

Bill No. 11, *Yukon Firearms Act*

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 11, entitled *Yukon Firearms Act*.

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 general debate on Bill No. 11, entitled *Yukon Firearms Act*.

Hon. Laura Lang: I would like to thank the officials. To my right, I have Mark Radke, my Deputy Minister of Justice and Deputy Attorney General of Yukon, and to my left, I have Mr. Drew MacNeil. He is the Director of Policy and Communications for the Department of Justice.

It is certain that the Government of Yukon has supported and will continue to fully support federal initiatives aimed at reducing the criminal use of illegal firearms, preventing gang violence, and stopping the smuggling and sale of illegal firearms. I appreciate that the Government of Canada presented firearm prohibitions as measures to enhance public safety and keep Canadians safe from gun violence. However, the evidence indicates that the current approach is not delivering the intended results. Instead, the firearms prohibitions and the assault-style firearms program are creating growing challenges for our jurisdictions, law enforcement, and law-abiding firearms owners across Canada.

While it is certainly expected that we all work to implement measures that deny criminal access to prohibited firearms, this must too be balanced with the important role that legally purchased and operated firearms provide in supporting subsistence lifestyles and personal safety from wildlife in extremely remote settings, in supporting hunters and trappers, and in supporting those who safely use firearms for positive and beneficial activities such as shooting sports. The roots of firearms-related harm are tied largely to the illegal drug trade, organized crime, and gaps in the justice system, not to lawful firearms ownership, which remains an important part of life, culture, and subsistence practices across the Yukon.

With frustration, I note that the federal Assault-Style Firearms Compensation Program and related bans will neither address the illegal firearms and street weapons used in violent crimes nor enhance public safety. The federal government's approach has not demonstrated measurable public safety benefits. Instead, it has placed significant strain on law enforcement, eroded confidence and trust among lawful firearms owners, and negatively affected firearms businesses and sport-shooting communities.

Alongside most provinces and all territories, our government has consistently brought these issues forward with the federal government and will continue to advocate for solutions that achieve the objectives of reducing criminal use of illegal firearms, preventing gang violence, and stopping the smuggling and sale of illegal firearms. This must be done while respecting lawful firearms owners.

As noted in numerous speeches, supporting lawful Yukon firearms owners is a key mandate commitment of our government. Yukoners — including members of Yukon First Nations exercising their subsistence rights, hunters, outfitters, and sports shooters — face the brunt of the federal confiscation efforts. As noted in my introductory remarks, this misguided federal policy doesn't apply to criminals; it exclusively targets trained, vetted, licence-holding Yukoners who have adhered to the *Criminal Code* and the *Firearms Act*.

Our proposed legislation reflects and formalizes this opposition. It echoes views heard from hundreds of Yukoners over the summer through public engagement and many hundreds, if not thousands, more over recent years since Ottawa began targeting responsible firearms owners.

One such letter I received was from a former NDP supporter who was a hunter and gun collector. Not only does he oppose the assault-style firearms program, the letter took issue with how firearms have been determined to be included in the program and specifically the Chiappa M1-22. This particular rifle is largely collected as a historic reminder of the sacrifices of those who carried its namesake in the Second World War. As a .22-calibre rifle, it is also used to hunt small game and teach young hunters how to shoot.

Other examples of types of firearms used by Yukon hunters on the federal prohibited list include: semi-automatic firearms with limited magazine capacity that function similarly to other non-restricted hunting rifles and are commonly used for harvesting game; rifles chambered in standard hunting calibres that are suitable for northern conditions, long-distance, and ethical harvesting practices; firearms with ergonomic or modern design that do not increase lethality but are prohibited based on appearance rather than function.

The question we have received since the program introduction is how removal of legally purchased firearms such as the Chiappa M1-22 effectively reduces criminal use of illegal firearms, prevents gang violence, and stops the smuggling and sale of actual illegal firearms. Noting the broader concerns and those related to the listing of illegal firearms as prohibited, we ask the federal Minister of Public Safety for a northern exemption or a solution that recognizes the reality of life in the North. This was followed up with a letter between all three territories to the federal Minister for Public Safety. We have yet to receive a response to either letter. We have joined our voice with eight provinces, two territories, and a growing number of law enforcement officers who have shared their opposition to the federal government's misguided approach.

Two provinces enacted legislation to voice their dissatisfaction with Ottawa. We are joining them. I realize that unlike the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta, the *Yukon Act* does not contain provisions that may allow greater flexibility by provinces to counter federal law. However, while we may lack the same legislative authority of provinces, it's important to do all we can to protect our northern identity and Yukon firearm owners' position to the federal government.

While this bill does not counter the *Criminal Code* or the firearms act, what it does is create another mechanism to voice Yukoners' concerns to the federal government. It can do more. Establishing a firearms advocate would provide Yukoners a dedicated resource to: hear and collate their concerns; support firearms education, training, and safety initiatives; improve public safety outcomes related to firearms; of course, advise me as the Minister of Justice as well as my colleagues on emerging firearms issues; and finally, communicate with the public, including individuals and businesses, and other jurisdictions on firearms-related issues to hear and understand Yukon's perspectives.

The Opposition may find it hard to believe, but we wish we didn't have to do this. This is a response to federal government actions that are unfair and have an overwhelming impact on law-abiding Yukoners. We are doing it because we must. This unreasonable firearms policy and related prohibitions have serious criminal consequences for many responsible Yukon firearms owners and businesses. The federal government is criminalizing Yukoners who have done nothing wrong. Licensed, trained, and background-checked Yukoners legally purchased firearms. Then, with a stroke of a pen in a federal order-in-council, their products were deemed illegal largely for political and aesthetic reasons, and they were informed that if they do not surrender these products, they would be committing a crime.

Since it was created, the list of prohibited models has not only grown over the years, but it even includes many single-

shot and rim-fire firearms. It is important to be clear that assault rifles or fully automatic rifles have been banned in Canada since the 1970s. "Assault-style" is not a technical term. It is not an accurate way to classify firearms. We committed to stand up for responsible Yukon firearms owners and resist these unreasonable federal efforts that have no impact on crime or keeping communities safe.

I would like to move on to what the *Yukon Firearms Act* proposes: the creation of a firearms advocate, the first office of its kind in the territory. This act supports action on a mandate commitment to support lawful firearms owners. I will go through the provisions of Bill No. 11 and their intended impact, and then I welcome discussions from Members of the Legislative Assembly.

The bill commences with a preamble outlining the importance of lawful firearms ownership, including its connection to private property rights, Yukon history, culture, and way of life. The preamble also recognizes the importance of firearms for safety on the land as Yukoners pursue cultural and recreational activities. Finally, the preamble underscores the importance of hearing Yukoners' perspectives and ensuring the northern context is understood and considered when developing firearms policies and legislation.

Section 1 of the act sets out definitions, and I will highlight just a few of them. The "Chief Firearms Officer" is defined by reference to the definition in the federal *Firearms Act* in which the position is created. The same applies to the definition of "firearms officer". "Public officials" is inclusive of elected members of federal, provincial, and territorial legislatures, employees of the federal, provincial, and territorial public service, and agents of federal, provincial, and territorial governments.

Section 2 establishes the creation of a firearms advocate office as a corporation sole, which allows the office to act independently from government. The advocate, per section 2(2), can be appointed by ministerial order.

Section 3(1) of the bill outlines the function and the powers of the advocate, which includes advising the minister on legislation and policies relating to firearms use, ownership, and possession. This includes advising on the impact of federal legislation and policies on lawful Yukon firearms owners. The advocate's functions also include communication with public officials on use, ownership, and possession of firearms. This will support the firearms advocate in their advocacy on behalf of Yukon firearms owners. Sharing information with the public supports the advocate in their mandate to promote education in support of public safety. The advocate may provide or promote education respecting firearms use, ownership, and possession as a means of promoting public safety and safe practices.

Section 3(2) further outlines the functions the advocate may carry out to meet their mandate, including conducting and facilitating research and the collection and analysis of data respecting firearm use, ownership, and possession, engaging with the public, including firearms owners, communicating with public officials, and conducting other activities to carry out the functions of the advocate.

Section 3(3) clarifies that the advocate does not act as an agent of the government unless such a relationship is specifically created in the future by contract.

I will now turn to provisions respecting eligibility, appointment, and tenure.

Section 4 of the bill excludes the Chief Firearms Officer, firearms officer, any member of the public service or member of the Yukon or federal legislatures from eligibility for appointments.

Section 5 outlines the term and tenure of the advocate. The advocate may be appointed for a term of up to two years, and an individual may be reappointed. The advocate serves at the pleasure of the minister.

I will now turn to the accountability and the reporting provisions contained in the act. Remuneration and expenses are addressed in section 6 and will be prescribed by ministerial order and published publicly. Funding will be allocated with consideration to meeting these functions of the advocate. Section 8 establishes reporting and financial accountability requirements applicable to the advocate. The advocate is required to provide a report to the minister by June 30 each year detailing the advocate's activities and financial statements, which will then be tabled in the Legislative Assembly.

The bill also includes a provision to allow the minister to request any report, financial statement, budget, or other record related to the functions of the advocate.

Section 9 applies the conflict of interest provision found in part 4 of the *Cabinet and Caucus Employees Act* to the firearms advocate. Section 10 is a standard immunity provision that protects the advocate and the minister and persons acting under the minister's authority for actions taken in good faith under the act. Section 11 provides general regulation-making powers to the Commissioner in Executive Council, including the power to define any expression used but not defined in the act.

Finally, I will note that section 12 contains a consequential amendment. Part 2 of schedule 1 of the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Regulation* will be updated to include the Yukon firearms advocate. This applies to the existing privacy legislation framework and extends protection for personal information of Yukoners collected by the advocate in the course of conducting engagement.

With those provisions reviewed, I would like to conclude with a few brief remarks. The *Yukon Firearms Act* created the office for the firearms advocate to ensure that the voice of Yukoners is heard on matters related to firearms policy and legislation. I do look forward to the members' questions and comments, and I thank the members for their questions thus far and in preparing me for today. Again, I hope that I have been thorough in my explanation of the intent of the bill, and I'm looking forward to the discussion now.

Carmen Gustafson: If you could forgive me for a moment — I had to look around and see if we were in the Legislative Assembly of the Yukon or on the floor of the Parliament, because most of the minister's comments were about federal legislation and the meaning of that federal legislation, which is, I would point out, not what we are here debating today. Whether that legislation has had impacts or the validity of it — that will be before the Supreme Court of Canada next week to decide whether that was constitutional or not. I'm going to focus my questions on the legislation that's here today and not about what the federal government is or is not doing with respect to this file.

Saying that, I recognize the minister also referenced a former member of the NDP, a friend of mine. I know that exact letter; I received it as well. I recognize that there are individuals

who feel impacted by that legislation, but again, that's not what we're here debating today. We're debating the Yukon Party's decision to create a paid position to advocate for firearms owners.

In Second Reading, I did go through some of the things that I will focus on in this part of the debate, which are about priorities, about costs, about the interaction with this act and with the firearms advocate, with the appointment of a Chief Firearms Officer by the federal government, about the mandate and the parameters, and the general understanding by people in the Yukon about what this role will and will not do. I'll be asking about the analysis that was used and considered when developing this legislation, the potential for scope creep of what the advocate does, and about accountability to this House and to the Yukon public. It won't be in that order. That's not how I went through it, but those will be the things that, as I said in Second Reading, I will be asking about and a few other things as well. I just wanted to start off with a bit of background.

Could the minister tell us if she has an idea of how many lawful firearm owners are in the Yukon?

Hon. Laura Lang: There's a difference in numbers depending on which source we look to. Currently, it looks like we have approximately 9,155 PALs as of 2025. However, I do know in conversations with the Director General of the Canadian Firearms Program that it is estimated that there are greater efforts needed to enhance that number — because while that's a good representation, there are far more individuals who still need to secure their PAL, especially in rural communities — both in the Yukon but across Canada.

Carmen Gustafson: On that differing in numbers, would the minister say that somebody who owns firearms but doesn't have a PAL is then a lawful firearm owner who will be advocated for by the firearms advocate?

Hon. Laura Lang: I think it's fair to say that with any program, there are always opportunities for improvement, and that includes access to the actual program itself. When we think about the PAL, there may be opportunities for us to see how we can make it more readily available to all Yukoners, including those who may not be actively aware that a PAL is needed. Again, through education, people increase their understanding and awareness that this is required through the *Firearms Act*.

Carmen Gustafson: I don't dispute at all that making PAL courses and education and information about getting a possession and acquisition licence is important. But when the minister talks about this legislation and other members, I keep hearing an emphasis on lawful firearm owners.

Maybe the minister could define "lawful firearm owner" for me?

Hon. Laura Lang: "Lawful" does include compliance with the *Canadian Firearms Act*, and again, I recognize that for some Yukoners, the process for application of a PAL may not be something that is familiar to them and there is more work that is needed.

Just as I said in my past response — and again, I remind the Assembly that the purpose of this federal program is not targeted toward this population of people. It is targeted to the criminal activity and it is targeted to illegal firearms.

Carmen Gustafson: Could the minister define what an "illegal firearm" is? Would that be in the possession of somebody who is not following the *Firearms Act*?

Hon. Laura Lang: I'm always eager to answer a question with as much detail as I can, and sometimes it's better to just go to the source. In this case, both the *Firearms Act* and regulations at the federal level as well as the *Criminal Code* — I think the member opposite will find the answers there.

Carmen Gustafson: Certainly, we want to make sure that what I have seen in the Yukon Party platform and in the mandate and in all of this — all of the public engagement — the emphasis on lawful firearm owners, we want to make sure that we're talking about the same thing.

I just want to be clear that I understand that there are many reasons why somebody doesn't have a PAL. I understand that, absolutely, and I'm not trying to cast aspersions on anybody who doesn't have a PAL and does have a firearm in their home. I'm just pointing out that the emphasis has been made by the minister and throughout this process on lawful firearm owners. I just wanted to clarify what she considered a lawful firearm owner. To me, I would say it sounds like you should have a possession and acquisition licence.

Along these lines, so we know now how many firearm owners we have.

How many firearms do people own in the Yukon?

Hon. Laura Lang: No, we don't have that information.

Carmen Gustafson: I suspect it's far greater than the number of firearm owners there are.

It's not particularly relevant. I was wondering if the minister had that information.

She did make some comments about this, but could the minister lay out what the initial mandate and priorities of the firearm advocate would be?

Hon. Laura Lang: I appreciate that question. Again, I remind us that this is a first step. This piece of prospective legislation is required in order to create a mandate for the prospective firearms advocate. As outlined in section 3, whether it's a mandate or the role — it is listed. I will just highlight a few things: hold dialogue with the firearms community and stakeholders across the territory; support and advocate on behalf of lawful Yukon firearms owners; provide advice to the Minister of Justice on firearms issues and share findings; identify and fill education gaps; and supporting programming initiatives, et cetera.

What's extremely interesting, though, is that in addition to having this, we now have a Yukon Chief Firearms Officer. That is a role that we've been advocating for some time, and the federal government has now given this Chief Firearms Officer to the North, of which, that position is now situated in Whitehorse for the next 18 months.

If this bill does pass, we will be working with the Chief Firearms Officer and the federal government to understand what that focus will be of that role, and then from there, we will determine what their primary functions will be in the early days.

Carmen Gustafson: It sounds like maybe we don't really know right now what the advocate will actually do — I

kind of question why we have to debate this legislation this fall then — and the minister talked about sort of a timeline for understanding that and working with the CFO.

Is there a timeline for when this advocate would be appointed and put in their position, and when we might know what they're actually going to work on?

Hon. Laura Lang: I have previously stated that once this bill does pass — which my hope is that it does — then that would be the next step that we take. But again, I'm very open to working quickly to see this position come into reality.

Carmen Gustafson: It's not looking hopeful that there would be an advocate in place in the short term.

The Supreme Court of Canada is hearing a case challenging the federal firearms legislation. The Supreme Court isn't really known for writing judgments quickly. There will be some time before a judgment comes from that hearing that's happening the week after next.

Will the mandate of the firearms advocate change based on the outcome of that case?

Hon. Laura Lang: I'm not trying to be trite, but I can't answer that question, since I don't know the outcome of the case.

Carmen Gustafson: There are really kind of two outcomes that could come from that case: Either the law is constitutional or it's not constitutional. It's relevant because the minister spent quite a bit of time railing on the federal government for that legislation as sort of the setup for the reason for the advocate.

If the law is determined to be constitutional, it's a valid law made by the Government of Canada. If it's not determined constitutional, then it is potentially of no force and effect. Either way, I think it has significant bearing on the role of the advocate in opposing a piece of federal legislation.

I wonder if the minister wants to answer that question again.

Hon. Laura Lang: I think what we've learned over the last number of years is that not just the firearms community but Yukoners in general have concerns about the programming approach on firearms by the federal government. Whether or not the law is found to be unconstitutional, there is likely a reason for the Yukon to pursue a voice at federal tables and within Canada itself.

That voice is done by me. That voice is brought by my officials, and the advocate may very well still have a relevant voice. As I have said very clearly in the past, we will see what happens with the Supreme Court ruling as well as what that role of the advocate will look like.

Carmen Gustafson: Could the minister expand on what she means by: a problem with the federal government's programming with respect to firearms? Could she expand on what that means?

Hon. Laura Lang: Canada will continue to have firearms programs. Knowing that, Yukon will still have the need to ensure that Yukoners' culture is part of future conversations regarding that program.

Carmen Gustafson: I noticed and as the minister noted, this firearms advocate is not going to be speaking on behalf of the government. I'm not even sure that they have to take a position consistent with Yukon Government. The minister suggested that maybe they're bringing the voice of the Yukon to some federal tables.

Which tables would they be going to?

Hon. Laura Lang: It's a great question. The most important first step for us to take in determining where the advocate's time is best spent is by working with jurisdictions such as Saskatchewan, which has provided Canada with a lot of good efforts in how they're bringing voice to this matter. As examples, I appreciate that for provinces like Saskatchewan, they are working with Public Safety Canada, they are working with the Canadian Firearms Program, and they are working with various police organizations, including police organizations that are not the RCMP — but also the RCMP — as well as the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, et cetera.

What I'm looking forward to is that these conversations with other provinces and territories will afford us the ability to learn where our effort is best suited, because there are a lot of opportunities. Again, we want to make sure that Yukon's voice is presented at the appropriate places.

Carmen Gustafson: I'm glad that the minister raised the Saskatchewan program, and I wonder if the minister could tell me the difference between the Saskatchewan position and the firearms advocate for Yukon.

Hon. Laura Lang: Time has not been friendly in the creation of this piece of legislation, and so I appreciate that there is a general understanding of the differences not just between what Saskatchewan's bill has provided but also what Alberta has done as well as just the general activities in other provinces as well as territories.

While we haven't done that thorough, deep analysis, I do recognize that there are differences in powers between provinces and territories. As I said in my opening remarks, fundamentally, territories are treated differently under the *Firearms Act*. Everybody is quite aware of that, and so I think that while Saskatchewan might be performing functions that are permitted through the *Firearms Act* and I readily acknowledge that right now the territories do not have that function, similar to Saskatchewan and similar to Alberta and similar to the unofficial approaches taken in other jurisdictions, we are bringing an official ground-level voice by the advocate to these various tables.

Carmen Gustafson: I will have some more questions about that, because I think it's an important distinction that I think a lot of Yukoners don't necessarily understand that there is a significant difference between this Yukon Firearms Advocate and what I believe is the commissioner in Saskatchewan and similarly in Alberta — what they do. But I'll come back to that.

Where I was really kind of going with this is I just want the minister to clarify whether the advocate will be advocating on behalf of the Yukon Government — although they won't be an agent of government — or are they advocating for the position of Yukon firearm owners?

Hon. Laura Lang: Neither. It would be for all Yukoners.

Carmen Gustafson: Now the scope has gone from lawful firearms owners to lawful firearms owners plus firearms

owners who may or may not have a PAL to all Yukoners. I'm impressed by how much this has expanded just in our brief conversation here.

Just to clarify, will the advocate be taking positions that are consistent with the Government of Yukon?

Hon. Laura Lang: As already explained in my opening remarks, the office of the advocate is independent from government. The job of the advocate is to provide advice to me, but that advice is coming from the voice of Yukoners. Yukoners include Yukoners who lawfully own their firearms, Yukoners who feel invested in this subject, and as I've said on multiple occasions, I'm very open to hearing a variety of different perspectives.

But again, this is primarily about the focus on the federal government's program development that is not actually dealing with the issues at hand, which is about criminals; it is about illegal firearm possession and use, and it's about ensuring that focus is what the federal government is placing, not on individuals like Yukoners who have a northern way of living that includes the use of firearms.

Carmen Gustafson: The minister did emphasize the one role of the advocate, which is to advise her, and maybe positions that she would take. But as an independent officer or an independent body outside of Yukon Government, can the firearms advocate take a position that is contrary to the Yukon Government's position?

Hon. Laura Lang: Again, the role is going to evolve. I don't pretend to know all the answers right now. But I can confirm, as it stipulates in the legislation, the role would be reporting to me, and the role does serve at the minister's pleasure. The answer is mixed. It's not going to be black and white, and that might create frustration for members of this House. But again, the role is to bring what I understand to be a perspective of Yukoners.

If I had to give a true yes or no, then yes. But there are reasonable checks and balances that are going to be built in.

Carmen Gustafson: I think the minister is going to know where my next question is going to go, which is: What are those reasonable checks and balances when you have created a legal entity separate from Yukon Government that is not an agent of Yukon Government? What are those checks and balances?

Hon. Laura Lang: Similar to the roles that we also have in government that serve at pleasure, those roles are fundamentally built on a premise of trust. We depend on the advice, we depend on the consideration and the knowledge that the person or the people have who come to us and who serve at the pleasure — in some cases, that's somebody like a deputy minister. I completely rely on my deputy minister because I also trust my deputy minister. There's trust.

That means that we don't always agree. That means that there can be rigorous debate. That also might mean that the approach that I originally want to take to something — because we've had that rigorous debate, because there's a trusting relationship — may change. I can confirm, in my very short tenure in government, that I have done exactly that.

I can imagine that, similarly, the advocate would be an individual who is trusted, who is bringing the Yukon's voice into both my and my colleagues' awareness and there will be rigorous debate. That will be a requirement I would expect if we are actually bringing the perspective of Yukoners, including lawful firearms owners, into our considerations as we're moving forward.

Carmen Gustafson: I now understand that the role of the advocate is going to be to listen to all Yukoners — not just firearm owners but all Yukoners — and share that perspective. I understood from the beginning from this legislation what "serving at pleasure" means. How is this firearms advocate who is initially supposed to be advocating for firearm owners and now is advocating for all Yukoners — if they are in the position of advocating for something that's actually not what a group of firearm owners want, is that really something that the firearms advocate is going to do? Wants to do? In that position — I'm going to ask the second part of the question after.

Hon. Laura Lang: I want to go back for a second. I think it's important to remember that when we're talking about this matter, yes, we are talking about legal firearms owners. Yes, we've also said Yukoners. The member opposite is correct. That's not new. I have said that in every single speech, in every single article that I've ever interviewed on — Yukon firearms owners and Yukoners.

I appreciate that for some Yukoners there is a different perspective, which I have listened to for the year that I have been in. I also appreciate that for Yukon, for people who are responsible firearms owners, or Yukoners in general who we are hearing from are individuals whose livelihood, their business, or their way of life is impacted by these decisions that are not taking into account what is happening in our territory — how we use firearms. While I appreciate that there are households with firearms that may not agree with the approach that we're taking, there are far more households who actually do agree, and those households include households who don't use firearms but whose family members are dependent on hunting, as an example, hunting or trapping or enjoy the recreational pursuits of sport shooting.

As I think this through, the advocate will be bringing forward the voice of our territory, and that's for me to listen to, that's for my colleagues to listen to, and that's for us to consider. As I will remind us, because we are a democracy, the government makes the final decisions, so the advocate can bring that, but it's my responsibility to then make a decision on something. With my Cabinet colleagues, that is how the process would be applied.

Carmen Gustafson: I'm just wondering where the minister gets the data from that more households agree with this approach than disagree with this approach and if she could share that.

Hon. Laura Lang: When the election was called and the Yukon Party ran, we were very clear on using this as a key mandate item.

One of the things that I have found frustrating is the lack of data that is available on firearms in general in Canada. It is a known gap, and this is something that we are working with our

federal colleagues on and something that I would hope to continue to work on over the coming years.

I can confirm that every single one of my elected colleagues has heard at more doors than not that this is an area of concern, particularly for the rural community members. While I don't have hard data to provide to my colleague, I can confirm that the anecdotal evidence is very strong in this area — that this is something of great importance and meaning to many Yukoners.

Carmen Gustafson: Oh, thank you. It sounds like the landlords and the firearms owners that the Yukon Party bases their policy on might be the same people that don't show up in any data anywhere.

I would actually just like to remind the minister that the campaign promise was: "Developing and Passing a *Yukon Firearms Act*." I guess we could check that off. "Preventing the Implementation of the Federal Liberal Buyback Program aimed at confiscating lawfully-owned firearms." The minister has advocated for that, and: "Creating a Territorially-Appointed Chief Firearms Officer Position to advocate for the Yukon's lawful firearms owners and promote safety."

Could the minister just clarify whether the *Yukon Firearms Act* creates a territorially appointed chief firearms officer position as campaigned on and seems to be relied on by the minister for supporting this position?

Hon. Laura Lang: I acknowledge the federal government stepping up and appointing the Chief Firearms Officer position for the Yukon. That was a huge win for the three territories and something that truthfully we did not think would happen. While I appreciate that there was acknowledgement in our platform to appoint a territorial position, I'm thankful to the federal government for coming through with something that has been long anticipated, and now we actually have it.

The difference, though, is that position is a position that is a federally appointed position and doesn't advocate on behalf of the Yukon. It doesn't bring Yukoners' concerns. The position is laid out in the federal firearms legislation. Again, what is it that the Chief Firearms Officer is responsible for at a federal level? It's not about the Yukoners' voice. It's about implementing a piece of federal legislation. The federal position is required by law in all Canadian jurisdictions and appointed by the federal Minister of Public Safety — not me — and funded by the federal government. It is responsible for administering the federal *Firearms Act* and overseeing firearms licensing, eligibility, and safety in their jurisdiction. The position is also authorized to issue and revoke licences, authorize transportation and carrying of restricted or prohibited firearms, and approve shooting ranges.

It's all very great news for the Yukon, Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories. I'm thankful, again, for the decision by the federal government on that particular aspect.

The firearms advocate would be a territorial position that is appointed by the Minister of Justice. It would be funded by the territorial government. Its job would be to: support and advocate on behalf of lawful Yukon firearms owners and Yukoners; support firearms education, training, and safety initiatives; advise the Minister of Justice on firearms issues; and communicate with the public on firearms to hear Yukoners' perspectives.

Carmen Gustafson: There is a difference between what was campaigned on and what is happening in the legislation. Now, I just want to clarify that.

There was an engagement period from July 2 to August 7, 2026. One would expect that if this was a real hot-button issue that a majority of Yukon households were really interested in and wanted to support, they would participate in the public engagement. Could the minister tell me how many formal responses were received in the public engagement on the firearms legislation?

Hon. Laura Lang: A total of 268 formal responses were received.

Carmen Gustafson: Madam Chair, 268 formal responses to a piece of legislation that a majority of Yukon households are behind. Of those 268 respondents, could the minister tell me how many expressed firm opposition to the position?

Hon. Laura Lang: As noted in the "what we heard" report, there is firm opposition from 76 responses.

Carmen Gustafson: There was a survey that was conducted, and there were just over 200 responses to that survey. In that survey, it asked about priorities for the firearms advocate. In the programming priorities question, which was question 3, could the minister tell me how many of the respondents included, as a priority, opposition to federal bans and buybacks?

Hon. Laura Lang: The member opposite has the "what we heard" document. Just to be clear for everybody, it's page 6 of the "what we heard" document, and the number is 25.

Carmen Gustafson: I'm aware that the "what we heard" document is publicly available, but I think it doesn't hurt to put it on the record of Hansard for the debate of a piece of legislation.

Within that question 3, how many of the respondents just outright reiterated a lack of support for the position entirely?

Hon. Laura Lang: As it says on page 6, 20 responses.

Carmen Gustafson: I would note that a strong majority of the respondents did indicate that their programming priority here was firearm safety. I'm happy to see that, and I think that's a good focus. But I just wanted to be clear that even within the public engagement on this legislation, there was not very high engagement, and not everybody agreed that this was the approach that the government should take. I'm not sure that a majority of households do agree with this approach as suggested by the minister.

But I will move on to another question. One of the understandings of this role is that the advocate will advocate for individual firearm owners. Earlier today, we had the Child and Youth Advocate Office come in, and their programming has two distinct streams. They have systemic advocacy and they have individual advocacy. That's certainly something that happens in other advocacy offices.

Could the minister confirm whether the firearms advocate will be working as an advocate for an individual firearm owner on an issue that they are facing?

Hon. Laura Lang: I think with any government body or government organization or advocate, in the sense that the

member opposite has said, such as the Child and Youth Advocate, any Yukoner is able to come forward with a concern, and we will take time to listen to those concerns of the individual.

Carmen Gustafson: Just to clarify, will the advocate be advocating on behalf of an individual firearm owner in a process? They could potentially appear in court as an amicus. Will they be advocating on behalf of an individual firearm owner?

Hon. Laura Lang: In the proposed bill, the functions and powers are outlined in section 3(1)(a) to (d). I'm going to read those out again: "The functions of the Advocate are the following:

(a) providing advice to the Minister in relation to legislation and policies in respect of firearms use, ownership or possession, including the impact of federal legislation and policies on the use, ownership or possession of firearms in Yukon;

(b) communicating with public officials in respect of firearms use, ownership and possession, including advocating for the interests of Yukon firearms users;

(c) disseminating information about firearms to the public, including information about proposed legislation and policies and their likely effect on firearms use, ownership and possession;

(d) promoting public safety respecting firearms, including by providing, or facilitating the provision of, education respecting firearms use, ownership and possession.

Carmen Gustafson: Similar to the fact that the "what we heard" document is available to everybody, so is the actual legislation we're debating.

I just wanted to ask the minister again if the firearms advocate will be advocating on behalf of an individual firearm owner in any process.

Hon. Laura Lang: An individual is welcome to raise concerns to the advocate, and they can do so either on behalf of themselves or an organization or a business. Equally so, they can raise their concerns directly with the Chief Firearms Officer, who is now here in Whitehorse, whereas previously, the position has been out of British Columbia. There are two avenues that an individual can seek to support their needs.

Carmen Gustafson: I'm glad that the minister raised the Chief Firearms Officer.

If an individual firearm owner had an issue with a decision of the Chief Firearms Officer, would the firearms advocate then advocate on their behalf to the Chief Firearms Officer?

Hon. Laura Lang: I think I just, in detail, outlined what we are contemplating the role would be, and, of course, Yukoners are able to contact me, contact any one of my colleagues as well as the advocate if they have any type of concern about anything, including those related to firearms.

Chair: Would members like 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 general debate on Bill No. 11, entitled *Yukon Firearms Act*.

Carmen Gustafson: I was asking some questions about individual advocacy and the Chief Firearms Officer and the firearms advocate. I want to ask the minister if she could tell me some of the authorizations that a Chief Firearms Officer is empowered to give.

Hon. Laura Lang: Those authorizations are set out in the *Firearms Act*.

Carmen Gustafson: They certainly are set out in the *Firearms Act* — I've got the *Firearms Act* here. I wonder if the minister could also tell me some of the other kinds of decisions that the chief firearms officer could make, for example, whether they can revoke licences or things of that nature.

Hon. Laura Lang: I've already answered that question, and the member opposite has the legislation in front of her.

Carmen Gustafson: You could maybe say that I brought the guns to the gunfight. In the *Firearms Act*, a Chief Firearms Officer can revoke a licence and authorization to carry for any good and sufficient reason. If they have reasonable grounds to suspect that an individual who holds a licence may have engaged in an act of domestic violence or stalking, the Chief Firearms Officer actually must revoke the licence within 24 hours. They also issue licences as well. These are the kinds of decisions that a Chief Firearms Officer makes. They're very serious decisions, and they are empowered to make those decisions.

The firearms advocate — would they advocate on behalf of an individual firearms owner for whom the Chief Firearms Officer made a decision under the *Firearms Act* that they did not agree with? For example, if they revoked a licence, if they denied an authorization to carry, or if they revoked a licence on grounds of domestic violence, would the firearms advocate then advocate on behalf of that firearms owner to the Chief Firearms Officer?

Hon. Laura Lang: Not only is that a hypothetical question, that's not what is being contemplated by this bill. I believe I answered this question earlier when I outlined section 3, the functions and powers of the advocate, for which I went clause-by-clause of the proposed bill, for which I don't believe I need to read out again. But again, for anybody's interest, it's section 3(1)(a) to (d).

Carmen Gustafson: I want to be very clear that the minister has said that the purpose of this act is not to advocate on behalf of individual firearms owners to the Chief Firearms Officer if they disagree with a decision of the Chief Firearms Officer. That is what I heard the minister say. If she has a different understanding, I would like her to clarify that right now.

Hon. Laura Lang: I believe I have also answered that question previously, but again, I will add to say that the advocate can help any individual navigate appropriate processes and is here to work with the CFO.

Carmen Gustafson: I don't think that actually was a very clear answer. Could the minister tell me what the normal process is to appeal a decision of the Chief Firearms Officer?

Hon. Laura Lang: I remind the Legislative Assembly that the opening remarks of the member were very clear that we are focused on this particular bill and not on any other bill, including the federal bills.

Carmen Gustafson: I think it actually is important. Now we're focusing on this bill and we're not focusing on what the federal government is doing. But I'm actually talking about what the current legal situation for firearms owners in the Yukon is. If you had a problem with a Chief Firearms Officer's decision, you would take that to court.

Can the minister clarify whether the firearms advocate will be going with an individual who doesn't like the decision of the Chief Firearms Officer — if they will be advocating to the Chief Firearms Officer to change that decision?

Hon. Laura Lang: Under section 3(2)(c), it reads: "(2) In carrying out the Advocate's functions, the Advocate may do any of the following:

"(c) communicate with a chief firearms officer or any other public official;"

By virtue of the actual bill, the advocate can communicate with the Chief Firearms Officer.

Carmen Gustafson: At this point, I'm very confused about whether the advocate is working for an individual firearm owner who has a particular issue with the decision of the Chief Firearms Officer — when they're communicating with the Chief Firearms Officer, if they're advocating on behalf of a position brought by the Yukon Government to the Chief Firearms Officer, whether they're advocating for all Yukoners when they're going to the Chief Firearms Officer — so, I really would like the minister to clarify. I could see there could be a situation for either case. But if a person disagrees with a decision made by a Chief Firearms Officer, will the Yukon Government taxpayer-funded firearms advocate be going to the Chief Firearms Officer to ask them to change that decision?

Hon. Laura Lang: I'm working really hard to imagine all these different scenarios, and I can say that the way that the bill is currently established, I don't speculate that at all. In fact, what I think is that the advocate will work with the CFO in bringing Yukoners' voices forward. Things can change, which I've also been very clear about. We're speaking to hypotheticals for which I'm being asked to give answers, and I don't think it is reasonable to ask me to be so accurate or so decisive in something that has yet to happen. With actual respect, please allow the bill to actually do what it's meant to do in the Legislative Assembly, and if it does pass, we will determine what the functions and the priorities are of this position, including that relationship between the advocate and the CFO.

Carmen Gustafson: It's not a hypothetical that I'm bringing to the minister here. I would just like to draw her attention to the fact that she attended a gun show. She attended a Q&A with the Premier — they attended those together — attended a Q&A with people who are in support of this legislation. I would suggest that people who support this legislation — that is exactly what they think this bill will do. It's not a hypothetical. It was brought to me by somebody who supports this legislation who said that they expect the advocate to go to the Chief Firearms Officer when an individual firearm owner gets a decision they don't like to do something about it. I would like the minister to clarify whether she has heard this interpretation of what the legislation does.

Hon. Laura Lang: I have not heard that — so, clearly on record, I have not heard that.

There is a dispute resolution process built into the Canadian *Firearms Act*. I can imagine, as I've already said, that as this position evolves, so too will the role of the advocate and the relationship between the advocate and the CFO. Again, if somebody has concerns with a ruling of a CFO, they are welcome to engage the dispute resolution process. Any Yukoner, regardless of whether they own a firearm or not, is welcome to bring matters to my attention, to my colleagues' attention, or to the advocate's attention.

But again, we are getting into hypotheticals, because I didn't experience what the member opposite has experienced, and I don't want to speak to something that I have not experienced.

Carmen Gustafson: I think some people will be interested to hear that interpretation.

I'm going to move to some questions about the cost of this position.

Could the minister tell me what costing analysis was done in the development of the legislation? How much is implementation of this legislation expected to cost Yukon taxpayers?

Hon. Laura Lang: I've also previously spoken to this. We all know that this legislation is required to establish a framework for the compensation of the advocate, and it would be based on their work, which would be as published through a ministerial order. As of right now, the funding scheme has not been determined, but the act creates a flexible framework that allows me to specify remuneration for the advocate through that ministerial order. It also allows other funding to be allocated based on the work expected of the advocate, which could vary from year to year.

Carmen Gustafson: I just have to note that I find it very difficult to be asked to vote on a piece of legislation that has clear spending in it with no idea of what we're talking about in terms of budget. There has been no costing. There's no estimate of how much this program is expected to cost. Can the minister confirm that there has been no estimate of how much this program will cost?

Hon. Laura Lang: No, I can't answer that question, because that's breaking Cabinet confidence.

As we progress, if this bill does pass, then our approach to how we implement the advocate will be made public.

Carmen Gustafson: That is your confidence. You could tell me, but you're choosing not to tell me.

Chair's statement

Chair: I remind members to address comments through the Chair and not to personalize debate.

Carmen Gustafson: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm asking for the costing analysis of the position that was done. How much is this expected to cost? I hear that there was an analysis that was done but that it's not being provided to members who are being asked to vote on this bill.

Could the minister please give me an estimate of — she could use as a range — what is the range for the remuneration for the advocate that she would expect to issue by order?

Hon. Laura Lang: I believe I've answered that question.

Carmen Gustafson: I'm very tempted to move an amendment to change this to the "blank cheque act". The program funding, section 7, allows the minister to provide financial assistance and other support.

Could the minister tell me how much financial assistance and other support might be contemplated for the administration of this program?

Hon. Laura Lang: Again, I believe I have already answered this, and I also have said in previous commentary that if this bill does pass, then we will make a determination of what the role will look like in terms of time. That also is in conjunction with the new CFO for Whitehorse. Again, I believe I answered this question, and I look forward to this position working with the CFO.

Carmen Gustafson: Under section 7, where it says that the minister can provide financial assistance and other support, could the minister clarify what financial assistance and other support would be available? Anything that the minister considers advisable to carry out the functions of the advocate — what would that financial assistance and other support be paying for?

Hon. Laura Lang: Section 7 of the bill, under "Program funding", states: "The Minister may provide the financial assistance and other support to the Advocate that the Minister considers advisable to carry out the functions of the Advocate."

Again, if this bill does pass, once the advocate is put in place, once we determine what those priorities will look like, then we will determine the financial assistance that would be required for that.

Carmen Gustafson: Can I ask: Will that financial assistance be coming in a line for a future budget bill that will be debated in this House?

Hon. Laura Lang: Yes.

Carmen Gustafson: Just to clarify: There is currently no funding available to this position until we have an opportunity to vote on a budget in the Spring Sitting?

Hon. Laura Lang: There are currently no funds that have been allocated within our budget.

Carmen Gustafson: It sounds to me then that the advocate will not be able to begin their work until after the budget passes in the Spring Sitting.

Can the minister confirm that the advocate will not be starting their work if this bill passes until a subsequent budget bill passes?

Hon. Laura Lang: The formal appropriation of these funds would happen in this spring budget of 2027-28, and, of course, we would always look to see, if this bill does pass, whether or not there are any funds within the department that we could look to use.

Carmen Gustafson: If the minister is looking to funds within her department, what program would she be taking those funds from to fund the advocate?

Hon. Laura Lang: Again, it's a hypothetical question that I have genuinely not put any true effort into looking into my budget for that. If this bill does pass, then I will take a look at that.

Carmen Gustafson: I'm just trying to get an understanding. If this bill passes and an advocate is appointed, do they start work tomorrow? Do they start work in April? If the funding hasn't been voted on and has to be pulled from somewhere else within the Department of Justice budget, I think it is important in terms of priorities. Timeline-wise, when is the minister expecting that the firearms advocate would begin their work?

Hon. Laura Lang: I believe I have answered this, and this is to be determined.

Carmen Gustafson: I just want to go back to some previous questions that I asked and the minister's response that she hadn't heard the suggestion that the advocate would be working for an individual firearms owner. During a CBC interview on October 8, the person being interviewed said: "… advocate is going to be an intervener … between the federal government and myself. If I am having an issue, they will … intervene" on my behalf.

Could the minister once again clarify whether the advocate will, as part of their role, be intervening on behalf of individual firearm owners?

Hon. Laura Lang: I've already answered that question.

Carmen Gustafson: We can agree to disagree on whether that one was answered clearly. I do want to go back to the cost of the program and the program funding, because the minister is given quite a bit of discretion under this legislation.

Is there going to be a travel budget for this position? Will the firearms advocate be expected to travel, and will that fall under the section 7 program funding?

Hon. Laura Lang: I've already said that this is to be determined.

Carmen Gustafson: Just to clarify, we don't know whether the firearm advocate will be travelling on behalf of firearm owners or Yukoners or the Yukon Government. We don't know if there will be funding allocated toward travel for the advocate.

Hon. Laura Lang: I'm not sure — was there a question or a statement?

Carmen Gustafson: All right. I did ask a question about whether the advocate will be travelling as part of their position and whether that will be funded under the section 7 program funding. But because we don't really know what the advocate is going to do yet — TBD. We don't really know when they're going to be starting — TBD. I can see why that is a difficult question to answer.

In terms of the individual advocacy part of the role, how much of their time is potentially going to be spent advocating for individual firearm owners with an issue with the Chief Firearms Officer versus these general issues?

Hon. Laura Lang: I believe I've also answered this question, as I described verbatim what the bill says as highlighted in section 3 of the proposed bill. If this bill passes, then we will get into more details, including the priorities of the position.

Carmen Gustafson: All right. Is it anticipated that office space will be provided for the firearms advocate?

Hon. Laura Lang: That is also something yet to be determined. Again, as I stated already, section 3 of the proposed bill outlines what the functions are. We will get into the priorities of the individual if this bill passes, and that includes whether or not actual space is required. Again, it's yet to be determined.

Carmen Gustafson: All right. Is it anticipated that support staff would be available to the firearms advocate?

Hon. Laura Lang: At this time, that is not anticipated. But as I've already said, we will learn as this position evolves what is actually needed by the position.

Carmen Gustafson: This position is created as an independent position. Just going back to the office space, if office space was needed, I assume somebody working in a job — they're a real person; they need real space.

If office space would be needed, would that be provided within a Yukon Government building or office space?

Hon. Laura Lang: As I've said multiple times, the bill is the framework for what it is that we will be delivering on for the firearms response for our territory, and that includes the advocate position. The office space — given the position is not a YG employee, this is something that I don't really have at the front of my mind that would be provided. But again, we will see as this position evolves.

Carmen Gustafson: Has there been any consideration given to the range of the remuneration for this position?

Hon. Laura Lang: I already answered that.

Carmen Gustafson: Has the minister considered what sort of qualifications or what sort of criteria will be sought in the person who is acting as the firearms advocate?

Hon. Laura Lang: We will put far more effort into honing down what that will look like if this bill does pass. However, as I've already publicly stated, the position will need to have an understanding of firearms. They will need to be able to work with a wide range of Yukoners, and they do need to have an understanding of our Yukon context and the North.

Carmen Gustafson: Would this person have to have any sort of professional qualifications, level of education, those kinds of things that are generally sort of looked for in a position like this?

Hon. Laura Lang: No.

Carmen Gustafson: Would they have to have a PAL?

Hon. Laura Lang: Not according to the legislation.

Carmen Gustafson: I appreciate that answer. I'm asking questions about what sort of parameters or what we're looking at in terms of what this program will cost, because it is something that Yukoners have raised. We hear that the government is fiscally constrained. We hear that the departments are under some pressure fiscally. I think it's important to Yukoners to have an understanding if this is a couple-hours-a-week position with no budget for travel that can easily be absorbed or whether this is a multi-million-dollar program. The entire range is open right now. The discretion is to the minister.

I think Yukoners, whether they agree with the legislation or not, would like to have an idea about what the funding of this program would look like. What's being anticipated? I understand that the minister has some information about what that might be. I'm hoping that we can get an understanding of where we're looking in terms of the spending that's anticipated for this program.

Hon. Laura Lang: As I've said, that funding will be made available. How we choose to appropriate funding for this position will be made available in the 2027-28 budget. I want to take a minute to reflect on why we're here today.

The Yukon Legislative Assembly twice passed motions unanimously opposed to the federal long-gun registry. The first motion was done by the late Johnny Abel, an MLA for Vuntut Gwitchin, and the second was by the MLA for Lake Laberge. All to say that there is a very long history of all-party support for this northern context for subsistence hunting for Yukoners who use firearms.

While I may not be able to provide the exact answers that the member opposite is asking for, because we have yet to pass this bill, I would remind us that this is not new. This conversation has been going on for years. I would hope that Yukoners are actually not disappointed by what it is that we're doing. In fact, they'll actually be quite pleased to see that we are working very hard to bring our Yukon voice to the federal government in any way we possibly can, including through this bill.

Carmen Gustafson: I am grateful for the history lesson. I am aware that this is an important issue for a number of people, but so are other priorities for spending government money. I'm trying to get an idea of the range. The answer to that could change the minds of people who are voting on this bill if we had an idea of what the range of spending is.

Could the minister give a range of what the cost analysis is for how much this program might cost?

Hon. Laura Lang: I've already answered that.

Carmen Gustafson: Is it $20,000?

Hon. Laura Lang: I have already answered this question. I think it's time for us to move on to a new set of questions.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Carmen Gustafson: Off-mic, one of the members did mention that this sounds like *The Price Is Right* — we could do that. Maybe we could go high and see if we go over. Is it $1.5 million?

Hon. Laura Lang: I already answered the question.

Carmen Gustafson: I do think that it is important, when we're asked to be voting on legislation, to get a full range of what the legislation means. Part of this is that it will cost taxpayers' money. There are many priorities — this is a priority of some people. The members opposite say that it's a priority of a majority of people. That may be, but I think that responsible spending, responsible lawmaking includes a consideration of the analysis of the cost of the program.

Is it $1 million?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Chair: Government House Leader, on a point of order.

Hon. Scott Kent: Looking at Standing Order 19(c): "… persists in needless repetition or raises matters that have been decided during the current Session" — the member opposite is continually bringing this up, asking the same question that has been answered by the minister during this debate.

Chair: Member for Riverdale South, on the point of order.

Justin Ziegler: I believe the questions asked by the member were always different.

Chair's ruling

Chair: We've had this question come up over the last few days, and I will again caution members to avoid needless repetition. At this time, I will say there is no point of order. There may be arguably some nuanced part to the questions. I would caution members, though: Avoid needless repetition. Let's move on.

Carmen Gustafson: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Bill No. 11, *Yukon Firearms Act — continued*

Carmen Gustafson: With the funding, it says that the minister can provide financial assistance, and then in the reporting, it says that the advocate needs to include any expenses and financial assistance received from the minister during the preceding year. Could the advocate receive funding from sources other than the minister?

Hon. Laura Lang: What this bill contemplates is that this position will be an advocate position that is per the objective of the Minister of Justice and therefore will be supplied territorial funds through our government. More specifically, section 7 of the bill outlines how the minister may provide those funds through an order-in-council or ministerial order and that those functions would represent what the minister would be directing the advocate to do.

Carmen Gustafson: Would the minister be able to use her discretion to allow somebody else to provide those funds?

Hon. Laura Lang: If the Government of Canada would like to provide funds to the Department of Justice, they're more than welcome to fund this position. But, of course, as already stipulated in section 8 of the proposed bill, it does state in addition to the annual report and financial statements required under subsection (1), that the advocate must, upon request of the minister, prepare any report, financial statement, budget, or any other record related to the function and powers of the advocate.

Carmen Gustafson: I'm going to go back to the "what we heard" report. Many respondents to the engagement and in that report expressed their opposition to the creation of the advocate position entirely, and some others suggested that they would rather see the resources that would go into this program devoted to other places.

Could the minister tell us from her engagement how many people were outright opposed to the creation of the advocate and how many wanted the resources to go elsewhere?

Hon. Laura Lang: I'm very happy to table the "what we heard" report in the Legislative Assembly.

Carmen Gustafson: I do have the "what we heard" report, so that's not really necessary.

But maybe other people want to see it as well. I was hoping that the minister could reiterate what is in that report for the record for Hansard. From engagement with municipalities, organizations, and First Nations, can the minister share if any comments or suggestions were received that indicated whether the role of the advocate was a priority issue for them?

Hon. Laura Lang: I regret that I've actually just looked at the clock.

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

Chair: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

Hon. Scott Kent: I move 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

Patti McLeod: Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 11, entitled *Yukon Firearms Act*, 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. Scott Kent: Madam 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. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 5:26 p.m.

The following sessional papers were tabled today:

SP 36-1-57
Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office 2025/2026 Annual Report – Children's Rights, Taking Flight (Speaker Clarke)

SP 36-1-58
Yukon Public Accounts 2025-26 (Dixon)

SP 36-1-59
Government of Yukon Financial Report For the period April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026 (October 6, 2026) (Dixon)

SP 36-1-60
Fourth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees (October 28, 2026) (Porter)