

Yukon Legislative Assembly

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HANSARD

Thursday, October 29, 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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Thursday, October 29, 2026 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Under Introduction of Visitors, I am pleased to introduce Shea Newnham's Political Studies 12 class from St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Secondary School. Please welcome them to the Assembly.

Are there any other introductions of visitors?

Visitors introduced

Speaker: Tributes.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Statement — Road safety during Halloween

Adam Gerle: As Halloween approaches, children across the Yukon are eagerly preparing their costumes and planning their trick-or-treat routes. Halloween is a fun and exciting tradition, but it's also a time to remember the importance of safety.

We encourage drivers to slow down, stay alert, and watch carefully for little ghosts and goblins crossing busy roads and moving between houses. Parents and caregivers, please remind children to stay in groups, carry flashlights, and wear reflective clothing to increase their visibility in the dark. We encourage little ones to stay aware of their surroundings, use sidewalks, and cross streets safely.

By looking out for one another, we can help ensure that children across the territory enjoy a memorable Halloween filled with fun, laughter, and plenty of treats. I wish all Yukoners a safe and spooktacular Halloween.

Statement — Parks Canada job cuts

Brent McDonald: I rise today to speak to Parks Canada job cuts announced last week throughout our country.

These cuts affect roughly 42 percent of staff or 60 living wage jobs right here in the Yukon alone, many in rural communities. These are living wage jobs in Haines Junction, Dawson City, Old Crow, and Whitehorse, and every one of them supports a family, a school, and a local business.

Behind each position is a caring, dedicated professional whose work protects and brings our heritage and ecosystem to life for Yukoners and for visitors from around the world. This knowledge and expertise took decades to build and cannot be replaced by a sign or an app.

Madam Speaker, these people are not budget numbers. The work that Parks Canada staff does is an investment in who we are, and I ask all members of this House to support the workers involved and the communities affected.

Statement — Yukon Native Language Centre

Debra-Leigh Reti: The Yukon Native Language Centre is dedicated to the preservation, documentation, and revitalization of Yukon First Nation languages. This initiative, run by CYFN, is located at Yukon University and offers courses and language programs year-round, and it is supported by an excellent interactive website that provides learning and teaching resources that are accessible to everyone.

The Yukon Native Language Centre website features eight Yukon First Nation languages. These eight distinct languages span two separate language families: the Athapaskan family and the Tlingit family. The site has posters, audio clips, and printed resources. My favourite is the printable poster of Gwich'in encouragement phrases. Elders from the Yukon and the neighbouring areas contribute to this work by making recordings providing information and guidance in training sessions.

Statement — Yukon Outfitters Association community contributions

Doris Anderson: I rise today to recognize an outstanding example of the generosity of the Yukon Outfitters Association.

Traditionally, successful hunters always shared their harvest with families in need, and the Yukon Outfitters continue this tradition today.

Earlier this week, I had the pleasure of attending a sausage-making 101 class at Jack Hulland Elementary School. The excitement in the room was contagious as students learned new skills, gained a better understanding of where their food comes from, and took their hard work home. I want to thank the Yukon Outfitters Association along with the many hunters and volunteers who donated wild game and their time to make this program possible in Yukon schools.

Their generosity extends beyond the classroom. Recently, they also donated moose meat to the Whitehorse Food Bank, helping support our families. Programs like this preserve traditional knowledge, encourage responsible harvesting practices, and strengthen the connection young people have with the land.

Statement — ATCO Electric Yukon billing

Lane Tredger: Yukoners have had an incredibly rough year when it comes to electricity bills. Rates have climbed to new highs. The rate rollbacks this government promised never came, and Yukoners have been receiving wildly inaccurate bills. The Yukon NDP tabled a petition with over a thousand signatures calling for an independent review into electricity billing. Unfortunately, the Yukon Party refused to listen and instead is having ATCO investigate themselves.

Earlier this fall, my motion to bring ATCO in for questioning was passed. ATCO will appear as witnesses on November 24. I want to urge all Yukoners to send us their questions so we can hold ATCO accountable. Unfortunately, though we asked to have ATCO appear on a separate day from Yukon Energy to give more time for both, the Yukon Party declined. As a result, our time will be limited, but we will try to get through as many questions as we can.

The Yukon NDP will continue to listen to Yukoners, bring forward their concerns, and keep fighting to hold ATCO accountable.

Statement — Parks Canada job cuts

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I rise today to speak to Parks Canada's recent workforce adjustment decision to restructure and reduce roughly 67 percent of the organization's positions nationwide. In the Yukon, 58 of 137 employees have received unfortunate communications regarding their positions. I'm deeply concerned by this decision. Parks Canada staff are members of our community in Kluane. Not only do they perform valuable work, but they also provide for their families and are integrated into the communities of Haines Junction and the other ones in the Yukon.

Yukoners are impacted by this decision, and it is concerning, as we are left with more questions than answers. How will one of the oldest and largest parks have quality enforcement? How will the scientific and cultural knowledge of the area be passed down? How will stewardship efforts continue to meet management goals? When Canada talks about Arctic sovereignty, their parks staff play a role in their presence.

I'll continue to advocate for my community and the communities in the North for conservation, which is why I will be writing Yukon's Member of Parliament, Brendan Hanley, the Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Nature, and the Minister of National Defence.

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Jen Gehmair: I have for tabling a legislative return responding to Written Question No. 4.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Hon. Linda Benoit: Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present an interim report from the Special Committee on Electoral Financing.

Speaker: Are there any further committee reports to be presented?

Are there any petitions?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Carmen Gustafson: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Canada to reverse staffing cuts to the Parks Canada Agency in the Yukon.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

This then brings us to Question Period.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Question — Social assistance rates

Kate White: On December 1, this Yukon Party government will remove virtually all protections for Yukon renters and bring us back to the infamous days of unlimited rent increases and no-cause evictions.

One-bedroom apartments in Whitehorse are regularly listed at $1,800 a month or more, which highlights the significant gap when comparing the amount that social assistance covers for shelter and utilities, because at its highest, social assistance provides a maximum of $1,346 a month. Finding a safe place to live for that amount, including utilities, is already next to impossible. Yukoners who rely on social assistance can't even work to make up the difference because that would be clawed off their cheque. The current amounts leave them short hundreds of dollars every month, and that's before rent controls have been removed.

Will the minister raise the housing and utility amounts and the social assistance rates?

Hon. Brad Cathers: We are doing a review of the social assistance system that includes reviewing how well the system supports those who are seeking to enter the workforce, and in that area, we are quite sure that we can do a better job of supporting people, including people with disabilities. Again, we're doing a comprehensive review of the social assistance system right now, including assessing the costs, and we will consider what adjustments may be necessary.

Kate White: The Minister responsible for Yukon Housing Corporation said the government adjusted the Canada-Yukon housing benefit because rents have risen 32 percent since the rates were first set in 2020, but people on social assistance and disability can't access that benefit. Their rates haven't been reviewed since 2012, and since then they have only been adjusted for inflation. That is already far behind the real cost of rent, and the Yukon Party government is about to push rents even higher.

In a CBC interview, the Minister of Community Services said — and I quote: "I suspect that there could be people who fall into having a little more trouble paying their rent…" This government recognized that the Canada-Yukon rental benefit was no longer adequate because of rising costs and increased it.

When will it do the same for social assistance rates?

Hon. Currie Dixon: The minister has indicated that the social assistance rates are being reviewed by the department right now, but what the member opposite is doing by highlighting these challenges is pointing to the fact that the policies that have been implemented by the previous government over the past number of years have failed. We've seen rents continue to escalate throughout the territory despite promises by the NDP that they would not. That has not been the case and that has not been the reality. The facts show that rents have increased, that we've seen a decline relative to population in the number of units that we need across the rental market.

We're making changes to the rental market. We're bringing in new policies that will allow for a healthier rental market in the territory. We're also continuing to work with the Yukon Housing Corporation to provide the Canada-Yukon housing benefit. The Minister of Health and Social Services is reviewing social assistance rates to ensure that they're adequate. But across the board, we're doing our best to ensure that there are adequate opportunities for Yukoners across the housing spectrum.

Kate White: I guess Yukoners can take the Premier's answer as a no, which is disappointing, because the Premier

also said that he was willing to look at further changes if there is a need. Well, there is a need.

The Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society's executive director describes the heavy human toll these changes will take with the story of a family who has lived in the same home since 2019 and could lose it. There are no further units that fall within the strict social assistance allowances that could replace this home. FASSY went on to say that these changes could push more people onto the street, and multiple Yukon housing advocate organizations have said that these changes may increase homelessness.

The minister keeps pointing to a review of social assistance, but a review with no timeline won't keep a roof over a person's head. Without improvements to social assistance rates, FASSY's fears are well-founded.

Until the review is complete, will the minister commit to an interim increase to the social assistance housing amounts before the unlimited rental increases in May?

Hon. Currie Dixon: Over the course of the last several weeks, we've seen the NDP raise a number of different angles about their concern with the changes we're making to the *Residential Tenancies Act*. Those are fair enough for the NDP to bring those forward. We respectfully disagree. We believe that those changes are necessary to bring stability to our market, to allow the rental market to be attractive to investors, to have more Yukoners want to become landlords so that they can increase the supply across the rental market. We think that having a healthy rental market is good for tenants, it's good for landlords, and it's good for all Yukoners.

Question — Whitehorse Emergency Shelter services and downtown core concerns

Lane Tredger: Earlier this week, the Minister of Health and Social Services said he was going to get rid of the tents outside the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter with a crackdown. The next day, after it was pointed out that being homeless isn't a crime, he backtracked and said that the crackdown was because he had heard that the people in these tents were drug dealers.

If there are illegal activities happening, they need to be dealt with by the justice system to make sure that any crimes are stopped and to make sure that people aren't harmed along the way. That process doesn't involve the whims of the minister. It would be grossly unfair to tear down people's shelters just because he claims that he's heard allegations of drug dealing.

The minister said he took action, but he's been very reluctant to share details about what happened to get the tents taken down and what his role was. What actions did the minister and his department take that led to the tents in front of the emergency shelter being removed?

Hon. Brad Cathers: It's really not helpful when the NDP deliberately mischaracterize my remarks on the topic again and again and again —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: The Member for Whitehorse Centre, on a point of order.

Lane Tredger: Deliberately mischaracterized remarks, I think, is pretty clearly a violation of Standing Order 19(h), which is to accuse another member of uttering a deliberate falsehood.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: There is a point of order under 19(h). I would remind members to temper their remarks.

Let's proceed.

Hon. Brad Cathers: It's not helpful when the NDP do not accurately reflect the comments that I make. Again, as the member will recall, on October 21 when the member asked questions, I made reference to drug dealers who are preying on vulnerable people, including some of the most vulnerable clients who access the shelter. I would remind the member that the Liberal Member for Vuntut Gwitchin asked about things outside the shelter and specifically expressed concern about tents and called for "effective enforcement measures against the illicit drug trade going on right in front of us".

Yes, in response to the concerns we've heard, including reports of drug dealing on the premises of 405 Alexander Street, I did the action that was appropriate, which was to ask officials to work with the RCMP, with bylaw, and with other departments to take such action as is required to end illegal activity on the grounds, especially illegal drug trade.

Lane Tredger: CBC interviewed a resident of the shelter who was staying in the tents that the minister cracked down on. The resident said, "If he wants to know something he could come and ask me. Come and live our life, feel how we feel." The minister has admitted that he's never visited the emergency shelter. When CBC asked him why not, he said, "There is an appropriate role for advocacy but there is a risk of politicians going too far into the role of advocacy". It's a strange thing to say, because it's very normal for ministers to visit the programs their departments fund and to meet the people they're responsible for supporting.

If it's appropriate for the minister to visit, say, the hospital, it's appropriate to visit the shelter. The minister also told media, "I'm not going to sit down with drug dealers and hear their thoughts." Does the minister believe that everyone who accesses the emergency shelter is a drug dealer? If not, why won't he meet with them?

Hon. Brad Cathers: The member knows the answer to the question. I have been clear every time I've been asked, in making reference to vulnerable people at the shelter who need those services, who are being preyed on by drug dealers. However, what I was making reference to is — I remind the member that her own leader was called out on October 16 by the very rare event of five doctors writing a letter expressing concern in response to comments the Leader of the NDP made here in this House and noting — and I quote in part from the letter which has been tabled: "… when complex clinical issues are presented in an overly simplistic or sensationalized manner, the resulting public discussion can inadvertently cause harm, create unrealistic expectations, undermine confidence in existing services…"

Now, that was in reference to mental health services, but I would remind the member that in this particular situation, the CBC report acknowledged that the woman to whom they spoke had a bed in the shelter. As I noted in previous responses for

those who have been on the sidewalk, Connective has indicated the shelter has been at 64-percent capacity recently. There is room available in the shelter for those who need it. Again, I would encourage members of the NDP to be accurate in their comments rather than sensationalising things.

Lane Tredger: My pronouns are they/their.

Earlier this week, I asked if the minister knew where the people who had been sleeping in the tents would go. He didn't know. All he said was that there was capacity at the shelter.

No one sleeps on a sidewalk in the cold instead of in a warm bed without a reason. But it's clear the minister hasn't tried to find out what those reasons might be, and it's also pretty clear he doesn't care. Tearing someone's tent down doesn't get them a safe place to stay. It is below zero outside, and when people are forced out of visible places like the sidewalk in front of the shelter, they often end up somewhere more dangerous with even less access to help.

Why doesn't the minister care what happened to the people whose shelters he had torn down?

Hon. Brad Cathers: Again, the approach the NDP have taken in this debate is not accurately reflecting comments, and they ought to know it. We do care on this side of the House about vulnerable clients who need access to shelter services. That is why we have continued to fund shelter services. As I mentioned in a previous response, the operator of the shelter, Connective, has indicated that they have been at 64-percent capacity most days recently. There is space in 405 Alexander Street for those who may need it, including people who have been out front.

Again, I would also note that when I go to Whitehorse General Hospital, I don't go to the emergency department and sit down with every patient and make a decision about what services they need. I leave that to health professionals, and in dealing with vulnerable clients at the facility, I respect the role of the professionals in this area. The NDP does unfortunately choose to take the approach they have, which is not accurately reflective of the facts.

Question — Yukon First Nation representation in public service

Linda Moen: Access to information data shows Yukon First Nation people were 4.9 percent of applicants to competitive posts in the public service in 2020, and 11.9 percent of screened-in Yukon First Nation candidates were hired. By 2025, both numbers had decreased so that only 2.4 percent of applications were Yukon First Nation and only 3.6 percent of screened-in applicants were hired. That is a large and steady drop, and regardless of who was in charge in the past, it is now this minister's job to reverse that trend.

What is the minister's plan to improve Yukon First Nation representation in the public service?

Hon. Jen Gehmair: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this question, and I can say that there has indeed been a lot of work done in the space to increase the representation of Yukon First Nations in Yukon Government positions. There are policies in place; those policies have been reviewed. There are groups and work being done with Yukon First Nation governments in order to increase that and find opportunities that make working with Yukon Government desirable and have opportunities more readily available.

Linda Moen: The *Breaking Trail Together* representative public service plan promised to advance Yukon First Nation employees into management so their perspective shapes decisions at every level. The latest annual report shows Yukon First Nation employees are 3.0 percent of management, down from 3.1 percent over the last year. Overall, Indigenous representation is 10.9 percent in management against 17.5 percent at entry-level positions. The Indigenous recruitment and development program funded 16 people last year, but only two were in management.

What is this minister's plan to improve Yukon First Nation representation in management, and why is the government's leadership team still so far from representation?

Hon. Jen Gehmair: The *Breaking Trail Together* 10-year strategy that's been in place from 2019 and effective until 2029 is currently under review, and the work to create the next iteration is beginning. I think that the question around management is one that is a good question and one that is being considered in this work going forward.

Opportunities for First Nations to be able to access Yukon Government jobs are not just at hiring; we also have secondments and opportunities within our youth programs. I think that I will reiterate that the commitment to increasing Yukon First Nations' involvement and opportunities within Yukon Government remains, and there is more work over the course of the next few months where we will be able to announce more programs that will indeed work toward this goal.

Linda Moen: The *Umbrella Final Agreement* commits Yukon Government to a representative public service, and Yukon First Nation governments are the other parties to those agreements. Yet the annual report describes a plan to improve representation without describing any work with First Nation governments on why the numbers have been steadily falling. Fewer Yukon First Nations are applying, fewer are being hired, and fewer are reaching management.

When will this government engage with Yukon First Nation governments on why representation is so low, and when will the minister commit to sitting down with them to develop a joint approach to improving it?

Hon. Jen Gehmair: There has been a significant amount of work that has been done with Yukon First Nation governments. There are committees and there are groups dedicated to working on the *Breaking Trail Together*. I would say with a great deal of confidence that working with Yukon First Nations and Yukon First Nation governments is underway and will continue.

Question — Tourism sector support

Justin Ziegler: Yukoners have heard from this Yukon Party government that their priority is to diversify the economy and support industry. I think we can all recognize the critical moment our country is in regarding the trade war with the United States. This moment highlights the importance of economic diversity.

This Yukon Party government has made many commitments to other sectors, but there is a lot of opportunity within the Yukon's tourism sector. Tourism keeps money moving through local businesses in every community. It creates jobs in every season, and this government needs to create the conditions to support economic growth through tourism.

Where does tourism sit with this government's plan for economic diversification and private sector growth?

Hon. Jen Gehmair: As many of us can appreciate in this Chamber, tourism is one of our biggest economic drivers in the territory. I have had the opportunity to meet with dozens, if not more, of tourism operators over the course of the last several months and learn about the needs of their particular business, where the sectors are growing, and where we're seeing increased opportunity in tourism.

I would say that our investments into tourism through marketing, through product development, continue to see the benefits of tourism and the opportunities that it brings to the territory. We've seen an increase in numbers pretty steadily since the pandemic, and I think that all of the businesses here in the territory would say that the tourism industry is one of the most important industries, and we exist because of much of that economic activity to the territory. We will continue with those investments, and I look forward to sharing numbers on our tourism numbers here in the coming months.

Justin Ziegler: Tourism businesses across the Yukon are being hit with the rising cost of fuel, food, and insurance. We have all heard from the small to medium business owners in our communities that margins are tight. They cannot find workers to fill seasonal positions, and the workers they do find often cannot find anywhere to live. These problems compound each other, and Yukoners who run tourism businesses can't find a solution to a global problem on their own. In the minister's words, tourism is the backbone of our economy, but operators say they are struggling to cover the rising costs.

How is this government accounting for rising costs, labour shortages, and housing constraints when it comes to supporting the tourism industry?

Hon. Jen Gehmair: I would like to say that the work that we've done to support tourism businesses continues to exist, and in fact, bringing together the departments of Tourism and Culture and Economic Development presented an opportunity where we could actually streamline the supports for some of these businesses. We recognize that tourism businesses are economic drivers, and having these funds available and creating opportunities for these funds to have more of a streamlined access was part of the intent of that role.

The businesses have opportunities to access tourism cooperative marketing funds. We've got Spark programs, destination improvement funds to help these businesses build their product and ensure that the world knows about them. I'm very proud of the work that we've done here in the territory as a Yukoner to showcase what we have to the rest of the world.

Justin Ziegler: Tourism is a major economic driver in the Yukon — the minister just said it. Visitors bring money into our communities, and that money supports locally owned businesses, jobs, and families across the territory.

The *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy* has guided the sector since 2018, but it ends in 2028. Renewing it properly takes time, and the clock is ticking. Right now, tourism operators are making decisions about the next five to 10 years. But without a clear, shared plan, Yukon businesses are left guessing and investment that could create jobs in the Yukon could go elsewhere.

Will the government lead the renewal of the *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy*, and if so, when will the process begin?

Hon. Jen Gehmair: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to that.

That is an important plan, and I have heard from operators and had conversations with associations over the last little while with respect to the *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy*. In fact, that work is overseen by an independent group that reports to the minister, and I have plans to meet with them over the next couple weeks, at which time, we will have conversations and I will get recommendations from that committee and understand what it is that they're hearing from the community, and we can work forward together on what a next iteration of the tourism strategy looks like.

Question — Department of Education review

Doris Anderson: Earlier this year, the Government of Yukon launched an independent review of the Department of Education. The independent review panel released its first status report earlier this year.

Can the minister tell the House about some of the key recommendations that emerged from that work?

Hon. Scott Kent: Our government launched an independent review because we believe the Department of Education can improve how it functions. Our goal is to restore accountability and make sure the education system puts students and educators at the centre of every decision. The review is helping us understand where improvements are needed and how the department can more effectively support students, families, educators, school boards, and the broader school communities.

In their status report, the panel identified several opportunities to strengthen the system. They recommended improvements to inclusive education supports, stronger accountability and quality assurance, better use of student achievement data, and clearer roles for the department and school authorities. The report also identified opportunities to strengthen governance, school board funding, staff onboarding, and public confidence in the education system. These recommendations are helping guide our work as we build a stronger education system focused on student success.

Doris Anderson: Can the minister provide an update on the work being done to implement the panel's recommendations?

Hon. Scott Kent: While the review is not yet complete, we have already begun advancing work in several areas identified by the panel. We have expanded shared resource programs. We have developed new autism support resources for educators. We have also added two registered nurses to support students with complex medical needs.

We are developing a school board funding framework and funding manual, reviewing governance and accountability structures, and we're also improving how student achievement data is collected and reported. In addition, we are establishing a new onboarding working group with education partners to strengthen supports for new and returning educators.

While this work represents important progress, we recognize there is more to do to fully realize the changes

Yukoners have asked for, and the panel's final recommendations will help identify additional actions to further strengthen our education system.

Doris Anderson: As the review continues, Yukoners will be interested in what comes next. Can the minister outline the next steps for the department?

Hon. Scott Kent: The review panel continues to engage with Yukon First Nation educators, school authorities, students, families, and departmental staff. The panel is expected to release its next status report later this fall, with a final report anticipated in early 2027. Those recommendations will provide a road map for future improvements across the system.

In the meantime, the department will continue advancing the initial recommendations identified in the first status report. This includes work related to inclusive education, governance, accountability, data reporting, school board funding, and staff supports. Once the final report is received, the department will develop an implementation plan that identifies priorities, timelines, and actions. Our focus will remain on making practical improvements that support students, families, and educators across the territory.

Question — Coroner's recommendations on Whitehorse Emergency Shelter

Debra-Leigh Reti: All this week, I've been asking questions about the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. One series of questions I asked the Minister of Justice did not get answered.

There was a coroner's inquest held in the spring of 2024 regarding the deaths of four Indigenous women at the emergency shelter. There were several recommendations that came out of the coroner's report. I asked about these recommendations in the fall of 2025, and the government said there was more work to be done.

Can the Minister of Justice tell Yukoners whether the implementation of these recommendations is now complete?

Hon. Brad Cathers: We have been, of course, following through on the recommendations of the coroner's report. I'm just looking to see if I have the specific information that the member asked for in front of me. If I don't, I'll get back to her at a later date. I'm just checking to see if I have the specific information that she asked about.

Debra-Leigh Reti: My question was for the Minister of Justice, as the coroner reports to the Minister of Justice.

The last response from the Government of Yukon posted to the coroner's website with regard to this inquest is from November 2024. The government said in the fall of 2025 that work was still ongoing to respond to the coroner's recommendations. The government has a legal obligation to ensure its full response is made public.

Why have no further updates been made to the public since November 2024?

Hon. Brad Cathers: According to the information that I have from officials, all eight recommendations from the April 2024 coroner's inquest into the deaths at 405 Alexander Street have been implemented. Health and Social Services did provide the chief coroner with a written response outlining actions taken by government and by Connective Support Society to address each recommendation. HSS continues to oversee Connective's compliance with the transfer payment agreement, including performance monitoring.

Those recommendations included reviewing policies and procedures within six months, reviewing staff training, prioritizing Indigenous recruitment and lived experience, evaluating Connective's compliance, independent review of future deaths, providing grief and loss supports, improving complaints and communication, and improving safe spaces for 2SLGBTQIA+ guests at the facility.

Again, my understanding from the information I've been provided is that all have been implemented, although as I mentioned, some do require ongoing work to ensure that they continue to be in place.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Despite the work in progress to respond to the coroner's recommendations, it is obvious that more work needs to be done.

The minister mentioned a meeting last week of a long list of stakeholders. I'm curious if the implementation of the coroner's recommendations was on the agenda of that meeting. When does the government anticipate it will complete the implementation of all recommendations from the 2024 coroner's inquest?

Hon. Brad Cathers: As I indicated in my previous response, the information that I have from the department is that in fact the recommendations have been acted on and implemented. As I mentioned, Connective's compliance with the contract is something that is an ongoing matter but has been implemented. To the best of my understanding, according to the information I have from officials, those recommendations have all been implemented. Whether this was on the agenda of the interagency committee recently — I was not at the meeting — I'm not aware of exactly what all they discussed. Certainly, they did discuss and in fact responded to the concerns brought forward by the Leader of the Third Party in debate previously when she made reference to activities outside the shelter saying: "… things outside of the shelter have gotten worse…" and she called for "… effective enforcement measures against the illicit drug trade going on right in front of us", and so that interagency committee was convened in part in response to the concerns that were brought forward by the member as well as concerns that I've heard directly and through colleagues, including reports that we had to take seriously — and did — of illegal activity going on in tents on the premises —

Speaker: Order.

Question — Grizzly bear management and wildlife research funding

Justin Ziegler: Last summer, people in Marsh Lake had a neighbour. A grizzly bear was feasting peacefully along the Alaska Highway for a while, and residents stopped to watch it. Families took pictures. Visitors slowed down. In September, that bear was shot and wounded. Residents say the bear was left injured. A conservation officer later had to end its suffering in the highway ditch in Marsh Lake. Grizzly hunting is not allowed within 100 metres of that part of the highway.

I understand there is an investigation; I will not ask about its details. My question is about the people of Marsh Lake — more than a month later, they say they have heard nothing.

What is the government's process to keep a community informed when an incident like this happens near their homes?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: On September 19, Conservation Officer Services branch initiated a formal investigation surrounding the report they received regarding the incident with the grizzly bear in the Marsh Lake area. As a member alluded to, COSB attended the area and tracked the bear to assess the situation. It was determined that the bear was injured and, to reduce suffering, the bear was humanely killed. COSB is currently performing an investigation, and like the member opposite said, I can't comment on that. But when there are further details to share, they will be shared.

Justin Ziegler: The incident with the Marsh Lake bear is not unique. The department's own harvest report shows that grizzly hunting in the Yukon is most concentrated along the Alaska Highway and the Haines Road. The bears that live near our roads are the bears Yukoners and visitors see. They are part of why so many tourists come to the Yukon, but they are also vulnerable. They are used to cars and people and they don't run. Shooting a bear like that from the side of the road is not a fair hunt.

In 2022, the government banned grizzly hunting within 100 metres of roads in some areas of Southern Yukon. That was a good step, but most of Yukon's roads still don't have a bear-hunting ban. Will the minister look at expanding the roadside ban on grizzly hunting and make it a territory-wide rule?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I thank the member opposite for the question. Grizzly bears, of course, are an important part of the Yukon's ecosystem, of culture, of our tourism and economy, and we are committed to maintaining healthy bear populations while ensuring public safety.

Yukon has a well-established grizzly bear management framework that balances conservation, public safety, and sustainable hunting opportunities. We're going to continue to make grizzly bear management decisions that are informed by scientific knowledge, population data, traditional knowledge, harvest monitoring, and collaboration with our First Nations and other wildlife co-management partners, including municipalities and other Yukon communities.

Justin Ziegler: My question was about grizzly bear hunting along the roads. Outfitters hunt grizzlies under quota. A quota should be based on one simple thing: how many animals live in an area. To know that, someone has to count them. That is science, and science costs money.

Last fiscal year, a trophy-hunting organization helped pay for grizzly bear surveys in the Yukon. When this government talks about doing more wildlife surveys, it says it will look for help from the private sector.

This goes far beyond bears — moose, caribou, sheep — Yukon wildlife. Every decision to open a hunt, approve a project, or protect an area depends on data. When those who benefit from a decision help to pay for the data, Yukoners question the results. The science that protects our environment should be paid for by the public and owned by the public.

Will the minister commit that wildlife and environmental research will be funded by governments and not by the industries that benefit from the results?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: The Yukon is home to an estimated 6,000 to 7,000 grizzly bears that are managed under the 2019 *A Conservation Plan for Grizzly Bears in Yukon*, the *Wildlife Act*, and associated regulations. Resident hunters can harvest one grizzly bear every three licence years. Non-resident hunters must hunt through a licensed outfitter. The Yukon's adaptive management approach to roadside grizzly bear hunting allows First Nations, communities, municipalities, and resource councils to request a prohibition on roadside grizzly bear hunting in a specific area.

When it comes to wildlife management and surveys, we work with the mining industry. We work with a lot of different industries looking at population and levels of animals, doing surveys and stuff like this. This government is going to continue to do that.

Question — Physician assistants

Kate White: In November 2023, this House unanimously voted to urge the government to get physician assistants working in the territory. That included the Yukon Party, then in opposition, and it included the current Minister of Health and Social Services. Physician assistants can handle a large share of routine primary care visits, which frees up doctors to see more patients. That is exactly what Yukoners need when so many are still without access to primary care.

What work has been done to allow physician assistants to practise in the Yukon?

Hon. Brad Cathers: There's much work to do in the area of Health and Social Services. We have done some of it to date, but more work is required.

We've expanded what we're doing in the area of health human resources. We have more than tripled the funding available for the health bursary programs and expanded the number of people who can be served under it. We've been expanding the health care learners initiatives, including providing increased support for Yukoners. That includes the family medicine residency project that has begun with the University of Alberta. We are also providing additional support for recruitment.

We have again made a number of announcements regarding expansion of nurse practitioner services, including nurse practitioners operating the former River Valley Medical Clinic providing services there. I just did an interview with CBC this morning about the expected offering of nurse practitioner services through a clinic in Dawson City, and we also supported Kwanlin Dün in expanding nurse practitioner services with the creation of a new position in their health centre.

There is more work to be done, including around other health professions, but we've been working with health professionals to set the short-term priorities. But there are many areas where more work is required, and we look forward to reporting continued success as we deliver on those matters —

Speaker: Order.

Kate White: The current Minister of Health and Social Services didn't just vote for this motion; he moved an amendment that put consultation with the Yukon Medical Association and the Yukon Registered Nurses Association right into the wording. Now it's his job to follow through. It doesn't sound like consultation has

happened, which is too bad, because Yukoners want to know when that will happen, especially those who are studying to become physician assistants and want to come home.

If consultation hasn't started, what is the timeline to get consultation started on allowing physician assistants to practise in the Yukon?

Hon. Brad Cathers: First of all, I would point out to the Leader of the NDP, who ought to know this, that actually the regulator of health professions in the territory is Community Services, not Health and Social Services.

We are, however, working with the Yukon Medical Association on strengthening family medicine services and access to primary care, including discussing what additional supports we should be putting in place within the system. That work is ongoing through the family medicine working group. I might have the proper name of that incorrect, but we're working together with the Yukon Medical Association to determine what the priorities should be for strengthening primary care, including what is available through family medical clinics. We look forward to seeing that work proceed. As I noted, that work with them has involved setting some short-term priorities that we look forward to moving forward with along with the Yukon Medical Association.

I do meet regularly with the association to discuss priorities. We also involve them through the Joint Management Committee process, and we are working with them actively on the priorities that have been identified by physicians and the department as well as Yukon hospitals and look forward to reporting more success in those areas, including to date, through our shared efforts, we have reduced the patient wait-list by 60 percent from January to September, which is in stark contrast to the nine years previous.

Kate White: Folks may not actually recognize, but I actually was asking this question in a pretty nice way.

Other provinces have shown there is more than one way to do this. Some amend their medical acts. Some regulate through their colleges, and some start with pilot projects. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Ontario, and New Brunswick found ways to bring physician assistants into their systems. British Columbia and Nova Scotia started with pilot projects.

The 2023 motion was amended so that government could act through legislation, regulation, or policy, so there was no shortage of tools available. That was meant to give the government room to move quickly, I had thought.

What approach will this government consider, and what is the targeted timeline to have physician assistants practising in the Yukon?

Hon. Brad Cathers: Again, as I reminded the member, the Minister of Community Services is the lead on the regulation of health professions. But in terms of adding additional supports to the system, we are working, as I mentioned, with the Yukon Medical Association on priorities. We've supported Yukon Hospitals through significant increases, responding to the years of chronic underfunding by increasing their O&M this fiscal year by over $19.7 million.

We've worked together with Yukon doctors and nurse practitioners to reduce the number of people on the patient wait-list by 60 percent between January and September — a drop from 4,606 patients on the wait-list down to 1,860 by September. This is connecting people who have been on that wait-list for years with a family doctor or nurse practitioner.

We will continue to work with doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, and other health professionals to identify short-term priorities, medium-term priorities, and we look forward to reporting on what we hope will continue to be successes in that area. But I appreciate the work that we have all done together in just 11 months since taking office, and I thank the Yukon Medical Association, Yukon doctors, Yukon nurse practitioners, and nurses for all the excellent work done to date.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 205, *Third Appropriation Act 2025-26* — Third Reading

Clerk: Third Reading, Bill No. 205, standing in the name of the Hon. Currie Dixon.

Hon. Currie Dixon: I move that Bill No. 205, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2025-26*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. Premier that Bill No. 205, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2025-26*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Hon. Currie Dixon: I provided a number of comments about this bill at Second Reading. The bill then proceeded to Committee of the Whole, where the ministers responsible for the appropriation in this act provided answers to questions from members opposite.

It's a relatively small amount of money in relation to the 2025-26 budget. This is, of course, the *Third Appropriation Act 2025-26*, also known as the supplementary budget. The exercise in this budget was largely an accounting exercise. It was not the result of an overexpenditure in the project itself.

Having said all that, I commend this bill to the House and look forward to seeing it pass.

Kate White: In speaking today in regard to Bill No. 205, the *Third Appropriation Act 2025-26*, I don't think it will surprise anyone when I say that we won't be voting in favour, as it's a confidence bill. Based on my week of Question Period exchanges with the minister, I absolutely do not have confidence. We will be voting against this bill.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I rise today to speak to Bill No. 205, the *Third Appropriation Act 2025-26*.

As the Premier noted, the bill contains only two items for the Yukon Development Corporation, and the spending is 100-percent recoverable from Canada. One of those items is the battery storage project. This spring, the minister told the Legislature that the battery was damaged last winter. I did write to the minister over the summer on this matter, and the minister responded that it was too early to determine the extent of the

damage and whether the battery could still be used. I gather from the debate on this legislation that this is still the case.

As this is a confidence vote, I will not be supporting this spending bill.

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

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: 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: Disagree.
Lane Tredger: Disagree.
Brent McDonald: Disagree.
Linda Moen: Disagree.
Carmen Gustafson: Disagree.
Justin Ziegler: Désaccord.
Debra-Leigh Reti: Disagree.

Clerk: Madam Speaker, the results are 12 yea, seven nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it.
I declare the motion carried and that Bill No. 205 has passed this House.

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

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

Committee of the Whole Motion No. 2 — Consideration of operations and policies of the Department of Environment

Hon. Scott Kent: Mr. Deputy Chair, I move:
THAT Committee of the Whole consider the operations and policies of the Department of Environment immediately following the adoption of this motion until such a time as the normal hour of adjournment is reached or there are no further questions for the Minister of Environment, who may have departmental officials seated with him.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Government House Leader:
THAT Committee of the Whole consider the operations and policies of the Department of Environment immediately following the adoption of this motion until such a time as the normal hour of adjournment is reached or there are no further questions for the Minister of Environment, who may have departmental officials seated with him.
Is there any debate?
Are you prepared for the question?
Are you agreed?

Committee of the Whole Motion No. 2 agreed to

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

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Consideration of operations and policies of the Department of Environment

Deputy Chair: Is there any debate on the matter before the Committee?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I want to introduce my deputy minister, Dennis Berry, and my assistant deputy minister, Marc Cattet, here today. And I want to thank Alexander Graham Bell for inventing the telephone — because of the technology we have today, I have people on the Internet here and however that stuff works supporting me today. I want to thank them in the background.

I rise today to provide an update on the progress that the Department of Environment has made since the approval of the 2026-27 main estimates earlier this year. The department's main estimates reflect our government's investment and commitment to responsible environmental stewardship, healthy fish and wildlife populations, climate resilience, and strong Yukon communities. Those investments are advancing practical actions that are delivering real results for Yukoners.

I've spent my whole life living in the Haines Junction area and being out on the land. This experience has given me a deeper appreciation of our lands, our waters, fish and wildlife, and our way of life as Yukoners and northerners. I know how important the work of this department is to Yukoners, communities, and to our environment. This work really matters to me personally, and I'm proud of the progress that this department is making, which I am going to share with you today.

Our work to manage fish and wildlife in the Yukon continues to be guided by the co-management framework established under chapter 16 of the Yukon First Nation final agreements. Working together with Yukon First Nations, the

Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, renewable resources councils, and other partners is helping to ensure that wildlife management decisions are informed by science, Indigenous and traditional knowledge, and, of course, local experience. Over the past year, we have continued working closely with co-management partners to ensure fish and wildlife populations in the Yukon remain healthy while supporting responsible, sustainable harvest opportunities.

A great example of this work is the reinstated Yukon fish and wildlife regulation change process, which has been paused since 2019. Working with the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, we relaunched a process where Yukoners have an opportunity to weigh in on regulation change proposals submitted by the public, by renewable resources councils, by Yukon First Nations, Yukon Government, or interest groups. This process helps ensure wildlife regulations continue to reflect current information, local knowledge, and the priorities of Yukoners.

Wildlife monitoring gives us information we need to make sound, informed management decisions to ensure wildlife populations remain healthy and on the landscape for future generations. By the end of 2026-27, we will have invested over $2.6 million in advancing survey work to support ongoing wildlife monitoring survey work across the territory. This includes species such as caribou, moose, elk, deer, musk ox, bison, thinhorn sheep, and some species at risk.

Our work to understand and manage fish and wildlife goes hand in hand with our broader commitment to conservation. This year, we've advanced work on the Yukon conservation fund, which will support habitats, wildlife conservation, and stewardship projects across the territory. I'm happy to announce that we had our first in-person meeting this morning, and things are moving along. This includes investing $450,000 in the fund, which will be managed by the Yukon conservation fund advisory committee to support eligible local wildlife and habitat conservation and management projects. I look forward to sharing more details on the eligibility requirements and timelines for funding applications in the near future.

Over the past several years, conservation in the Yukon has been significantly advanced through the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*. We are currently in discussions with the federal government to find a path forward to build on this progress and support future conservation priorities. As part of this work, the department is also continuing to discuss, with Yukon First Nations and conservation partners, options for a renewed approach to help refine a path forward that reflects shared priorities and interests.

One of the most significant investments the department is making is to address environmental liabilities in the territory. Since the budget was passed, the department has continued remediation and reclamation work at priority sites across the Yukon. This includes significant progress as we prepare for the abandonment of the Kotaneelee natural gas well L-38, with abandonment activities beginning winter of 2027. Work has also continued on the Discovery Creek placer mine, where major reclamation activities took place during the summer construction season. These projects help reduce environmental risk and create opportunity for future land use and economic development.

Our government has also taken action to address concerns related to the implementation of the extended producer responsibility framework, particularly the cost impacts that packaging and paper fees have had on Yukon businesses. Since the Spring Sitting, the department has worked closely with businesses and service providers to identify practical and effective solutions. As a result, a temporary rebate program was introduced to help offset these costs for eligible Yukon businesses while longer term approaches are considered. This support is helping reduce financial pressures while maintaining recycling and waste-diversion programs that benefit communities across the territory. We will continue working with businesses, municipalities, and industry partners to ensure Yukon's approach to waste management reflects the realities of operating in the North.

Climate change continues to impact communities throughout the territory. This year's budget is investing $132,000 to support the development of a new Yukon climate change action plan that focuses efforts on community resilience and being better prepared for climate risk.

Progress has also continued to develop flood-hazard mapping for 14 flood-prone communities throughout the territory. These maps help inform flood preparedness, emergency management, and land use planning. Flood-hazard maps are now publicly available for 10 Yukon communities and waste-water areas. Final maps for Mayo and Ross River will be released soon, with mapping work for Whitehorse and Pelly Crossing to follow. By providing communities with better information, we are helping them prepare for future climate impacts and make informed decisions about growth and development.

Investments made through this year's budget are also improving recreational opportunities for Yukoners and visitors and all those who visit us. We have invested $100,000 this year to finish up the improvements to the Pine Lake Campground and open 20 new developed campsites, including 14 vehicle sites, five walk-in tent sites, and a group camping area. It was great being out at Pine Lake this summer for a community barbecue to celebrate the opening of these new sites.

The department also expanded reservations for two additional campgrounds. This service is now available at Wolf Creek, Marsh Lake, Pine Lake, Tombstone Mountain, Kusawa Lake, and Fox Lake. Frontcountry campgrounds make camping more accessible and predictable for Yukoners and visitors alike.

At the same time, the department continues to implement the parks general regulations across —

Deputy Chair: Order.

Justin Ziegler: I'm just going to give the minister more time to finish his remark.

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Thank you, Deputy Chair, and I thank the member opposite for that.

The progress made this year demonstrates the investments approved through the budget are delivering results for Yukoners and our environment. Whether it is strengthening conservation partnerships, improving collaborative fish and wildlife management, addressing environmental liabilities, helping communities prepare for climate change, or enhancing recreational opportunities, the Department of Environment continues to make steady progress on

priorities set out in this year's budget. There is still important work ahead, but we are building on a strong foundation and working collaboratively to achieve lasting results.

I would like to thank, of course, the dedicated staff of the Department of Environment for their professionalism and their commitment to serving Yukoners. I would also like to thank all our partners, our Yukon First Nations, municipalities, stakeholders, community organizations, and residents whose partnership continues to make this work possible. Together, we can continue to stay grateful for the Yukon's environment that we have, support resilient communities, and build a strong future for Yukon.

Thank you, Deputy Chair, and I look forward to questions.

Justin Ziegler: The minister mentioned Graham Bell at the beginning of his remark. I would like to also mention someone — Mabel Gardiner Hubbard, who was actually Graham Bell's wife and who provided him with the financial means to bring the telephone to us.

I'm very happy to be here as the critic for Environment on behalf of the Official Opposition. I would like to thank the Member for Whitehorse Centre for staying with me during this transition and providing me with their wealth of knowledge and expertise on the file.

I would like to start by talking about the federal-provincial-territorial ministers' meeting that happened on October 16 in Toronto. I would like to know: Who represented the Yukon at the meeting, and what did the Yukon present, as the Yukon was a presenter?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: For the member opposite, my deputy minister went to Toronto, and we presented on the Southern Lakes caribou.

Justin Ziegler: The statements say that each government will work on shared objectives according to its own priorities. What are the Yukon's conservation and biodiversity priorities as presented to the other ministers there?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: If I can beg the House's indulgence, I cannot hear very well when the member speaks. We're having a hard time hearing on this side. I don't know if the member could speak louder or if we can have volume come up on the mic. But I didn't get the last part of that question; I'm sorry.

Justin Ziegler: I'm actually going to ask another question. I was wondering: Why did the minister not attend in person himself?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I did not attend mainly because we were in session. I was preparing for work in the Legislative Assembly.

Justin Ziegler: The statement says each government will work on shared objectives according to its own priorities. The minister shared that one of the Yukon priorities was the Southern Lakes caribou herd.

Are there any other Yukon conservation and biodiversity priorities that were shared at this meeting?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Another one which is big — and we were working on this actually with the northern territories also when I was at CCMEs this summer — was our *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* status, the federal funding provided to the Yukon Government to implement the 10-year agreement. The funding under the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* has allowed us to accelerate conservation initiatives and strengthen fish and wildlife conservation across the territory.

While current funding for the 10-year agreement has expired, Yukon and Canada are discussing avenues for future federal support. Additional funding would support species at risk monitoring, enhancing data management and analysis, and ongoing collaboration with Indigenous governments and groups to identify and establish protected areas.

This agreement was signed in December of 2022 to provide $20.6 million over three years to support this work in the Yukon, including Indigenous-led conservation, wildlife surveys, land use planning, and an ecological cumulative effects framework. It's important for us that this funding from the federal government keeps coming through, and that's the work that we're doing right now. As noted by my deputy minister when he presented on the Southern Lakes recovery work, the Yukon Government has worked on collaborative work with Indigenous governments. The Yukon will continue to work with our co-management partners to inform our conservation priorities.

Justin Ziegler: As the minister just said, part of the conversation was Canada's strategy to protect nature.

I wonder if the 2030 nature strategy was also mentioned, and where does the Yukon stand on shared national objectives of these two strategies?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: The Yukon protected areas total 21.1 percent, and it is the highest percentage of any province or territory in Canada. That's in our annual report that we publish through working with the federal government, as this is one of their key things.

The Government of Canada launched *A Force of Nature: Canada's Strategy to Protect Nature*, which includes a $3.8-billion investment aimed to protect and restore critical habitats, ensure industrial strategies complement conservation efforts, and to mobilize new capital for nature. Our department officials, including me, continue discussions with Environment and Climate Change Canada to identify these opportunities and to work with them for future collaboration and support.

Justin Ziegler: Now I would like to discuss air emission permits and noise. Noise is a pollutant under the *Environment Act*, but the Yukon has no noise standards. I asked the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources in April about this question.

What is the role of the Department of Environment in air emission permits?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Some of Yukon Energy's facilities can be loud, particularly diesel generators. They must operate during peak demand to keep the lights on and our homes heated. I think everyone in this House understands that.

But also, we received a petition and it is a concern, especially with the people of Riverdale and some of the people in Faro. The department may include noise management conditions in permits, which we have, when identified through the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board on a project-specific basis, as done for Yukon Energy Corporation's facilities — the ones in Whitehorse and in Faro.

The corporation is completing noise assessment reporting in Faro and plans to install noise mitigation measures in Whitehorse as required by existing permit conditions. The department will continue to apply noise-related conditions where warranted and work with the proponents to ensure compliance.

I do understand the work that is ongoing and what the department requires through the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board for the proponent to do that work. I do understand that I think it has little to do with the trade war we're having right now, them getting that equipment and those parts to upgrade those generators, but it is a priority for everyone — noise.

Justin Ziegler: I would just like to know if it is indeed the Department of Environment that grants these permits.

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Yes, we are the ones that issue the permits.

Justin Ziegler: "Issue" is the verb that I was looking for. Which power generation sites will need new or amended air emission permits in the next few years, including the proposed Whitehorse Power Centres?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: The Yukon Energy Corporation's facilities in Faro, the ones here in Whitehorse, and the new ones that we're developing, but Yukon Energy is the one that will have to go through the environmental process, and the environmental process then dictates whether you are required to have an emissions permit and a noise permit. Then that's when our Department of Environment comes in and regulates and issues.

Justin Ziegler: The Whitehorse Rapids power generation permit requires physical noise mitigation by the end of 2026. As mentioned, these noise mitigations are not going to be implemented by the end of 2026. A lot of people in Riverdale are hoping that these noise mitigation solutions will be implemented next summer.

What happens to the air emission permit since this condition is not going to be complied with? What does that mean?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: The department has requested that Yukon Energy submit the revised environmental monitoring plan actually this month and it includes interim noise mitigation measures for the winter — like the member opposite said, trying to have everything done by 2027.

I do know just from talking to the people that work at the site there that some of the newer generators have better noise emissions and they will focus on running those which are quieter and only during times like we had for about a month last year. Everybody remembers that when we need the power, those other ones would have to be turned on.

Justin Ziegler: About these new generators in Whitehorse Rapids power centre, has their noise been measured? The minister just said that they were quieter. Has that been measured, or is it a feeling?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: They were running the generators during the summer and there were no complaints this summer. But I commit to the member opposite — I will actually get back to him with the details. I don't have that here today.

Justin Ziegler: The Faro permit requires noise-impact assessments. The minister just mentioned that.

Have these started, and what have they shown? Are they going to be made public?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Thank you, and I want to thank the staff for getting back to me here. Faro, actually — yes, they model that noise and the reports can be shared. We can share those reports with the member opposite.

Sorry, I'll have to get back to the member opposite on the other reports, but I know this one for sure. We'll get back to the member opposite.

Justin Ziegler: I didn't hear if the report could be shared or could not be shared.

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Yes, the reports can be shared. We'll share the reports with the members opposite.

Justin Ziegler: As part of the Whitehorse Power Centres, the two new upcoming units, will noise conditions be written into the permits? Who will measure the noise, and will the results be made public, just like for Faro?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: We're going to have to wait for the decision document. It has to go through the environmental process and what's put out in the process then will have to come.

Justin Ziegler: Noise is a pollutant under the *Environment Act*, but there's no noise standard. Will the department create noise standards for power generation before the Whitehorse Power Centres are permitted? Generally speaking, will the department create noise standards for industrial noises?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Our noise is based on BC standards, and we don't have a plan of changing that or creating our own.

Justin Ziegler: The Yukon is following BC standards by law?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: We do. When the Yukon doesn't have prescribed standards, we are able to reference standards from other Canadian jurisdictions, and we use BC — British Columbia.

Justin Ziegler: I wonder what the mechanism is if, for example, the Whitehorse Rapids power generation centre — are these following BC's regulation?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: They have to follow what the terms are that are laid out in their permit. For the Whitehorse Rapids, the BC noise guidelines have been accepted and used.

Justin Ziegler: How is this being enforced?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: The Department of Environment regulates emissions through thermal power generation under, of course, the air emissions regulations and the *Environment Act*, enforced through noise modelling and through some of the required noise modelling.

The Department of Environment's compliance and inspections unit verifies compliance with the Yukon *Environment Act*, *Waters Act*, related regulations, environmental authorizations, including water licences for power generation. But for understanding correctly

and for this legislation and for those that are listening and for all Yukoners, if those generators are needed during a cold spell to keep the hospital open, to keep schools open, to keep people's homes heated, they will be used, but we do have the compliance and inspections going on. But let it be known that if it is an emergency — and I think minus 50 and extreme temperatures can be an emergency — we will be using generators.

Justin Ziegler: I'm not questioning the need for electricity. I'm not questioning that nearly the only option right now is thermal and is loud electricity. Nobody is actually asking anybody to cut the electricity because it's too loud.

I just want to understand. When I talk to my constituents in Riverdale who hear this electricity being produced 24/7 for eight months in the year, I want to be able to tell them there are systems in place that will help you and that will help the situation to get better.

What I'm doing right now is not criticizing the way electricity is being produced. I'm trying to understand so I can answer to the constituents in Riverdale with actual facts and data on what will be done and what can be done for this very specific situation that's affecting Riverdale but also for people who are going to be affected in the future north and south of Whitehorse by electricity production that may be loud.

I have heard that before that, with technology improving, these units were getting less and less loud and more and more quiet.

What I want to understand is what is in place in terms of regulation legally, in terms of law that we can communicate to the people who are already sending me e-mails to tell them: That's the regulation; that's what's in place; that's what will protect you; and that's what will be done.

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I thank the member opposite for that — for realizing that there could be tough times where we need the power, and our goal here on this side of the House through debate like this today is to give the information to the member opposite. I think we're doing a good job so far today. I look forward to more questions.

Justin Ziegler: I regret that I don't yet understand and I don't yet have the tools to answer the people of Riverdale and soon people of Lake Laberge and soon people south of Whitehorse to tell them what is in place to ensure that their nights will be protected.

I want to talk about climate change. The Premier has said on the floor earlier this week or last week that this Cabinet is willing to start working on a climate change plan. Is there a time frame for this?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: The Government of Yukon is committed to taking effective action focused on realistic targets to address climate change. Building a resilient Yukon requires practical action to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change.

We're in the process of this plan right now, soon to go out to consultation, and then, once the consultation is done and we have something to report back, we will. And I can offer to the members opposite, when that work is done, a technical briefing for them.

I look forward to that work being done and I want to thank both the Department of Environment and the work that the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources is doing in collaboration with us to get this work done.

Justin Ziegler: I gladly accept any technical briefing. Always — any minister in this room. I'm always accepting a technical briefing.

I have a few questions about the climate change plan. Since this plan is supposed to address climate change, what definition is being retained of "climate change" when we work on the plan?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I think we all realize climate change is real. We see it every day. But for us, we're not changing anything in the wording of "climate change".

We are ensuring communities are prepared for the impacts of climate change through resilience. The draft plan is focused on strengthening this resilience, protecting communities and infrastructure, and supporting adaptation to climate change. It reflects previous engagements with Indigenous governments, municipalities, stakeholders, and Yukoners, and it also includes actions near and dear to I think every community in the Yukon's heart, whether it's wildfire, flooding, infrastructure resilience, energy reliability, ecosystem health, and emergency preparedness.

Additional details on the plan will be shared through the engagement process, and I'm happy that process is ongoing.

Justin Ziegler: The minister mentioned a targeted solution. What is being targeted?

Sorry, what the minister said was "realistic targets". My question is: What are the targets?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: When we speak of targets, we talk about the plan and the targets are focused. These are focusing on strengthening our resilience, protecting our communities and infrastructure, supporting adaptation to climate change. It reflects previous engagement, like I said earlier, with many and the work that we're doing now. The additional details on the draft plan will be shared through the engagement process.

Justin Ziegler: The Premier and the minister said that the new plan will focus on community resiliency. I don't know how to say this word — resiliency.

How does the minister define "resiliency" in this case — "resilience"?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Resiliency or resilience — that's a broader capacity of people, communities, and systems to prepare for and absorb, respond to, and recover from hazardous climate events while minimizing damage and transforming when necessary.

Justin Ziegler: I gather from what the minister is explaining that what this plan would address are the consequences of climate change on the community more than addressing the cause of climate change. Am I correct?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Climate change is a global phenomenon, and it comes from everywhere in the world. I think Yukoners want us to be focused on resiliency, adaptation, and actions that come from climate change — being prepared for wildfires, flooding, our infrastructure resilience, making sure that we have a reliable energy grid, ecosystem health, and just basically preparing for emergencies and being ready.

Justin Ziegler: Yes, I think everybody wants to be ready for what's coming, and we know that what's coming is going to be more and more devastating, especially for those who are the most vulnerable. But I think this is only one part of what is going to be a sustainable plan. Addressing the consequences is one thing.

What is going to be done in this plan to address the cause of climate change?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I think the difference between this government and the previous government is that we're focused on building a resilient Yukon, which requires practical action to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. Responsible climate action is also closely connected to our energy grid. No one spoke about this in the previous government. The previous *Clean Energy Act* did not balance grid capacity with peak winter demand.

When we took office, we took immediate action to stabilize and reduce the demand on the grid. Repealing the *Clean Energy Act* supports — and that's why we did it — our mandate priority to focus climate change efforts on developing a plan focused on, like I said earlier, realistic and tangible actions. We ended the misguided legislative policies like the electric vehicle mandate and emissions targets, which increase electricity demand across the territory. This also helped create reasonable breathing room to stabilize our electricity grid through the new winter reliable energy plan. Instead of setting unrealistic targets, we're focused on working with stakeholders to create a climate change action plan based on realistic actions. We'll also take actions to mitigate the impacts of forest fires and floods on communities and ensure that they have necessary emergency plans in place.

Justin Ziegler: I appreciate the context from the minister about what happened with the previous government, but now that the minister is in charge, I would like to know: What does the minister do? What will be done in this upcoming climate change plan to treat the cause of climate change? What is going to be considered a cause? The previous government is not the cause of climate change. What is going to be targeted as part of the cause of climate change, and what will be done as part of this plan?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: For us, the primary focus is to help Yukon adapt to the impacts of climate change already being experienced across the territory. Then let me say this: The previous strategy provided important foundational work, including the improved understanding of climate risks, stronger partnerships, and a range of foundational actions that established knowledge, tools, and relationships needed to support future adaptation efforts. However, the context here in the Yukon has evolved significantly in recent years, with continued climate impacts, rising costs, growing pressures on infrastructure and service.

When we talk about infrastructure, for example — I said this earlier today: resilient infrastructure. When we build infrastructure, build it better, build it more energy efficient. There are a lot of good things that happened in the past, but as we move forward, we need to take action. Now we need to take action, and we need to adapt.

Justin Ziegler: We do need to adapt, and as part of adapting, I think adapting the way we participate in climate change should be part of the solution.

Are greenhouse gases still monitored by the department?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Of course, we'll continue to report annually on the Yukon's greenhouse gas emissions through the state of the environment report.

The 2026 state of the environment report will include information on the territory's 2024 greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, the Government of Canada reports annually on national greenhouse gas emissions, including emissions for the Yukon.

Our current methodology for calculating greenhouse gas emissions is publicly available on yukon.ca, and it aligns with the guidance and methodologies established by the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. Of course, our department regularly reviews emissions calculation methodologies and ensures accuracy and transparency.

Justin Ziegler: Why are we monitoring greenhouse gas?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: We monitor our emissions like other jurisdictions do, but we also realize that even if global emissions reach net zero today, climate impacts would continue for decades. That's why we're developing this plan that prioritizes building resilience in our communities, our infrastructure, and essential services so Yukoners are better prepared for the challenges that come ahead from climate change.

Justin Ziegler: Does the minister think that reducing greenhouse gas will mitigate climate impact?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Deputy Chair, could the member opposite repeat his question, please?

Justin Ziegler: My question is: Does the minister think that reducing greenhouse gas will also mitigate climate impact?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: The Yukon produces very, very few GHG emissions globally. I don't think the Yukon's the problem. We know that, like I said in my previous question, if global emissions reach net zero today, climate impacts would continue for decades. That's why this plan that we're working on prioritizes building resilience in our communities, our infrastructure, our essential services, and Yukoners are better prepared for the challenges ahead.

Another interesting fact is that if the Yukon's emissions were reduced to none, climate impacts would keep continuing. We still need to keep the lights on. We still need to heat our facilities. We still need to get out there and cut firewood so we can have affordable wood for heating our homes. We still have to create GHG emissions to live.

Justin Ziegler: Is the minister saying that we are not going to try to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: What I'm saying here today is — and it bears repeating again — what I said in the previous question the member opposite asked and the one before: We know that if global emissions reach net zero today, climate impacts will continue for decades. That's why this draft plan prioritizes building resilience in our communities, infrastructure,

and essential services so Yukoners are better prepared for the challenges ahead.

Yes, when we build, we focus on being better for the environment by how we do our building. I think there are rules and regulations in just about every department here in the Yukon that take into consideration the effects of GHG emissions, and we'll continue to do that. But for us on this side, it's about having an affordable Yukon that we can live in, enough energy for the Yukon, and so we can continue to also prosper and thrive as a territory.

Justin Ziegler: Because even if we reach net zero, climate change will still have an impact. We will not try to reach net zero. Is that correct?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I think I've answered that question already.

Justin Ziegler: I think we are part of a system that is bigger than us.

We can all agree, and we are collectively the victims of climate change. I consider myself as one of the privileged ones, because some people are losing their home, some people are losing their land, and some people have disease, more cancer, higher mortality, higher poverty rate. These are the consequences of climate change. I agree that we have to deal with these consequences because they exist.

But if we don't deal with the cause, how are we going to look our children in the eyes if we tell them that we're only Yukoners — it was someone else? Because, yes, it's correct. The cars that we drive have been built somewhere else. The fuel that we burn has been harvested from somewhere else.

All of this is correct, but we still have a responsibility not toward the entire planet, toward our own children, to be able to, in 10 years, 20 years, 30 years from now, look at them in the eyes and tell them: This is what we've done so that we protected our community against flood. This is what we've done so that you could have a house that was more resistant. This is what we've done so that we can treat the disease that climate change is causing to you and your friends.

But this is also what we've done to treat the cause. We have reduced our greenhouse gas emissions. We have reduced our carbon footprint. We've changed our lifestyle so that you could live longer.

My question is: As part of this climate change plan, is anything going to be included to treat this cause? Greenhouse gas, carbon footprint, lifestyle, incentive, all of these things?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Yes, previous work has supported a range of actions we've already done, including climate risk and resilience assessments, emergency preparedness and wildfire planning, renewable energy initiatives, building efficiency programs, infrastructure and geohazard monitoring. These efforts have strengthened understanding of the climate risks and continue to inform our current work.

But it's time to build resilient communities. Many of the proposed actions are intended to provide multiple benefits such as strengthening infrastructure resilience, supporting a reliable energy system, reducing risks from climate change related-emergencies, and helping protect the environment.

I can tell my children that when I built my house, I built my walls twice the standard of the building code, that my new vehicle has better emissions on it than my grandfather's 1972 Ford. Are we doing our part in the Yukon here? Yes, we are.

Justin Ziegler: What is the minister going to tell my children?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Could the member repeat the question, please?

Justin Ziegler: My question was what the minister is going to tell my children, other children.

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I've answered quite a few questions from the member opposite on this issue. We're working on our plan. Like I said, additional details on the draft plan will be shared through the engagement process, and I've committed to the member opposite for a technical briefing when it comes out. I look forward to more questions.

Justin Ziegler: Back to how the plan is going to be built. The minister said that is going to start with outreach.

What is that outreach going to look like?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Our outreach is engaging with Indigenous governments and organizations, municipalities, environmental non-governmental organizations, industry, research representatives, local advisory councils, and renewable resources councils, and that will gather the feedback on practical actions and identify opportunities to strengthen this final plan.

Justin Ziegler: What is going to be in that outreach? Is it going to look like open questions or closed questions?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: For the member opposite, in the engagement process, that will be revealed, and I can provide more information on that to the member later.

Justin Ziegler: While we're talking, a lot of people are listening outside, and I'm receiving a lot of messages. A lot of people are sending me messages asking me questions directly. How about this? How about that? How about this? How about that? I think people have a lot of ideas. People have actually a lot of good ideas.

As part of this engagement process, is there going to be the opportunity for people to write down their own ideas and write down their own suggestion and for these suggestions to be made public?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: This is a targeted engagement focused on gathering input from partners with direct experience implementing or responding to climate-related risks and impacts in the Yukon. The feedback received will help refine the draft plan and ensure the final actions are practical, achievable, and responsive to Yukon needs. The way we'll do this is through meetings and discussion papers and working with those organizations.

Justin Ziegler: Yukoners are not going to be included. All Yukoners are not going to be included in this outreach. Is that correct?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I think I've said this before in the House. There's been a lot of previous work. Significant work has already been done to inform the draft climate change action plan, including public engagements, climate risk assessments, departmental input, and actions already underway.

We'll work with that and target with engaging with our Indigenous governments, organizations, municipalities, our environmental non-governmental organizations, industry, research representatives, local advisory councils, and renewable resources councils to gather feedback on practical actions and identify opportunities to strengthen the final plan.

Justin Ziegler: I have a few other questions about emissions. The minister said that we were emitting a very small amount. I already asked a question about if it was monitored and why it was monitored.

What is part of monitoring? What is being monitored as greenhouse gas emitters?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: In 2023, nearly 50 percent of the Yukon's emissions came from transportation, including on-road gasoline, on-road diesel, and aviation. But we provide methodology publicly online where the member opposite can see all the categories that contribute to GHG emissions, and that's on the yukon.ca site.

Some of the questions that I'm getting from the member opposite get a little technical, so I take the time to answer them or maybe get back to the member opposite later.

Justin Ziegler: Yes, I would love to have a return.

My question is: What is included in the greenhouse gas monitoring? Which industries are emitting? Which industries are being monitored? I have a lot more questions.

I have a question about *Our Clean Future*. I was wondering if there were any actions that are still delivered as part of this.

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Actions under the previous climate strategy supported embedding climate change adaptation and emissions reduction considerations into regular planning and operations across the government. For example, climate risk assessments are informing government planning, infrastructure design, and program delivery. There are initiatives across departments that continue to address the climate risk and reduce emissions. Many initiatives under the previous strategy are continuing, especially those related to renewable energy support, building retrofits, transportation, climate risk assessments, geohazard monitoring, protected areas, active transportation planning, and ongoing First Nation partnership initiatives.

As we develop the new climate change action plan, we are reviewing the processes that impact our climate change initiatives to determine which should continue, evolve, and be replaced with more efficient approaches. The department has begun to work to review the Yukon-wide assessment reporting to assess progress toward addressing climate hazards and vulnerabilities that identify areas of future resilience and work.

I do want to go back to something the member had asked earlier. When it comes to our monitoring, our monitoring does align with the guidance and methodologies established by the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*.

Justin Ziegler: I appreciate that our monitoring aligns with the United Nations, but we can see that climate change is still happening and is still getting worse. I have the ambition that we're going to do better to have better results. At least this is what I believe in.

The minister just said that the plan will address climate hazards. What is that? What are climate hazards, and how are we going to address them? Is there any specific example that the minister could give?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Forest fires, flooding, permafrost, roads — many things.

Justin Ziegler: The Premier told this House last week that the old targets had no science, no backing. The department actually paid Navius Research to model emissions and build *Our Clean Future*.

Does the department agree with the Premier that its own analysis had no scientific basis?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I think the member opposite and the majority of Yukoners that voted for us know that we campaigned on developing a climate change action plan that's focused on achievable actions and community resilience.

The department staff who work on preparing these data, these notes, and everything for me are a wealth of knowledge. They work hard. They provide the information that is needed to us at any given time, and we sure appreciate it.

But this government, like we said in our platform — and we campaigned on, banged on doors, and I think we got the largest majority government in Yukon history. We campaigned, like I said, on a climate change action plan focused on achievable actions and community resilience. A lot of work has been done. We'll use that work, but as we move on, we'll be focused on achievable actions and community resilience.

Justin Ziegler: I would like to take this opportunity to actually send my admiration to all the staff working for Environment and actually any department, and I have a specific thought for all of those who work on *Our Clean Future* and on the *Clean Energy Act*, because I know that all these people work really hard on this. Most of them are very passionate, very determined to probably make things change, because I think the environment is not something that is partisan. I would like to thank them all, because now they have to work on another plan — basically start from scratch. The biggest majority government of the history of Yukon is starting with tabula rasa, and I think there were other options, and I do admire the people who are going to be working on this, because I know it's not going to be easy.

My next question is about energy rebates. I know this is not really the topic, so this is why I want to ask the question: Which climate-related incentive programs, if any, does the Department of Environment still run? What are they, and which were cancelled since November last year?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I'm sure the people listening here today, many of whom are my staff, appreciate what the member opposite said about our staff. I agree wholeheartedly with them. And just for this House today, a lot of that work done in the past you will see in our new climate change action plan. It's not like we're scrapping everything and starting from square zero, like the member might be insinuating, but we're not. We're looking at information we've gathered in the past, but we want to focus more on resiliency and adaptation, and we've said that. We said that on the campaign trail.

Now, when it comes to the programs the member opposite asked about, that's not in the Department of Environment; that's in the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources.

Those questions can be forwarded to that minister when he's up in debate.

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

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Is there any further debate on the matter?

Debra-Leigh Reti: I'm just going to ask a few questions to start in regard to the program status of the EPR. Forgive me if some of these questions have been asked, but I just want to start in April when the minister had said the pause applied only to hazardous and special waste. The September 29 release added glass, styrofoam, flexible plastics, aerosols, and small business collection paused until 2029.

Could the minister walk me through what is happening with the EPR program right now?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I thank the member opposite for the question. We've heard concerns across the Yukon when it comes to extended producer responsibility, particularly under the packaging and paper product program administered by Circular Materials. Good to update here in this House today for all members and for Yukoners.

In response, we have introduced a temporary targeted rebate to help reduce the financial impact on eligible Yukon businesses paying packaging and paper product program fees. This approach helps ensure recycling services continue for Yukoners while we evaluate EPR programs and assess how EPR is working in the Yukon context.

Eligible Yukon businesses may receive rebates of up to 65 percent on their 2026 packaging and paper product fees. The rebate targets packaging and paper products, which account for about 85 percent of the EPR costs and fund the key Yukon recycling services.

Debra-Leigh Reti: The September release said the expansion of glass, styrofoam, flexible plastics, et cetera is paused until January 2029, and this was not mentioned during the Environment debate in April.

When was this decision made?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: There are three active programs: packaging and paper, with delayed phased-in collection of glass, styrofoam, flexible plastics, and aerosols and collection from small businesses; batteries; and oil and antifreeze program.

We amended the permit this month. The extension that was set to start in May of 2027 is now delayed until January of 2029. This is so we can do more work.

We inherited the EPR program from the previous government, and I had the opportunity to go to ministers' meetings this summer with all the provincial and territorial ministers, and, of course, the Yukon is the only northern jurisdiction that is on EPR. But when we sat down at our ministers' lunch, every single Minister of Environment brought up the issue of EPR and the problems they're having in their own jurisdictions with it.

The Yukon and actually British Columbia right now are chairing a committee, and I believe my deputy minister is soon meeting here. We just talked about that this morning — to look at EPR holistically across the country to see if there are synergies, what work needs to be done.

But right now, of course, us being so far away from the rest of the world, our fees are exceptional. Working with Circular Materials, working with the PROs involved, has been a daunting task for the department, but we're trying to work for solutions. The main point is that we still want to continue recycling, but we have to look at EPR and how all this works to make it affordable for Yukoners.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Can the minister explain why the government did not fully pause the program like it promised to?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Existing EPR programs support recycling services. Pausing them could disrupt services and create uncertainty with nothing to back it up. Environment is assessing program data to understand costs and impacts before considering major future changes that will come.

We heard loud and clear from the business community that a small number of businesses are paying astronomical amounts once they started getting charged, and that's why we developed a rebate program, like I spoke of earlier, for them.

But we also heard loud and clear from municipalities that we do want to recycle, that we want to divert our stuff, keep it out of the landfill, and take it to the places that it needs to be.

But I think holistically or at the big picture, myself as a minister in charge of EPR here but also the Minister of Community Services and I are looking and working with our departments, working with municipalities, key stakeholders that are paying, to look to see what other options there are out there, because we need to keep it affordable. We want to recycle, but we need to keep it affordable for Yukoners and Yukon businesses.

Debra-Leigh Reti: In regard to the rebate, it was budgeted at $3 million in 2026-27 O&M — quote: "… to address private sector impacts of EPR." But in April, the minister was not worried about spending it and said support would come sooner than later, and so the rebates opened as of September 29.

Is this rebate spending the $3 million that was budgeted this year on the rebate to businesses only?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: The funding, of course, is first-come, first-served and capped at $3 million in this budget. Corporate and multinational businesses are ineligible except for locally owned franchises. The rebate targets packaging and paper products, which account for about 85 percent of EPR costs and fund key Yukon recycling services in the Yukon.

The businesses up here, like the locally owned businesses — you can probably think of the bigger-scale ones — I think you know that they give back to the community through Ronald McDonald House or Ride for Dad. Some of those big businesses are paying three, four, five, six times more than a business similar to themselves down south. This is what this program was put together for. We don't want prices to go up because of the extreme costs.

I don't know if I said it, but this program is being run under the Department of Economic Development. They do a good job. My department's been working hard with Circular Materials, working with the PROs, negotiating with them. We weren't confident that the pros or Circular Materials would pass on those rebates.

They have a new name now: tourism and economic development. It'll come to me, but anyway, that's why they're administering the program. They did some great programs during COVID to help businesses. I'm thankful for the work that they're doing here too.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Is the minister able to share how many businesses are eligible, how many have applied so far, and how much of the $3 million has been paid out so far?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Yeah, I can't speak to the details because the program has just started.

I'm understanding that two businesses have put in for it, but I understand — I think there would be about 128 businesses that could be eligible for it, but I can actually get details as more details come in on it. This program just started up here in the last little bit, so I can get more details for the member as it moves on.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Mr. Deputy Chair, thank you for that, and yes, I look forward to an update on that.

The minister had just mentioned that it's first come, first served. This program runs on that basis.

What happens if the $3 million runs out before December 31? Will businesses that apply later receive less or nothing?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: The work that the department had done, working with Circular Materials, looking at costs and everything else, determined that at a very high level, our EPR fees for most of those businesses are two to two-and-a-half times higher than, say, Alberta or BC. It is estimated that $3 million would cover EPR costs that are above what Alberta's EPR fees are. That's why we've picked the number of 65 percent. That's internal work that has been done on that.

We wanted to make sure that each business was able to apply. With the analysis and the work the department has done, that's the number we came up with, and we're confident that if they apply to it, they will be able to receive funds to help with the cost for Yukoners.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Could the minister explain — sorry, I'm not quite getting the 65 percent from the conversation. Sorry.

Hon. Wade Istchenko: The 65 percent comes if you take off what the businesses — and this is proprietary information — they don't share their information; the business wouldn't; I wouldn't share mine with the government either — but 65 percent is the savings, which would bring them in line with what the southern businesses are paying. What an Alberta McDonald's or Tim Hortons would pay — that 65 percent would make it, then, the Tim Hortons in the Yukon or a McDonald's in the Yukon would pay the same. That's what the rebate's for. Get them in line with the southern jurisdictions, which is affordable.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Thank you, Deputy Chair, and thank you to the minister for that answer. From what I understand, then, that information of what the businesses are paying is not public — correct?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: No, the individual businesses — that's not public, but through this program and information I share with you, it will be public on what businesses get. But through work that the department does with that individual business.

Debra-Leigh Reti: In regard to conservation and protected areas, in April, the minister listed Peel implementation and the Dawson regional plan and the Ross River MOU as work on new protected areas establishment. What progress has the department made on these since then?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: The independent Dawson Regional Planning Commission released the *Final Recommended Dawson Regional Land Use Plan* to the Government of Yukon and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in — the parties involved — on March 31, 2026. The Government of Yukon and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in will conduct joint public consultations. It's out for consultation on the final plan right now.

When it comes to the Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan in partnership with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, and, of course, those from the member's riding, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, and the Gwitchin Tribal Council. As part of this implementation, the ongoing work with those parties and, of course, the Government of Canada, the work is ongoing creating a national park in the Peel River watershed. Establishing the new national park would protect about 3,000 square kilometres of the Peel, recognize the regional spiritual, cultural, environmental, and socio-economic values, and support co-management of the parks with the parties.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Thank you to the minister for that update. Regarding Ross River and the IPCA, in the spring, the minister spoke about the Ross River IPCA and said that his department, will then play a role at some point in time, but we don't play a role right now.

Is the Department of Environment now involved, and where is the feasibility study at?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I think that question is better routed to the Premier's shop under aboriginal relations.

The Department of Environment is not involved right now with the planning. I think there's still ongoing work on the feasibility of that. I know there's a joint steering committee and there's work being done right now.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I'll come back to that one, then.

In regard to McIntyre Creek, can the minister give an update on the McIntyre Creek management committee? How many times has it met, and when will a management plan be prepared?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: There is a committee, and the committee has met multiple times. We provide the technical support, and we're working toward advancing the management plan with partners. There's not much to update yet on the plan, but all the interested parties are meeting toward that, and the committee is up and running.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I thank the minister for that.

In regard to the Peel special management areas, in April as well, the minister said the Peel Plan Implementation Committee is working to determine how to fulfill commitments to protect the other areas in the Peel watershed. What has the committee determined? What will joint management of the special management areas look like? Will the government commit to any legislative amendments needed?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: This work is ongoing. We will continue implementing the *Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan* in partnership with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, and the Gwich'in Tribal Council, as I spoke to earlier. I do know that Yukon is negotiating, and we are working with the implementation committee, which consists of representatives from all five governments who are signatories to the plan. The work is ongoing on how to fulfill the commitments and work toward other areas to protect in the Peel watershed. That's all I have for an update today — ongoing work.

Debra-Leigh Reti: We just have to wait and see until we hear some more updates in the future then.

In April, the minister didn't have much to say about Indigenous protected and conserved areas. Has the government worked on its position on Yukon First Nations establishing Indigenous protected and conserved areas? Specifically, will it recognize and support them?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Work is always ongoing with Indigenous governments and supporting Indigenous-led conservation. We recognize concerns raised, and we do have concerns with some of the partnerships we have with First Nations and with the federal government, and funding agreements.

Part of my job as the Minister of Environment is to get after our federal ministers and make sure these funding agreements come through to fruition. The governments of Yukon and Canada work with the Indigenous governments to discuss options for new or old approaches that help define paths forward to reflect shared priorities and interests. So, we are aware that there's a group of First Nations that are engaging with the federal government also to discuss long-term funding conservation-related initiatives. And we look forward to learning more as their discussions proceed. I've met with that organization a couple times, and they're also lobbying Ottawa for funding for ideas that they have when it comes to conservation-related initiatives.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I just want to jump back to McIntyre Creek. Another question there. Have the mineral claims in the McIntyre Creek Park been relinquished by the owners as they committed to doing?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: That question would be better directed to the minister or the Department of Energy, Mines, Resources when they're up in this House.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I guess in regard to the questions I'm asking, I was, you know, just asking if the minister can share, if the Department of Environment manages parks and protected areas, how his department does not have a role in that last question in regard to the mineral claims.

Hon. Wade Istchenko: So, the administration of mineral claims falls under the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources. I think you'll find with a lot of issues and concerns or questions asked to the floor, there are multiple departments that are involved in this. But if it's a mineral claim, it will fall under Energy, Mines and Resources.

Debra-Leigh Reti: And thank you to the minister for that answer. Can the minister give an update on how the conservation fund is being implemented, and how much of the $450,000 has been spent?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: So, of course, I've spoken about this a little bit in the House today. I'm happy to rise actually to talk about this again today. The Government of Yukon has launched the conservation fund that will fund wildlife and habitat conservation projects in the territory. So, this government has invested — there's $450,000 in the conservation fund to support local wildlife habitat conservation and management projects across the territory. The Yukon conservation fund advisory committee, which I'm happy to say, today got together for the first time in person, and I went there for the inaugural meeting. We've had one before to set up a good meeting date. Just met. So, the first step of this advisory committee is developing the funding priorities and project assessment criteria for the fund. So, I look forward to sharing more information.

They were meeting most of the day today to decide when intakes are and everything else like that. So, there hasn't been anyone with applications in, but as soon as they come up with the criteria for it, we will do as I told them this morning. The department will do a heavy advertising campaign to get it out there to all the communities and all those organizations that value fish and wildlife and the outdoors and conservation of our fish and wildlife so they can apply for some of these funds.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Well, it's good to hear that the board's, you know, getting set up and working on this. So, at this point, is there any knowledge of what projects will be eligible?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: So, that will come out with the criteria for, and that's what they're developing today. So, there's more to follow on that. That will come after the committee is done and they decide how they want to go about working with this. And we have to follow rules and regulations within the department, of course. But those criteria aren't set yet. But I imagine they're probably set by now. But they just finished that today.

Debra-Leigh Reti: So, has the department found any of the additional revenue sources that the minister mentioned in April?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: So, currently, the conservation fund collects revenues from pelt and hide auctions as well as fines directed by the courts for convictions under the *Wildlife Act*. And I am excited and I'm happy that actually these funds are going to go back into conservation. And I think Yukoners will be happy to see that some of the revenue sources there can go back into fish and wildlife. And we're working with other organizations across the board for opportunities to raise funds for this. One of the things that I can highlight today — because as the committee meets and has discussions, I think we'll see

more — is the establishment of a Premier's and minister's permit. So, we're looking for new ways for this fund — it's conservation initiatives across the territory.

So, with the development of these permits — could be auctioned off or awarded through a draw system that would provide unique hunting opportunities such as sought-after species or an exclusive area or time period. The Yukon is home to some of the world's most sought-after hunting experiences, and an initiative like this would generate significant funds to support conservation initiatives in the territory. There are other jurisdictions that do it, and I'd like to highlight the forward thinking of Kluane First Nation when they settled their land claims. They and I think most members know that they have a sheep auction that is auctioned off at Wild Sheep Foundation. And last year when it was auctioned off, it sold for $610,000, almost a million Canadian, and that goes back to Kluane First Nation for conservation efforts. So, the way they set it up in their Umbrella Final Agreement is — and the minister of the day, which is me now, can give one tag out to a Yukoner also. So, that's the idea behind the Premier's hunt and the minister's hunt, and that's one way that we will be looking to create revenues for this fund.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Can the minister give an update on the department's review of the outfitter quota process?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: So, I just do want to start with — and it was interesting today with one of our members' statements about the sausage-making that the outfitters do. But the outfitters — one of the oldest industries in the Yukon, and they contribute to the Yukon tourism sector and economy. And I think there was a question in Question Period today about tourism and how we're working with the tourism industry to make sure that we have that sustainable industry. It's a key driver for Yukon's GDP. So, when it comes to the quota process, all the decisions that will be made are in collaboration with our co-management partners to ensure continued hunting opportunities while respecting the First Nation subsistence harvest rights.

So, as the department is working right now with co-management partners and industry to develop the process, the process will consider all harvest groups, uphold Indigenous treaty rights, and aim to provide greater predictability and certainty for the industry. As an initial step, an independent facilitator is gathering perspectives and he's working right now with First Nations, Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, and renewable resources councils as well as the industry to inform and to develop this process. So, this process is underway right now, and it's something that I committed to and it was committed to in the platform that we would have certainty, and this is how we go about creating certainty for one of our industries. And the department has contracted Bath and Associates to facilitate this independent discussion with co-management partners and, of course, the outfitting industry.

Debra-Leigh Reti: So, in April, the minister said that we have the skill and we have the employees within the department who can do all this good work. He also said the board's review was cancelled for fiscal reasons with a tight budget and that there was a huge price tag with this.

Can the minister share why the work has now gone to a consultant?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: So, the consultant was always going to be an independent consultant that was going to do this work.

Fiscal restraints when we took over and got to have a look at where the books were — the high price tag that the previous government had on what they were doing. Confident in the department — the department is going to do most of that technical work anyway, so they're doing that. So, we're going from the price tag of — I believe it was over $600,000 to this — is going to be more cost efficient and effective for the government using the resources that we have, and I think it'll come in at around $75,000, is what we budget for.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I could be wrong, but I thought I remembered having this exact conversation back in the spring, and the consultant was not mentioned. So, the consultant contract cost you're saying is going to, if the minister can just confirm, is going to reach about $75,000?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Yes.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Can the minister share if the contract tendered was sole-sourced, or how was this consultant chosen?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: So, they were sole-sourced. Bath and Associates have done a lot of work to facilitate our wildlife and things like this, so that's why we use them.

Justin Ziegler: I didn't hear that. Sorry, can the minister repeat?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Thank you to the member opposite. I said that we're sole-sourced. Bath and Associates are leading experts in human dimension work involving interface with wildlife and humans, and they're experts in their field.

Justin Ziegler: I'd like to circle back to the conversation we were having before, and we were talking about *Our Clean Future*. My question was: What will be kept from the plan? The minister mentioned that people working for Environment did a great job and that most of their work was going to be kept. So, I was wondering: What is going to be kept?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I sort of think I answered this question, but I'll answer it again.

So, actions under the previous climate change strategy supported embedding climate change adaptation and emissions reductions considerations into regular planning and operations across the government. For example, climate risk assessments are informing government planning, infrastructure design, and program delivery. There are initiatives across departments to continue to address climate risks and reduce emissions. Many initiatives under the previous strategy are continuing, especially those related to renewable energy support, building retrofits, transportation, climate risk assessment, geohazard monitoring, protected areas, active transportation planning, and ongoing First Nation partnerships and initiatives. So, as we develop the new climate action plan, like I said, we're reviewing the progress and impacts of the initiatives that were done in the past to determine work as we move forward, and the work has begun to review the Yukon-wide risk assessment

work and progress toward addressing climate hazards and vulnerabilities to identify the areas for future resilience work.

Justin Ziegler: I asked earlier what climate hazards were, and the minister gave a list: flood, wildfire, all of these things. I believe that wildfire, flood, all of this belongs to the Department of Community Services.

So, what climate hazards is the Department of Environment going to address directly?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: So, one of the ones that would fall under our department is flood mapping and flood forecasting. But under the Climate Change Secretariat, all the actions under there would run through many departments, like the member opposite mentioned with wildfires and the Department of Community Services.

Justin Ziegler: So, what are these actions? What are the actions being targeted that are going to be done?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I think I've said this more than once in this House today, but I guess I'll say it again.

We're committed to developing actions, an action plan rooted in practical, achievable actions that will benefit our community now and for generations to come. This plan will help ensure communities are prepared for climate change and better equipped to respond to the impacts of it. So, our focus is to develop realistic, tangible actions that aim to protect our homes, communities, and infrastructure and support a more resilient Yukon.

Justin Ziegler: The reason I'm asking all these questions is because I really want to buy into this plan. I really want to believe that this plan is going to change something, and I really want to understand what this plan is going to do so that I can answer the questions that people are going to ask me. Because we've all heard questions knocking on doors. We all hear questions about climate change when we go anywhere. You know, people ask questions. What is this government going to do to fight climate change? And I would like to have some answers, but that will not be tomorrow.

I want to ask about the conservation fund. I have the answer, but I would like the minister to remind us how much is in that fund.

Hon. Wade Istchenko: There's $635,000.

Justin Ziegler: I do understand that these questions were asked before. What are the criteria of the fund?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I answered that question just earlier when the member from Vuntut Gwitchin asked.

The criteria will be set by the committee. The committee met today. There's more information to follow, and it will be shared widely. And I sure hope that members from the Opposition see the government press release on there that actually came up when I was just speaking to them — that the department said we're hoping that everyone shares this, so there's opportunities for everybody to look at this and apply to it.

Justin Ziegler: Yes. I will encourage a lot of people to apply to this fund, but are there terms of reference? And if there are, could they be tabled?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: When I left the committee this morning, they were talking about the terms of reference. So, once all the stuff is there, I can absolutely table them. I can share them with the member opposite and Yukoners.

Justin Ziegler: I have some questions about Chasàn Chuà. I just want to follow up on how many times the committee has met.

Hon. Wade Istchenko: They met last September and they have had multiple meetings — or this September, sorry — and they have had multiple meetings.

Justin Ziegler: Do we know what is on the agenda of this group?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: So, the management planning roles, responsibilities, and establishing terms of reference — that's the ongoing work that the committee is doing.

Justin Ziegler: What is the budget that is given to Chasàn Chuà this year?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I don't have that answer today, but I can commit to getting back to the member opposite with the dollars allotted for that.

Justin Ziegler: I'm looking forward to having an answer to this. The member from Vuntut Gwitchin already mentioned this about the mineral claims inside the park. They have not been relinquished, at least from the information I found. Is the Minister of Environment having conversations with the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources to make sure that these mineral claims are being relinquished soon?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I have conversations with the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, Mines Resources on a daily basis, and we talk about many items. But like I said earlier, that falls under his department, and that question is better asked of him on the mineral claims or the work the member has done looking into whether they have been relinquished or not. Was better asked for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, Mines Resources.

Justin Ziegler: About this, what is the bigger picture, the bigger plan for protected areas in the Yukon?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I'll have to get back to the member opposite, but I do have an answer on the previous question. There is no budget for what the member asked. We're using operational dollars for that, but I'll answer the question he had in just a second.

Justin Ziegler: How much does that represent?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I'll have to get back to the member opposite on that, but there's not an actual budgeted line item. We're working internally through our operating dollars, so I'll get back to the member opposite.

Justin Ziegler: Just circling back to my question about protected areas — what is the big plan? Does the government have a target of protected areas?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Funding under the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* has allowed us to accelerate conservation initiatives and strengthen conservation across the territory. While the current funding for the 10-year agreement has expired, the

Yukon and Canada — right now, we're discussing avenues for further federal support. Additional funding would support species at risk monitoring, enhanced data management and analysis, and ongoing collaboration with Indigenous governments and groups to identify and establish protected areas. When the agreement was signed in 2022, it provided $20.6 million over three years to support this work, and some of it was Indigenous-led wildlife surveys, land use planning, and the ecological effects framework — it's a word there that I'm having a tough time with apparently. So, Yukon's protected areas right now total 21.1 percent, and is the highest percentage in Canada, per province and territory. The department — we publish this in our annual report. But like I said, we're working with the federal government as they launch the *A Force of Nature* strategy to continue on the good work that we need to do and including the work that we do with the Indigenous governments supporting Indigenous-led conservation.

Justin Ziegler: I am glad to know that the Yukon has the most protected areas in the country. Does the minister have the desire to increase that area? Does the minister have the ambition to protect more areas in the Yukon?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: In the Yukon, we don't have an actual target, but through the nature agreement and through our work with Indigenous partners, regional planning, and other initiatives, we support identification of potential new protected areas. And this work will be done through, of course, our Indigenous partners, like I said earlier, regional land use planning, and, of course, other initiatives, and some that might be set out under some of the final agreements to support identification of potentially new protected areas.

Justin Ziegler: I have questions now about the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*. How many positions are funded by this agreement, and how many of these positions are filled, and how many are vacant?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: We have 12 positions with no vacancies.

Justin Ziegler: Under the agreement, the Yukon committed to start developing species at risk legislation. The government said it won't. It won't. What happened here? Are there other conversations or any consequences to that?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: As happens when governments change, sometimes things change, like some of the discussion we had earlier today. This government does not believe we need species at risk legislation because we do so much work already. We work with co-management partners, the federal government, on a range of species at risk. This year, over $1.5 million will be invested into species at risk monitoring and conservation efforts, plus an additional $495,000 from external funding and industry partners. Recent government monitoring and research efforts have focused on northern mountain caribou, wood bison, little brown bats, collared pika, wolverine, and grizzly bear, and we're going to continue to work with our Indigenous governments or groups, the coal management boards and councils, and the federal government to support species at risk conservation across the Yukon.

Justin Ziegler: I think a lot of effort being put to protect species at risk is great, but outside of legislation, it's based on desire, and this agreement required legislation to be implemented. So, the fact that there is no — I'm not questioning the fact that species at risk are being protected. I'm questioning that the absence of legislation might put at risk the agreement in the future. Is this the case?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: So, the agreement didn't commit to species at risk legislation. The previous government did through our agreement, the initial three-year funding envelope under the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*, was used to support some of our species at risk work. I said earlier — I talked about some of the work we were doing and discussions regarding — the big thing for me is making sure that I work with the federal government and the discussions for conservation funding opportunities get to keep coming from the federal government so we can keep doing this good work on species at risk.

Justin Ziegler: As part of this agreement, are there any other commitments that are going to be missed?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: No, it's just all ongoing work, and we're committed to doing the work. I'm big into working with the federal government right now to make sure that the funding is there so we can do that work.

Justin Ziegler: I want to talk about Parks Canada. How will the minister work with his federal colleagues to protect Parks Canada jobs?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: My job as an MLA is to bring up concerns and issues in my riding. Parks Canada is not part of the Department of Environment and the Yukon Government, but we do co-work with Parks Canada. I'm as concerned as everyone else in this Legislature about the job losses. I think if the member heard my member statement today, I'll be sending a letter to our Member of Parliament and the federal ministers about this issue. I live in a riding that has had a park; I grew up with it. I didn't have a chance in my one minute today to talk about how Parks benefits our community, but I know my neighbour — and I've moved since 2018 — but my neighbour was a park warden for 30-some years, and I know more about birds and the environment and everything else from a guy like that who came to schools, taught us stuff. And there's grave concerns in my riding, as I'm sure there are in any other ridings that are affected by these layoffs and cutbacks. So, I'm glad that we're aware of it here. And when it comes to the economic value and jobs and stuff like that, I'm pretty sure the member opposite can ask the minister in charge of that too. But you know my point of view and how I feel about it.

Justin Ziegler: I would like to know: What else is the minister going to do apart from a letter to work with potentially, you know, other environment ministers across the country to advocate for these jobs and for the protection of these areas and parks?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Actually, I thank the member opposite for bringing the previous question and the question again here today, because I think it's important and it is important for our communities. Like anything, when something happens like major cutbacks to an organization like Parks Canada, the ball starts rolling. I know the work that we do with Parks Canada within the department. I know that deputies are

talking now, I'm sure, across the country. I know that our ADMs and directors — and if there's a phone call between a biologist to another biologist, they're probably talking about: Well, how's that going to affect our relationship and everything else down the line? Myself as a minister and I'm sure the Premier and other ministers — the opportunity, as soon as I get the chance to meet with federal counterparts, I am sending a letters. I can almost guarantee you at the next Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, it will be a conversation and probably be a line item or on the agenda to discuss.

Justin Ziegler: How will the department respond if these positions are indeed lost?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: So, letters have just been sent. We're in the early stages. This is brand new on the radar. So, I don't have an answer to that question except that we will be working. Our department will be looking at — if we find out that a project that we have a co-management partner is Parks Canada — I don't want to see any — I don't want to see a loss of the jobs in the first place, but I also want to make sure that the work that we're doing to protect the environment, to look at climate change and any work that we do continues on. So, we'll have to figure out and leap that hurdle when we get there. But I'm not just going to bow down and say we're not doing it now because Parks Canada has cut a bunch of employees. We'll find a way and we'll get it done. It's important.

Justin Ziegler: I understand. I'm just going to ask my question. How will the department sustain what Parks Canada does in the future? Again, if these jobs are lost, is there anything that comes to mind that the minister feels passionate about and wants to make sure keeps going on in the future?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: So, right now, we know that — what I can tell you is what we know and what the staff knows is that we've lost jobs, but they also said they're repositioning jobs. So, we're not there yet. We don't know. But, of course, like you heard from two members in the House today during members' statements, there is grave concern, and I think all three parties in this House are on the same page. We're not happy with what these cuts have brought, and I guess we're going to have to wait for a little bit more information on this to follow.

Justin Ziegler: I will be sending a letter to our MP as well. And yeah, I don't know if anybody working for Parks Canada is listening to us right now, but I will be sending letter and making some noise for sure.

I want to talk about campgrounds now. How much revenue did camping fees bring in 2026, if we know that?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: So, when it comes to campgrounds, it's great to be on this side of the House as a minister in charge of campgrounds. When I was in Opposition — and I'm sure my fellow colleagues over there that were critics also, I think campgrounds are near and dear to us and we love our campgrounds. So, at the start of this year's camping season, we did expand the frontcountry campground reservation service. This year, the campsite reservations were available at Wolf Creek, Marsh Lake, Pine Lake, Tombstone Mountain, Kusawa Lake, and Fox Lake. So, our campground hosts were available at all those campgrounds with reservable sites to help with the check-in and any questions regarding the service. The reservation service has proven to help reduce site-saving at participating campgrounds and is popular with many local and visiting campers.

And I'm sure, like the members opposite, all I hear and I think we hear at the department is 99 percent of it's positive stuff about our campgrounds. The work that our people do in the Department of Environment with campgrounds is exceptional, and kudos to them, for sure. We do have — you know, for what we have to manage — 42 campgrounds, 12 recreation sites across the territory — I think they do a miraculous job. The stats here tell us that 90 percent of the users had favourable experiences.

So, between 2024 and 2026, the number of reservations for frontcountry campgrounds made on the opening day increased by 185 percent. There's a stat for you. In 2026, 152 percent — 14 percent of about 1,100 frontcountry campsites across the territory were available for reservation. The remaining sites are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Yukon residents who hold an annual permit campground voucher can reserve campsites at participating campgrounds for up to three nights per season at no additional cost. The backcountry camping reservations for the 2026 camping season opened on March 4, and reservations for frontcountry campgrounds opened on April 8. There's been a few changes in there. When it comes to the numbers that the member opposite was asking for, the information isn't quite ready yet. It's a manual process of processing that information. It should be ready in December. They basically said: Hey, we're still counting. So, as soon as we get those numbers in, I can share them with the member opposite.

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

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

There will be continued debate on the matter.

Justin Ziegler: I'm really looking forward to having more numbers on campgrounds and camp nights. Fun fact: Since elected, I was not able to go camping once, but I will make it up next year, for sure.

Are there plans to open new campsites? I know that there was some heritage assessment done in Snafu and Tarfu. Where are we at?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: So, we are working to increase and enhance camping and recreational opportunities across the country. I think every Yukoner is hopeful for that, and it's the same question I would ask if I was in Opposition.

So, camping in the Yukon has become so popular each year. The department — we need to do good work working with First Nations, municipalities, and our partners to increase camping and recreational opportunities across the territory. This also includes investing in new campsites at high-demand campgrounds, enhancing the reservation service, and implementing campground host programs. This summer, I just

want to highlight: We had a barbecue at Pine Lake and opened up 20 new campsites, including 14 sites. And if the member opposite is looking to come out to my neck of the woods next summer because he wants to go camping, we have these five cool new walk-in tent sites and a group camping area. We had a tour of them there. They're kind of neat. It's a new thing that the department's doing. And that campground at Pine Lake has the Pine Lake Trail, which links you to the community, to the Village Bakery, to Top Spot. Just putting a plug in for my community, Mr. Deputy Chair. We will continue to work to offer incredible camping recreation experiences across Yukon for both those visiting and the campground.

This year in the budget mains, we allocated $100,000 in campground development. This funding supported, of course — I spoke about Pine Lake, but we're reviewing previously completed feasibility studies, assessing areas with existing territorial park boundaries, and re-engaging with First Nations and communities on options for new camping opportunities. So, the department is compiling work right now. It will come. We'll put it in the budget. So, I don't have anything to announce on actual sites right now, as we're in budgetary cycles. But I'll be as excited as everyone else to find and work with the department to figure out what we're doing next.

Justin Ziegler: I assume there will be no new campsite next year, but I will keep asking to make sure there are new campsites coming up, because more and more people are coming, and it's great.

I have a question about the reservation contract for the online booking system. What was the cost of this?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: So, the reservation system was a great initiative from the department. I think we heard that through previous consultation work, listening to Yukoners. It does work well, and it's one of the things that we've done, I think, that the department has done that hasn't — it has been very positive. Not much negative feedback. Like I think I said, over 90 percent are satisfied in comments we get. But the department tells me that it costs about $80,000 a year to administer and manage.

Justin Ziegler: I would like to know if the reservation website is fully available in French.

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I want to thank my department and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources for helping me with this answer. And the answer is yes.

Justin Ziegler: Merci au ministre de l'Énergie, des Mines et des Ressources d'avoir trouvé cette réponse-là. Is all signage in every campground bilingual?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: As I wait for an answer from the department, I'm positive that most of it is, and if not, I know that's something that we're committed to in the Department of Environment to making sure that it is.

It says here that — and I'm just trying to remember Pine Lake; I spent a lot of time there — the kiosks that provide the messaging to campers in the campgrounds are bilingual.

Justin Ziegler: Pine Lake is now the centre of the universe.

Is any signage in any campground available in any First Nation languages?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Pine Lake is pretty close to the centre of the universe.

The answer to the member opposite is yes, there is. I think, depending on the area you're in, you will see the different First Nation dialects.

Justin Ziegler: How much of the budget of Environment is put specifically into First Nation languages — specifically First Nation language signage and all of that?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I'm not exactly sure of the amount, but that's operational. I know, through the different branches and the different departments, that we do work with the First Nations in the different areas to strive to have their language there too.

Justin Ziegler: Is there a desire from the department to make sure that, in every campground in the Yukon, there is some signage and some information related to the culture of the land the campground is located on?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I thank the member opposite for that question, because I've noticed and I think we've all noticed in the last few years as we move on — and I had the opportunity to travel to the North Yukon with some of my campground workers who actually work in the department. One of the conversations that we chatted about was the fact that we work with First Nations in developing campgrounds — and all municipalities and everything else — and part of that work goes to developing, say, a trail system to access that campground. But some of the other work is to identify — a campground is usually a spot where people would stop and camp at before we were here; it was probably a heritage site or a site of something. To have the history behind it in First Nation — and I'm actually not well spoken in Southern Tutchone; my son's fiancé sure is — Mats'äsa'na Ma — but we try to talk back and forth, and it's good to learn a little bit of the language there.

But we strive in the department to get that in all our campgrounds and it's in most of our campgrounds, and anything that we develop now will have that. If you want to get people to stay a little longer in the Yukon, I found that there's things for them to do and see. Our rich First Nation culture is key to that too.

Justin Ziegler: I agree with the minister. I am looking forward to the day where all campgrounds actually take pride in giving information to the people visiting these campgrounds about the history of the land, the history of the people, all these very rich, important pieces of the Yukon that people come here for as well. I will be asking similar questions to the Minister of Tourism and Culture.

I want to talk more about EPR. There is a $3-million rebate. We talked about how it worked. I would like to get some more information.

Can the minister tell me what would be the highest and the smallest that businesses can claim?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: It depends on the business, the size of the business, but it's up to 65 percent of their fees. Like I said earlier, we don't have that information yet because this program has just been rolled out. When we do, we'll be able to share that with members opposite. But like I said, it's dependent

on the size of their business, and it's up to 65 percent of their fees.

Justin Ziegler: When was the rebate rolled out?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: September 29 is when the program rolled out.

Justin Ziegler: Happy one-month anniversary to this program.

What are the conditions of the program? I understand it's only going to cover paper, but what are the conditions?

I guess my question is: Which boxes do businesses need to tick to be able to access this program?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Like I said, we heard concerns from Yukon businesses about this EPR cost, particularly under the packaging paper products program. That's a program that the businesses are eligible for.

Justin Ziegler: I'm looking for details around eligibility to the program.

Hon. Wade Istchenko: The companies must be Yukon-based and -owned companies in good standing, and they must have paid fees for the packaging and paper products EPR program, and they have to have been invoiced during the 2026 calendar year.

Justin Ziegler: That means businesses can apply for the amount they paid in the 2026 calendar year.

Is this program going to be available for 2026 past January 1, and if yes, until when? Can the business apply retroactively?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I missed that. Can the member opposite repeat the question?

Justin Ziegler: Can businesses apply retroactively, and can they apply in mid-January 2027 for the entire 2026 calendar year?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: The application deadline is December 31, 2026. Only costs incurred or invoices received between January 1, 2026 and December 31 will be eligible for the rebate.

To continue on to this right now, we're working with Circular Materials and we're looking at next steps moving forward in negotiating with all the key players.

Justin Ziegler: What is the process for a business to apply?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I will direct the member opposite to yukon.ca. The details are all on there. I don't have them in front of me, but they're on there and they're public.

Justin Ziegler: Do we know if $3 million is going to be enough? How was this calculated?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: The EPR fees that the businesses up here are being hit with are two to two and a half times higher than Alberta, and it's estimated through the work the department did with Circular Materials and the business community that the $3 million would cover the costs that are above what Alberta EPR fees are. Alberta is one of the western provinces that has most recently implemented extended producer responsibility. Yukon regulatory product definitions are most closely aligned with Alberta. That's where those numbers came from, especially when it comes to product definitions.

But I do know, like I said earlier in this House, the conversation I had at ministers' meetings this summer about EPR with my fellow counterparts from the provinces and territories — and then it was also brought up to the minister that EPR is quite challenging. Different provinces have different definitions of product, different products that are aligned. The East Coast is different from central Canada. Ontario, Québec have their own issues.

BC and the Yukon, we came to the conclusion — I think we were not forced into it, but we were working with their deputies to say: Hey, can we work with the federal government and look at what this administered cost of business is costing and how we can do a better job at it?

We created this program in the Department of Economy, Tourism and Culture. The staff here are working diligently with the Department of Community Services also to see if there are opportunities to do a better job to make it more affordable for Yukoners.

Hon. Scott Kent: Seeing the time, I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Tyler Porter: Pursuant to Committee of the Whole Motion No. 2, Committee of the Whole has considered the operations and policies of the Department of Environment.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

Hon. 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. on Monday.

The House adjourned at 5:25 p.m.

The following legislative return was tabled today:

LR 36-1-45
Response to Written Question No. 4 re Economy, Tourism and Culture project funding (Gehmair)

The following sessional paper was tabled today:

SP 36-1-61
Interim Report of the Special Committee on Electoral Financing (October 29, 2026) (Benoit)