Yukon Legislative Assembly

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HANSARD

Monday, November 16, 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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Monday, November 16, 2026

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: Introduction of visitors.
Visitors introduced

Speaker: Tributes.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Statement — Geoscience Forum and Trade Show

Adam Gerle: The 54th annual Geoscience Forum and Trade Show officially kicks off today and runs through Thursday here in Whitehorse. Geoscience brings together people, ideas, and expertise from across the industry, attracting leaders and experts in mining and geology along with investors and local service providers. Delegates network and learn from one another while showcasing the Yukon as a territory rich in mining history and with huge potential for responsible resource development. It's also the largest conference of the year in the Yukon, giving the territory a significant economic boost during a traditionally slow time of year.

We look forward to the annual geoscience awards, which recognize individuals in the industry for their dedication, innovation, and environmental stewardship. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all industry partners and organizations for their continued commitment to supporting our communities and advancing responsible mining in the Yukon.

Statement — Kaska Voices

Kate White: I stand today in celebration of last week's *Kaska Voices: An Evening of Storytelling for Future Generations*. I joined a packed house for a beautiful evening of storytelling, short films, language, and drumming.

With support from CPAWS Yukon and others, the Ross River Dena presented their perspective and the importance of the creation of Gūkēyeh Gūs'ān (Our Country Will Always Be), the proposed Indigenous protected and conserved area. The vision for Gūkēyeh Gūs'ān is rooted in the understanding that culture, stewardship, and ecological health are inseparable. Through Indigenous-led conservation, Ross River Dena Council seeks to protect the conditions that allow the Kaska language, harvesting, land-based knowledge, governance, and cultural practices to continue evolving and thriving in contemporary ways.

I've heard it said that when speaking English, you are speaking through your head, but when speaking Kaska Dena, you are speaking through your heart, and that truth was apparent in listening to elders share their stories and love of their land.

Thank you to all who have contributed and continue to put so much heart into this work and thank you to Dakali for his humour and care as the MC of this event.

Statement — National Addictions Awareness Week

Debra-Leigh Reti: November 15 to 21 marks National Addictions Awareness Week. This week is to help address the harms related to the use of alcohol and other drugs. It is a time to continue what we here in the House have been discussing at length: prevention, harm reduction, treatment, recovery, and most importantly, solutions for change.

We are all painfully aware of the issues that Yukoners face every day, and we must continue to help, listen, and work on finding meaningful and lasting solutions to the crisis our communities are currently facing. This is not an issue of political sides; it is a human issue affecting so many of our citizens and their families. We must continue to work together to move forward and to remember all those we have lost to addictions.

Statement — Emergency preparedness

Patti McLeod: As Yukoners settle into another winter season, it's a good time to reflect on the importance of emergency preparedness.

Yukoners are no strangers to challenging winters and the emergencies that can arise. Emergency preparedness is a shared responsibility. Governments, utilities, first responders, and community organizations all have a role to play in helping to keep people safe. Just as importantly, individuals and families can prepare by making a plan, checking emergency supplies, and ensuring they are ready to be self-sufficient for at least 72 hours.

Last winter reminded us that emergency preparedness cannot be taken for granted. Whether facing power outages, extreme weather, or other unexpected events, there is important work to do to strengthen resilience in communities across the Yukon. I encourage all Yukoners to review their emergency plans, check their supplies, and take steps to be prepared this winter.

Statement — Trans Awareness Week

Lane Tredger: This is Trans Awareness Week, which finishes on Friday with the Trans Day of Remembrance.

In the same way that the trans community holds multitudes, so does this week. Celebration for our wins, rage at the violence and murders, gratitude for our trailblazers, grief for those we've lost, pride in our resilience, fear of the horrors to come, exhaustion, joy, and solidarity.

Thank you to Queer Yukon for hosting social events, youth activities, workshops, and a vigil. Their Whitehorse space has a community-created installation for Trans Remembrance Day that I'd like to quote: "Thank you for showing me how sassy, playful, joyful, and fierce courage can be. Your glitter is scattered through my life, and your top hat reminds me of the carefree moments dancing, venturing, and loving. Thank you for breaking trail. I'm sorry it was necessary. You did a beautiful job. I'll keep going … making a little more space for all the rainbow babes coming through."

Statement — Project Red Ribbon

Doris Anderson: Today I rise to recognize the Red Ribbon campaign — a national effort led by Mothers Against Drunk Driving. It serves as a powerful reminder of the

importance of driving sober and making responsible choices behind the wheel. Each year from November to early January, Canadians are encouraged to wear a red ribbon as a commitment to never drive impaired and to keep our roads, highways, and communities safe.

Remember that road safety is everyone's responsibility. Whether attending holiday gatherings, visiting family and friends, or travelling between communities, every driver has a role to play in helping people get home safely. MADD Canada and its volunteers are encouraging everyone to make safe and responsible choices this holiday season and throughout the year by planning ahead before you travel, arranging a safe ride home, never driving impaired or riding with an impaired driver, or calling 911 if you suspect a driver is impaired.

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Jen Gehmair: Pursuant to subsection 7(7) of the *Historic Resources Act*, I have for tabling the Yukon heritage annual report. Also, pursuant to section 12 of the *Arts Centre Act*, I have for tabling the Yukon Arts Centre's annual report. And I have the Yukon Geographical Place Names Board's annual report.

Speaker: Are there any committee reports to be presented?

Are there any petitions?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Adam Gerle: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to engage with partners and take the necessary steps to prepare an offer to host the 2035 Canada Winter Games.

Doris Anderson: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House supports Bill S-246, *An Act respecting the recognition of wartime service*, in an attempt to develop a national framework for the recognition of certain military service as wartime service.

Tyler Porter: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to engage with firefighters on updating the listed cancers under the *Workers' Safety and Compensation Act*.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

This then brings us to Question Period.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Question — Yukon Hospital Corporation funding

Kate White: Since 2021, the current minister of health has used the words "chronic underfunding" or "chronic neglect" of the Yukon Hospital Corporation 62 times. He continues to blame previous governments for the current state of Yukon's hospitals.

The Hospital Corporation's board initially approved a deficit budget for 2026-27. In June, the minister told CBC that a pension contribution holiday would more than erase that deficit. However, in response, the Yukon Hospital Corporation told CBC that deficit would still exist. They went so far as to say that they had to make choices like paying vendors or making payroll.

After bringing up chronic underfunding 62 times, why did the minister leave the Hospital Corporation to start the year with a deficit budget?

Hon. Brad Cathers: As we know, the Liberals, with the support of their NDP colleagues, chronically underfunded Yukon Hospitals for years.

We have increased funding for Yukon Hospitals, including by $19.7 million in O&M this fiscal year. As members in fact heard the other day from Yukon Hospital Corporation officials, the hospital is not in a deficit right now, and that is due to the unprecedented increases by this government to support the chronically underfunded needs of the Yukon Hospital Corporation.

I remind the member that during their time in office, we saw one fiscal year where only by delaying paying $10.7 million in accounts payable beyond their normal terms was the hospital able to be in the black at the end of that fiscal year.

Kate White: I stand corrected. I think we're at 64 times now.

When appearing as witnesses in this House, the Hospital Corporation was asked what it requested from government for 2026-27 and whether it received it. The minister interjected. Ultimately, Yukoners still don't know whether the Yukon Hospital Corporation's funding request was met. Yukoners need to know that their health care system is funded appropriately.

Will the minister tell Yukoners what the gap was between the funding the Yukon Hospital Corporation requested and what they received?

Hon. Brad Cathers: This belated conversion by the NDP in becoming supporters of Yukon Hospitals is long overdue. It's too bad that they didn't have this attitude when they were holding the balance of power when the Liberals and the NDP were in partnership last term.

We have substantially increased funding for Yukon Hospitals since taking office. In the first month of taking office, we tabled a supplementary budget with an increase of millions of dollars for Yukon Hospitals to get them through the fiscal year and add eight new hospital beds.

We've increased total operational funding by $19.7 million this fiscal year. We've provided $9.8 million in funding for high-priority capital maintenance, $4.1 million to advance the work on the Whitehorse General Hospital expansion project, and a further $14.4 million for a total of $18.5 million approved just this year to support the Whitehorse General Hospital expansion project.

As I noted to media in answering this, does the hospital have additional requests? Yes, those include a $1.1-billion expansion project, which this government has made a high priority. I, the Premier, and other colleagues have personally lobbied the federal ministers and the Prime Minister on multiple occasions to get their support for moving this project forward in the interests of all Yukoners and the interests of Canadians.

Kate White: Again, Yukoners still don't know what that gap was. The CEO of the Yukon Hospital Corporation has been clear that the Whitehorse General Hospital is over capacity and

out of space. This year, visiting specialists are expected to see 15,000 patients in a clinic built for 2,000.

The first floor of 1 Hospital Road has been proposed as an ideal space to hold the specialist clinic. If this clinic moves out of the hospital, it will give the specialist clinic the space it needs while also creating desperately needed room for chemotherapy and other services in the main hospital. However, this would require government to relocate Yukon Government offices out of 1 Hospital Road and funding to ensure that renovations are made.

Is this government committed to working with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to relocate the specialist clinic to 1 Hospital Road?

Hon. Brad Cathers: I would remind the Leader of the Official Opposition that she knows very well that budgetary requests are subject to budget confidence.

We have stepped forward to increase resources for Yukon Hospitals, certainly far beyond what happened under the previous government when the NDP held the balance of powers — $19.7 million increase in O&M resources this fiscal year; $9.8 million increase in funding for high-priority capital maintenance; $4.1 million in the spring for Whitehorse General Hospital expansion; an additional $14.4 million this fall for a total of $18.5 million to support the long-overdue Whitehorse General Hospital expansion project, which I remind the member she did not support when she held the balance of power despite the Yukon Medical Association referring to that project as an "urgent need" in the 2021 election.

We are also working with Yukon Hospitals on their needs between now and the expansion project, including their space needs. I look forward to making announcements when we're in a position to do so, but I can tell this Assembly that, in fact, of the $74.5 million in health infrastructure funding that we signed with the federal government earlier this year, the majority of projects that we're submitting on that list for federal approval are for the needs of Yukon Hospitals.

Question — Teaching materials about residential schools

Linda Moen: Last week, Yukoners learned about a worksheet shared in a Yukon school that asked students to explain the positive effects of residential schools.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission showed that thousands of children experienced abuse, hunger, and neglect in residential schools. Presenting a lesson in a school as if there were positive benefits to a system of genocide is irresponsible and harmful.

I see the legacy of residential schools every day in my community — people struggling after they have been told again and again by this education system that their lives don't matter. If the minister doesn't recognize this, that is the problem. Does the minister understand that presenting this question in this way denies the reality of cultural genocide?

Hon. Scott Kent: I appreciate the question from the member opposite, as I appreciate the question raised last week by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

As I mentioned last week, the grade 5 and grade 10 Indian residential school curriculum was developed in collaboration with the Yukon First Nations Curriculum Working Group, which includes Yukon First Nation elders and knowledge-holders and incorporates local Yukon resources and perspectives. After listening to the questions in Question Period last week, I reached out to the department and asked them to go back to those working groups and ensure that material was still meeting the needs of Yukon students and was delivered in a manner that was respectful of the negative impacts and the disastrous impacts of the residential school system. I'm happy to say that a group will be convened to discuss revising the delivery of this resource, including consideration of delivering this content through guided classroom discussion rather than an individual worksheet.

But I believe the place for us to alter curriculum content isn't on the floor of the Legislature. It's back with the curriculum working group that established it in the first place.

Linda Moen: Last week, the minister's minimization of the harm of this question to Yukoners was very devastating.

Survivors and their families should not have to explain once again how damaging residential school denialism is. I should not have to explain it to this minister, who is responsible for the education of every Yukoner. The minister saying that a review may or may not happen is not enough. While the material is still available to teachers and students as it stands, residential school denialism is alive and well in Canada and it needs to be dealt with.

Will the minister commit to pulling this material immediately, and will he commit to working with Yukon First Nations to address these concerns?

Hon. Scott Kent: I'm not sure if the member opposite listened to my response to her first question, but as I mentioned, the grade 5 and grade 10 Indian residential school curriculum was developed in collaboration with the Yukon First Nations Curriculum Working Group, which includes Yukon First Nation elders and knowledge-holders and incorporates local Yukon resources and perspectives.

As I mentioned in my initial response, a group will be convened to discuss revising the delivery of this resource, including consideration of delivering this content through guided classroom discussion rather than as an individual worksheet. I've also asked the department to review this particular aspect of the course. It's one aspect of a much larger course that's delivered as part of the Indian residential school curriculum. I've asked the department to go back to that curriculum working group and ensure that the content of that course is still meeting the needs of Yukon students. That's what I've committed to do and that's what is underway now.

Linda Moen: We are not talking about the past. This is lived experience of my family and my community and thousands of others across the territory. Questions like this one in a worksheet are nothing less than the erasure of our lived experiences. This goes beyond inappropriate. This is unacceptable. It is simply not good enough for the minister to suggest that the department might do a review.

Yukoners want a full review of this curriculum done together with Yukon First Nation survivors, elders, and Indigenous education specialists. I am listening. Will the minister commit to that review with a clear timeline, and will he commit to a public update on the results?

Hon. Scott Kent: That's exactly what I committed to in my previous responses here today.

As I mentioned, a group will be convened to discuss revising the delivery of this resource, including consideration of delivering this content through guided classroom discussion rather than as an individual worksheet. I've also asked the department to go back to the curriculum working group, which includes Yukon First Nation elders and knowledge-holders and incorporates local Yukon resources and perspectives.

That work will be done. When I have a better sense of what the timelines will be, I'll be able to report back to Yukoners with that information. But as I mentioned in my previous two responses and this one, we are committed to doing that work.

Question — Minerals legislation

Debra-Leigh Reti: It is Geoscience Week, and the mining industry is still working under legislation that is more than a century old. On June 30, the government announced an agreement with Yukon First Nations on a process to complete new minerals legislation within its current mandate. On October 7, the minister responsible told this House he could not announce timelines or a completion date.

Can the minister tell Yukoners whether the government plans to bring forward new minerals legislation as one complete package or in parts?

Hon. Ted Laking: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the question on new minerals legislation.

Of course, this is a file that is of great interest to every single Yukoner, and it will have significant impacts on the future of the territory. We're excited that earlier this year, we were able to announce jointly with First Nations a process to move forward on this.

Right now, it would be premature to determine today what the form of the final piece of legislation would look like, whether or not it comes as one piece of legislation or potentially multiple pieces of legislation, because we want to work collaboratively with First Nations. We have an oversight group which contains myself as well as the Chiefs Committee on Mining. We meet regularly. We have officials who are meeting regularly on this, and so we want to work in good faith and genuinely with our partners to move this process forward.

Debra-Leigh Reti: We have heard that the government proposed dealing with the issue of placer royalties first ahead of the rest of the legislation, and that First Nations agreed to that approach. We have also heard that the government then tried to add more topics to that short-term work and that First Nations declined. The result was that legislation that was to be tabled this fall has been pushed back.

Can the minister confirm whether the government proposed a separate short-term approach for placer royalties and tell us where that work stands today?

Hon. Ted Laking: Yes, coming out of the Yukon Forum, we felt that we had a path forward to advance work on placer royalties and to modernize them. We advanced that work quite substantially. However, through an engagement with our partners, we realized that not everybody was ready or felt that we had done the appropriate amount of engagement at that point in time, and I think that this is just a symbol of how important the collaborative development group and the oversight group are, because we were able to have those discussions and we determined that the best path forward was not to table legislation to update royalties this fall and to continue to work with First Nation governments on a path forward.

As to where that work stands now, we are meeting quite regularly with the oversight committee, which contains myself and the Chiefs Committee on Mining, and our officials meet quite regularly to discuss these issues as well. As there are updates on the legislative process, of course, we will return to this House with those updates.

Debra-Leigh Reti: The minister and the Premier have said that the legislation would be completed within this mandate. The government is now a year into that mandate. It sounds very much like this is a bilateral negotiation between government and First Nations and that the mining industry is not part of the formal negotiations.

Can the minister confirm that this is the case?

Hon. Ted Laking: With the process that we agreed on to collaboratively develop legislation, it contains First Nation governments and it contains the Yukon Government, and that's the process going forward.

As outlined in our announcement, there is the opportunity through the development that we could jointly decide to reach out to industry or to NGOs or to other stakeholders that we believe could provide some insight into the development process. But the legislation is being developed collaboratively between the Yukon Government and First Nation governments.

Question — Outfitter quota review

Justin Ziegler: The Fish and Wildlife Management Board was created through the Yukon land claims process so that First Nations and the Yukon Government could manage wildlife together.

Half of its members are named by Yukon First Nations. Last winter, this board launched a public review of outfitter quotas. This spring, the minister cancelled funding for the board to conduct this review. In April, the minister said his department had the skill and the staff to do the work itself. On October 29 of this year, we learned the work had instead gone to a private consultant with no open competition. First, staff could do it; now it's a paid consultant hired without competition.

How can the minister justify taking the outfitter quota review away from a co-management board and giving it to a consultant?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: We're committed to upholding chapter 16 of the Yukon First Nation final agreement through respectful and collaborative relationships with our co-management partners. That includes the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board. They play an important role informing fish and wildlife management through recommendations, their traditional knowledge, local expertise, and community perspectives. We work with our co-management partners in planning, monitoring, research, and decisions made in the process to support the effective stewardship of Yukon fish and wildlife resources.

When it comes to the outfitter quota review, the Fish and Wildlife Management Board will be part of that process too.

Justin Ziegler: The outfitter quota review matters to every Yukon hunter. The department's own harvest report released last month shows that outfitter clients take about two-thirds of the total thinhorn sheep harvested in the Yukon. Yet only two outfitting concessions in the Yukon have a sheep quota. Everywhere else, there is no cap on how many sheep clients can take in a year.

Resident hunters work hard for a chance at a ram. In some areas, Yukoners have to enter and win a lottery before even getting out on the land. Yukon hunters deserve a system that is fair to them based on science they can see.

Will the review of outfitter quotas include sheep? Will all the findings of the review be made public?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: Absolutely everything will be made public after we go to work and this process gets done. When it comes to the outfitter industry, they're under special management, not like resident hunters. Resident hunters have opportunities throughout the Yukon. Outfitters have their specific areas there, so it's important to us that when it comes to this outfitter review process, everyone is engaged and everyone gets an opinion. When it's done, it will all be public.

Justin Ziegler: Outfitter quotas decide on how many moose, caribou, sheep, and bears are harvested from Yukon First Nation traditional territories. This is an important part of why Yukon First Nation representation is required to be included on the Fish and Wildlife Management Board. In April, the minister told this House he is committed to following chapter 16 of the *Umbrella Final Agreement*. Since then, the board is no longer conducting the outfitter quota review, and a consultant hired without a public competition is instead running the conversations. The duty to consult belongs to this government.

How is the minister ensuring that every affected First Nation is consulted directly, government-to-government, before any change to outfitter quotas?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I do want to thank Bath and Associates, who are doing this initial work.

They're going to be meeting with everybody — I think I've said this many times in the House — when it comes to chapter 16, it sets out a co-management framework for Yukon fish and wildlife and formal co-management partners. Yukon First Nations will be part of this process — renewable resources councils, Fish and Wildlife Management Board, and also special interest groups. Anyone who wants to comment, they'll have an opportunity to comment on this.

The co-management bodies established under chapter 16 of the Yukon First Nation final agreements are super important to us, and I'm glad that we have all our renewable resources councils. The last one is Mayo that I'm working on getting set up. But when I took over a little over a year ago, we had six renewable resources councils that weren't up and running. Things were not running well when it comes to chapter 16, and I'm working to make sure that gets back on track.

Question — Parks Canada staffing reductions

Tyler Porter: Yukoners were concerned when reports emerged that 58 Yukon-based Parks Canada positions, representing roughly 42 percent of its workforce in the territory, could be affected by federal workforce reductions. We now know these cuts will include the Kluane National Park warden detachment in Haines Junction.

These are not just numbers on a spreadsheet; these are people who live in our communities, support local businesses, protect our natural environment, and provide important services to Yukoners and visitors alike. Losing that level of experience and local knowledge could have serious consequences for our territory, particularly in rural communities.

Can the Minister of Environment explain what impact these federal cuts could have on Parks Canada's ability to carry out its responsibilities in the Yukon?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: As the Minister of Environment and as the MLA for Kluane, I know first-hand how important Parks Canada employees are to Haines Junction and, of course, the surrounding region.

They do so much more than administer parks. They support scientific research, ecological monitoring, visitor services, heritage protection, stewardship, and, of course, very important enforcement activities. They're also active members of the community. They volunteer, they raise families, and they contribute to local life.

The reported reduction of 58 Yukon positions raised serious questions about Parks Canada's future operational capacity in the territory. The closure of the Kluane warden detachment adds to those concerns. Parks Canada employees are an important part of our communities, and their experience and knowledge of the land cannot easily be replaced.

Tyler Porter: Parks Canada confirmed to the media last week that the northern warden services will be centralized in Yellowknife, nearly 2,000 kilometres away from Haines Junction by road. To put that into perspective, this is comparable to expecting services in Whitehorse to be delivered from Kamloops.

We now know how vast our territory is and how important it is to have experienced personnel who understand our geography, wildlife, and the communities they serve. Centralizing these services so far away raises serious questions about emergency response times, enforcement capabilities, and the federal government's ability to maintain a meaningful presence on the ground.

Does the minister believe that a centralized operation nearly 2,000 kilometres away can realistically deliver the same level of service and responsiveness that Yukoners expect and deserve?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: My fellow colleague, you are correct — geography does matter. Effective conservation enforcement requires more than a regional office. Wardens develop local knowledge of the landscape, wildlife patterns, visitor activities, and unique challenges of the areas they serve. They build relationships with the community, First Nations, park users, and other agencies operating on the ground. The local presence helps support public safety, stewardship, and timely enforcement when issues arise.

My concern is whether a centralized model can provide the same level of service and responsiveness that Yukoners have come to expect and deserve. That is why I have asked the federal government to explain how it intends to maintain its enforcement, operational, and stewardship responsibilities in the Yukon if these changes move forward.

Tyler Porter: The federal government frequently speaks about strengthening Arctic sovereignty, improving northern security, and maintaining a strong federal presence across Canada's North. Yet at the very same time, it's reducing Parks Canada staffing levels in the Yukon and closing the Kluane warden detachment. It is difficult to understand how Ottawa can talk about strengthening its presence in the North while removing experienced personnel from the very communities that help maintain that presence. These decisions raise serious concerns about the federal government's priorities and its understanding of the realities facing northern and rural communities. Yukoners deserve to know that their government is standing up for their interests.

Can the minister tell this House what concrete steps our government is taking to challenge these federal decisions and protect Parks Canada services in Yukon?

Hon. Wade Istchenko: This is an issue that cuts across party lines. Of course, we all know this House unanimously supported a motion calling on the Government of Canada to maintain Parks Canada staffing levels in the Yukon.

Following that motion, I wrote to the Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Nature and Yukon's Member of Parliament to raise the Assembly's concerns directly with the federal government. I asked how Parks intends to maintain its operational stewardship and enforcement responsibilities in the Yukon if these reductions proceed. I also asked how these decisions align with Canada's objectives around Arctic sovereignty, northern security, and maintaining a meaningful presence here in the North, especially in the Yukon. Those objectives depend on experienced personnel living and working in our communities.

I'll continue to advocate for a strong Parks Canada presence in the Yukon and meaningful engagement with Yukon First Nations and our local communities before any final decisions are made.

Question — Firewood access

Carmen Gustafson: Firewood is a local renewable resource that does not require transportation from down south. It has long been relied on by Yukoners for an affordable source of heat. As Yukoners face climbing utility bills, the crunch of the overall cost of living, and an increasingly unreliable electricity grid, firewood has become more popular.

For many Yukoners, especially those in rural and remote Yukon, access to firewood is essential. Permits to harvest wood for personal use allow Yukoners to harvest up to 11 cords of wood per year, offering a relatively stable, affordable, and self-sufficient way to keep themselves and their families warm over Yukon winters.

The number of personal use firewood permits issued can paint a picture of how demand for firewood has changed over time and allow us to understand the extent of Yukoners harvesting firewood for personal use.

Can the minister tell Yukoners how many personal use firewood permits have been issued this year, and how does it compare to previous years?

Hon. Ted Laking: The most recent stats I have are that 1,200 personal use permits have been issued, and my understanding is that's higher than the previous year.

Carmen Gustafson: Each winter, more Yukoners are turning to firewood to heat their homes. This spring, the Yukon Government introduced grants for Yukoners to install wood stoves, and with this incentive, interest in firewood has only increased.

Either to save money, due to the unpredictability of commercial firewood supply, or because they like the work, many Yukoners harvest their own wood under a free permit, allowing them to control their own wood source and offset some of their monthly heating costs. This places increased pressure on the availability of wood in designated personal use harvesting areas and may have larger implications for forest management and long-term sustainability of local firewood harvesting.

As demand for firewood continues to rise, what steps is the government taking to ensure the long-term sustainability of personal firewood harvesting?

Hon. Ted Laking: The Department of Energy, Mines and Resources has undertaken a significant amount of planning work to identify new sources for harvesting opportunities in the territory.

That's one of the elements that we're doing, but the other part that we're doing is we're investing time and energy into speeding up permitting. For example, when we look at the timeline of issuance of commercial permits this year, they're issued 35 percent faster compared to last year. When we talk about how much wood has been permitted for harvesting, as of November 9, we've issued commercial fuelwood permits totalling 69,400 cubic metres, which is more than we did in any of the previous five years.

Carmen Gustafson: Sourcing firewood does seem to be an ongoing issue in spite of steps taken by the department. We continue to hear from Yukoners experiencing significant delays in receiving commercial firewood. Timely and accessible permitting as well as the location and distribution of harvest areas are important to ensuring both commercial harvesters and personal harvesters are able to secure wood needed to heat Yukon homes. It seems that permitting delays, picked-over harvesting areas, and the decay of beetle-killed wood have created significant challenges not only for those who make a living harvesting and distributing wood but also Yukoners who buy firewood. Many Yukoners who ordered wood this summer are still waiting.

How is this government ensuring that Yukoners are able to get the wood they need to heat their homes this winter?

Hon. Ted Laking: We've invested time, money, and energy into planning and opening up new areas for harvesting. We've sped up our permitting; it now goes 35 percent faster than it did the previous year, and we've permitted more firewood than even the previous five years had. We're making a number of steps to improve the speed at which we do this. We're making investments in planning for the future, and we're trying to ensure that we do have access to firewood that is spread out throughout the territory so that all regions do have access to this.

There's a lot more work to do. We don't have any illusions there, but we are encouraged by the results to date because it shows that when you have a government that's willing to make

decisions and willing to show leadership, things can actually get done in this territory.

Question — Chronic disease program administration and coverage

Kate White: Yukoners living with chronic illness tell us that the chronic disease program is hard to reach and even harder to hold accountable. This isn't about the staff; it's about the system that they are working with. When Yukoners e-mail the program with a concern, they are given a phone number and told to call. When they share important feedback or questions about programs, they deserve to know that the information is going to contribute to meaningful change. People deserve to know their concerns are tracked and acted on.

Will the minister commit to creating a documented intake process for feedback on the chronic disease program and ensure that Yukoners with clinical questions about the program are routed to someone qualified to answer them?

Hon. Brad Cathers: As I think I've indicated earlier in this House, we are in fact looking at what is covered under that program, and we'll happily take feedback from Yukoners who provide it to the program about where they think there's an opportunity for improvement. Overall, though, we do intend to make improvements. We're dealing with the situation we were left by the previous Liberal-NDP coalition that spent money far faster than it was coming in, and that left us with a significant financial challenge at the start of this mandate. We've taken steps to begin to get our finances back on the path to balance, but again, any decisions we make about expansions to coverage or changes to it will have to keep the costs in mind.

But as I've indicated, we are in fact looking at the program and what is covered, recognizing that it has been some time since most of the framework that's in place now was put in place previously.

Kate White: Yukoners have a suggestion on how to expand the chronic condition program. Endometriosis is a painful, long-term condition that affects many Yukoners, yet it is not on the list of conditions covered under the chronic disease program. This means that those without additional insurance coverage pay out of pocket for needed and critical medication. Will the minister add endometriosis to the list of chronic conditions covered under the program?

Hon. Brad Cathers: Well, I'm not going to commit to start adding conditions to the coverage here in response to a 60-second question on the floor of the Legislative Assembly.

Again, the specific request the member mentioned, we'll give that consideration. We will also involve health professionals in determining whether conditions or medications would be best added under the coverage of the program. Again, the very structure of the program has been in place for I think over 30 years, and there are some considerations about whether that should be adjusted.

But again, we'll take that specific suggestion under consideration, ensure that it's considered as part of the review. But no, I will not here in response to a question on the floor of the Legislative Assembly make a shoot-from-the-hip commitment to add any specific condition.

Kate White: Aren't people with uteruses lucky that health care has come so far in 30 years, recognizing that endometriosis is actually a clinical condition?

Even when Yukoners get an endometriosis diagnosis, they're often left to navigate their care on their own. Surgery, physiotherapy, and counselling are not connected to the chronic disease program in any coordinated way. For a higher risk endometriosis surgery, people have to leave the territory altogether, and there is little to no consolidated information to help health care professionals find the right referral pathway for their patients. Too many people are being told to do their own research.

Will the minister expand specialist capacity and clear referral networks for women's health care into the territory?

Hon. Brad Cathers: Again, happy to pass that on and get feedback on that.

I'm not in a position to make specific commitments here in the Assembly. We do appreciate those bringing this up via the member, but we need to understand cost implications of any request.

Question — Arctic Winter Games legacy and economic impact

Adam Gerle: Earlier today, the host society issued a press release about the impacts of the 2026 Arctic Winter Games. Hosting the Arctic Winter Games was a significant undertaking for the Yukon involving extensive coordination between sports organizations, volunteers, municipalities, and our partners across the North. Major sporting events require more than venues; they require experienced organizers, strong community partnerships, and the capacity to deliver an experience that brings people together.

What did the territory learn from hosting these games, and how does this experience help Yukon prepare for future sporting events?

Hon. Cory Bellmore: Yukon set out to host an outstanding Arctic Winter Games, and together, we delivered. From March 8 to 15, we welcomed participants from across the circumpolar North and showcased the very best of Yukon.

Congratulations to all the athletes who competed. Their hard work, dedication, and sportsmanship made these games special, and Yukon athletes represented their communities with pride.

These games were a true team effort. The host society, City of Whitehorse, sport organizations, athletes, volunteers, community partners, First Nations, and all levels of government each played an important role. My sincere thanks to everyone who contributed their time, expertise, and resources. We couldn't have done it without you.

Yukoners should be incredibly proud. We demonstrated our ability to host world-class sporting events, strengthen partnerships, and build valuable experience for future major games. We didn't just host a successful games; we showed the world what Yukon can accomplish when we work together.

Adam Gerle: One of the things that makes a successful sporting event particularly valuable is what it leaves behind for the next generation.

Yukon's sport organizations do tremendous work throughout the year, often relying on dedicated volunteers and limited resources to provide opportunities for young people in communities across the territory.

How will the legacy investments from the Arctic Winter Games support these organizations and help create more opportunities for Yukon athletes?

Hon. Cory Bellmore: Supporting athletes and sport organizations is important because they are the backbone of sport and recreation in the Yukon. More than 20 sport organizations played a role in delivering these games, and their contributions go well beyond that one week in March. They develop athletes, support coaches and officials, and bring communities together through sport.

We recognize that financial pressures are being felt across the Yukon, and sport organizations are not immune to those challenges. That's why the host society's $500,000 commitment to support long-term sustainability of Yukon sport organizations is so very important. A successful games should leave more than memories; it should leave a stronger sport community.

I want to express our sincere gratitude to the host society, its board, staff, and volunteers. Their hard work, leadership, and responsible stewardship made these games possible, and their decision to reinvest in the future of Yukon sport is a legacy we can all be grateful for.

Adam Gerle: Major sporting events can also play an important role in supporting Yukon's economy.

When visitors come to the territory, they support local businesses, stay in our hotels, eat in our restaurants, and experience everything the Yukon has to offer. There is also an opportunity to introduce new visitors to the Yukon and encourage them to return.

How do events like the Arctic Winter Games contribute to economic diversification and support opportunities for Yukon businesses?

Hon. Jen Gehmair: The Arctic Winter Games were a tremendous opportunity to showcase Yukon and deliver real economic benefits to the territory. The economic impact analysis estimates that the games generated $21.3 million in economic activity and supported more than 1,400 jobs. These benefits reached well beyond the competition venues. Local hotels, restaurants, retailers, transportation providers, and local service organizations all played an important role in welcoming visitors and delivering a successful games.

But the benefits go beyond the games themselves. We introduced visitors to the Yukon, strengthened our reputation as a destination for major events, and created opportunities for local businesses to build new relationships.

We want to build on that success. Major events bring people here, support local businesses, and help grow a stronger, more diversified Yukon economy. Yukon is no stranger to hosting major successful sporting events, punching above our weight, leaving lasting investments and unique experiences for Yukoners, participants, and visitors. We look forward to continuing to work with the Tourism Industry Association, the Yukon Convention Bureau, and Sport Yukon to showcase all we have to offer in the future.

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. 11 — *Yukon Firearms Act* — Third Reading

Acting Deputy Clerk: Third Reading, Bill No. 11, standing in the name of the Hon. Laura Lang.

Hon. Laura Lang: I move that Bill No. 11, entitled *Yukon Firearms Act*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 11, entitled *Yukon Firearms Act*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Hon. Laura Lang: Again, thank you to the members of the Assembly for their contributions to the debate of this bill. This fall's Sitting included the tabling of Bill No. 11, the *Yukon Firearms Act*, as a direct and necessary response to the federal Assault-Style Firearms Compensation Program. In tabling this bill, I expected that we would honour our responsibility within this House to govern and create legislation in the best interests of all Yukoners, to make laws that reflect our voice, our unique northern way of life, our interests, our history, and our traditions.

As a territory, we all recognize that we have limited authority to react to the federal *Criminal Code* or the *Firearms Act*. With that, we also know that this legislation is one of a few actions we can take to effectively stand up for responsible Yukon firearms owners and responsible policy development by the federal government. To stay idle on this issue and rely on the federal government to operate in Yukon's best interest would be doing a disservice to Yukoners and our northern way of life.

It is our responsibility to act. This bill does that. It establishes a Yukon firearms advocate and creates a legislative framework respecting the functions, powers, accountability, and administration of that office. Creating this legislation provides an important legal anchor for this advocacy and for offering an additional channel for Yukoners' perspectives to be heard.

Unfortunately, much debate about this bill has focused on the specifics, the operations, modest funding, and the day-to-day role of the advocate. We have spent about eight days irresponsibly and repeatedly debating details like whether the firearms advocate can travel and what type of office space they might have. To devote so much focus to operational-level detail is a distraction from the essence of this bill and the purpose behind it.

Our government is taking steps to support responsible firearms owners in response to federal action and the prohibition of over 2,500 makes and models. Some of these firearms are used in the North for subsistence, hunting, harvesting, wildlife protection, and sports shooting, and Yukoners are seeking avenues to have their perspectives heard.

This bill recognizes the importance of the responsible use of firearms for many activities in the Yukon. It creates an avenue through which Yukon perspectives may be communicated to public officials and decision-makers on matters related to

firearms policy, and it recognizes that Yukoners do not see themselves reflected or feel heard by the actions Ottawa is taking.

It goes without saying that our government is committed to making Yukon communities safer, but the federal government's Assault-Style Firearms Compensation Program distracts from that goal. It targets licensed, trained, vetted, and responsible Yukon firearms owners and users. The question I often have asked is: Why? Isn't the point of the federal policy to seek to implement solutions that result in a country with reduced criminal use of firearms, reduced gang violence, and reduced smuggling and sale of illegal firearms? Not only does this policy solution not respond to the problem identified, but it also negatively impacts our northern way of life, all at a cost to taxpayers of the better part of a billion dollars.

When we talk about responsible firearms owners in the Yukon, we're talking about over 9,000 PAL holders and counting. Over the past few years in Opposition, we heard from them. They opposed the direction the Government of Canada continues to take on firearms. On the doorsteps during the election, we heard from them. They agree that diverting police resources away from dealing with serious issues, including organized crime, would make the Yukon and other parts of Canada less safe.

During several in-person and online public engagement events held to inform this legislation, we also heard from them. They welcomed the creation of a Yukon firearms advocate. They expressed gratitude for our government's willingness to see this through and make it real with legislation.

Madam Speaker, I can confirm that not one of these people was a figment of our imagination, and if you take the time to talk with Yukon firearms owners like I have, they will confirm for you that the ASFCP is not a figment of their imagination, nor are the serious criminal consequences they would face due to Ottawa's bans.

It should be no surprise to anyone, not even the members opposite, that our government is standing up for responsible Yukon firearms owners and businesses. Supporting responsible Yukon firearms owners was in our platform; it was a key mandate commitment of mine.

With respect to firearms, we've consistently opposed efforts taken by the Government of Canada to gradually erode our northern way of life, as has this House. There are several examples of this House opposing actions taken by the Government of Canada with respect to firearms, Madam Speaker.

In December 1994, Motion No. 23, a non-government motion from Yukon Party MLA Johnny Abel, the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, was debated in this House. It read: "THAT it is the opinion of this House that the proposed amendments to the federal government's firearms legislation to be presented to the Parliament of Canada in February, 1995, do not accommodate the needs of northern Canadians and their lifestyle; and "THAT the Yukon Legislative Assembly urges the federal Minister of Justice, the Hon. Allan Rock, not to proceed with the proposed firearms amendments until such time as the needs of northern Canadians are met."

I would like to quote from MLA Abel's wise remarks, because I think they still hold true today. MLA Abel said: "The proposed amendments to the federal government's firearms legislation do not accommodate the needs of the people of Old Crow and their lifestyle." He also said: "The people in Toronto do not go ratting, nor do they need to hunt caribou like the people of Old Crow do. When they want food, they just go down to the nearest grocery store. The grocery store for the people of Old Crow is the land itself, our traditional territory: Old Crow Flats. To my constituents, a firearm is a tool. We need a rifle to hunt and to live off the land. A carpenter needs tools, such as a hammer and a saw, to do his or her job. A mechanic needs tools, such as wrenches and screw drivers, to do his or her job. My constituents are hunters. We need to use firearms to do our job. The current federal firearm proposals do not appear to recognize that there is a difference between how the people of my riding use firearms and how the people in Toronto and Vancouver use, or need to use, firearms."

Madam Speaker, that motion carried unanimously — 16 yea, nil nay — including several NDP MLAs. I encourage Yukoners to read the all-party exchange in Hansard that occurred 32 years ago.

More recently, in October 2022, a motion was passed by the Yukon Legislative Assembly that read: "THAT this House urges the Yukon Government to ensure that territorial policing resources are not diverted to assist in the implementation of the Government of Canada's gun buyback program." It might be tough to believe for anyone listening over the last week or two, but there are members on each side of this House here today who supported that 2022 motion.

Then this past spring, we tabled Motion No. 54, which passed unanimously in this House and was supported by our northern territorial neighbours. They supported it because we were urging the Government of Canada to acknowledge our unique northern context by establishing a carve-out exempting the three territories from the ASFCP and the related prohibitions. We were simply seeking a practical solution and an acknowledgement that the North is much different than urban centres of the South. Motion No. 54 carried unanimously with 14 yea, nil nay.

But I would remind members and responsible Yukon firearms owners listening today that when that motion carried, there were no NDP votes to support it. Curiously, there were no NDP votes opposing it either. The members opposite refused to vote, unable to support or oppose that important motion. Perhaps it's not important to them, but it is very important to us.

If that motion was not important to them, one might be confused by the members opposite devoting so much time to debating how the firearms advocate might itemize their expenses. To put it in perspective, we and the department staff, who are public servants supporting this good work, spent more time discussing Bill No. 11 than we did the amendments to the *Residential Tenancies Act*. It was a fantastic discussion, but spending eight days repeating the same hypothetical questions about a five-page bill suggests it might be important to them. We responded to more questions about the preamble and the translation than we did to questions about how to most effectively convey the Yukon's displeasure with the direction the federal government is taking with respect to firearms. We responded to many questions about cost, yet there seems to be a lack of focus on the cost of the federal ASFCP.

It is unfortunate that despite escalating costs and widespread opposition, the federal government appears unwilling to listen to

responsible firearms owners from coast to coast to coast. Elsewhere in Canada, we have seen the Saskatchewan and Manitoba NDP both oppose this wasteful and divisive federal program and stand up for their constituents. The Saskatchewan opposition NDP even supported that province's *Firearms Act*.

The members opposite should consider whether they support responsible Yukon firearms owners or clarify for this House and those listening that they support the federal government's well-resourced, wasteful, and repeated efforts to target and criminalize responsible Yukon firearms owners and erode our northern way of life. The thousands of Yukoners, including members of Yukon First Nations exercising their subsistence rights, hunters, sport shooters, outfitters, and other businesses, could face the brunt of this program.

We know that the ASFCP is more about politics than evidence, fighting crime, or keeping our communities safe. We also know that firearms are vital for hunting, trapping, harvesting, sport shooting, and wilderness protection. They are part of our northern community and our identity, and their safe and responsible use should be promoted, not punished. We don't expect or want this to ever change, Madam Speaker.

At the same time, we don't know what the future holds for responsible firearms owners in Yukon or across Canada. The long-gun registry was brought in over 30 years ago. Thankfully, it was eventually scrapped but not before costing Canadian taxpayers an estimated $2 billion. Again, at that time, as the federal government prepared to bring in that ineffective and wasteful program, we had every MLA in this House wisely sharing their concerns and noting how incompatible it was with life in the North.

More recently, through orders-in-council, the current federal government continues to expand the number of firearms it arbitrarily deems prohibited or assault-style. This is not an accurate or effective way to classify firearms. Assault weapons or fully automatic firearms have been banned in Canada since the 1970s, but the federal government is now spending nearly a billion or more dollars on the misguided ASFCP. Their decisions are not based on data or statistics or keeping communities safe. They have no impact on reducing crime. These are decisions based on politics, emotion, and aesthetics rather than good public policy or community safety.

In short, we have seen the federal government fumble this file for decades. We don't know what the future holds, but we will continue to stand up for responsible Yukon firearms owners and call on the Government of Canada to cancel this program and its prohibitions entirely. We will closely watch for the outcome of the Supreme Court case, and we will focus our police resources on actions that target people who break the law, not those who follow and respect it.

There are many ways we can make our voices heard in Ottawa and across the country, just like almost all other provinces and territories and many police forces and unions, including the National Police Federation, have already done, and this legislation, when passed, will afford us a new way to do just that.

Creating a firearms advocate is a modest but practical step to demonstrate where we stand on this important issue. We recognize that if work with the federal government begins in earnest on this file, then there may not be a need to continue with the position. Until that happens, we are committed to this course of action. We are renewing our resolve to stand up for responsible Yukon firearms owners today and ensure that they have an avenue to share their concerns in the future.

I do thank the members opposite for recognizing that such a role does not exist elsewhere and highlighting that this is indeed a unique, made-in-the-Yukon approach. Creating the firearms advocate with legislation makes it a real, meaningful, and enduring role for Yukoners.

On this side of the House, we firmly believe it's unacceptable for even one responsible Yukon firearms owner to face criminal consequences due to this unreasonable and misguided Ottawa program. I again thank all members for their contributions during debate and discussions on this bill and encourage members of the Assembly to support the passing of Bill No. 11, the *Yukon Firearms Act*.

We are proud to carry through on this commitment to responsible Yukon firearms owners, and we will be working with the firearms community to determine the rollout and specific details of the advocate position. We are looking forward to doing this work.

Hon. Ted Laking: I'm very excited to enter this debate. I've listened closely over the many days that we've discussed this, and it's a topic that was very important to my constituents. The topic of gun control and the federal government's gun buyback came up significantly at the door, and so I'm glad to see that the Government of Yukon is proposing to move forward with this advocacy position, because I think that it reflects the voice of Yukoners and gives us the ability to advocate and ensure that there are other elements or avenues for people to get their voice heard by the government.

But while I'm on my feet, I did just want to speak to the nature of the debate and some disappointing things that occurred during the debate. Now, through the course of it, unfortunately, sometimes I think things got a little bit heated and potentially a bit too personal. I'd just like to quote from the Member for Riverdale South, who earlier in this debate on November 2 said, "Now, I totally understand and appreciate the fact that the minister doesn't speak French — and I actually wish that she never does, because when she does, people might laugh at her for it." Now, that is a very unfortunate devolution of the debate to get that personal here in this House. I wish that it had not occurred, but I think that today we do have the opportunity to hear from the member and to receive a public apology on that.

With that, I will be supporting this piece of legislation, and I look forward to it passing this House.

Carmen Gustafson: It's unfortunate that the minister didn't hear the apology that was made and the explanation that was made for that debate. Had I known the tone that this debate was going to take, I think I would have had different notes, a different response to take based on what the minister had said. But I have the notes that I have.

We did spend many hours of debate on this bill, and I do thank the officials and the public servants from the Department of Justice who assisted the minister during the debate as well as the drafters who worked on a shortened timeline to get this bill ready.

Debate in this House is the responsibility of the members and of the Official Opposition, and however many days it was

to try to get some answers to questions, I don't regret asking those questions of the minister. I think that's our role here. It's too bad that she initially wanted a rigorous debate and now has come here and told us that it was too long.

What we did hear from the minister is that this bill creates the framework for an independent firearms advocate who will work on behalf of Yukoners and report to and be overseen by the minister herself. They will advise her on firearms-related matters as well as listen to Yukoners with an interest in firearms. They will advocate a position that may or may not align with the government's position, particularly on federal firearms policy and programs.

We heard that since the announcement of a chief firearms officer for the territories, changes were not made to the bill but that the firearms advocate is anticipated to work with the CFO. There was an emphasis in the debate and in the feedback from Yukoners about education and information about safe and responsible firearm use. However, it's not clear that the firearms advocate would deliver such programming.

After days of debate on the bill, some Yukoners may still be unclear about what exactly this advocate position will do for them. It remains to be seen what the advocate will do that cannot be done or has not been done by a departmental or Cabinet policy analyst advising the minister or the minister herself when working with her counterparts in Ottawa on the file.

Frankly, it seems like the government doesn't know the answer to that either.

Some of the questions that were asked and scenarios put to the minister seem to be the first time that thought was given to them or they were tested. It seems that it was such a high priority for this Fall Sitting for the Yukon Party to introduce a piece of legislation with a flashy title that they didn't finish their homework on the bill before it came to the House. There are apparently many details that remain to be worked out, and the minister was clear that it would happen after the legislation passes. When I asked about the priorities or the actual work the advocate would undertake, the minister said at one point, for example, quote: "… these details have yet to all be determined in terms of what the actual duties and responsibilities and details are going to be for the individual outside of the functions and powers outlined in section 3."

My colleagues and I asked multiple times of the Minister of Justice what the person who acts as a firearms advocate will be paid. The minister couldn't give a number or even a range of what the position could cost in either salary or programming. When asked what it will cost to run the office, she said, quote: "… we will learn as this position evolves what is actually needed by the position."

We couldn't get an idea of what sort of qualifications the person would have — what education, experience, or certifications would be required. We were told that the firearms advocate was created as an independent body so they would be able to enter into contracts as a separate legal entity, but then it wasn't clear what contracts they would need to enter into; buying office supplies and renting office space, maybe, were the examples given. I guess these are the kind of details that take too much time to debate in this House despite the fact that is exactly what has happened in previous debate on previous establishment of similar bodies or positions.

We don't even know when the position would be appointed, when they would start, or how the government will pay for the office to be set up unless they wait to appropriate funds through the spring budget. It really begs the question why it was so important that the *Yukon Firearms Act* be brought for debate this Fall Sitting if the government doesn't have the funds allocated to budget for the firearms advocate and doesn't have answers about how it will work. The Yukon Party is essentially asking Yukoners to write a blank cheque for a position without precedent across Canada, without a job description, for a person with unknown qualifications to start a job that has not been budgeted for.

It's clear that the government wants to be seen taking decisive action on this file. The minister detailed many of those things here today in her remarks, but nothing in this legislation changes the federal law that the minister referenced many times as being the catalyst for creating the firearms advocate.

In her opening remarks, the minister read from a letter from a former member of the NDP. I had coffee with him the other day, and he also said he wasn't really sure what the firearms advocate would do or why you would spend money on that — so it's not just us. It's not clear that the legislation will do anything to address concerns Yukoners have about the federal program and who the independent firearms advocate may be able to lobby more effectively than the government can itself.

Yukoners across the territory are being hit hard by cost-of-living crises. Public servants are being asked to find ways to save money in their departments, and when it comes to social programming or supports, this government uses the challenging fiscal situation it is facing as a justification for lack of investment or continuation of programming that supports the daily lives of Yukoners. Yukoners are left wondering how the same government that is under fiscal restraints can justify creating a position that isn't exactly clear about what they will do or how it will evolve to address a variety of priorities, with a potential budget of an undisclosed amount.

We fully recognize on this side that many Yukoners use firearms safely and responsibly for hunting, putting food on the table, for sport, and while on the land. We also recognize that there are high rates of firearms-related crimes and violence in the Yukon and that public safety resources need to be carefully directed to actually addressing those problems. However, unlike the Yukon Party, we don't believe a majority of Yukoners are asking for this position, and we understand that Yukoners have concerns about the role.

Again, we don't know the cost, we don't know the priorities, and we don't know the actual work the advocate will do to make a difference for Yukoners. It's a real bill that lets the government hire a real person who will be paid real money, and it remains uncertain whether the firearms advocate will even meaningfully address the issue it was created to fix.

With so many pressing priorities facing Yukoners, the limited resources of government would be better put toward programs, services, and legislation that address immediate and known priorities rather than this firearms advocate with an unknown job description and an unknown cost. Yes, there's some suggestion that members on this side don't understand the importance of firearms or don't understand safe and responsible use of firearms. My brother is the executive director of a rod

and gun club, for goodness' sake. I think we do understand those things.

What we take issue with here — what I have taken issue with — is the priority put on the firearms advocate position and this legislation. I won't be voting in support of it.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I rise to speak to Bill No. 11, the *Yukon Firearms Act*, at Third Reading.

I'm just thinking about some of the comments made here today and the nature of the debate and how all this is pretty new to me. But now, a year in, I sit here as a lone party member and I don't have anyone to stand up for me the same way the other parties do. I'm grateful, though, that I have my colleagues here and work well with the other side too. I'm really grateful for that. I really see that as a really important aspect of this job: to represent our constituents, represent Yukoners' voices but also try to find a way to work together.

I just think that we really need to work harder at how we treat each other and how we speak to each other. I know this has been going on for ages, probably way before I was born. I understand there's a certain temperament in here, but we're still human and we still owe each other respect. Anyways, that's just my little comment to throw in on how things took place last week.

Just to mention again, in my home community of Old Crow, we hunt caribou and moose on a regular basis. There's always a season to hunt something up there. Firearms are tools we use regularly that help feed our families and keep us safe on the land. I fully support the rights of lawful firearm owners and the safe use of firearms.

As I said before, I will be voting in favour of this bill, but as I noted in the Second Reading, my support is reluctant, though. It's mainly for this aspect: For the second time this Sitting, the government has brought a rushed piece of legislation to the floor of this House that leaves many questions unanswered. That's why the debate went so long: There were just so many unanswered questions and it was in such a hurry that it had to make an amendment on the fly during the debate on the bill — that was surprising as well.

On the surface, the bill simply creates a new firearms advocate to advise the minister and speak for firearm owners. Of course, the government can already do this work on its own. Just recently, the federal government announced a dedicated northern chief firearms officer for all three territories, as we all know, created specifically to respond to the needs of the North. Again, the question is: If the government can do this work itself and there is a dedicated federal authority for the North, why are we spending more time and money on this?

Again, to mention, there's no dollar figure anywhere in the bill. Pay for the new advocate and funding their office are left to the minister's discretion. Of course, that's going to bring questions forward. It could be a million dollars or more — exaggerating, but you never know. There will be a cost attached to the creation of this position, and yet we are voting on it without knowing that cost. Meanwhile, Yukoners keep hearing from this government that there is no money.

As I mentioned before, essential programs were cut. No money for the baby baskets for new mothers, reductions for youth sports funding, no more money for the substance use health emergency — yet somehow there is room for a new office with an open-ended budget. We have to call it that because it came with no numbers. During debate on this bill, the minister was forced to admit this legislation does nothing to prevent the implementation of the federal Liberal buyback program. This was an empty campaign promise that the government made.

This bill also does not create a territorially appointed chief firearms officer position to advocate for the Yukon's lawful firearms owners and promote safety. It simply creates a firearms advocate — in the eyes of Yukoners, another campaign promise broken. Basically, just reiterating what we talked about at the Second Reading and through the whole debate.

Justin Ziegler: Je suis, j'allais dire que je suis particulièrement fier, mais ça n'est pas le cas. Je prends la parole une dernière fois sur le projet de loi n° 11, qui est la Loi sur les armes à feu au Yukon.

L'Opposition officielle, évidemment, votera contre ce projet de loi, et je vais expliquer pourquoi. Mais avant cela, je voudrais parler d'autre chose.

Parler une autre langue est un défi qui est particulier. C'est un défi singulier, particulièrement lorsque c'est un exercice quotidien, et davantage encore en public. C'est un exercice qui est particulièrement difficile. On se sent exposé, vulnérable, et surtout quand le sujet est technique. Et je le sais mieux que personne, puisque je vis cette situation chaque jour, ici même à l'Assemblée.

J'en profite d'ailleurs pour saluer les efforts de la ministre et de tous les autres membres, les efforts de toutes les personnes qui essayent de parler français. Je vous encourage chacun et chacune à vous aventurer dans ce défi linguistique, qui, je peux vous le garantir, vous apportera rien d'autre qu'un grand respect et une immense satisfaction personnelle.

En comité plénier, la ministre dit que les versions anglaise et française font toutes les deux autorité de manière égale, et qu'il est important que le projet de loi concorde dans les deux langues.

Je remercie la ministre d'ailleurs d'avoir présenté un amendement à l'article 8, à l'alinéa 1. La version française dit maintenant que le rapport annuel est remis directement au ou à la ministre, et que le soutien financier vient du ou de la ministre. Avant cet amendement, l'argent allait dans une direction en anglais et dans la direction opposée en français. C'est corrigé, et je crois que c'est important.

Je remercie aussi les légistes en français et en anglais qui ont fait ce travail rapidement avec beaucoup de soin.

Néanmoins, tout n'a pas été corrigé.

Le mot « droits » est toujours dans le titre français. Il est aussi dans la définition à l'article 1, et comme c'est le terme défini, il revient évidemment dans chaque article où l'on parle du défenseur.

En comité plénier, on m'a répondu que le mot « droit » a un sens plus large en français, qu'il peut vouloir dire « la loi ». C'est vrai, mais seulement au singulier. « Le droit », c'est la loi. « Les droits », au pluriel, ce sont des droits. Et le projet de loi utilise justement le pluriel. J'ai malheureusement jamais reçu de réponse quant au choix de ce vocabulaire en particulier.

Ailleurs au Canada, je tiens à rappeler que, quand on crée un défenseur, on le nomme d'après les personnes qu'il défend.

Ici au Yukon, nous avons le défenseur de l'enfance et de la jeunesse, le défenseur des travailleurs. Au Manitoba, il y a le protecteur des aînés. Au fédéral, il y a le défenseur fédéral du logement. Et la loi fédérale justement reconnaît spécifiquement le droit au logement comme un droit fondamental de la personne, et même là, le mot « droit » n'existe pas dans le titre de cette loi.

Au Canada, posséder une arme à feu n'est pas un droit. C'est une activité encadrée qui demande une formation, un permis, et la version anglaise de ce projet de loi respecte cela. Ce qui, je pense, n'est pas le cas de la version française.

Et dans quelques minutes, pourtant, ces deux versions-là vont devenir la loi, le droit. Et sur ces points, elles ne disent toujours pas la même chose.

Alors, sur le fond, maintenant, nos préoccupations restent les mêmes. Le défenseur est nommé par la ministre à titre amovible. Sa rémunération et son financement dépendent entièrement de la ministre. Ça n'est donc pas de l'indépendance.

Nous ne savons toujours pas d'ailleurs combien ce poste va coûter aux Yukonnaises et aux Yukonnais, de l'argent public va pourtant payer quelqu'un pour faire pression sur d'autres gouvernements.

Et ce projet de loi ne dit rien sur la violence conjugale, la prévention du suicide, l'entreposage sécuritaire des armes. Et les armes à feu relèvent toujours du gouvernement fédéral. Et ce bureau et son défenseur n'y changeront absolument rien.

Madame la Présidente, je veux aussi profiter de cette troisième lecture pour prendre un engagement personnel devant cette Assemblée.

Je suis l'un des rares locuteurs de langue française dans cette Chambre. Je suis aussi le porte-parole pour l'Opposition officielle pour les affaires francophones et je prends ces deux rôles particulièrement à cœur.

Et je continuerai, comme avant, de lire chaque projet de loi d'abord en français. Et pour chaque texte, je vérifierai avec assiduité la concordance des versions anglaise et française.

Je le ferai évidemment dans un esprit de collaboration. La ministre m'a d'ailleurs invité à lui écrire directement lorsqu'une version pose problème. J'accepte cette invitation et je prends la liberté de l'étendre à tous les ministres et à chacun de leurs maroquins.

Quand je verrai un écart, je l'écrirai au ministre responsable avant les débats en comité pour que les légistes aient le temps d'examiner ces différences.

Les francophones de notre territoire ont droit à des lois qui disent la même chose dans leur langue. C'est d'ailleurs ce que prévoit la Loi sur les langues, et c'est notre responsabilité à tous dans cette Assemblée.

Pour conclure, je voterai évidemment contre cette loi et j'invite les Yukonaises et les Yukonnais à continuer d'envoyer leurs questions à tous les ministres de ce gouvernement dans la langue de leur choix.

Et je tiens à rappeler à tout le monde que je continuerai à m'exprimer dans ma langue maternelle, et j'invite tous les autres à s'exprimer dans une langue qui n'est pas la leur pour comprendre le sentiment qu'on peut éprouver quand on s'exprime de manière aussi publique dans une langue qui n'est pas la nôtre.

Merci de m'avoir écouté.

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I wasn't going to get up today and speak, but I just wanted to say a few quick words.

I just Googled what we're discussing. The first thing that popped up was a CBC article from January 23, 2026, and it says: "Yukon gun owners say they're unimpressed with Ottawa's buyback program. Experts say there's little evidence buybacks reduce crime or gun violence." That's exactly what Yukoners were telling me on the doorstep, and the Yukon is a lot different than our southern jurisdictions. What's good for Ontario or Québec or southern provinces sometimes isn't good for the Yukon.

I had the opportunity to travel quite a bit this summer. I went to the far North, Shingle Point, and one of the first things I did when I got there was talk to some friends I knew, and they showed me the new gun they bought because they harvest traditionally, and it's their way of life.

Every day of the week, I'll stand up in this Legislature and support my colleague. She put a lot of hard work into this bill, and I look forward to it passing in this House today.

Hon. Brad Cathers: I'd just like to thank my colleague the Minister of Justice and officials first of all for their work in bringing forward this legislation.

Note that though most of the debate on this legislation so far has focused on its creation of a Yukon firearms advocate or an inordinate amount of time spent asking repetitive questions, in the case of the Official Opposition members bringing in, I believe, all members of their caucus to repeatedly ask somewhat repetitive questions of my colleague. This legislation does more than establish an advocate position — it is also about enshrining in law a statement of values to stand up for Yukoners who depend on hunting and responsible firearm use to feed their families. This has more weight than a motion, and it's also reflective of the fact that for over three decades in this Legislative Assembly, there has long been a tradition of members, through cross-party efforts, often with unanimous support, standing up on behalf of Yukoners who depend on responsible firearms ownership for purposes including subsistence hunting, hunting, and for self-defence from wildlife, which, of course, is something that is a reality in the Yukon wilderness at times.

This follows, I would note, the first time that the Yukon Legislative Assembly unanimously passed a motion in opposition to federal firearms legislation brought forward by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin back in 1994. The then-member, the late Johnny Abel, brought forward a motion that on December 14, 1994, Motion No. 23, moved by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, stated, quote: "THAT it is the opinion of this House that the proposed amendments to the federal government's firearms legislation to be presented to the Parliament of Canada in February 1995 do not accommodate the needs of northern Canadians and their lifestyle, and that the Yukon Legislative Assembly urges the federal Minister of Justice, the Honourable Allan Rock, not to proceed with the proposed firearms amendments until such time as the needs of northern Canadians are met."

So, that, again, motion from the then-Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, we saw as well then the second time that a unanimous motion was passed in opposition to the federal long-gun registry was one brought forward by me on behalf of our

caucus. That motion passed in November 2005, quote: "THAT this House urges the federal Liberal Government to eliminate the firearms registry for long guns and redirect the money currently spent on this registry towards measures that effectively address the issue of violent criminal misuse of firearms while respecting the rights of responsible firearms owners."

Madam Speaker, there is a long tradition in this Assembly of standing up for Yukoners when the federal government is either taking actions that threaten their rights or is proposing to take those actions. This legislation, as well, as I noted in its preamble, sets forth a statement of values. The members of the Official Opposition, NDP, as they have indicated, will be voting against it. I would point out, actually, that I think that they have spent more time in this Sitting arguing against this legislation and filibustering this legislation than they have even spent on the issue of residential tenancies, which they claim is one of their top priorities.

But here, Madam Speaker, is what the NDP is voting against. They're voting against the clause in the *Yukon Firearms Act* that says: "Respect for lawful ownership, enjoyment, and disposition of private property, free from arbitrary interference, is a foundational principle of Canada's free and democratic society." For some reason, Madam Speaker, the territorial NDP do not support that statement.

They're also voting against this statement of values. Yukoners are best served by evidence-based firearms policies and programs that account for diverse cultures and circumstances and that respect the values of responsible Yukon firearms owners. Madam Speaker, apparently the territorial NDP disagree with that value statement.

It also includes this statement: "Yukon's geography, communities, cultures, and traditions give rise to distinct northern circumstances relating to the lawful ownership and use of firearms" — again, apparently a statement the territorial NDP disagree with.

Further, the legislation states: "The historical and cultural uses of firearms form part of Yukon's culture, heritage, and northern way of life, including for hunting and trapping, sport and recreation and subsistence harvesting" — again, a statement apparently the territorial NDP disagrees with and intends to vote against.

The legislation also states in the preamble the statement of values that: "The Yukon Legislative Assembly recognizes the importance of ensuring that Yukon perspectives and northern circumstances are understood and considered in the development and implementation of firearms policies and programs affecting Yukoners." Again, another statement apparently the territorial NDP disagrees with, because they intend to vote against it.

Madam Speaker, I want to talk briefly about the effect of advocacy by Yukoners to the federal government, and much of the rationale for the firearms advocate position is that one thing that we have run into often is that at a federal governmental level, including at a departmental level, there's often a very poor understanding of what firearms legislation actually is. Similarly, that occurs among some voters in Southern Canada who do not use firearms themselves, do not have a tradition of using them, and are not well-versed in what the rules are or are not.

So, in October 2022, I, in my then-capacity as the Official Opposition Justice critic on behalf of the Yukon Party caucus at the time, wrote to the federal Minister of Public Safety, the Hon. Marco Mendicino, in a letter dated October 25, 2022, which I will table again, though it was previously tabled on October 31, 2022.

In that letter on behalf of our caucus, one of the specific requests we made was to ask the federal government to "Work with the Yukon to appoint a Chief Firearms Officer for the territory, reporting to the territorial government. This would make the position more accountable, speed up the processing of PAL renewals for law-abiding citizens, and also allow for faster suspension of a licence if required."

That letter was copied to all justice ministers across the country as well as the leaders of the Official Opposition and the Third Party at the national level. I also shared similar correspondence that I had written to the then-Yukon Minister of Justice with Yukon's Member of Parliament and senator.

Although the chief firearms officer position being appointed does not report directly to the territorial government, I think it's fair to say that one of the reasons this position has been created is the successful lobbying efforts by the Yukon and by the Yukon Party even during our time in the Official Opposition.

So, to quote briefly from my letter to the Hon. Marco Mendicino — my letter was entitled "The Yukon Opposes Use of RCMP Resources for Federal Gun Confiscation Program" — and I'll quote from that letter: "The Yukon has joined the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba as the fourth jurisdiction to formally oppose the use of police resources to enforce the Trudeau government's gun confiscation plan. We are pleased that New Brunswick has also joined this group — five provinces and territories officially oppose your firearms confiscation plan.

"The Yukon Legislative Assembly voted in favour of our motion, which I introduced as the Yukon Party Official Opposition Justice Critic. The motion passed by the Yukon Legislative Assembly reads: 'THAT this House urges the Yukon Government to ensure that territorial policing resources are not diverted to assist in the implementation of the Government of Canada's gun "buy-back" program.'

"To help you understand the context for this decision by the Yukon, here is an excerpt from my speech in the Legislative Assembly: 'Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to emphasize four things. It is important to take an evidence-based approach rather than one guided by emotion. Public policy based on fear is not the right approach to take. Second, the so-called gun "buyback" program is actually the proposed confiscation of lawfully acquired property from Canadian citizens. Third, it is clear that diverting public money and police resources away from dealing with serious issues, including organized crime, would actually make the Yukon and other parts of Canada less safe. Fourth, the National Police Federation, which is the union representing RCMP members, agrees that the federal Liberal approach diverts police resources away from where they are needed most.

'"The National Police Federation issued a position statement about the matter of the Trudeau government's firearm legislation and the so-called "buyback" program, in which they clearly and specifically stated that those measures actually — I quote: "… diverts extremely important personnel,

resources, and funding away from addressing the more immediate and growing threat of criminal use of illegal firearms."

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

That is again a quote from my letter, Madam Speaker, and from Hansard, October 12, 2022. The measures that we proposed in the letter included asking the federal government to cancel the proposed buyback program, repeal the May 2020 order-in-council, and allow law-abiding firearms owners to keep their legally acquired property.

As stated by the National Police Federation, the buyback program actually "… diverts extremely important personnel, resources, and funding away from addressing the more immediate and growing threat of criminal use of illegal firearms." We further called on the federal government to prioritize crime reduction, gang diversion, safe communities, secure borders, Canadian enforcement agency integration, and cross-border safety of the public and all police officers, which was also called for by the National Police Federation. We asked the federal government to increase funding for the RCMP Border Integrity program to enable dedicated, proactive RCMP investigative and enforcement activity and dismantling of gang and organized crime and firearms smuggling — again, also called for by the National Police Federation. We asked the federal government to help law enforcement properly address crime prevention rather than focusing funding and resources toward the ongoing monitoring of unrelated restrictions on licensed and regulated firearms owners — again, echoing a call from the National Police Federation, the union representing the RCMP.

I will not, in the interest of time, read the rest of my letter, but I would note that the statements made by the union representing RCMP members have also been supported by comments made by other police, including in Toronto, which, as members will recall, back in the 1990s, used to be one of the leading voices of increased measures going after responsible firearms owners. But as of now, we see examples such as this. *Global News* reported on July 13, 2026, that the Toronto police chief said this about illegal firearms coming in from the United States: "The vast majority, 85 to 90 percent of them, when they can be traced, are traced to the United States of America. This city has a handgun crime problem. These are not licensed gun owners. We are not arresting people with firearms who are licensed gun owners. That is not happening in this city in any meaningful way."

As well, Madam Speaker, the Toronto Police Association, which is the union representing members of the Toronto police, in a social media post from last year on September 21, 2025, said this: "Almost all of the gun violence in Toronto is committed with an illegally obtained firearm. If the federal government would like to help our members and communities, they should focus on the items we have discussed, like youth violence, bail reform, and stronger sentencing, instead of mis-spending budget dollars targeting lawful gun owners. Send the money to the City of Toronto, where it can be invested in policing and public safety initiatives, including community well-being supports. That's how you make neighbourhoods safer."

On January 20 of this year, the Toronto Police Association said this about the so-called "gun buyback": "We support the decision of Toronto Police not to participate in this program. With no viable plan presented by the federal government, it makes no sense why we would allocate our limited resources towards this misguided attempt at public safety. In Toronto, our members are dedicating to making an actual difference on our streets by targeting illegal firearms and partnering with other law enforcement agencies to tackle the smuggling of guns and illicit drugs across our border. Our position has been clear from the beginning: money spent on the buyback program should be directed to police services across the country, rather than on a bureaucratic program with no tangible evidence of success."

In January of this year, Madam Speaker, in Manitoba, Premier Wab Kinew — who is, of course, now the lone remaining NDP Premier in the entire country — came out against the so-called "gun buyback program" that we are standing up against here today.

Quoting from *CTV News*: "Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew confirmed that the province would not be participating in the program during a news scrum on Friday. 'We just think there's a lot of headaches here that are not going to make our community safer,' Kinew said. 'If we're looking at taking away weapons from criminals, from people who are causing violence in our streets, I'm all for that,' he said. 'But this program doesn't look like it's going to achieve that end. Instead, it's going to create other issues around administration and cost.'" Again, that was from January of 2026.

As I noted, the Yukon Legislative Assembly has, for over 30 years, had a tradition of cross-party support standing up for the rights of Yukoners who hunt and own firearms. It's disappointing to see the NDP departing from that. It's disappointing to see them spending so much time filibustering this legislation and arguing against it that it seems like they are coming just short of endorsing the federal government's gun confiscation program. If that is not their position, then why have they spent so much time in this Legislative Assembly arguing against things, including, as I mentioned, principles that include the respect for lawful ownership, enjoyment, and disposition of private property from arbitrary interference and noting that's a foundational principle of Canada's free and democratic society, arguing against the statement that "Yukoners are best served by evidence-based firearms policies and programs that account for diverse cultures and circumstances and that respect the values of responsible firearms owners"? The NDP have also argued against the statement that "… historical and cultural uses of firearms form part of Yukon's culture, heritage and northern way of life, including for hunting and trapping, sport and recreation and subsistence harvesting", and they also apparently plan to vote against the statement: "The Yukon Legislative Assembly recognizes the importance of ensuring that Yukon perspectives and northern circumstances are understood and considered in the development and implementation of firearms policies and programs affecting Yukoners".

The NDP have opposed this government doing more to stand up for Yukoners. I thank my colleague the Minister of

Justice and officials for their work on this, and I look forward to supporting the passage of this legislation.

Doris Anderson: I appreciate the opportunity to rise again to speak at Third Reading in support of Bill No. 11, the *Yukon Firearms Act*. I speak on behalf of myself with respect to my lived experience as a Yukon First Nation woman, an elder who grew up hunting, fishing, and watching a way of life change for many Yukoners and Yukon First Nations over these many years. I respect that many Yukoners have experienced change differently, which means there's a diverse range of perspectives, values, and priorities. Change is what Yukoners voted for, and this change includes the firearms legislation for responsible Yukon firearms owners.

I have often heard our foundational document *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* referenced in this House, and I refer to it often myself. I encourage everyone here to take the time to read it. Within it, you'll see that back then, rifles were a great tool of value that historically Yukon First Nations and Indigenous people across Canada made unfair trades with beaver fur piled up to measure the height of the rifle. They wanted rifles because they knew hunting and trapping would be much easier with them than traditional trapping methods. Firearms helped with the staples required to sustain a family by providing the necessary food and fur clothing to survive.

Back in the 1990s, I remember seeing people drive around with rifles in their trucks in gun racks literally designed to hold the rifles along the back of the window for pickup trucks. This was not a safety concern, as firearm safety was a part of life that every Yukoner respected from every culture of any language. All Yukoners respected and embraced this. This was a tool that Yukon First Nations recognized as a person's livelihood, a mechanism that put food on the table, provided an opportunity to get outdoors, and pass down family heirlooms, knowing they are going into good hands.

All parties have recognized that Yukon First Nations and Indigenous rights are not an option to consider when convenient but something that must be incorporated into all decisions made by government. This includes the right to hunt with modern tools. This is a constitutionally recognized and protected right that this government means to respect and uphold.

Today, with the information available on Statistics Canada, my understanding is that Yukon has the highest per capita licensing for holders of PAL, with more than 25 percent of those licence holders being women compared to the national number of 15 percent, and has one of the lowest firearms-related violent crime rates. Interestingly, Yukon firearms ownership is seeing a significant increase, particularly with women, which has increased by 13 percent. This is all occurring by Yukoners who are abiding by the federal *Firearms Act* and abiding by the federal laws.

This government remains committed to protecting responsible Yukoners from the federal government's overreach by making informed decisions that align with the interests of the population that voted for change.

Yukon has the highest per capita rate of PAL holders with the lowest number of firearms-related domestic violence in comparison with other provinces and territories. Instances involving firearms in Yukon domestic violence are rare, with only one to two percent — most involve physical force from people who should have served their term or time.

This government is not seeking to put illegal or smuggled guns into the hands of violent criminals, untrained law enforcement, or underage Yukoners. Instead, the intentions are to ensure that a tool in the hands of responsible, law-abiding people can continue to put food on the table, get people outside, and revitalize a way of life that invites anyone to participate in a way that doesn't prohibit, harm, or interrupt rights and freedoms of anyone else when used correctly.

I also want to add that in First Nation culture, kids and adults trying to learn the language were encouraged and corrected with patience, not made fun of for trying. I see this as a compliment to the person's language and an effort to show respect. It reflects their willingness to accommodate others in learning and using the language. I commend the Minister of Justice for efforts to speak French. My colleagues and I recognize the courage it takes to speak French in this House. Change can be intimidating, but growth rarely happens in our comfort zones.

During Second Reading, I spoke to the importance of recognizing the perspectives and experiences of Yukon First Nations. I spoke to the importance of protecting our way of life, ensuring that traditions and practices can be passed down through generations to guide and provide for our communities. With the firearms advocate, I think it's a great opportunity to mould this position to fit Yukoners' needs for advice on all things related to the firearms legislation. I know for seniors and elders and those who may need assistance with various requirements of getting and renewing a PAL, it has been very difficult in the past.

At one time, our potlatches gifted firearms. It was one of the highest forms of respect you could give someone. Often, the naming ceremonies included rifles, which were given to respected workers and helpers or someone honouring the person's name because they were great hunters, and that was a person who was held to the highest standard as an excellent provider. There are a lot of customs that accompany getting a name, and the responsibility of looking after that name comes with a lot of respect for the tool as well. It was seen as the highest honour you could pay someone, and they knew that.

I support my colleagues' efforts to introduce a position intended to advise the Minister of Justice on firearms issues, advocate for education, training, and safety initiatives, and act as a point of contact to relay Yukoners' perspectives to ensure the Government of Yukon's understanding is up to date, accurate, and reflective of the concerns, interests, and perspectives of the population it's tasked to serve.

You cannot have reconciliation at the cost of picking apart what fits a political agenda or, in this case, disregards constitutionally protected rights. Yukoners voted for this commitment, and this government intends to deliver on what the public wants. I wholly support any efforts for safety and law-abiding efforts, which is hopefully a shared interest with all members in this Chamber.

Even Yukon First Nation and Indigenous hunting practices still require compliance with applicable laws, like having the PAL. We understand the importance of modern tools and recognize that their use is not only a privilege but also a constitutionally protected right. This government is committed

to upholding Yukon First Nation and Indigenous rights and protecting all law-abiding Yukoners.

I thank the minister for bringing forward this legislation. It's long overdue. I'm quite excited for it, and it has been long overdue. I know I brought it forward when I sat on chief and council as well at that time. It was, I think, Minister Cathers who assisted me and supported it. I do thank you for that.

Hon. Currie Dixon: I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill No. 11, the *Yukon Firearms Act*, today at Third Reading. This is something that I'm very happy to see delivered by this government by the Minister of Justice. I assume that it goes without saying that I very much support the bill, and I'm proud to see it advancing through the Legislative Assembly.

For many years now, my colleagues and I have been advocating on behalf of the rights and interests of Yukon firearms owners. That advocacy goes back, in the case of the Member for Lake Laberge, several decades now but in my case, only a number of years since I have learned more and more about the negative impacts of the federal government's agenda when it comes to firearms over the last number of years.

I think that a lot of attention has been paid to the Assault-Style Firearms Compensation Program, as is justified by its impact. But it is only the most recent in a pattern of decisions made by the federal government which have been a direct affront to the rights and interests of Yukon firearms owners. Whether we talk about the long-gun registry or any of the regulatory approaches taken by the government over the past several decades, we have seen a consistent pattern of ignoring the voices of rural Canadians, northern Canadians, and especially, in our case, Yukoners.

I am pleased to see this legislation come forward as one modest step toward pushing back against that agenda from Ottawa. Now, we have been very clear throughout the development of this legislation that it is not going to be a be-all and end-all solution to pushing back against the federal government, but it is an important first step for the reasons outlined by my colleagues today.

I should thank my colleagues as well for eloquently expressing their views on this legislation, starting with the ministers of Energy, Mines and Resources, Health and Social Services, and Environment, and, of course, we just heard from the Member for Porter Creek North with some very compelling arguments in favour of this legislation. But, of course, the specific congratulations I would say go to the Minister of Justice for delivering this as quickly as she has.

The speed at which this has come forward has been necessitated by the federal government's actions. As we've seen over the last year, there have been a number of announcements of dates for the extension of amnesty under this program, and those consistently get pushed back. In the face of ongoing court battles about this particular program, it was clear to us that we wanted to move quickly in the face of this rapidly changing landscape when it comes to the assault-style firearms program.

Going back to the program itself, it has been flawed from the get-go. It was flawed in its development consideration and the furtive attempts at implementation of it. We've seen only a pilot project implemented in Canada so far, in Cape Breton. It was a dramatic failure, a costly failure, and demonstrated that this, applied at a national level, would be a disastrous program to implement.

As well as the awareness of this program growing, we've also seen the opposition to this program growing. Years ago, there was a handful of jurisdictions that would openly oppose the federal government's plans on this. I believe it started with just a few provinces expressing either through a motion or through expressions by their government that they would oppose the program. But since that time, we've seen the development of opposition to this program extend widely. I can say that I've sat at tables with all premiers and the Prime Minister where every single premier around the table except for Québec, which chose to stay silent on the issue, significantly opposed this program. That was across regions, across party stripes, and across the entire country. The reason for that, of course, is because this is quite frankly terrible public policy. The Assault-Style Firearms Compensation Program is deeply flawed public policy.

I can speak about, first of all, the title — the fact that we have a program referencing assault-style firearms is a perfect indication of its lack of connection to reality. There is no such thing as assault-style firearms. That's not a technical term that anybody familiar with firearms or firearms policy would ever use, because it's an imprecise and inaccurate term to use. The fact that the federal government would name their policy that very clearly indicates that it is a policy designed to be based on politics and not based on evidence-based decision-making or effective public policy.

I could go on and on about the assault-style firearms policy. That's not what I intend to do today. What I would like to do is speak in favour of this bill. But I do think it's important that Yukoners and those listening and those reviewing the debate on this understand the context within which this bill has come forward and the fact that we have had a consistent pattern of negative policy implemented from Ottawa that has impacted Yukoners. This bill is very much a part of the response to that.

The next thing that I think is worth noting is what's in the bill itself. I won't go into detail as my colleague the Minister of Justice has done or as the Minister of Health and Social Services has just done a few minutes ago. But I think the preamble of this bill is particularly strong. The preamble of the bill sets out some very important fundamental principles that I think are very valuable to enshrine in legislation here on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. I think the commitment to establish the preamble that includes words like "Respect for lawful ownership, enjoyment and disposition of private property free from arbitrary interference is a foundational principle of Canada's free and democratic society" — I think that's a powerful statement, Madam Speaker, that is worthwhile to enshrine in legislation here in the Yukon. I won't go on about the rest of the preamble, but I very much agree with the statements and sections quoted by the Member for Lake Laberge in his dissertation or discussion on this earlier.

The other part about this is the advocate position itself, and I'll say that my thinking on this has changed over the years. I'll go to one particular conversation I had, though, that influenced me, and that's when we had the firearms commissioner for Saskatchewan come to the Yukon and attend a public event here with a number of stakeholders and interested parties who attended an event. At that public forum, there were a lot of

questions about what was possible here in the Yukon and what was possible in other jurisdictions. Blaine Beaven, who was the Commissioner of Firearms for Saskatchewan, was very generous with his time and provided a lot of really helpful information to Yukoners who attended that session. We had the chance to sit down with Mr. Beaven after the public forum and have a discussion about his experience. His experience was very much informative to us in the creation of the advocate position.

We had looked at the term "commissioner" as well, like they use, but decided that in the context of Yukon, "commissioner" probably wasn't the right choice of name or title for this position because of the fact that it could draw some confusion with our territorial Commissioner or any of the other commissioners that exist already in territorial legislation, and so the decision, of course, was made to land on an advocate position.

I think that advocacy will be integral going forward. Obviously, there are a number of clear examples where the federal government would have benefited greatly from consulting with Yukoners, but having an advocate position now to express Yukoners' positions to the federal government in the context of federal legislation and federal program implementation I think will be a very huge boon not only to the Yukon but to firearms policy in the entire country. I'm very pleased to see that position created as well.

I'll conclude as well by just speaking a little bit about the transit of this bill through the Legislative Assembly. Now, I've spent time, as members know, on both sides of the Legislative Assembly and for about four and a half years was the Leader of the Official Opposition, and I know very well that one of the most important decisions you can make as Official Opposition is how you allocate your time.

When the government controls the business and controls the majority of the subject matter that comes before you, you have to make some very careful decisions about how you allocate your time to best reflect your view on the needs of Yukoners. I think that the decision made by the Official Opposition to spend so many days, so many hours, debating and filibustering this legislation over and over again, oftentimes repeating the same questions over and over again, is a clear indication of that party's priority for the Yukon. Rather than debating things like the health care system and the Hospital Corporation, the Department of Highways and Public Works, Community Services — pick one — they chose to allocate their time to this bill and to debating and asking the same questions over and over and over again.

I don't believe that we've ever seen so many times the needless repetition clause cited in debate as we did over the course of this Sitting in the context of this particular bill. That is because the Speaker, the Chair, and others had to consistently remind the Opposition that they couldn't ask the same question over and over and over again because it was a waste of this House's time, and that's exactly what we experienced over the last number of weeks in debate on this bill.

But that's a choice — that's a choice that the Official Opposition has made. They have decided that filibustering this bill is more important than debating —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: Official Opposition House Leader, on a point of order.

Lane Tredger: The member opposite is suggesting that members of my party have violated the Standing Orders repeatedly, and if he would like to call a point of order, I suggest he do that.

Speaker: Government House Leader, on the point of order.

Hon. Scott Kent: On the point of order, I believe the Premier was just referencing points of order that had been raised during debate on the bill in question.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: There is no point of order, but I will caution members to temper their remarks.

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

Hon. Currie Dixon: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I'll just conclude by stating that it's my view that the Official Opposition made a clear decision that they wanted to spend an inordinate amount of time digging into the minutia of individual words in this bill instead of debating other important issues to Yukoners. They spent, I believe it was, eight days total on this bill.

I think it's an important issue and it deserves debate. But what we saw and what we experienced was not healthy, rigorous debate. It was repetitious, ongoing questioning that they knew very well the answers to already and the attempt to go back and forth from members taking turns asking the same questions over again. One minute, it was one member, then another. It was a clear demonstration to Yukoners that their intent was not rigorous debate. It was needless repetition, and therefore —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: Official Opposition House Leader, on a point of order.

Lane Tredger: Our intent is not rigorous debate but "needless repetition" is to say that we are intending to violate the Standing Orders, which is a violation of the Standing Orders.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: Members, I will review Hansard and get back to this House if required.

Let's continue, Hon. Premier.

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

Hon. Currie Dixon: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I think I've made my point about the nature of the debate. I would note as well the unfortunate situation that was referenced by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources earlier. There was an inaccurate statement made by the Member for Riverdale North when she noted that the Member for Riverdale South apologized. That's simply not accurate. When

you look back at Hansard from the day in question, you won't see the word "sorry" in Hansard. That's noticeably absent from Hansard; there was no apology. There was no public apology for the statements made by the Member for Riverdale South, but that's just another inaccurate statement.

I'll conclude now by simply noting that I'm proud of this legislation. I directed the Minister of Justice in a mandate letter to conduct this work, and she has admirably done so. I'm very pleased to see this legislation come forward. I'm very pleased to see the preamble that lays out important principles that I think are valuable to enshrine in legislation, and I think it's important to establish the creation of this new advocacy position that will lend itself to a stronger voice for Yukoners in the creation and implementation of federal policy. We hope that person, whomever it may be, will ultimately be vested with significant support from Yukoners as they do their best to engage in federal processes that will, of course, deeply affect Yukoners' rights, interests, and ways of life up here in the Yukon.

With that, I commend this legislation to the House. I look forward to seeing it pass, and I thank members for their votes.

Lane Tredger: I would like to rise to speak to this debate, because there's been a lot of conversation in this debate about languages and respectful conduct in this House, and I want to talk about that a little bit.

Something that I don't think anyone in this House would deny is that it is a benefit to this House when people speak in multiple languages. That is a difficult and often intimidating thing to do, and everyone should be supported to speak in their own language as well as new languages they're learning. I don't think there's anyone in this House who would disagree with that.

As House Leader, it's my job to make sure that our caucus does our part to help create a respectful debate, and I do believe that there is genuine concern from members like the Member for Porter Creek North that we haven't done that. I hope that this speech will clarify those concerns, and if she or any other members believe that we have not been respectful when I'm finished speaking, I hope they will speak with me about those concerns so we can resolve them.

The Member for Porter Creek Centre quoted the Member for Riverdale South in that debate, and there was a choice when he made that quote not to give the context of those comments or any of the follow-up comments that were made by the Member for Riverdale South, so I would like to add that context.

The Member for Riverdale South had been asking questions about the French version of this law that we are discussing today. He had taken on the task of proofreading the French version of the law as the only MLA in this House who is actually able to do that. I think we're actually very fortunate to have a francophone MLA who can do that role, because both of those versions of law are valid and enforceable and have impacts on the world. It is a weakness that I think all of us share, including myself, that we can't read that version in detail. I'm extremely grateful that he is able to take on that role of really digging into the French version and making sure that it reflects the will of the Assembly.

He also did this largely in his second language despite that putting him at a disadvantage. That's a courtesy and a gift that he gives every member of this House who is not fluent in French every time he speaks in English, which is the majority of how he speaks. He takes on the responsibility of making sure that people can understand him even when we haven't taken on the responsibility of making sure we can understand him in his first language, and I appreciate that.

As he spoke in his first language and in English, members opposite were laughing and jeering at him. That's something that's not reflected in Hansard, but it is a stunning lack of respect, of collegiality or appreciation of another perspective, and it is not compatible with something that everyone in this House I think believes — which is that people should be able to speak in their first language and be respected for it.

When the Member for Riverdale South responded and tried to express the boorishness of the behaviour that was happening on the other side, he tried to say that he was hoping that no one would have the experience of being laughed at while trying to speak a second language. I know that because I asked him after, "What were you trying to say?" and he told me that he was trying to say that no one should be laughed at while speaking in a second language in the way that he just had been.

A reality of speaking in this Chamber is that things may be taken out of context in many ways. It is a constant exercise when you speak in this House to find careful wording to consider all the possible angles, generous and otherwise, in which your words can be considered. Sometimes in a heated context, most especially in a second language, it is difficult to do that. Sometimes, as on that day, other members will find a way to quote what you say out of context without curiosity or desire for understanding.

When that happens, when your words are not clear and have the potential to be taken in a way that you did not intend, whether in this Chamber or elsewhere in life, the ethical thing to do is not just consider the intent of what you were trying to say but the impact of your words. It is your responsibility in that situation to clarify and to repair any harm that may have occurred.

I would like to explain how the Member for Riverdale South did that. He immediately wrote to the minister to clarify and express his support for her as a second-language learner. I would like to quote from that e-mail that he sent within the next hour.

He wrote, "I just wanted to send a quick note about what happened in the debate today. I do not want you to feel bad for speaking French. In fact, I praise you for it, and I know well how vulnerable it feels to speak another language in a public setting, and I appreciate your efforts." Then he went on to apologize, and he said he would go back into the Chamber to make sure that was on the record. Then he went back into the Chamber and clarified what he said. I want to repeat it again, because I'm not sure that it's something everyone here has heard or really thought about.

He said — quote: "I just want to make sure that my thoughts are in Hansard and that there is no room for interpretation on what I said earlier. I want the Minister of Justice to know that I really appreciate her effort to speak French, and I appreciate everybody's effort to speak French. I know first-hand how difficult it is and how vulnerable it feels to speak in another language, especially in such a public setting and especially on such technical matters. My words didn't take

into account the context, and yes, I will feel hurt when people laugh when I speak French."

I hope at this point I have made the context of this debate clear, that I have made it clear what the intent of the member's remarks was, and that when he realized his remarks could be understood in a different way, he took steps to limit and correct any potential harm. I want to thank him for those actions, because that's not easy to do.

I actually support the call of the Member for Porter Creek Centre. He called for respectful debate in this Chamber, and I support that. I really want to applaud the Member for Riverdale South for taking steps to make sure that it is understood by all members that he respects their languages and their efforts to learn.

I applaud all the members in this House who asked patient, thoughtful, detailed, meticulous questions about this legislation, as is their job. I hope that the members on the other side of the House will also consider what they can do to make debate respectful. I would like to suggest that they can do that by showing respect for the questions asked, by answering them as best as possible instead of repeatedly dismissing them as filibustering. I would like to suggest that they could listen respectfully to the comments of other members without laughing or jeering or mocking them.

I think we all understand the importance of what we do here. I think we all understand that we will not agree at all times, but I do believe that respectful debate is what is asked of us, what is demanded of us, and what we owe our constituents. I really do mean that I hope every member here considers how they can make the debate on this topic, on every topic — in English, in French, in First Nation languages, in any language — respectful at all times. If at any point people feel that's not happening, I invite a conversation to see how we can correct it.

Brent McDonald: I rise today to speak to Bill No. 11, the *Yukon Firearms Act*. Firearms are indeed a part of life in the Yukon and across the whole North. Families hunt for food, operate trap lines, carry firearms for protection while they're out on the land, and use them for recreational purposes. I'm one of those people, and my family is as well. I support anyone who is involved in any of these activities.

I also believe that there are issues and problems with the federal gun buyback program. I would much rather see them spending their money on saving Parks Canada jobs, for example, or on more productive matters — but that's outside of our jurisdiction. Now, this bill — Bill No. 11 — will in fact have absolutely no effect on any of those activities — none.

I find it curious — and I agree with the Minister of Justice when she says that things that happen in Ontario, in Toronto, in cities, don't reflect the nature of the North. Yet I sat and listened to another minister using facts and figures from those very same cities and areas to support the bill.

As an MLA and legislator, I think it's my duty to debate things — bills — where I believe that money is better spent elsewhere. Taking as much time as it takes to debate what I consider needless spending is not filibustering.

This bill was assembled in a hurry. The minister's own briefing notes, spring briefing notes, describe the government as exploring options with no mention of an advocate. By July, the minister was telling Yukoners there was limited time before tabling this bill in the Sitting, and the public had little time, right in the middle of their busy summer, to respond to public consultation. Roughly a quarter of those who responded to that consultation — the very small number of total respondents — actually opposed the idea of a gun advocate, citing costs and effectiveness.

This bill was tabled three weeks after Ottawa appointed a northern chief firearms officer, with no sign it was revisited after that appointment. The government asked for a chief firearms officer, and we got one at zero cost to the Yukon — and bonus: based right here in Whitehorse. That's a win for all Yukoners and responsible gun owners. We now simply do not need a gun advocate.

The essential details of this gun advocate office have been left out of the bill and handed to the minister. Who is appointed; how they are appointed; what they are paid; any oversight; how they are removed or extended — all of it is to be set by the minister.

The Yukon already has a proven model for independent officers: the Child and Youth Advocate and the Ombudsman are appointed and removed on the recommendation of this House, and their budgets go through the all-party Members' Services Board. In Opposition, the Yukon Party defended that model. The minister's own department has briefed her that the Ombudsman recommends funding for arm's-length bodies be overseen by this Assembly, not by the Department of Justice.

Bill No. 11 does the opposite. An officer that the minister hires, funds, reviews, and that serves at the minister's pleasure is simply not at arm's length. It's an extension of the minister's office with a different name.

When asked what the office will cost, the government's answer has been that the minister will tell us after Third Reading passes. The time to discuss the cost of any bill with financial implications is long before Third Reading, not afterward. This government has told every department to constrain spending, yet it asked this House to create a new office with an undisclosed budget.

When this government opposed the federal buyback program, the minister said, "limited policing resources should be devoted to improving police services and social supports for Yukoners and targeting criminals and organized crime." I agree with that statement, so I fail to see how any money spent on a gun advocate would address any single one of those issues.

In my own community, Robert Service School began this year with no shop class teacher and remains without one because of budget constraints. Rural Yukoners have had no access to closed local medical clinics for extended periods. Youth mental health supports are stretched or non-existent across the territory. There is an affordability crisis.

With many practical, defined-need programs that would benefit with a budget increase or any budget at all, I fail to see how money spent on a gun advocate is a priority for Yukoners. Those are services with clear costs and clear results. If the cost of this advocate is as small as the government implies, it should have had no difficulty telling us how much, and yet it has not.

The government says that this bill responds to the federal Assault-Style Firearms Compensation Program, but the minister's own briefing note says the federal government is covering all the costs of that program — none have been asked

of the Yukon — and the Government of Yukon is not involved whatsoever in that federal program.

The gun advocate mentioned in this bill will have no authority over licensing, classifications, or prohibitions. Those are federal, and the federal chief firearms officer that we now have will administer them.

Our Premier can communicate with the Prime Minister. Our Minister of Justice has two federal counterparts: the public safety minister who runs this compensation program and the federal Justice minister. Our Minister of Environment can raise hunting and harvesting impacts with the federal environment minister. Our Minister of Economy, Tourism and Culture can also communicate with her federal counterpart.

As mentioned, this House passed Motion No. 54 without a dissenting vote. None of that changed Ottawa's course in regard to their federal program.

No unelected appointee gun advocate with no statutory standing in the federal system will ever have any chance of success when the Premier, his ministers, and this Assembly did not. Our Premier called Ottawa's firearm policy performative and completely ineffective. A gun advocate with no powers, no jurisdiction, no visible budget, and no measurable outcomes meets exactly that very same description.

While in Opposition and in their recent campaign literature, the Yukon Party promised firearms owners an act that would block the federal firearms buyback program. It's hard to reconcile experienced politicians promising this without understanding it is completely out of their jurisdiction to do so. Bill No. 11 does not prevent the buyback program — it simply does not — and presenting it as a fulfilment of a campaign promise does a disservice to the very people it claims to represent.

Firearms owners in the Yukon already have a voice through their MLAs, through the Yukon Fish and Game Association, through this Assembly, and through a minister whose job it is to advocate for them already. We don't need an expensive new gun advocate office with no power, no authority, no visible budget, and which serves no defined, unique purpose and doesn't even fulfill a campaign promise.

If the government believes in this office, it should table its evidence-based defined need and its cost. And if it wants the advocate to operate at arm's length, it needs to be placed under the oversight of this Assembly, like other independent officers are, as well as set measurable outcomes.

Regardless of the content of this bill, Yukoners deserve better. They deserve evidence-based decisions with practical outcomes. Until it does, I cannot support Bill No. 11.

Linda Moen: I rise today to speak to Bill No. 11, the *Yukon Firearms Act*. I want to thank all the public officials from the department who came. This isn't about their work that they were mandated to do. As a former public servant, that is your job. When a new government takes position, you are mandated to follow the work that is prescribed. You are remunerated for that regardless of your political stripes, and I want to make that very clear.

I also want to make it very clear that this isn't about First Nation harvesting rights or subsistence lifestyle. As an Indigenous person, I fully know what those are, and those were fought for, Madam Speaker. They were fought for; they were not given to us. They were not there just because they knew that we needed them. They were fought for by people prior to me, and people are still fighting for those rights. That took a lot — and I guarantee you, more than eight days of debate for us to get those rights under section 35 in the Constitution with the federal government —50-plus years, 50-plus years of countless Indigenous leaders that it took for us to have those subsistence harvesting rights prior to most members opposite being here and on this side as well.

That's not what this bill is about. This bill is about having an advocate with no budget assigned to it. I have, again, as a public servant, never seen that before. As a public servant, we got a salary envelope, and in that salary envelope was the manager's ability to hire and have staff support their department and the mandate that came down. In that salary envelope was the remuneration for the work and the duties and the responsibilities that you undertook as a public servant. You were remunerated for that, and you did not act outside the confines of that agreement, and that was something you did every year in your performance management agreement. That was your accountability; a written document between you and your manager to carry out those duties. I was remunerated for that. I was very clear about what my role and responsibility was, and had it deviated from that, I would probably ask for a reclassification.

But as we debated this bill, it became very clear and very evident that, for lack of a better word, it seems very archaic that this position may evolve. It may do this; it may do that, at the leisure of the minister deciding.

Again, as a former public servant, I have never seen such a loose role and responsibility for any public servant who would be accountable to a budget, to expenditures, to where your time is spent.

As an MLA, I fully am aware of how I'm remunerated to stand here in this Assembly, what my role and responsibility is to my constituents, to all Yukoners, whether they supported me or not.

We should have fulsome and rigorous debate about this, because it affects each and every Yukoner we are speaking of today. That's what we're here to do: to have a debate, to have an understanding. How does this work? What does it look like? What are the implications to taxpayers? We may have asked the question in different ways, because we never got a fulsome answer. There is no budget; there is no remuneration; there is no role and responsibility; there is no job description. We don't know the vetting process. We don't know who will be sitting at the hiring table. We don't know what criteria or eligibility will be used for this role. But we're supposed to just stand here and trust what this bill may or may not do because it's unprecedented and nobody else across Canada has done it. Well, maybe that's why it has not been done — because there are too many unknowns.

This isn't about us not supporting Yukoners' rights — PAL owners. I think that's the very basis that people who want to own firearms should have. A lot of people have licences, vehicle licences, but not everybody owns a vehicle. My kids — they have their licences, but they don't all own vehicles, and that's fine.

To stand here in this Assembly as somebody who is new and having a very seasoned MLA saying that we're filibustering — I have to disagree with that. I feel that is really

disheartening to somebody new like me to hear that we're not fulfilling our responsibilities — that's something I take very seriously, Madam Speaker, very seriously. The work to get here and to stand here in this role is something that not a lot of people from my community have had the ability to do. We talk about rights and responsibilities. Again — and I'll keep mentioning it — in 1962, my grandparents got to vote. It's not so far removed from us. We don't have that equality and that equity here in this House yet or in the Yukon yet.

I just heard one of the ministers talking about engagement in Energy, Mines and Resources and the lack of engagement and work that still needed to be done. The Minister of Justice mentioned there was only one women's organization that was consulted or came to the table. I don't think anybody in this House would be surprised that NGOs just don't have the capacity or the resources to have somebody take on additional responsibility like that. The amount of work to provide an evidence-based, gender-based analysis — all of that takes resources and time, and the window of engagement was so short, as the Member for Klondike mentioned. In peak season time, we're travelling, people are taking holidays, kids are off from school, and only 268 Yukoners came and only one women's organization.

Maybe it has not been impressed upon this room the fact that maybe women's groups have some fear speaking out because of the client safety, of the sensitivity of triggering their clients, of asking very sensitive information that they're dealing with. Maybe their priorities are different.

I asked the minister about her priorities and domestic violence. That's all across the North. That is something that we should be deeply remorseful and regretful about. What work and action need to be done to address that? We have the highest numbers in the Northwest Territories and in Nunavut. I would love to see a women's advocate address that. That would be something that's very measurable. It affects each and every one of us. Women make up 50 percent of our population — more than the 268 who engaged.

I look at the election data on the Elections Yukon website about the eligibility of all the voters, and Yukon Party keeps saying we have the highest numbers, but I just reviewed the numbers. Not one of them won 100 percent of their electoral votes — none of them. For Whitehorse West, there were 2,126 voters. They got 615 votes; 1,511 people did not support them. Where's their voice? How about Copperbelt North? There were 2,141 voters. They got 760 of the votes; 1,381 did not support them. Where are their voices? I have all the numbers here listed. I can maybe spend some more time on this, but I think I made my point about what real engagement looks like.

When I went campaigning and door-knocking, that was 30 days, approximately eight hours a day, to earn my place to stand here. It was 30 days, and they're complaining about eight. This is Yukon-wide.

I can't stand here in good conscience, again, as a public servant. No role, no responsibility, no budget — that would never happen in any department, Madam Speaker; I guarantee you that. It would just not be allowed, because we come back to accountability; we come back to transparency. Yukoners deserve that. That should be the very basis that we provide on behalf of Yukoners when we stand in this Assembly — that not only can we justify what this bill is to do but what it's going to cost, what it aims to achieve, who's going to benefit from it, the time that it's going to take to do a good job. Maybe if those questions were answered, it would have been a different reflection of that — maybe we may have supported it. But there are too many unknowns, and we're not standing here to be on the unknown. Show us the evidence. Show us the numbers. Give us the budget. It might have been different.

But again, as a former public servant, in my conscience, for what I know — for the 21-plus years that I was a public servant — again, I know that no department would allow that. No minister would want to take on that kind of accountability. Nobody would want to risk-manage that. This isn't about Indigenous versus non-Indigenous. Maybe that's why there are so many different opposing views and so many different issues brought up, Madam Speaker, because there is a lot of confusion. I have a lot of respect for the Indigenous members who are here; they understand that and I understand that, but that's not what this bill is about, and I don't want to make it about that.

To me, this is a bill that is very reckless in spending. I've heard members opposite use words like "prudent spending", but I don't see that measured here today or demonstrated. As somebody who is accountable to this Assembly, to budgets, to transparency, to accountability, I cannot stand here in good faith and say that this is a priority when I know that there are other programs and services that are much more deserving of that and of our time.

Kate White: I thank my colleagues on both sides of the House today for their statements. I note particularly that I welcome the members of the Yukon Party Cabinet and caucus to a conversation, because there was not a lot of talking from that side when we debated the *Residential Tenancies Act*. I bring that up because — I'm going to say this with a certain amount of confidence — we debated the *Residential Tenancies Act* longer than we debated the *Firearms Act*. I'm sure that the Minister of Community Services would probably feel like that is reflected. Going through it, I think it was probably close to 12.5 hours. In talking about things that are important to us, we did — we did definitely talk about it.

I think it's important that we heard from the Minister of Environment, the Minister of Health and Social Services, the Premier, and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources today. I think it's important that we heard from the Member for Porter Creek North, because when we talked about the RTA and how it would affect tenants across the territory, those members were mute, which says a lot.

I appreciate the Minister of Justice talking about votes that happened in the Assembly in, I think, 1994 — I was in grade 11 — important vote.

I appreciate that members were trying to figure out where this NDP Official Opposition was in a motion that was debated that we chose not to vote on for the very reasons that I said at the time.

I think about the questions that were asked, and it was interesting, in the minister's opening comments to Third Reading of this legislation, where it was insinuated that asking about trips of the firearms advocate and where they could and could not go was a bad use of time and that asking about gifts or funding or invitations and trying to understand how a person could be influenced was a bad waste of time.

I think about the description I've heard from members opposite, and it sounded like the Yukon firearms advocate would be a lobbyist, but when we asked questions trying to understand clearly what was happening during Committee of the Whole debate, we didn't get those answers, and the reason why we kept on trying to ask the questions was for a better understanding. To be perfectly frank — I said the same thing to the Minister of Community Services — if we had gotten the answers, we would have just moved on. We would have moved on.

The challenge is that we have something called the *Yukon Firearms Act* in front of us that really creates the Yukon firearms advocate, and no one is clear on what that role does because we've been told it's going to evolve. It could evolve. We've been told that it's at arm's length from the minister, and then we've been told by the minister that there will be a discussion with the person who's appointed and then they will figure out what the advocate wants to do. But that advocate will have to clear travel by the minister or will have to report so that those things can be understood. What it really brings forward is that it's not understood.

I highlighted during Committee of the Whole debate that there were two firearms enthusiasts with the minister during a press conference, and they both had two separate understandings of what the role would be. One indicated that it would be a person who would intervene on their behalf in Ottawa, and the other one thought it was a firearms lobbyist. So even internally, it's not understood.

It's so interesting to be here and to think about where the discussion has gone and the way it has gone today — no shame on this side for asking the questions, but it's interesting that it is maybe one of the intentions that's trying to be brought forward. I think that there are so many times when really truly understanding the intention or someone's intention behind something would make it easier to understand.

I understand that during the 2025 election campaign, there was a commitment, but the commitment and what we have is not the same outcome. I was trying to go through Hansard, and I think it was pretty clear at different times that it's recognized that the Yukon firearms advocate actually can't stop the federal government's legislation. That is not the avenue. When we asked more questions like: What does it do? How does this position work? How will it work? — we were really just trying to get an understanding of what it would be. When I asked the minister if the roles and responsibilities, once that person was selected, would be publicly available to Yukoners to understand, I was told no. When we asked specific questions about funding or about office space or about resources, we were told that there would be more discussion after the legislation passed. We asked when the advocate could be appointed and we were told opposites: We were told that they could be appointed before the spring budget, and we were told that there would be a budget line in the spring budget — two opposite things.

When I think about the questions that my colleagues asked, the questions that I asked, about travel, about sponsorship, about gifts, about reporting those things, about how it would be tracked and understanding whether they could travel across the country in Canada, whether they could travel outside of Canada — those are questions that are relevant when we're talking about what this position is or isn't — trying to understand.

When we're here and there have been different thoughts — and I'm not going to try to say that I understand the positioning of the Yukon Party, because I don't; go figure — often we don't understand each other, but we do occasionally. This is not one of those cases. But I will say here very clearly that I am proud of my colleagues for the questions that they asked. I'm proud of their tenacity for trying to ask in different ways to get answers to questions that were never answered and to continue to ask those questions.

Et moi, je suis fière de mon collègue francophone parce que je comprends comment c'est difficile. C'est difficile. Moi, en parlant à ce moment sans notes, sans rien d'écrit, c'est difficile, mais il fait ça chaque journée. Chaque journée, il parle anglais. I understand that is hard.

Today, in response to Bill No. 11, *Yukon Firearms Act*, I reflect on something the Minister of Justice said about the federal Liberals and their legislation when she said it was about politics, emotions, and aesthetics. I'll note again that this engagement was for a longer time than the engagement on the Yukon *Residential Landlord and Tenant Act* by a number of days. This engagement, although we've been told it is the priority for Yukoners, only had 268 responses. Consultation on the *Residential Landlord and Tenant Act* at the time in 2024 had more than 1,500 responses.

Again, I thank the members opposite who spoke today: the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, the Minister of Environment, the Minister of Health and Social Services, the Premier, and the Member for Porter Creek North. I say that because at least we know where they stand; whereas around the changes to the RTA, it was silence.

We're not going to agree. We're not going to agree a lot of times, to be frank. We're not going to agree a lot of times, and this is one of those cases. But as this goes forward and as the advocate is appointed and as Yukoners try to figure out what they do and do not do, we will be asking questions, because that is our responsibility. Our job here is to ask questions to try to get a better understanding. There's no shame in that.

I thank my colleagues for participating today and every day. I welcome more members from the Yukon Party to speak in favour of this legislation so they can tell us that it's important to them and what they understand it will do. Because I would say that today we've heard more concrete answers in what this position may or may not do than we did in debate in Committee of the Whole.

There was the insinuation that we spent more time on firearms than we did on the RTA and: Where was our attention? I still maintain we spoke more about the RTA than we did about the firearms advocate. Just like the RTA, we're going to have more questions as we go forward.

I welcome other members to this conversation. Put it down on paper. Stand up. Make sure your constituents can understand why you're saying what you're saying — those who voted for you, those who support it, those who don't — because I stand by my words. Like my colleagues, I will not be voting in favour of Bill No. 11.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Laura Lang: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the members of this House for providing their respective thoughts.

As part of my closing remarks, I would like to remind all Yukoners that I do see the Yukon and our voice as mighty, as tenacious. To say or question that this legislation will not have any impact on the federal government or their program development neglects reflection of what our influences have been, including to the now-removed long-gun registry — we've recently seen this tenacious voice avail the North with a Whitehorse-based chief firearms program and officer, and we have seen the three territories unite a northern voice on this issue to the federal government. I do see that this bill, this preamble, and this position will also help the North realize a different conversation with our federal partners.

I extend my gratitude to the Department of Justice for diligently and quickly bringing this bill forward. I do appreciate that the speed at which this bill was created and is now being tabled was a rather mighty lift. Again, I extend my thanks to the Department of Justice. I also extend my gratitude to Yukoners who have patiently waited for us to table this bill to find another way to bring voice to the Yukon.

I also thank Yukoners who remain curious about what this position will do. I am confident that as we work to bring the advocate online, we will do so reflecting on what questions have been asked of us and, I realize, ought to be clearly communicated.

I would like to end with words that I spoke originally in this House. Responsible firearm use is a core part of our northern culture and livelihoods. Traditional activities like hunting, trapping, target shooting, being on the land, and using firearms safely for remote wilderness protection are fundamental to the northern way of life for thousands of Yukoners. These activities support survival and nutritional needs across the territory.

Several years ago, the federal government began taking increasingly irresponsible steps to target responsible, law-abiding firearms owners. This troubling trend of politically motivated policy, programs, and prohibitions was completely disconnected from our northern way of life.

We are committed to making Yukon communities safer. The federal government's Assault-Style Firearms Compensation Program and prohibitions will not achieve this goal. Instead, what it will do is cost and is costing taxpayers the better part of a billion dollars. This confiscation program is not being applied to criminals. It is exclusively targeting trained, vetted, licence-holding Yukoners who have followed the law.

Our government has consistently advocated and will continue to advocate on behalf of Yukon and northern firearms owners, and I am proud today to see that this House is having debate on the final chapter of this bill.

I look forward to hearing concerns from Yukoners. I also look forward to hearing positive remarks from Yukoners. But more importantly, I am really looking forward to hiring the advocate and putting in place the voice which Yukoners have asked to bring forward their northern identity and their northern perspective to those tables which I cannot advocate at, my deputy cannot advocate at, and the Premier cannot advocate at.

All in all, when it comes to the spring debate on our budget, I also look forward to questions being asked at that time about what this advocate's position will be, including what the funding formula will be for that.

Again, thank you to all Yukoners who have taken time to invest their thoughts, their pen to paper, and their communication in grocery stores, at the parks, along the roads, et cetera, about what this will mean to them. I hope that we do service to them in the way that I suspect this bill will do, and that is, again, bringing voice to our northern way of life.

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. Cory Bellmore: 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: Agree.

Acting Deputy Clerk: Madam Speaker, the results are 14 yea, six nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it.
I declare the motion carried and that Bill No. 11 has passed this House.

Motion for Third Reading of Bill No. 11 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

Bill No. 204 — *Second Appropriation Act 2026-27 — continued*

Vote 55 — Department of Highways and Public Works — *continued*

Chair: The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 204, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2026-27*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 204, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2026-27*.

Hon. Linda Benoit: Once again, I have Deputy Minister Tracy Allen and the ADM of Corporate Services, Richard Gorczyca, with me. I would like to thank them for being here today.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I'm just going to ask a question in regard to the Yukon First Nation procurement policy review. The tender for the review recently closed, and even if the contract hasn't been awarded, can the minister share the final scope?

Hon. Linda Benoit: As the member opposite mentioned, the RFP has closed and it is a negotiated RFP. Our officials are working with the proponents right now, and we're hoping to award the contract by January. The scope is part of that negotiation, but it is based on the input from the evaluation committee that was struck prior to that tender going out, and the evaluation committee is made up of members of industry and Yukon First Nations.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Thank you to the minister for that answer. When the review is finished, will the report be made public?

Hon. Linda Benoit: I thank the member opposite for their question. Absolutely, the review will be a public-facing process, and the results will be made public.

Debra-Leigh Reti: My next question is just in regard to capital planning. The Minister of Education had told the House that his department prioritizes capital projects through the five-year capital plan. Is Highways and Public Works still using that same plan?

Hon. Linda Benoit: Both Education and Highways and Public Works have their own capital planning processes and their own capital plans. They're not necessarily connected, although we do some capital projects for Education in terms of project management and building work on buildings that we own.

Debra-Leigh Reti: In April, the minister couldn't say which HPW projects had been taken out of the five-year capital plan. Can she tell us now which projects have been removed or deferred?

Hon. Linda Benoit: The budgeting process is a Management Board process that's subject to Cabinet confidentiality. We have, as the members opposite are aware, recently passed the fall capital plan, so that gives you a hint of what is to come for next year's capital planning. But the rest of that process is done with input from Management Board and within our fiscal situation.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Just to continue on with that one, then, can the minister share if the department is working on a new long-term capital plan, and if so, when will that be made public?

Hon. Linda Benoit: We don't publicize a capital plan. We do tendering forecasts. Now we've got the fall capital budget, but the budget is essentially our capital plan.

Debra-Leigh Reti: In regard to local agriculture, what progress has the department made on using government purchasing to support local agriculture?

Hon. Linda Benoit: I did answer this question to the Official Opposition in the last debate.

We do have six local food producers currently in the online marketplace. We've also been working with the Department of Health and Social Services on some of their bigger contracts where they are incorporating local vendors and local food producers into their larger contracts. We are making some progress that way.

Debra-Leigh Reti: In April, the minister mentioned an online marketplace for local food purchases.

Is this running, and how much local food has government bought through it?

Hon. Linda Benoit: To date in 2026-27, we have processed approximately $273,000 in purchases from local suppliers in the online marketplace, and that includes six local food producers.

Debra-Leigh Reti: That's really great to hear.

Just a question in regard to the Old Crow winter road. In April, the minister said that HPW would be happy to work with VGFN on the 2027 winter road.

What conversations or planning have happened since then?

Hon. Linda Benoit: VGFN officials have indicated that a winter road is in the planning stages, and we're waiting for more information and more contact from their officials.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Can the minister share if she's aware of what projects on the Yukon Government side the road is meant to support? For example, the diesel plant and landfill backhaul. I would suspect that these conversations are happening in preparation.

If she could just share on that, please.

Hon. Linda Benoit: My department doesn't currently have any projects on the go in Old Crow or anticipated that require materials. However, we would work with Community Services and other departments to organize any materials that they need to bring up. The other pieces — there could be old equipment and old materials that we might have to bring out that we would take advantage of the timing on that.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I would suggest it's probably a good time to get on it for the fact that the winter road planning takes a bit, and knowing what we're going to be hauling out, there's always backhaul. If the minister comes to Old Crow, I can show her all of it.

Just a question regarding the Old Crow main road that I asked probably last fall and in the spring too. Regarding work on the main road in Old Crow, on October 13, the minister clarified that the current design work is for the airport drainage and that the main road is separate.

What work, if any, is underway on the main road itself or planned to be?

Hon. Linda Benoit: We do continue to provide road maintenance and snow-clearing services in Old Crow, including on the main road. We prioritize access to essential services such as the health centre, the school, and other key community facilities, and routine maintenance will continue, including snow removal during the winter months and road-blading throughout the spring and summer.

Debra-Leigh Reti: As you know, I'm inquiring in view of the fact that we're going to go through winter again and then spring and that main road along the river is deteriorating.

My question is then, since I've brought this forward since last year: Will the work on the main road, especially at the end of the airport where it's deteriorating, be in the spring capital budget?

Hon. Linda Benoit: We are going through our budgeting process now, and that and many other road projects across the territory that are affected by flooding and water erosion will be among the projects that we have to consider.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Thank you to the minister. I'll follow up with that.

I have some questions in regard to the airport screening, and a lot of these questions are coming from the fact that there are some articles out in regard to this now.

I'm just wondering if the minister can share with me if she's heard back from the federal Minister of Public Safety since her October letter on airport screening.

Hon. Linda Benoit: I have not heard back yet, but I would expect to soon, and if I don't, I will follow up again.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Is the minister able to share thoughts on how that working group is going to be set up, who would sit on it for the Yukon, and have they met yet?

Hon. Linda Benoit: I'm not going to try to guess how the federal government is going to form the committee that they're speaking of, but we've asked to be involved in some way, so I will keep the member opposite posted as we know more.

Debra-Leigh Reti: We've had questions from some of my constituents from Vuntut Gwitchin in Old Crow, and they're very concerned if Vuntut Gwitchin will have a seat at the table along with the minister and in regard to this working group. I'm hoping that maybe as we connect more, we can work on that together.

Would the minister be willing to table the letters that she sent in May and October and the federal replies from June?

Hon. Linda Benoit: I'll certainly consider it. I also want to add that both the federal ministers involved in this correspondence are clear on having First Nation involvement, so I would just about guarantee the member opposite that there would be Vuntut Gwitchin representation involved. I do believe it will be more of an officials-level working group and likely not at my level, but again, I'll keep the member opposite posted on all of that.

Debra-Leigh Reti: If the minister could just share whether she's willing to table those letters that she sent in May and October and the federal reply from June.

Hon. Linda Benoit: I'll repeat that I'll certainly take it under consideration.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I guess I misunderstood that; sorry.

Is the minister aware if the three territories are making a joint request or is each one just writing separately in regard to the airport screening?

Hon. Linda Benoit: We at the officials level and the deputy level have been in touch with the other northern colleagues, and we're certainly on the same page with regard to that issue. I also had the opportunity to speak with my other territorial counterparts when I was at a meeting in February with them, so I know that we are all on the same page on this issue.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Inuvik is building a new terminal, and the NWT minister had said she's open to including screening in the design. Has the minister talked to her about timing?

Hon. Linda Benoit: We haven't spoken with any ministers in the NWT about their terminal building.

Debra-Leigh Reti: The minister of economy had said that the cost should not fall on airlines or communities for this project. Is the government's position that Ottawa pays for all of it?

Hon. Linda Benoit: I would just let the member opposite know that this is very early days, and we're asking to have a committee formed, a working group formed, made of officials and everyone involved. It is way too soon to start talking about that kind of thing.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Yes, I do understand it's early days. It's really important to have a lot of these questions either answered or on the table as we start to prepare. Thinking about a project like this and I know with the federals, the answer could take years. I understand how the process works.

My question is: What can the department do in the meantime at the Whitehorse airport for flights heading north,

really, to help the situation that we're dealing with and why I brought this forward in the first place in regard to the amount of drugs that are coming to our northern communities?

Hon. Linda Benoit: I would let the member opposite know that screening at the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport is done with the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority, and decisions regarding enhanced passenger baggage screening at northern airports fall within federal jurisdiction, as do the *Criminal Code* and drug law and that kind of thing. We're really waiting on them to be the lead on this. We're complying with all federal regulations in our security protocols, and that's what we're doing right now.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I do understand the process through CATSA. I'm just trying to look for something else that we can do in the meantime, because this is serious. If it's not Old Crow, it's another community that is losing people day by day. If anyone's paying attention to the news in the Yukon, our opioid deaths are rising again, and that's why I have these questions.

As Yukoners, we can't wait for the federal government. I understand this process requires them. I understand that, but there's got to be more that we can do as a territorial government.

Will the minister commit to updating the House or me directly when she hears back from Ottawa in regard to the plans for this committee or any other news or information?

Hon. Linda Benoit: I would be happy to update the member opposite when I hear back.

Debra-Leigh Reti: That will conclude my questions for today. I just want to thank the minister and thank the officials for supporting today.

Justin Ziegler: The last time I stood up during this debate with the minister and their official of Highways and Public Works, we talked about the CAR station and we talked about the fact that there was nobody currently working in the Old Crow CAR station. I wanted to know if the department was implementing some training built into the hiring process.

Hon. Linda Benoit: There's absolutely training built into hiring. The challenge is to find staff who want to live in Old Crow and work there.

Justin Ziegler: I just want to take a minute to talk about Nav Canada. When you become an air traffic controller for Nav Canada — which I highly encourage everybody to do — it is a great career — you are hired for a two-year training program, and then you go back to your community to work air traffic control.

I was wondering if this is the same process — hiring someone from Old Crow and then sending these candidates to Faro or Dawson City or somewhere else to do the training and then go back to Old Crow to hold the CAR station — is that something that the department is looking at in order to make sure that people of Old Crow have the same opportunity instead of shipping someone from somewhere else?

Hon. Linda Benoit: I actually have some personal experience with this. I used to work at the CAR station in both Faro and Teslin, so I can tell you that potential CARS operators are sent out to school in the Northwest Territories. By my recollection, the training is somewhere between 13 and 15 weeks, and it is hands-on training. It is all the radio training, all the weather training. You do real weather observations the whole time that you're there. You're trained, and when you come back, there is a requirement to train on-site for your specific aerodrome's features and landscape.

That training is provided, and certainly, if there are folks in Old Crow interested, I would encourage them to apply; there are jobs posted. I think what we are looking for at this point is more someone who wants to be there and do the job, because they can be trained.

Justin Ziegler: I agree with the minister. It would be a very rewarding career, and I encourage everybody in Old Crow to apply. I hope the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin is going to advertise these positions, especially that there's training linked to the position, because it's a very rewarding career.

My question about the CAR station now is — medevacs rely on the CAR stations to get weather reports, strip reports, and to be in touch with the ground when there is a medevac in a community. What happens when there is no staff working in the CAR station for medevac?

Hon. Linda Benoit: It depends on which aerodrome you're talking about. If you are talking about Old Crow specifically, there is weather information available there. Obviously, the decision to land a flight lies with the flight provider. It is not our decision unless we've NOTAMed the runway for too much snow to land or something like that. It is up to the medevac operator to decide whether conditions allow them to land or not.

If there are CARS operators available on call in other communities, they will be called out to do that weather observation. But there is automated weather in some stations and there is not in others. As well, in some cases, it depends on the lighting configuration and a bunch of things like that whether you can land unattended at night.

Justin Ziegler: My next question is still about medevac. I would like to know: As per the contract, how much time does the operator have from an EMS call to take off for a medevac out of Old Crow?

Hon. Linda Benoit: That would be a question better asked to the Minister of Health and Social Services.

Justin Ziegler: It's 30 minutes. Once EMS calls Alkan Air, which is the sole medevac provider, they have 30 minutes to take off. Within these 30 minutes, the role of the operator, as the minister said, is to make sure that they're going to send their own crew — that is, two pilots and an EMS crew, which is usually two people — to collect someone in need of care in Old Crow.

Within these 30 minutes, they are taking the responsibility to put four lives at risk potentially. They need eyes on the ground, and these eyes would provide strip condition, weather condition, all of these pieces that the pilot needs before filing a flight plan to know if landing in Old Crow will be safe so that they can save a life. This needs to happen within 30 minutes.

When there are no CAR operators, the operator relies on other streams. I know that Air North is providing some

information when it's about Old Crow, but for other communities, this luxury doesn't exist. What are the options if there is no CAR station for a medevac provider to make sure that things are safe to operate?

Hon. Linda Benoit: Ultimately, again, the pilots and the flight provider make the decision on what's a safe landing. Pilots will rely on the last available weather information that they have. As far as operationally what happens within EMS from there, if a pilot thinks they can't land, whether the airport is manned or not or there's a person there or not, those decisions in that process would be led by EMS.

Justin Ziegler: I don't have any more questions. I just wanted to point out that having nobody in a CAR station can potentially have consequences on services such as medevac. I just wanted to make sure that it was on the record and I know first-hand that the operator is doing everything they can to make sure that they have eyes on the strip, on the weather, on the ground, and I know that they will do everything to save a life — this is what they do best. I just wanted to thank the minister for her answer.

Kate White: I have a couple of questions about fleet vehicles. Can the minister walk me through if the Department of Highways and Public Works is responsible for all fleet vehicles in different departments or maintenance of those fleet vehicles? Can you just walk me through how fleet vehicles operate?

Hon. Linda Benoit: The Fleet Vehicle Agency is a central agency that operates within the Yukon Government that does look after all of the fleet vehicles across government, including maintenance and renting and allocating and working with departments to decide who needs what and that kind of thing.

Kate White: I appreciate that, because I was just trying to get a sense as to whether or not I should ask questions in each department.

I appreciate that response from the minister. When talking about fleet vehicles, so as an example, home care is an essential service, and home care in the city of Whitehorse operates outside of the city of Whitehorse, and I have heard concerns from some folks that have to access those fleet vehicles that there are preferred winter vehicles over others, and the reason why they're preferred is because some have winter tires and some do not.

When we think about putting a public servant in a car and asking them to drive — so then, it's a workers' compensation issue; it's a safety issue; it's all these things. I am curious and maybe concerned at the same time as to whether or not there is a policy for winter tires on all Yukon Government vehicles. In my preference, I would say studded tires, because they're best for many people who spend time on the highways.

We understand why that's important — for the very least, winter-rated, so not all-season tires, ones that are rated for cold temperatures, because we understand that the ratings on tires have to do with the flexibility of the rubber, and so tires designed for winter are different than all-season tires. What is the policy around winter tires on fleet vehicles?

Hon. Linda Benoit: I thank the member opposite for their patience while they wait for some answers about that very operational question. Fleet Vehicle Agency's operational standard is to purchase dedicated winter-rated tires for fleet vehicles. If there are public servants out there with any concerns, I suggest that they work through their supervisor to contact fleet vehicles and see what they can do.

Kate White: Is there an audit then that's done to the vehicles that Highways and Public Works is responsible for? Being responsible for the maintenance is important. You would understand, for example, the oil change schedule or other fluid changes. Does the Fleet Vehicle Agency maintain a schedule to change from summer tires into winter tires, or are winter tires used all season round? How does that work?

Hon. Linda Benoit: The maintenance is tracked and is done as close to the time it's required as possible. That information is tracked and looked at during those regular maintenance schedules.

Kate White: I appreciate that the minister said that if there was a public servant who was concerned about the safety of their fleet vehicle, for example, winter tires, that they could let someone know.

I think yes, and I appreciate that response, but the reality is sometimes it can be more challenging than that, and so is there an audit that's done? Does the department make sure? Do they bring in fleet vehicles once a year to ensure that things are tip-top?

I think about, for example, those that travel the highways in winter. I can think about social workers who are based in rural Yukon who drive to other communities, social workers based in Whitehorse who do the circuit between Carcross, Teslin, and Watson Lake, home care nurses, and others. I'm sure there are going to be so many more than I just said. But understanding that sometimes reporting those concerns of safety is more challenging.

Is there an auditing process to ensure that the folks who do this important work are in vehicles that are safe?

Hon. Linda Benoit: The fleet vehicles are maintained through regular preventive maintenance and inspection programs. We've got qualified mechanics who maintain and inspect those vehicles, and we use private sector garages also where appropriate. I would note that departments are responsible for getting their vehicles in per the maintenance sticker that's in the vehicle.

Kate White: I appreciate that. I'm going to go a little bit further. Is there a mechanism within the department that, for example, could help other departments ensure that their winter tires are on for their employees? To be frank, it's not the first time I've heard concerns about tires on a Yukon Government vehicle.

It's happened a lot over the years, and so is there a mechanism in which the minister can support her colleagues in ensuring that their employees are in vehicles with appropriate tires?

Hon. Linda Benoit: One of our health and safety requirements is that workers do a pre-trip inspection on their

vehicles, and if they were to find anything deficient — there's a fleet contact in each department — I would encourage them to contact that person or even call fleet themselves.

There are 600-plus vehicles out there, so we do have to rely on those driving them sometimes to get that information in.

Kate White: In mentioning the pre-trip inspection, is there a log that needs to be signed or anything that needs to be done prior to someone using it? The reason I'm asking is if, for example, there's a check mark next to concerns around tires, but it doesn't go anywhere except for into a logbook — I'm just trying to get a sense on how that's documented, and so I'm just trying to get a sense of what that looks like.

Hon. Linda Benoit: Given the level of detail about the health and safety program that the member opposite is asking about, I would have to get back to the member with more information.

Kate White: I'll just note here that I'd be happy for more information. At a different point, it can be via e-mail; It can be a legislative return. The reason I'm asking is because we all have a responsibility. The ministers, especially as employers — I don't employ anyone in the same direct way and so don't have the same responsibility. It's just trying to make sure that people have access to the safety equipment that they need.

The minister did mention that if there was anyone who had concerns, they could call fleet themselves, and so I just want to understand that mechanism better, because I want to make sure that if we put this out here and someone says something to me and I say: Oh, you should call fleet yourself — that they don't get into trouble.

If the minister can walk me through what that would look like, because if it's supposed to be reporting to someone who's above or someone else within a department, I want to get a sense to make sure that I don't get anyone in trouble if I ask them to report something.

Hon. Linda Benoit: As I suggested the first time, it's probably best if employees contact their supervisors. But the member opposite indicated that maybe that's not appropriate in some cases. Obviously, if someone feels unsafe in a vehicle, I'd rather have them contact fleet directly or their fleet person in their department than not contact anybody.

Kate White: It's not so much that it's not appropriate to report it to where it's supposed to go, but sometimes there are challenges. Challenges exist. There's no way that in 15 years I've heard about tires without there being mechanisms to report it that should have been reported. There are problems somewhere. It's just trying to get a better understanding.

Can the minister let me know how many apprentices work for the department and in what branches specifically?

Hon. Linda Benoit: If the member opposite is looking for a listing of all trades, I will definitely have to get a legislative return to get that information back to them.

Kate White: That would be awesome, because that would mean there would be more than five. That would be a phenomenal thing.

The reason why I was asking about apprentices is I believe that there is — and I'm going to get it wrong — one department or one shop that is underneath the minister's responsibility that's done a really good job of both recruiting and nurturing apprentices. I say this as a person who was an apprentice, who is a journeyman, next to my colleague who is also a journeyperson, understanding the important role of apprentices for the minister's colleagues. Some of them will know that I've asked this question many times when they were in government and asked in Opposition, because really, trades training can't just be the responsibility of the private sector. There's also a role.

I'll put this here. I can't imagine that we're going to be back in highways this fall. But I will note that there are a lot of things to celebrate in the Department of Highways and Public Works when it comes to some transformational things that have happened with apprentices. I hope that could be a happy story that gets shared here at some point.

But as far as — am I interested in knowing all of the apprentices across the board; I sure am. Knowing that there are more than 50 ticketed trades in the territory and many of those trades work for Yukon Government and over the years there have not been apprentices in those roles, the more we can bring on, the better. I would consider that a success if it's more than one branch and it's more than one trade. Like I said, I would definitely cheer her. I welcome that. But I think this would be something that the minister could celebrate in a public way. I also welcome that.

I have some questions about property maintenance, and I just want to confirm that I'm talking to the right minister about property maintenance.

Hon. Linda Benoit: We do property maintenance for all of the buildings that we own. There are many buildings that we lease as well. If we start talking about schools, there are some nuances there and some things that the Department of Education is responsible for.

Kate White: Can the minister give us an idea of how many buildings are owned by Yukon Government? I realize that is going to be a large number, but I'm curious as to the number that are owned versus the number that are rented. She may not have the number for the number rented, but I am interested in the number of owned buildings.

Hon. Linda Benoit: We do own and maintain over 560 buildings across the Yukon. Now, some of those buildings might be storage sheds or that kind of thing, so they may not all be buildings with people in them.

I don't have a number for leases here yet. If someone can pull it up for me while I'm still here, I'll share it.

Kate White: I appreciate that answer from the minister.

Recently, we were having a conversation around procurement and contracting of and within Yukon Government, and I'll note that there was a report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Yukon Legislative Assembly on procurement and contracting for Government of Yukon in 2024, and I know that the department has been doing updates.

Can the minister give me an idea of where the department is on the recommendations made both by the Public Accounts Committee but also on the recommendations of the Auditor General of Canada?

Hon. Linda Benoit: Just to backtrack to the previous question here for a moment, we have 73 leased facilities currently.

Then on to the current question: there were five recommendations, I believe, in the Auditor General's report. Yes, and we accepted all of them. Two are complete; three are underway. I could probably find some more detail on that information to get back to the member opposite, as I don't have the report in front of me.

Kate White: I will note that the Clerk of Committees was very helpful in trying to get that link back up, but I will also note that it did not work right now.

The reason why I was asking about an update on the recommendations is because it's an ongoing thing. Unfortunately, I'll also say that I am not going to remember all of them, but I think they may have been demonstrating a competitive environment, talking about contracts and the need for them to be signed ahead of work being started and real or perceived conflicts of interest in monitoring outcomes.

The reason why I'm asking for an update to those is that this was part of improving the process and transparency for Yukon contractors and folks who are doing bidding on that work. I appreciate that the minister said that two were completed, and I will just honestly say right now that I am Googling a lot to try to figure out which two are completed.

But if the minister has additional information on, for example, the reviews of the other three, including talks about the two that are completed, that would be helpful only for the context of folks who — I don't know why they would be listening right now, but if they were, that they could follow along. It's just to try to bring more context into what the conversation is as opposed to saying "two out of five".

If we could talk about which they are, that will also be helpful for me, because although I was there, I do not remember.

Hon. Linda Benoit: The two recommendations that are complete were around the stronger procurement documentation as well as the conflict-of-interest certification before work begins. There's new documentation in place that's required as well as the conflict-of-interest certification prior to work beginning.

Work continues on performance measurement, reporting, and benchmarking, including new tools to monitor procurement processes and outcomes. Some of that, as the member opposite mentioned, is ongoing because it is ongoing before we declare it complete, and some of it, we are still working on with affected partners.

Kate White: I'll note that there were recommendations made by Public Accounts as well, and I would anticipate that there have been responses to that, but even in a return or an e-mail to my colleague the critic for Highways and Public Works, that would be helpful. It's just trying to get a sense of where things are and where they're going, which I think is important.

One of the things that the government has talked about — and I'm just going to ask the minister to remind me, because it's quite possibly her colleague the Minister of Community Services. But it has to do with building standards, and if she could just remind me if that is her responsibility or Community Services, and it'll save me from asking more questions unnecessarily.

Hon. Linda Benoit: The member opposite is correct in asking, as that is the responsibility of Community Services.

Kate White: I just want to thank the minister and her officials. I will say here — because I didn't ask the question in the Assembly, because it felt weird — but I would like to congratulate or thank the minister for the responsiveness to questions, for example, via e-mail or in less formal settings than in the Legislative Assembly, because there are often times when we're in Opposition, we're just trying to ask for an understanding or clarity; we're trying to get something actioned without it having to be escalated in a really ginormous way.

I will note that one of the things I asked about was a weird section of sidewalk being cleared in Takhini off of Range Road, because the City of Whitehorse plow guy told me that they used to do it until Yukon Government told them to stop. The reason I mention this is that the minister and her officials have taken my concern seriously, and I can report to my neighbours in Takhini that soon we will be able to pedal safely on that one hill on Range Road, and I appreciate it.

Thank you to the officials for their time today and the minister and my colleague the critic for Highways and Public Works and my other colleagues for asking questions. I look forward to finding out more about winter tires, apprentice numbers in the future, and different things that can be celebrated within the department.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works?

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

Unanimous consent to deem all lines in Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, cleared or carried

Brent McDonald: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of the Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, cleared or carried, as required.

Chair: The Member for Klondike has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of the Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of $2,026,000 agreed to

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of nil agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of $2,026,000 agreed to

Department of Highways and Public Works agreed to

Hon. Scott Kent: Madam Chair, I move that you report progress.

Chair: It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

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

Chair: 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 Chair of Committee of the Whole?

Chair's report

Patti McLeod: Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 204, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2026-27*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

Hon. Scott Kent: I move that the House do now adjourn.

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:14 p.m.

The following sessional papers were tabled today:

SP-36-1-69
Yukon Heritage Resources Board — Annual Report — April 1, 2025–March 31, 2026 (Gehmair)

SP-36-1-70
Yukon Arts Centre — Annual Report 2025/26 (Gehmair)

The following filed document was tabled today:

FD-36-1-39
Yukon Geographical Place Names Board Annual Report 2025-2026 (Gehmair)

Written notice was given of the following motions today:

Motion No. 207
Re Appointments to the Yukon Human Rights Commission (Lang)

Motion No. 208
Re Reappointment to the Yukon Human Rights Panel of Adjudicators (Lang)