Yukon Legislative Assembly

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HANSARD

Wednesday, November 18, 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

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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

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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

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Wednesday, November 18, 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

Unanimous consent for Tributes to exceed 20 minutes

Hon. Scott Kent: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3 and notwithstanding Standing Order 11(6), I request the unanimous consent of the House for the time allotted for the rubric Tributes to exceed 20 minutes.

Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3 and notwithstanding Standing Order 11(6), the Government House Leader has requested the unanimous consent of the House for the time allotted for the rubric Tributes to exceed 20 minutes.
Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Unanimous consent has been granted.

TRIBUTES

In remembrance of Margaret Commodore (Joe)

Kate White: It is with great honour that I stand on behalf of the Yukon NDP Official Opposition to celebrate Margaret Muriel Commodore: trail-blazer, champion, government minister, and most important, beloved mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, auntie, and friend. Margaret packed so much living into her 93 years.

Her earliest memories were from Deep Bay, a sandspit on the BC coast. It was a paradise for Margaret and the kids around her. The hundred or so houses that were clustered around the factory were full of families from near and far, and that made the community so special: cousins, aunts, uncles, and immigrants from many parts of the world. Alongside the Commodores and the Prests lived Indigenous families from Fort Rupert, a significant Japanese community, and workers from China, Germany, Italy, and beyond. It was a beautiful cultural melting pot.

The children of Deep Bay saw no differences between them. They played together across every boundary their parents' world might have drawn. For Margaret, Deep Bay was her happy place. It was also the place that first showed Margaret what the world could be when people created connection and community instead of erecting very real walls from imaginary boundaries.

In 1939, when she was seven, Margaret began attending the Coqualeetza Residential School near her family's home community of Soowahlie. When that school closed a year later, Margaret was taken from her family and placed in the Alberni Indian Residential School. After the Alberni years, she attended a public day school but found it difficult to adapt to the less regimented school environment. She chose to end her education and returned to the Coqualeetza, now being run as a TB hospital. She spent the remainder of her younger years working in the laundromat, and it was here that she would start her journey in nursing.

In 1956, when in her early 20s, Margaret was invited to a friend's wedding in Whitehorse. With a population near 5,000 people and the Canadian military as the single biggest employer, it was a great place to be as an independent and adventurous young woman. The ballroom dances, baseball, fishing, and more suited Margaret so well that she stayed for two years before returning south to her family. The North had made its mark, and she knew that she would be back.

Much happened upon her return to BC. She got married, had two beautiful daughters, got divorced, and lost her Indian status because her ex was not Indigenous. This loss of status meant that she could not live on her home reserve. There were some tough years for the single-parent family as Margaret took practical nurse training and worked at various hospitals in the Lower Mainland. Despite the challenges, she never wavered in working toward the future she wanted for her children.

In 1965, Margaret, Jackie, and Trace came north when she was offered the nursing supervisor position at Yukon Hall in Whitehorse. It was the perfect opportunity for this family of three. Margaret met and fell in love with Yukoner Bobby Joe, got married, and together, they welcomed daughter Sheila. It was here in the Yukon that she would raise her family and build her life.

Margaret never forgot what she learned in Deep Bay about the importance of connection and community, and it was during those early nursing years that those lessons became apparent in her activism. It started with things like fundraising for dances for the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre or for floats for the Sourdough Rendezvous Parade, and in the early 1970s, the status/non-status issue couldn't be ignored. Her activism rose to meet the challenge, and Margaret helped found YANSI, the Yukon Association for Non-Status Indians, giving voice to people like herself who had been rendered legally invisible by their own country's laws. She broke trail as the first female to serve in an executive position in any non-status organization in the country when she served as a member of the executive from 1971 to 1978.

By 1974, she was part of the group establishing the Yukon Indian Women's Association. One of the first issues this group tackled was the disrespect shown to First Nation burial grounds. The Yukon government had been treating these sacred places as tourist attractions. They held demonstrations and made sure that decision-makers heard them. Even though it took years, they never wavered. You can still see their success throughout the Yukon with signs posted near burial grounds and spirit houses reminding visitors of the sacredness and respect required.

The association also worked to establish a transition place for women fleeing domestic violence. Kaushee's Place has since given safety and dignity to thousands of Yukon women in crisis. In 1985, the association added their voices and stories in support of Bill C-31, amendments to the *Indian Act* to restore

the rights to women and children who had lost their Indigenous status through marriage to non-Indigenous men.

During these years, Margaret was often intervening on behalf of those who had been abused or wronged by the police or the justice system, and in 1980, a judge encouraged her to apply to become a Justice of the Peace. She took the training, did the required exam, and became the first Indigenous JP in the territory. This role allowed her to help those who appeared in court, most of whom she knew and whose life experiences were like her own. Her efforts were directed to keeping those before her out of jail whenever possible. Margaret was so well known by Yukoners that it wasn't uncommon for the persons appearing before her to call her by her first name before remembering to call her "Your Honour".

Margaret was recruited by Tony Penikett to run alongside him in the New Democratic Party during the 1982 Yukon general election. She beat the incumbent and won her seat for Whitehorse North Centre. She first entered the Yukon Legislative Assembly as a member of the Official Opposition. Her election was not surprising. Margaret had always lived her values. She never sat silently when she witnessed an unfairness. She put her energy into things she cared about, and through her activism and volunteerism, she knew almost everyone in her riding. In her inaugural speech in this Assembly, she signalled that she would be very verbal and outspoken on the issues she cared about, and indeed she was.

In 1985, Margaret's name was back on the ballot, and she, along with seven others, formed Yukon's first NDP government. When she was named Minister of Health and Human Resources, she became the first-ever First Nation woman to hold a Cabinet position in Canada. Margaret's career in Cabinet was not tokenism. Premier Tony Penikett relied heavily on Margaret and described her as smart, enormously sensible, and tough.

She continued to prove just how capable she was. She was re-elected again during the 1989 election, and when Premier Tony Penikett named her the Minister of Justice, Margaret again was breaking trail, because at every level of government — provincial, territorial, or federal — in the entire history of this country, she was the very first Indigenous woman to serve as Minister of Justice.

Margaret dove into the files that she was handed, and she got things done. She worked across Health and Human Resources, the Women's Directorate, the Public Service Commission, Workers' Compensation, the Yukon Liquor Corporation, and Justice. Under Margaret, the Yukon was the first jurisdiction in Canada to put warning labels about fetal alcohol syndrome on liquor bottles.

Her work on child welfare issues emphasized the family as the centre of any child protection plan, leading to similar agreements being put in place across the country. Margaret made Yukon a leader in this area. Margaret implemented the territory's social services home care program and established another to bring home Yukoners with disabilities who had been forced to live Outside because of inadequate facilities and supports. It was her leadership that saw the NDP government establish the early childhood education program at the college, a program that continues to this day.

In her political work, she was making changes that had a direct impact on the lives of women, particularly the lives of Indigenous women and single mothers. Margaret fought hard to make childcare accessible for those working outside the home, knowing that without this kind of support, they could not fully participate in public life. This was something Margaret understood not as an abstraction but as lived experience. She wanted to make sure that all Yukon women had the opportunities they deserved. When learning about the inadequate care being provided at the daycare where one of her granddaughters was to attend, she understood that this couldn't be an isolated case. Insistent that regardless of a family's circumstance, every child deserved better protection, she launched a review of childcare standards across the territory. This led to changes, better standards of care, and better outcomes for all Yukon children.

Margaret's political career was also unfolding during one of the most consequential periods in Yukon history: the push toward the *Umbrella Final Agreement*, the hard-won negotiations of modern treaties, the assertion of Indigenous rights. Margaret carried that fight into the Legislature itself, using her voice to speak her truth and counter the overtly racist narratives that too often filled this very Chamber. She helped to redefine the role of the Yukon government in such negotiations, switching it from defending the rights of the territory's non-Indigenous population and the interests of the resource development sector to an approach that argued that the settling of land claims was not only the right thing to do morally but also a path forward that could and would benefit all Yukoners. Her efforts contributed to the 1989 signing of the land claim agreement in principle.

Margaret truly believed that politics was about public service. Her genuine care and love for the people she represented and all Yukoners did not go unnoticed. She ran and won in four separate elections, serving from 1982 until 1996, and for 30 years until this past spring, she held the record as the longest serving woman in Yukon political history.

Margaret's public service went far beyond politics. She was a force behind the Yukon Indian Hockey Association, understanding again that community is built on frozen ponds and ball diamonds as much as in chambers of government.

For all her achievements in public life, some of the most enduring lessons she shared happened out on the ball field where she was known as Mugsy. Fastball wasn't a hobby; it was a way of life for the whole family, every one of them playing. This love of fastball has spanned generations, including the Pipeline Blasters on which all three girls played and were coached by Margaret. It was said that she was a good coach. She taught them how to be good players, to have fun, never give up, and the importance of discipline. Her never-say-die attitude was clearly expressed to the girls with lines like this one: "I don't care if your arm is broken or your leg is broken; you make that play before you say, 'Ouch!'" She was tough as nails, and it wasn't only her daughters who received this coaching. It was generational, because while playing T-ball one evening, granddaughter Capri looked around for her Gram's encouragement only to hear Grandma Margaret call out across the crowd of six-year-olds on the field: You're not allowed to be crying.

What sounds harsh to some was at its core an act of the fiercest love. Margaret had endured pain that would have broken most people. Taken from her family as a child, stripped

of her Indian status as a married Indigenous woman, she entered politics in a legislature that had never seen anyone like her, and she kept going. Margaret kept showing up, pitching in, making the play. She showed her children and grandchildren how they could do the same, raising strong women who could take the field regardless of what had happened the inning before. She was ultimately coaching them for life.

Home life for Margaret — whether it was when she was a YANSI activist, the Justice of the Peace, or the politician — was busy. Her residential school experience meant that she was especially protective of her girls, and she openly admitted that she wasn't that good at marriage or at cooking. Her homes always had an open door, whether it was the family home on Roundel Road when the kids were growing up, making sure that there was a soft place for young people to land, or in her later years after she returned home to her Soowahlie roots, where she welcomed Yukoners and her extended family to her home in her home community.

In 2013, 63 years after she survived Indian residential school, a system designed to erase her language, culture, and identity, Margaret stood bravely before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to give testimony about the abuse she had endured as a child at the Alberni Residential School. She shared how hard it was to be isolated from her family for seven years, how rarely the children got to go outside, how cruel some of the staff were, and more. She testified to ensure the truth would not be buried so that future generations would be aware of the injustices humans can inflict on one another. Like so many other times in her life, Margaret led by example, because she wanted future generations to have the courage to speak truth to power and make the world a better place.

When she left politics in 1996, it was not the end of her political involvement, because she loved elections — the buzz, the connections, and the people. Margaret thrived in election scenarios.

I met Margaret for the first time when I ran in the 2006 election. If you can imagine what it would have been like for a 28-year-old greenhorn to get sent out to knock on doors with the legendary Margaret Commodore, I'll tell you that it was an even bigger deal than that, because I don't even know how it happened, but I'm grateful that it did, because I got to see one of the best in action, and I have benefited from her wisdom ever since.

There has not been a single election that I've participated in where Margaret wasn't involved, and there have been a lot. She returned to the Yukon every election to help where she could. She nurtured new candidates, she knocked on doors, she made phone calls, and she could always bring a room to its feet.

I remember getting the note from Margaret last fall during the election telling me that she was coming up for a visit. She was tired of watching the action from down south, so she got the okay from her doctor to travel and flew north with Sheila so that she could be at the campaign office on election night. She was, and it was amazing. Margaret was there to witness the results as they came in, and when the now-MLA for Mountainview was elected, Margaret celebrated and shared stories about the activism of that member's grandmother.

This was the essence of who Margaret was: never someone to hand off the torch or retreat quietly but someone who stood alongside the next generation to celebrate their victories and the new possibilities.

Indigenous women and girls in the Yukon and indeed across Canada inherited a different world because Margaret Commodore lived, played, and worked in it, reshaping it along the way. They know their voices matter because she showed them how powerful they are and that they belong in the rooms where decisions are made. Margaret gave voice to the voiceless. She made visible the invisible, and she walked into rooms that had been built to exclude her and she remade them not with anger but with the steady, patient, unstoppable force of someone who had seen as a child, on a sunlit sandspit in Deep Bay, what it looked like when people simply lived well together. She never stopped fighting to recreate a world that embraced the diversity, dignity, and generosity she had known there.

But perhaps the greatest legacy she left us is understanding that life is more than just enduring. Margaret taught us that we can flourish, that we can lead, and that we have an infinite capacity to love.

The life journey of Margaret Muriel Commodore, the mother of three, grandmother of seven, great-grandmother to five, was one of love and service. Her 93 years saw her raising the strongest of women, watching election returns with too much excitement to stay home, sharing stories, and always making sure that the next generation had more than hers.

This is the real legacy of this remarkable woman. It's not just the firsts, even though they were historic, and it's not just the titles, even though they were hard won, but the enduring, generous, radiant commitment to the idea that every person deserves dignity, visibility, and justice and the tireless, joyful, lifelong work of making that idea real. One door held open, one policy changed, and one more inning at a time.

I am grateful for the life of Margaret Commodore and her family who shared her — because you shared her a lot — and for her friends and her colleagues who supported this incredible woman in her life.

Applause

Hon. Currie Dixon: I rise today on behalf of my colleagues to pay tribute to Margaret Commodore and her impressive legacy, which has touched the lives of many generations of Yukoners and helped shape our territory in many ways.

One of the sad things about tributes that we do in the Legislature is that they're usually done in memoriam after someone has passed. While obviously Margaret isn't here today, some of us were lucky enough to be present for a tribute to her back in 2022 when we gave a tribute on the occasion of Margaret's 90th birthday. I'm thankful that back then, Margaret herself got to hear those tributes and witness them first-hand. That is a rare blessing. I'm thankful for that.

Margaret was born in 1932 in Chilliwack, brought up in the southern BC town of Soowahlie within the Stó:lō Nation. By all accounts, her early life was full of adventure and beautiful memories on the BC coast with family and connection to her nation and community. She attended two residential schools as a child, and the impacts of her experiences at those schools forged much of her path forward many years later.

Margaret visited the Yukon in 1956. Similar to the stories of so many long-time and even recent Yukoners, this place left an imprint on her and she vowed to return. In 1965, Margaret returned, this time as a single mom of two girls, Jackie and Trace. She married Bobby Joe and welcomed a third daughter, Sheila, and began her first career of many in Whitehorse as a nurse at the Whitehorse General Hospital.

Margaret's career took several turns in many directions, but her dedication to improving the lives of others was constant throughout. She began a lifetime of advocacy, helping to establish organizations for the betterment of society. Her efforts earned her recognition as a pathmaker and a champion for the territory and helped to make a different future possible for future generations.

Margaret was among the founding members of YANSI, the Yukon Association of Non-Status Indians, and helped to give a voice to Indigenous Yukoners who had been denied recognition and rights under the *Indian Act*.

I should also note that Margaret was instrumental in YANSI creating a recreation program and hiring a young lady named Linda Gould, my mother, to help run it. It was during that time that YANSI played an integral role in the creation of what we now know as the Yukon Native Hockey Tournament, which will soon hit its 50th anniversary.

Margaret also worked with Skookum Jim Friendship Centre and the Yukon Indian Women's Association, the latter of which, with the help of Margaret, established Kaushee's Place in 1980. Kaushee's Place is still serving Yukon women and children fleeing domestic violence today, nearly 50 years later. Margaret's legacy obviously continues to live on.

In 1980, Margaret became the Yukon's first Indigenous Justice of the Peace and just two years later, in 1982, was elected to the Yukon Legislative Assembly. Margaret proudly represented the Yukon New Democratic Party in the Legislature until 1996 as the Member for Whitehorse North Centre and later Whitehorse Centre. Politics and government were transformed, with Margaret making history to become one of the first two First Nation people appointed to Cabinet in the Yukon in 1985, and she became the very first First Nation woman to serve as a minister in Canada, serving over the years as Minister of Justice, Health and Human Resources, and Minister responsible for the Women's Directorate and others.

Margaret brought a unique voice and perspective to leadership and politics. She continues to be an inspiration today not only for First Nation women but for all women and girls throughout the Yukon.

Before I conclude, I should note that for all her incredible accomplishments in public life, in politics, and in government, none of that was how I knew Margaret. In fact, I didn't know her as Margaret at all. I knew her through my mom, and I knew her as Mugsy Joe, a pitcher with the Copper Queens. I particularly got to know her sitting in the stands of Minto Park, usually watching one of Trace's games, chatting about fast pitch and politics. I can report that despite my best efforts, I was never able to convince her to take out a membership in the Yukon Party. She did say that I was a pretty nice guy but that I was most certainly in the wrong party.

As a community, we have certainly lost a remarkable Yukoner. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Margaret's family for sharing your mother and your grandmother with not just the Yukon but the entire country. She left a mark on politics, on activism, on volunteerism, and, of course, on the sport community and fast pitch here in the Yukon. Margaret didn't just claim her place in Yukon history; she changed who could imagine standing in that same place.

Thank you to Margaret's friends and family for joining us today.

Applause

Debra-Leigh Reti: Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the life and legacy of a remarkable woman, a trail-blazer, mentor, and advocate, a woman who opened doors for people for generations to come. Margaret Commodore, also known as Margaret Joe during her time in this Legislative Assembly, passed away on June 1 at the age of 93. She lived a life of service, courage, and determination. The contributions that she made to the Yukon will continue to benefit generations to come.

In reading up about Margaret and her life, I was struck by the similarities between her early life and that of my own mother; both were residential school survivors who later pursued careers in nursing. Their strength and perseverance are a powerful example for those around them.

Margaret came to the Yukon in 1954 to work for the Canadian Army. She then worked as a nurse at Vancouver General Hospital and eventually returned north to build her life and career here in the Yukon.

Margaret was not content to simply leave things as they were. If she saw injustice, she challenged it. If she saw people being left behind, she stood beside them.

In 1972, she was a founding member of the Yukon Association of Non-Status Indians. She was also a founding force behind the Yukon Indian Women's Association. She helped build and support organizations that continue to serve Yukoners today, including Kaushee's Place and the Yukon Native Hockey Association.

Margaret was a true political trail-blazer. She was first elected to the Yukon Legislative Assembly in 1982, representing Whitehorse North Centre and later Whitehorse Centre. She would go on to serve four terms, remaining in this House until 1996.

As a First Nations woman and member of this House, it is especially meaningful to me that on May 29, 1985, Margaret became one of the first two First Nation people appointed to the Yukon Cabinet and became the first First Nation woman to serve as a Cabinet minister in any Canadian legislature. What an amazing achievement. Her life was full of amazing achievements.

She also served as a Justice of the Peace and was closely involved with the Indigenous courtworker program. She advocated for Indigenous people within the justice system and worked to challenge discrimination wherever she encountered it.

She helped build organizations. She challenged governments. She advocated for women. She stood up for Indigenous people, and she mentored those who followed her.

Margaret has been recognized for her contributions to First Nation children, Indigenous social services, and her work in public life. Margaret's legacy can be found in the people she inspired and the institutions that she helped create. Today, Indigenous women serve in leadership positions across the Yukon and Canada. Organizations supporting women, families,

and Indigenous Yukoners continue work that is so important to the members of our community. Margaret helped to make all that possible.

I extend my deepest condolences to Margaret's family, friends, and former colleagues. We remember Margaret Commodore not only for the barriers that she broke but for the impacts that she made on our community and the people in it.

Applause

Speaker: There are no members' statements today.

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Currie Dixon: I have for tabling a legislative return dated today.

Justin Ziegler: I have for tabling a document entitled *Yukon Nominee Program — 2026 operational guidance*, updated July 3, 2026.

Speaker: Are there any committee reports to be presented?

Are there any petitions?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Debra-Leigh Reti: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to fully fund the Yukon Hospital Corporation 2027-28 budget request to ensure the Hospital Corporation doesn't begin the fiscal year with a deficit.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House congratulates newly elected Alaskan Senator Mary Peltola, who finished first with 50.1 percent of the ranked choice votes.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

This then brings us to Question Period.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Question — Medical travel reimbursement delays

Kate White: For a family travelling to Vancouver or Edmonton for specialist care, the costs add up quickly and they must be paid up front. When a reimbursement takes months instead of weeks, families put those costs on credit cards, drain their savings, or fall behind on bills. Some may even decide to delay or skip care because they cannot afford the upfront costs. Rural and remote Yukoners who travel the farthest are hit the hardest, and a delay that might be an inconvenience for one household can be a crisis for another.

What is the targeted reimbursement timeline for medical travel, and what processes are in place to ensure that it is met?

Hon. Brad Cathers: I don't have at my fingertips the target timeline for making those payments as the member asked for. I am happy to look into getting that information.

As I touched on earlier during debate in the House, we are looking at the medical travel program right now. We do regularly hear concerns from Yukoners about how it works, including the difference between the rising cost of accommodation, particularly in Vancouver, and the total subsidy that's available. Again, happy to look into the question the member asked and provide information about that.

I would note, as I've mentioned previously, that to speed up processing times in medical travel, we have actually added two new positions within Health and Social Services to speed up the processing of medical travel payments. That is, of course, within the context of the government overall keeping a very tight rein on new positions, but we've recognized this as a priority area.

Kate White: I want to be clear that this is not about the staff who are working within the system. This is about making sure that the staff have the supports they need, a system that functions as it should, and the tools required to serve Yukoners.

I'll help the minister. The government's medical travel guidebook says that medical travel reimbursement should be processed within 30 days, but this isn't happening. Some have waited for six months or even longer. These are people who, while dealing with a serious health issue, have already paid for transportation, accommodations, and meals out of their own pocket, and too many of them wait on money that they were told would be back within weeks, but they can't even get answers about why the delays persist or when they will be reimbursed.

Has the minister been made aware of these delays, and does he think it's acceptable for Yukoners to wait six months or longer for reimbursements?

Hon. Brad Cathers: I can explain the reason for the delays to the member: It's using an old computer system that's in need of replacement — again, part of the work we're doing through the Connected Health strategy will determine a successor computer system — and the fact that staff of medical travel are entering paper records manually into the computer system as part of the work that they do every day.

That is why, as I mentioned earlier, within an overall context of government keeping a very tight rein on new positions, we have added two new positions in medical travel to speed up processing of payments and processing of medical travel. We recognize that there are many concerns people have expressed, including to my office, about the timelines for these things. That is why we have added two new staff to that to speed up processing of things, including payments to people.

Kate White: It's not working so far. Reimbursement delays are not a small administrative problem. They become part of the complicated calculation as Yukoners decide whether they can afford to get the care they need. These delays undermine the promise of a medical travel program that is supposed to support people, not leave them struggling. Setting a 30-day standard on paper means nothing if it's not met. Fixing systemic issues and improving support for staff takes accountability at the ministerial level. Yukoners deserve to know that the minister is taking responsibility.

What additional concrete steps will the minister take to clear the backlog and meet the 30-day standard for reimbursement going forward?

Hon. Brad Cathers: I explained already that we have taken steps, including adding two new positions this year. I believe one of the people just recently started in that position.

We've added new resources in this area to speed up the booking of medical travel as well as the processing of payments.

We are committed to taking additional actions in this area, but as I mentioned, the problem at hand is that staff in medical travel are dealing with a computer system that is roughly 20 years old. They're dealing with a lot of paper records that they need to manually enter into the system, and that is one of the major challenges there.

We are committed through the Connected Health strategy to replacing the computer system with one that is more modern and interfaces better with medical clinics, which is where some of those paper requests come from. We are committed to taking action to, as well, review things including the supports provided to the medical travel program.

But these things do take some time, and I would remind the member that during the four and a half years that she and her colleagues held the balance of power supporting the previous Liberal government, no action was taken to improve processing timelines here. We are taking action, but it does take a bit of time to make those changes come into effect.

Question — Energy infrastructure funding

Lane Tredger: It is encouraging that the federal government has recognized the Yukon's need for major energy investment. The federal budget created a $713-million stream for northern renewable energy and another $929 million for electrical infrastructure. Mayo B, Atlin hydro, and the Whitehorse Power Centres were identified for potential support.

However, these funds will support projects across the North, and no specific amount has been confirmed for any of them. We know the details are still coming, but if the Yukon does not receive enough to advance all three, the Yukon Party will need to decide what comes first.

If the federal funding is not enough to fully support all three projects, which project will the Yukon Party prioritize and why?

Hon. Currie Dixon: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. It is indeed an important one. The member is correct. We see those projects specifically named in the federal budget, and I believe, off the top of my head, the numbers cited by the member are correct.

That being said, the member is correct. We do not know exactly how and when the money will flow through those funds and what exact breakdown that will mean for the projects themselves. We have identified these projects because they are imminent and ready. In the case of the Whitehorse Power Centres, that's a project that's been going through the environmental assessment process. The site selection has been very public and discussed widely.

In the case of the Atlin hydro project, it is, from our perspective, permitted and ready to go. It is shovel-ready, so to speak, and an electricity purchase agreement is in place, and so that's ready to go. Then, of course, the Mayo project is already underway. In the case of the Mayo project, there are cranes swinging in Mayo as we speak working to address the emergency work at that facility.

Depending on how the funding comes from Canada, we'll allocate it as necessary. But it's not necessary at this time for us to choose one or the other. We think we can do them all and, in fact, we are moving forward on all of them right now as we speak.

Lane Tredger: I was particularly excited to hear about the Atlin hydro expansion. It could provide Yukon with dependable renewable power during the winter, reduce the use of imported fuel, and create economic opportunities for the Taku River Tlingit First Nation. The Yukon NDP wants to see this project succeed.

Previously, we asked for the current price tag, and the Premier could not provide one. He said the funding gap was close to $100 million but that updated costs would have to come from the project's proponent. Since then, he said and said again today that it's a shovel-ready project, which should mean that its costs, funding needs, and construction schedule are now known. I'm hoping he can share those details.

Can the Premier tell Yukoners the current cost of the Atlin hydro expansion project, any remaining funding gaps, and the expected date for delivering power to the Yukon?

Hon. Currie Dixon: As I said earlier, the progression of that project will depend on the funding from Canada. If Canada is able to flow the money quickly, then we can start that project quickly.

As I've noted before, we are not the proponent for the Atlin hydro project, and the First Nation — the Taku River Tlingit First Nation, of course — and their development corporation are the proponents. In communication with them since the budget has been tabled, they aren't sure exactly when the money will flow either.

The stack of capital funding for that particular project is fairly complex. It involves the Canada Infrastructure Bank, the Government of British Columbia, the Government of Yukon, and other separate funds from the Government of Canada. We need to understand how and when the Government of Canada will flow money to that project in order to commit to a timeline for when the construction can begin.

Until we know when the money will flow, we aren't able to say with certainty when the project will begin and therefore when it will be complete and ready to flow electricity into our grid.

Lane Tredger: The federal money coming will make a significant difference in moving these projects forward, but it is likely that it won't cover the full costs of all these projects. Yukoners have already absorbed steep electricity rate increases. They simply can't take any more.

The government has celebrated this federal budget as a major win. It should now be prepared to use it to give ratepayers some certainty.

The Yukon Party can commit to using federal and territorial funding for upcoming electricity projects and upgrades and avoid the extreme hikes to Yukoners' electricity bills that we've seen in the last year. They could even make good on their election promise and roll back Yukoners' rates.

Now that the federal government has committed to funding Yukon Energy projects, will the Yukon Party keep its election promise and roll back Yukoners' electricity rates?

Hon. Currie Dixon: As I said, until we know exactly how and when the money will flow, we can't make any commitments about that exact funding. We know that the projects that have been named today in the Legislature have been listed in the federal budget. In the case of the Mayo project and the Atlin project, they both have a page dedicated to them.

I've noticed that our Member of Parliament posted a photo with the Prime Minister's signature on that page. We believe the commitment to those projects is real and it is significant.

But we do not know the exact details of how and when that money will flow, and therefore, we cannot say definitively how that money flowing will affect Yukon's ratepayers or rate base. We are optimistic that it could have a positive impact on the rate, but we don't know exactly what that will look like until we know how the money will flow.

Like all Yukoners, we are very interested to learn more about how the federal government intends to fund these projects, how that funding will impact Yukon's rates as well as the availability of affordable electricity for Yukoners. But at this point, we just don't have those details yet.

Question — Public and private sector jobs

Debra-Leigh Reti: A year ago, the Yukon Party said: "The Yukon needs a territorial government which puts the private sector, not the government, at the forefront of the economy. This will mean putting a clear focus on the growth of the private sector."

According to employment statistics that were released this month by the Government of Yukon, there are 13,500 Yukoners employed in the private sector. A year ago, that number was 15,100. That is a drop of 1,600 private sector jobs that have disappeared since this government took office.

Can the Premier confirm those numbers?

Hon. Currie Dixon: No, I cannot confirm those numbers. I'm not familiar with the data that's being cited by the member, but she is correct that we do want to put an emphasis on creating private sector growth here in the Yukon, and that's what we're focused on. I think that there's no better example of that than the work that's been done over the last few days in relation to the Geoscience Forum where we see the mining industry and exploration industry come to this territory and celebrate the success that they have seen over the last year and look forward to an optimistic future for that industry, for the growth of the private sector, and for the Yukon as a whole.

We're going to continue focusing on that. We're going to focus on growing the mining industry, capitalizing on the opportunities that present themselves with our vast mineral wealth. We're going to continue to engage with the mining industry to ensure that we have the infrastructure necessary to allow that industry to grow, the permitting system in place to allow that industry to thrive, and the workforce here in the Yukon that will allow Yukoners to benefit through jobs, economic opportunities, and other ways from the mining industry. That's our focus — we're continuing to do that work, and we're optimistic about the future of not only the mining industry but what it will mean for the private sector economy here in the Yukon in the years to come.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Since this government took office, private sector employment in the Yukon has dropped dramatically: 1,600 private sector jobs have disappeared.

At the same time, the number of people working in the public sector has increased. A year ago, there were 12,300 public sector employees, and now there are 13,700. Over the last year, the private sector has shrunk and the public sector has increased.

Can the Premier confirm those public sector numbers?

Hon. Currie Dixon: No, I can't confirm exactly what numbers the member has cited. If she would like to table the document she's referring to, I would be happy to review it.

But what I can say is that we are focused on creating opportunities for private sector growth in this territory, and we want to see that growth occur over the next few years. I've cited the example of the mining industry, but I would also note that the Yukon leads the country when it comes to the growth of our tourism sector, and so we continue to see the tourism industry thrive here in the Yukon as well. When you see examples like the mining industry, the tourism industry both leading forward toward a bright future, we are very optimistic about the growth of the private sector in the Yukon, and we will continue to push forward that agenda of allowing the private sector to lead our economic growth in the territory.

Meanwhile, on the public sector side, the Yukon government is obviously only in control of the Yukon territorial government's size and workforce. When it comes to municipal, First Nation, or federal governments, we aren't able to comment on the size of those governments. That's not our responsibility, but we're obviously very focused on containing growth in the public service of the Yukon government as well, and we'll continue with those efforts as well.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Yes, I will table this monthly publication. A year ago, 44.9 percent of the jobs in the Yukon were public sector jobs. Now that number has reached 50.4 percent. The public sector has grown since the government took office and, at the same time, the private sector has gotten smaller.

Can the Premier confirm that the number of public sector jobs in the Yukon is now over 50 percent?

Hon. Currie Dixon: No, I can't confirm the numbers that the member has referenced, because I haven't seen them yet. But if she would like to table them, I would be happy to review them.

Either way, the only parts of the public service numbers that we can control in the numbers she cited are the ones for the Yukon government. We can't control the size, growth, or trajectory of the federal, municipal, or First Nation governments in this territory. Although those governments are certainly very important, we're focused on what we can control, which is the Yukon territorial government's size and the number of jobs within it.

But overall, the fact remains that we are committed to growing our private sector economy here in the Yukon. We want to see investments and commitments to the mining industry, to the tourism industry, and to a whole range of other sectors that will allow the private sector to grow and lead the economic future of this territory.

Question — Yukon nominee program

Justin Ziegler: We have all heard how hard it is to hire and retain staff in the territory. The Yukon nominee program is one of the few tools we have to deal with labour shortages. Last year, the Yukon had 407 nomination spaces; this year, it has only 282. If we look to our neighbours, in August, Ottawa gave the Northwest Territories 103 additional spaces for 2026. It's now November and the Yukon has received nothing.

In May, I asked the minister if she would formally request a higher allocation from Ottawa. I'll ask again: Has the minister made that request to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada? If yes, when and what was the answer?

Hon. Currie Dixon: I'm sure that the Minister of Economy, Tourism and Culture would be happy to provide a more fulsome response to the member's question. What I can say is, of course, we understand the restrictions that have been placed by the federal government on the Yukon nominee program by way of the allocation of slots. We continue to engage with the federal government and make them aware of the realities that our labour force creates for us here in the Yukon, and we are currently reviewing the Yukon nominee program to ensure that it's better aligned with the needs of the private sector.

That being said, I really can't say exactly when or if the minister has engaged with the federal government as yet, and I would invite her to respond to the member separately.

Justin Ziegler: This year, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada announced that any nominee that meets a minimum requirement of French will not be counted as part of the Yukon nominee program allocation, but this change is not reflected by the current Yukon nominee process.

Francophone workers still depend on their employer applying in either of the two 12-day application periods per year. Once again, the Northwest Territories sets an example for us. They have a dedicated francophone stream that is open all year, and workers can even apply to it directly. This looks like a great opportunity to cut red tape.

Will the minister commit to creating a separate, streamlined francophone immigration process?

Hon. Currie Dixon: As I've indicated, we're currently reviewing the Yukon nominee program. We conducted a public consultation that included surveys and outreach to the business community, to nominees themselves, as well as to the public generally. That consultation concluded a few weeks ago, and the government is currently reviewing the results of that. We will be in a position to share a "what we heard" document early in the new year, and that will inform the changes that we want to make to the nominee program.

When it comes to the member's specific suggestions around something modelled after what they're doing in NWT, I'm happy to look into that and consider making those changes based on the member's comments as well as what we heard through the public consultation.

Justin Ziegler: This year, the government brought in a point system to rank employers' expressions of interest. A regulated health care occupation gets eight points. Four years of living and working in the Yukon gets four, and that's the maximum.

Nobody disputes that Yukoners need more health care professionals. But when health care and every other job compete for the same small pool, someone who has worked here for years but does not work in health care will lose.

Other jurisdictions like British Columbia run a dedicated health care stream next to their regular stream. This could allow the recruitment of health care workers the Yukon needs without pushing out people who are already building their lives here.

Will the minister create a separate health care system so that new health care workers aren't competing against established Yukon workers for the same spots?

Hon. Currie Dixon: As I've indicated, the Yukon nominee program is currently under review, and we're happy to consider suggestions for making amendments to that program. We've conducted a public consultation, and we'll share the "what we heard" document early in the new year.

I'll touch base with the Minister of Economy, Tourism and Culture and ask her if a jurisdictional scan has been completed in regard to this, and we can look at what NWT and British Columbia and other provinces and territories are doing and draw from those examples perhaps best practices that we can consider employing in the future.

Question — Rural health care staffing

Patti McLeod: Residents of Ross River and Faro deserve reliable access to health care in their own community. Recently, both the Ross River Health Centre and the Faro Health Centre experienced temporary closures due to nursing shortages. Ross River was closed from September 4 to 30, while Faro was closed from September 25 to October 2. For families in these communities, having to navigate interruptions to local health services creates uncertainty and can mean travelling farther to access care. This is not a concern just for my constituents but for rural communities across the territory.

Can the minister explain what this government is doing to address health workforce shortages and ensure communities like Ross River and Faro have access to the health care professionals they need?

Hon. Brad Cathers: We're taking action to recruit and retain health care professionals through measures including recruitment incentives, licensing supports, professional development, and temporary staffing coverage.

Community Nursing has not seen an increase to staff since 2018. In the recent agreement announced with the federal government to extend Working Together funding, we have made increasing resources for Community Nursing a priority. This will include new nursing positions intended to reduce gaps in coverage.

We are also moving forward with the long-awaited transition from paper-based records in rural health centres to an electronic medical record system scheduled to start rolling out next month, with all community health centres planned to be using it by spring. There is more work to do, but these investments are important steps toward more reliable access to care for Yukoners wherever they live.

Patti McLeod: One of the best ways to build a sustainable health care workforce is to invest in Yukoners themselves. For students from rural communities, pursuing a career in health care can mean leaving home to access education and training, which brings additional financial and personal challenges. But these students also represent an important opportunity. By helping Yukoners access the education they need, we can encourage more people to return to the territory, bring their skills home, and serve the communities they know best.

What is the government doing to provide more opportunities for Yukoners to pursue health care careers?

Hon. Brad Cathers: This year, we more than tripled funding for our three health bursaries.

I'm pleased to announce that as a result of this, our government is supporting 54 Yukon students this year with $320,000 in health care bursary funding. These students are pursuing medicine, nursing, and other health careers. This includes 15 medical students, 22 nursing students, and 17 students pursuing other health careers.

We've made a significant investment in expanding the support. Budget 2026 added more than $200,000 to the bursary programming, bringing annual funding to over $300,000 and increasing the number of health bursaries awarded by more than 50 percent.

In return, health bursary recipients commit to working in the Yukon after completing their studies. This is creating more opportunities for Yukon students to train for Yukon health careers.

Patti McLeod: Supporting students through their education is an important first step, but we also need to make sure they have opportunities to complete their training and build careers here in the Yukon. We know that communities like Ross River and Faro need nurses and other health professionals who understand their communities and are committed to serving them. Programs that allow Yukoners to train closer to home can make a real difference.

Beyond bursaries, what is this government doing to help build a stronger Yukon health workforce?

Hon. Brad Cathers: We're working to create more opportunities for Yukon students training for Yukon health careers. The Learn Where You Live Nursing Pathway allows licensed practical nurses to pursue the registered nursing degree while continuing to live and work in Yukon. A new cohort began in fall of 2026, and I look forward to improving support for licensed practical nurses in the program.

The Yukon Family Medicine Residency program began as a single dedicated Yukoner wanting to do their residency here after medical school. We extended that pilot project, allowing two more doctors to do their residency here, and this year plan to make this an ongoing program.

We also increased funding this year for the Continuing Nurse Education fund from $150,000 to $225,000, helping more nurses access ongoing education. This is all part of the work we're doing to help more Yukon students pursuing Yukon health careers.

Question — Direct-to-consumer alcohol sales and Old Crow alcohol ban

Debra-Leigh Reti: In July, several premiers signed on to a plan to allow direct-to-consumer alcohol sales across their jurisdictions. The Yukon didn't sign, but according to a news release from premiers, Yukon is in the process of establishing the necessary infrastructure to implement direct sales in their jurisdiction, with the aim of signing on to the agreement in the near future.

My community of Old Crow is a dry community; no alcohol sales are permitted. How does the government plan to address this issue as it moves ahead with direct-to-consumer alcohol sales?

Hon. Currie Dixon: I'm aware that the Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation has reached out to the Government of Vuntut Gwitchin by way of consultation and by letter to discuss this.

The reason why the Yukon did not sign on to that particular agreement at that time was that we had not had the legislation passed here to be able to offer that program or that service immediately. Therefore, we didn't feel it was right to participate in the program when other provinces were going to have it go live immediately. We didn't have the legislative framework to allow that to occur at that time.

While we were in support of the initiative and while we look forward to advancing that, it will likely require some legislative changes, and we look forward to bringing those forward in the course of our time during this term.

Debra-Leigh Reti: We have no issue with implementing direct-to-consumer alcohol sales in the Yukon. It's a different story completely when it comes to Old Crow. It's a dry community and has been for years. Direct sales to individuals in Old Crow would violate the current ban on alcohol and would no doubt have a detrimental impact on the community.

When this decision was announced this past summer, the news release said: "The Yukon will be taking steps to implement DTC and is working closely with Yukon's dry communities to ensure their preferences are reflected."

Has the government held a community meeting or does it plan to in Old Crow to discuss this topic?

Hon. Currie Dixon: No, I don't believe we've held a public meeting about this. I stand to be corrected, but my understanding was that the minister had reached out at a government-to-government level to seek the feedback of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, but I don't believe a public meeting was held.

While we move forward with the potential of bringing forward direct-to-consumer alcohol in the Yukon, as the member noted in the question, we'll obviously take into consideration how best to incorporate the realities of dry communities like Old Crow in the implementation of direct to consumer.

But we are excited about the opportunity that direct-to-consumer purchasing could allow for the Yukon. I know that there are many Yukoners who would be interested in buying particular kinds of wine that aren't available here in Yukon and could have it shipped directly to their doors by Canada Post or some other form, which could create new opportunities as well for Yukon brewers who could ship their products as well outside the Yukon to other jurisdictions and create new venues of sales for liquor and beer producers here in the Yukon.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I would urge the government to hold a meeting in Old Crow to discuss this issue. It's important to hear directly from the community on a potential change like this. The alcohol ban has been in place for 35 years, and something like direct sales would essentially end the ban.

Will the government commit to leaving the alcohol ban in place and outline how it would enforce it if it decides to move ahead with direct-to-consumer alcohol sales?

Hon. Currie Dixon: As the member may recall, we've discussed this issue at length recently in the Legislative Assembly. We discussed the challenges that come with enforcing that ban and the fact that, despite the fact that the ban is in place, alcohol and drugs still seem to find their way into Old Crow, and so we know that there are issues with the ability to enforce that.

The Minister of Highways and Public Works has discussed the opportunities to increase security screening and the possibility of what that could look like with the federal government. My colleague the Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation is engaged with the Vuntut Gwitchin by letter to seek their feedback and will continue to take into consideration the impacts on dry communities like Old Crow as we move forward with the possibility of direct-to-consumer sales here in the Yukon.

Question — Response to Education review panel recommendations

Linda Moen: The report released by the Yukon education independent review panel in June listed four recommendations that required immediate action. However, as of November 9, the panel hasn't heard anything back from the minister or the department about the work on the recommendations. Yesterday, the minister told Yukoners that the department has begun acting on the panel's June recommendations, but he didn't provide any details. Which of these recommendations have been started, where are they in the process, and when will they be completed?

Hon. Scott Kent: The department has begun work on all four of those key recommendations from the June status report.

I'll address one of them in this response and perhaps more in subsequent responses. But with respect to addressing political interference, we're ensuring that the appropriate delegations are in place so that decisions can be made and implemented without political involvement. A recent example is the delegation of the authority to issue guidelines for the implementation of special education under section 15 of the *Education Act* to the department. That is just one example of what is underway.

As I said yesterday in the Legislature, we will be putting together a response to the independent review panel on progress to date, with the caveat that it is very much a living document and more work will continue as we work to implement the recommendations not only in the June status report but also the most recent report that we tabled earlier in this Sitting.

Linda Moen: School staff and school communities need to understand the actions that have been taken in response to the panel's recommendations and how this may impact the work that they do. The minister said yesterday the department still needs to find a way to communicate its actions.

When and how will the minister be communicating the department's response to the recommendations to the panel, schools, school councils, Yukon First Nation governments, and the Yukon Association of Education Professionals?

Hon. Scott Kent: As I just mentioned in my earlier response, we are in the process of putting together a document to respond to the education review panel. Of course, that document will be available publicly, and we'll share the details with education partners.

But maybe I could talk a little bit more about one of the other recommendations and some of the work done. That's with respect to separating the dual roles of the Department of Education. The department is reviewing its policies and procedures toward ensuring that they reflect the roles of ministerial versus school operational authorities. The department is working on targeted amendments to the *Education Act* and missing financial regulations as well as work to update the funding criteria and formulas for school boards to create a clear, predictable, and transparent funding structure. That is just another example of the work that we're doing with respect to the recommendations in the June status report.

Again, as I mentioned, we'll put together a document to respond to the panel with progress to date but with that caveat that it is very much a living document and will change as more work and more actions are taken.

Linda Moen: I look forward to seeing that report when it's available. Yesterday, I asked the minister about the severe hiring delays and the chronic late payment in his department. In June, the independent review board recommended immediate action on this problem. He answered with staffing percentages and never said a word about the pay. Staff numbers do not help educators who are still waiting on a paycheque. The panel warned this government about payment wait times, and educators deserve a response from the minister on this.

I will ask again: How will the minister ensure educators are paid on time?

Hon. Scott Kent: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. It's something we're certainly aware of and working on. I heard this directly from the Yukon Association of Education Professionals — the teachers and educators as part of that association — at their AGM that I attended earlier on this year.

As the member mentioned, one of the recommendations of the panel is to create a robust accountability system. The department is reviewing and updating onboarding processes working in partnership with school boards and school councils and others. These are the types of things that we need to do to ensure that we can get the teachers and the educators trained as well as paid as soon as possible. I've also been in contact with my colleague the Minister of the Public Service Commission on those challenges as well. This is something that is very much an active file for us and that we would like to see resolved as soon as possible.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 204 — Hosting 2035 Canada Winter Games

Clerk: Motion No. 204, standing in the name of Adam Gerle.

Speaker: It is moved by the Member for Porter Creek South:

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.

Adam Gerle: I rise today to speak to Motion No. 204, which I have brought forward urging the Government of Yukon to engage with partners and take the necessary steps to prepare an offer to host the 2035 Canada Winter Games. This is an important opportunity for the Yukon and one that deserves serious consideration. We have hosted these games before. We have seen the lasting benefits, and we have demonstrated what we can accomplish when Yukoners come together through the 2026 Arctic Winter Games. I would like to take a few minutes to talk about why I believe we should pursue this opportunity.

In 2007, Whitehorse hosted the 21st Canada Games. Over 16 days, from February 23 to March 10, the games celebrated their 40th anniversary and marked the first time the event was held north of 60. More than 4,500 athletes, coaches, and managers came to the Yukon, supported by approximately 4,000 volunteers, participating in 154 events across 22 sports. Snowboarding made its Canada Games debut, and the popular Inuit and Dene games were held as demonstration sports. It was a significant undertaking for the territory and an extraordinary community effort. We continue to see the benefits of that investment today.

The Canada Games Centre remains an important sport and recreation facility for Yukoners. The athletes' village was repurposed to provide housing for seniors and students. The games helped build capacity within sporting organizations and strengthen community connections.

According to the economic assessment by the Canadian Sport Tourism Alliance, the games generated an estimated $176.7 million in economic activity and contributed $75.2 million to Yukon's GDP.

But the legacy wasn't just about facilities or economic activity. It was about the experience, relationships, and opportunities created for Yukoners. The games lasted just over two weeks, but their benefits have continued well beyond that.

Another important part of the 2007 games was their pan-northern approach. All three territories contributed to the games, demonstrating the value of working together to deliver a major national event. Notably, the 2007 Canada Winter Games in Whitehorse was the first national sporting event to include traditional northern sports. Teams from the three territories competed in Inuit games and Dene games as demonstration sports. These sports, which are a regular feature of the Arctic Winter Games, were showcased across Canada for the first time and introduced many Canadians to favourites like the knuckle hop, high kicks, finger pull, snow snake, and hand games.

There was also a cultural component, which included performances, concerts, art exhibitions, snow carvings, and community events celebrating northern artists. The medals incorporated a northern ulu design featuring northern animals and symbols.

I think there is an opportunity to build on that experience in 2035. Keeping the Canada Games in the North could give the Yukon an opportunity to work alongside our counterparts in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut and showcase northern sports and culture. There are many opportunities to share experience, build sporting connections, and collaborate on aspects of hosting. The benefits of the games don't necessarily need to stop at the Yukon's borders. We should look at how we can build on our shared northern experience and strengthen our relationships with our territorial partners north of 60.

Another important consideration is what hosting the games could mean for our athletes. In 2007, Yukon athletes had the opportunity to compete at home and represent their territory and compete against some of the best young athletes in Canada. For some, it was an important step in their sporting careers. Emily Nishikawa, for example, competed at the 2007 Games at age 17 and won bronze in the cross-country ski relay. She went on to represent Canada at the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi in 2014 and PyeongChang in 2018. The games also welcomed future Canadian sporting stars, including Steven Stamkos and Marianne St-Gelais.

Hosting the games again would create similar opportunities for a new generation of Yukon athletes. It would allow young people to compete in front of their families and communities and hopefully inspire more Yukoners to get involved in sport. Those opportunities are worth considering when we look at the longer term benefits of hosting.

We also have the recent experience to build on through the Arctic Winter Games. Those games demonstrated what the Yukon can accomplish when sport organizations, volunteers, businesses, and governments work together. More than 20 sport organizations participated. The host society has committed $500,000 to support long-term sustainability of Yukon sports organizations, and the games themselves generated an estimated $21.3 million in economic activity, which supported more than 1,400 jobs. Local hotels, restaurants, transportation companies, cultural attractions, retailers, and many other businesses benefited, with many visitors staying extra days to partake in some of the Yukon's legendary tourism experiences. We gained valuable experience and demonstrated that we have the people and partnerships needed to deliver major sporting events.

Why 2035 and why now? As we heard during Question Period this week, the Northwest Territories will no longer pursue hosting the 2035 games. The Yukon has expressed interest — the first step in a long process of understanding what hosting would involve. It would involve a number of steps going forward, including engaging First Nations, municipalities, sport organizations, and businesses, assessing existing facilities and infrastructure requirements, understanding accommodation and transportation needs, identifying funding opportunities and financial responsibilities, working with our territorial partners to explore opportunities for collaboration, and developing a realistic and responsible offer.

The anticipated timeline includes a host jurisdiction agreement in 2027 followed by formal bid development in 2028 and 2029. We need to begin bringing partners together now if we are going to be in a position to make an informed decision.

Yukoners will remember the previous government's decision to withdraw from the 2027 Canada Winter Games bid. I think many people saw that as a missed opportunity. Now we have another chance. We shouldn't dismiss it before understanding what is possible.

This motion isn't about making commitments without knowing the costs. It's about doing the homework, engaging the right partners, and determining whether we can put forward a strong, realistic offer. We owe it to Yukoners to properly explore the opportunity.

Madam Speaker, I want to leave members with a few things to consider. We invested in the 2007 games and Yukoners continue to benefit from that investment. We have more recent experience through the Arctic Winter Games. We have facilities, sporting organizations, volunteers, and community experience to draw on. We also have an opportunity to work with our territorial counterparts and build on a pan-northern approach that was part of the 2007 games.

Hosting in 2035 could mean more opportunities for Yukon athletes to compete at home, economic opportunities for local businesses, continued investment in sport and recreation, stronger relationships between northern communities and sporting organizations, and the opportunity to showcase the Yukon and the North to the rest of Canada.

We don't have to have every answer today. We do need to be willing to ask the questions, bring the right people together, and do the work to understand what hosting would involve. We hosted the games in 2007 and saw the benefits that carried forward. Now we have the opportunity to explore whether we can build on that experience in 2035 for the Yukon and for the North.

I encourage all members to support Motion No. 204.

Kate White: I'm happy to join the conversation about Motion No. 204 about the possibility of hosting the 2035 Canada Winter Games.

I'll say that I had a really interesting experience myself in 2007, because I had the Midnight Sun Coffee shop up at the Canada Games Centre, and so I had a front-row seat to just how busy things could be and what that could look like, and it was pretty awesome. Really, it's not going to be the discussion here that makes the difference, although a vote in support shows a lot. But what I will say is that Yukon has benefited from legacy projects. We've heard talk about athletes' villages. I'm very familiar with 600 College Drive, as that's the seniors complex in my riding. I spent a fair amount of time there.

I do think it's worth, as we discuss this or as government moves forward to work with the sport governing bodies and others to make that bid, seeing if it's possible to include communities on the outskirts of Whitehorse. I think about the hockey rink, for example, in Carmacks and how that is a stunning facility. Depending on how much ice we need, that might be an opportunity. I think about, for example, whether it's access to snow. Again, understanding that we're going to be talking about close enough for bus services or making sure that there's transportation, but I think that it is worth looking at how it could benefit rural Yukon as well.

I will also say that we've heard from young people. We heard in questions asked yesterday from my colleagues to ministers about the importance of investing in recreation for youth going forward. I know I'm not the only one who probably survived high school by my outdoor activities or my after-school activities, and so I think about, for example, the changes in Mount Sima since it first opened when I was 16 years old.

Mount Sima now is known as a world-class destination for pre-season training. Currently, there are teams — not just national teams but from around the world — training at Mount Sima ahead of the season in the rest of the country. I think there's opportunity to build on the lessons we've learned.

I will say that I would hope that by the time we get to 2035 and we are luckily the hosts of the Canada Winter Games, the volunteer policy changes for Yukon government so that staff can volunteer during daytime hours. I know in 2007 it was all hands on deck. It required every single person. It's actually why we still have a two-week spring break; it came from that change there. I think that there are lots of changes that will need to be made internally within Yukon government, but also, I think this is an opportunity for what we can bring as far as legacy projects going forward. I do think it's important to think about how to include rural Yukon, understanding that it's not going to be incredibly rural. But whether there's a possibility of hosting some of the bigger games in places like Carmacks to give that community an opportunity to see that level of play, I think that's a real opportunity.

My colleagues and I are in support. We were surprised when there was a ministerial statement in the previous iteration of Yukon government when the then-Minister of Community Services made an announcement in a statement that the games were cancelled or Yukon was pulling out of that application. I think that probably did a bit of damage to our reputation, but I'm sure together today in voting for this motion, we can make some of those reparations as required.

But again, there were lots of benefits and I think there were probably some growing pains. I will tell you that for myself the Canada Games Centre was closed the week before the games and the week after the games. Although my coffee shop was busy for 16 hours a day, I made no more money in two weeks than I would have in a normal four weeks. It just meant I had lots of staff and lots of work to happen for two weeks, and I kind of twiddled my thumbs leading up to it and after it.

There are benefits across the board, I'm sure. But more than that, I think it's about the possibility of what kind of support we can get nationally and from other jurisdictions to make sure that the games leave behind a similar legacy that we saw in 2007. No one's going to say that the Canada Games Centre isn't a valuable asset, and no one's going to challenge the housing that we have or the experiences that volunteers and participants had in 2007.

I look forward to it. In 2035, I'm sure I will volunteer like I have for anything that ever happens here. At that point in time, my parents could still be running the snowshoeing and all those aspects, but at that point in time, they'll have put in close to 40 years, so they might be done by then.

But there are opportunities. I think it's also important to make sure that the public service can volunteer. We knew that they were not available to volunteer in ways that many people thought for the Arctic Winter Games — and so a change to make sure that when those volunteers are needed, Yukon government can play their role as well and make sure that staff are able to volunteer their time.

I'm happy to have the conversation, happy to hear more stories. But if anyone ever wants to talk about what it meant to have a coffee shop run for 16 hours for 14, 15 days straight, it involved milk being stored in the ice area. I maybe stretched the comfort of environmental health, but they were supportive and understanding that it was a safe temperature. It was four degrees, so it was like a refrigerator; it just wasn't the classic refrigerator.

What we saw in 2007 was really what I would expect to see again in 2035, which is community responding, rising to that call, and showing up when we were needed. I will say that it was a great party after. I can't remember the band, but there was a tent down on the waterfront, and it was a real fun time.

I look forward to us hosting in 2035 and seeing what Yukon can do between now and then and then how Yukon benefits after. I thank the member for bringing it forward and look forward to seeing letters or whatever happens go out. The NDP are in support, and we look forward to the future.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I'll be supporting this motion, and I thank the Member for Porter Creek South for bringing it forward.

He has clearly been excited by this prospect this week. Many Yukoners still remember the 2007 Canada Winter Games in Whitehorse. It was the first time the games came north of 60, and many still use the Canada Games Centre every day. I was not present in the Yukon during the games, but my late father,

Harvey Reti, was involved with the Yukon boxing team along with my twin nieces.

With the Canada Games Council now looking for a new host, this seems to be a good opportunity to try to leverage our recent success with the Arctic Winter Games to put together a strong bid for 2035. Leveraging federal funding to support new infrastructure for sports and recreation would be a great win for the territory.

As the motion notes, it is important to engage with partners on this idea. It would certainly be important for the government to engage with the City of Whitehorse, who would be the official host, of course, and to discuss this offer. I would hope those conversations are already well underway. Engagement with Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council is also very important, and again, I would hope those conversations have already started — of course, engagement with Sport Yukon and other organizations.

That said, I think a part of a strong bid would be to show that we have a robust and well-supported sports and recreation community in the territory already. In April, I asked the Minister of Community Services whether a sport infrastructure plan was being developed, and the answer was that there wasn't one. Sport Yukon's funding has not changed this year, and with the decline in lotteries revenue, many sports organizations are seeing cuts to their operations. Cutting funding for sports organizations and not planning for infrastructure is not really a good way to build a foundation for a successful bid.

Hosting the Canada Winter Games means building facilities and housing athletes, and that takes years of planning and a commitment to adequate funding. If it's done well, the games can leave something behind. New facilities can serve athletes from the communities long after the closing ceremony.

I do also look forward to what this will bring to the outlying communities of the Yukon and Old Crow in regard to recreation and bringing out some very skilled, successful athletes to the games. I look forward to seeing the government's plan, including who it will work with and how it will be paid for.

Hon. Currie Dixon: I'm pleased to rise to speak to this motion. I'm very appreciative of the Member for Porter Creek South for bringing it forward. I think it's an important discussion and one that I'm happy to get started on.

The interest in discussion around the possibility of hosting the 2035 Canada Games has probably been happening quietly among officials and volunteers and other sports organizations for a little while now. But for me, it really began during the Arctic Winter Games earlier this year. I'm sure everyone is already aware of this, but the Yukon did just a phenomenal job of hosting the Arctic Winter Games earlier this year. Our sport organizations, our volunteers, the government, the host society all did a spectacular job, and Yukon's ability to host major multi-sport games was very much on display during the Arctic Winter Games.

As an undercurrent, though, to those discussions, the Canada Games Council was represented at the Arctic Winter Games. I had a chance to sit down with Kelly-Ann Paul, the CEO of the Canada Games Council, and we had a conversation about how great Yukon was at hosting these Arctic Winter Games and what future opportunities might present themselves.

Now, at that time, the Northwest Territories was still slotted in the rotation as the 2035 host, and that meant that while there was some uncertainty because of the debate going on within that territory about it, it was very much hands-off from our perspective. Northwest Territories was going to be the host, and even though they were having some public debates about it, it wasn't something we were going to discuss.

However, I did note to the Canada Games Council at that time that if something were to happen there, we would certainly be willing to put our hands up not just because we would like to host for the Yukon, but we thought it was really important that the games stay in the North, and that was something that was really important to a lot of our sports organizations as well.

In discussions that I've had with sports organizations over the last number of months and years, remembering that the Canada Games are meant to be Canada-wide is something very important, and it's very rare and very difficult for small jurisdictions and especially remote northern jurisdictions to ever be able to host games, and we need to make sure that we take advantage of the opportunity to do so when given the opportunity.

I had been staying in touch with the Premier of Northwest Territories over the course of those months as well and was privy to some of the thinking and the debate that was going on in the community of Yellowknife and in the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories, and ultimately, a decision was taken a few months ago to decline hosting, and I know that was a very difficult decision for Northwest Territories. I know that it was a heated debate in the community of Yellowknife, and ultimately, it was decided that they would pass. While I pass zero judgment at all about their decision — that was a decision that Northwest Territories folks had to make themselves — I certainly feel strongly that we should put our hand up, and so that's why I indicated to the Canada Games Council that we would be interested. We followed that up with a letter from the Minister of Community Services to the Canada Games Council to very clearly articulate our interest in ensuring that the 2035 games, if they do happen to leave NWT, that they stay in the North and that Yukon would be willing to put their hand up and ensure that we do our part and we put our best foot forward.

As others have indicated, there is some lingering challenge and a lingering bad taste in the mouths of some who were associated with the decision by the previous government to decline those 2027 games fairly late in the game. So, we as a territory have some work to do to repair our reputation on that front, and I'm really hopeful that motions like this that are supported unanimously by all three political parties will do a lot to demonstrate to the national sport community, to the Canada Games Council, and to others that there's a real willingness among Yukoners to host these games again.

I really want to thank my colleagues here. It sounds like all members have indicated a willingness to support this motion, and I think that's actually really valuable, because this is not a for-sure thing. This is not a lock. We do know that there are other jurisdictions that would likely be interested in hosting 2035, and I think we need to be united as a territory in presenting an offer to the Canada Games Council that we would host the 2035 games.

I want to speak just a little bit about the process, because I think it's important. At this point, we have a rotational system for the allocation of the games-hosting duties, and as I've noted, the Northwest Territories was originally slotted in for 2035. After 2035, there's a good chance that we'll move away from a rotational basis for the provinces and territories, and we could go toward a bid system nationally. That will be very difficult for small jurisdictions like the Yukon to ever be able to win a bid, because bigger jurisdictions with more established infrastructure and lower operating costs for travel and other things will mean that smaller or more remote jurisdictions like us will have a hard time being able to host these games. I think that 2035 is very important for us to capitalize on, because it could be the last time that we have a really good chance at hosting the games.

Where we go from here is that ultimately the decision is going to be made by the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers of sport, who will meet during the February Canada Games in Québec. The decision will ultimately be made by that table.

We have heard that there are other provinces that could be interested as well, and that's their right to put forward their names as well and to suggest that they may be willing to host, and that's what has prompted us to bring it forward and why I discussed it with the Member for Porter Creek South, and he agreed to bring forward this motion on private members' day to express our collective view that the Yukon really should put together a bid and that we should do so in a united way, in a way that has broad support from not only all political parties but, we hope, all Yukoners as well.

Other members have pointed out that we do have a lot more work to do ahead of us. We don't have a formal bid, so to speak. We don't have a partnership agreement with other governments, but this motion largely is the launch point for those discussions. If we pass this motion today, we can then begin the conversation with municipalities, with First Nations, with sports governing bodies, and with the sport community more broadly about what that could mean for the Yukon to host in 2035.

Earlier this week, my colleague across the way from Riverdale South asked a question about sports infrastructure, and it was a well-founded question. It was one that we hear about all the time. There are sports groups who want to see a new pool. There are sports groups that want to see a new sheet of ice. There are sports groups that want to see a racket facility, a pickleball facility.

The list of sports infrastructure that is being sought by the sport community here in Yukon is long, but having the plan in place to host the 2035 games could give us a bit of a framework for guiding the discussions as we launch toward the potential hosting of the 2035 games. I look forward to working with my colleagues to engage with the sport community to plan over the course of the next nine years how best to capitalize on the opportunity of hosting and ensure that we get the kind of legacy infrastructure that will see the sport community benefit for years to come.

With that, I'll conclude my remarks and simply note my appreciation and thanks to all members who it sounds like will be voting in favour of this motion. I thank my colleague the Member for Porter Creek South for lending his name to it and bringing this motion forward for us to debate, and I look forward to taking this motion as an expression on behalf of all Yukoners and on behalf of the Yukon Legislative Assembly to the national sport community, to the Canada Games Council, and to the decision-makers that sit alongside the Minister of Community Services at the FPT for sport to make that decision and have them be aware of the fact that we are united in our view that the Yukon should host the 2035 Canada Games. Thank you to my colleagues for that, and I look forward to getting to work on the conversations that will lead to the ability for us to put forward a strong bid to host the 2035 games.

Justin Ziegler: I am happy to rise to speak in support of the motion, and I have a few things to say. I agree with what was said. These types of events are not only about sport, and it's actually one week that marks entire generations.

I remember the Arctic Winter Games was the very first event of that type that I participated in, and I was very proud to volunteer along with my colleagues from the Official Opposition. It was a very strong bonding moment, and it was very nice to be able to participate in the event from the inside.

I remember seeing young people from Greenland, Alaska, Nunavik, and Sápmi meeting each other for the first time and sharing so much more than sport. It was a very strong human experience that I will remember for a very long time. I mentioned this before in this Chamber. I think my favourite part of this event was the cultural gala and the many different cultures that I have discovered through that show. I can't imagine what this is going to look like on a Canada scale — so many people coming from all around this country that we all love.

I wasn't here in 2007, because I wasn't born — I was born; I was just not here — I'm not that young.

Since the idea of hosting the 2035 Canada Games came up in this Chamber, we've had many conversations in the caucus with staff and among other MLAs, and many different souvenirs came up. One of our staff told us that she was 12 years old in 2007, and clearly, she said that it was the best two weeks of her life: free buses, trading pins, the whole city celebrating. And almost 20 years later, they're still riding that wave.

An opportunity for 2035 means that we could potentially give memories to the next Yukoners until at least 2055. I think we should take this opportunity, for sure.

It has been mentioned as well that these kinds of events are a real opportunity for the local economy: hotels, restaurants, shops, and suppliers. I think it's not only two weeks — there's a momentum that's built around it. I hope that we will be able to take on this momentum, especially to promote tourism and travel to other communities outside of Whitehorse. I hope that there will be real strong benefits to rural Yukon communities to surf that wave too if we are successful in hosting the games, in attracting tourism and attracting people and other opportunities.

I think there is a real expertise in the Yukon in hosting these kinds of events. We've seen it first-hand with the Arctic Winter Games. There's real expertise in sport, the infrastructure, and the knowledge of people in hosting these events but also logistics and safety. Safety is a major thing that I think can be done really well here.

Culture — obviously strong Yukon culture, and Yukoners are very proud to share their culture. We're mentioning Yukon culture in this Chamber a lot, and I think we have a lot to share. This would be a great opportunity to share it.

Another thing that Yukoners are pretty strong at showing up for is volunteering. I think this is a great opportunity to bring together a lot of Yukoners around an event and build some partnerships, some friendships, and some cohesion.

About communities, the Leader of the Official Opposition mentioned it — I really hope and I wish to see rural communities being involved in the games, probably in a different way. I'm sure there is a lot of creativity in creating these events and creativity around the logistics of it and finding a way to involve other Yukon communities in participating in the games by hosting some events or — I don't know what this can look like. That would be absolutely great.

Of course, I hope that we will take on this opportunity to bring forward First Nation cultures. I know that across Canada, we usually say Canada Winter Games, les Jeux d'hiver du Canada, and I hope we will translate this name in all First Nation languages so that these languages and these cultures are also represented.

As I said, I wasn't here in 2007. I'm looking forward to this event happening here in Whitehorse. I will be volunteering, for sure. I hope that public servants will have the opportunity to take part in the event by volunteering or going to support athletes. I will be voting in favour of this.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Adam Gerle: Thanks to all the members for your observations, ideas, and support. I know Yukoners appreciate when we all work together.

The games are a rare and invaluable opportunity to showcase the Yukon and the North to the rest of Canada, to generate significant economic impact, to leave lasting legacies like the Canada Games Centre, and very importantly, to create opportunities for youth and for Yukon communities that will leave a generational impact and promote a healthy lifestyle through sport.

Again, thank you to all the members, and I look forward to having this motion pass the House today.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Are you agreed?

Motion No. 204 agreed to

Motion No. 205 — Bill S-246, *An Act respecting the recognition of wartime service*

Clerk: Motion No. 205, standing in the name of Doris Anderson.

Speaker: It is moved by the Member for Porter Creek North:

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

Doris Anderson: I rise to speak to Motion No. 205, which reads: "THAT this House supports Bill S-246, *An Act respecting the recognition of wartime service*, in its requirement to develop a national framework for the recognition of certain military service as wartime service."

Bill S-246 is the *Wartime Service Recognition Act* about ensuring that military service deserving of wartime recognition is properly acknowledged. The bill would create a national framework with clear criteria to identify qualifying service and provide a process for officially recognizing it as wartime service. At its core, this bill is about ensuring recognition, fairness, and respect for those affected. The men and women who have served Canada in conflicts around the world have done so with the same bravery and selflessness in wartime as in peacekeeping missions.

Canada has a proud military history. Generations of Canadians have fought for our country and for our freedom, often at a great personal cost to themselves and their families. We remember those who fought in the First and Second World Wars and the Korean War, and we honour their commitment to defending our country and Canadian values. But our responsibility to recognize military service does not end with past conflicts. While the nature of warfare has changed, Canada's military has continued to be involved in modern conflicts and dangerous operations. The Persian Gulf War, Afghanistan, and other missions involved Canadian Armed Forces members facing significant risks, hostile environments, and life-altering experiences. For those who served in these operations, the danger was real and the sacrifices were real.

Bill S-246 seeks to address the gap in Canada's formal recognition of wartime service, which has not kept pace with the realities of modern military operations. This bill establishes a national framework to help determine when military service should be recognized as wartime service. Objective criteria would consider conditions experienced by service members like the level of risks they face, exposure to unsafe conditions, the nature and intensity of operations, and more.

We should not determine the significance of someone's service based on terminology used by the government. Peacekeeping mission or not, many military operations since the Korean War have had the same level of risk as those conflicts defined as "wars". Service members bear many scars, both mental and physical. Service members have lost their lives defending our beautiful country. Those sacrifices deserve full recognition. Those service members deserve fairness and respect.

I look forward to hearing from my colleagues in support of this motion and collectively voicing our support for Bill S-246.

Kate White: Today, in speaking to Motion No. 205, I'll just indicate at the beginning that the NDP is in support, but I guess I have questions that can be answered in closing about how the member envisions that this House will support Bill S-246, whether it's with the intention of asking the Premier or one of the ministers and writing a letter on our behalf or the Speaker yourself to write a letter on our behalf.

I'll note that even in the time that I've been in the Assembly, there were changes to Veterans Affairs that essentially created two different tiers of support for Canadian veterans and unfortunately left many behind. In reading a bit about this bill that was put forward by Senator Hassan Yussuff, it's clear to understand why it has broad support in Ottawa, to the best of my understanding, from all political stripes and how come this is important. For all the reasons that my colleague noted, for my own concerns over how Veterans Affairs unfortunately has created different systems of support depending on when veterans served, whether it's in conflicts that we view more as historic or

those that are current, unfortunately supports from Canada have not kept up.

The NDP — we support the motion and just request if, in closing, the member can let us know how she envisions — or maybe her colleagues, maybe one of them can say that they will be the one responsible for writing the letter — because I think if we're trying to show a joint response, then it's good to know who it's coming from and where it's going.

I appreciate the motion today and its intent, and we're in support. Again, we can't thank veterans if it just means in words and not in action. Canada has a responsibility, and we're in support of the motion today.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I'm pleased to support this motion today.

Last week, we marked Remembrance Day, and I spoke to the importance of remembering those who have served this country. I believe strongly that it is essential that Canada recognizes the people who serve.

Bill S-246 asks the federal government to set clear criteria for when military service counts as wartime service. Many Canadians who served in Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf, and other missions faced the dangers of war, but their service has never been formally recognized that way. As one Member of Parliament put it during debate: "Wars don't become less dangerous … because governments choose not to … declare them." The bill doesn't change benefits, but recognition matters to veterans and their families, and having clear criteria means future decisions won't depend on the government of the day.

I appreciate the member for bringing this forward.

Màhsi' cho.

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I thank my fellow colleague for bringing Motion No. 205 forward. Bill S-246, *Wartime Service Recognition Act*, is something that I've discussed with a lot of military members in the community that I'm in, so it's especially meaningful to me as a veteran, an active ranger, and like I said, it's really important to my fellow military members.

Not often do I get to rise in the House and speak a little bit about my life, but my great-grandfather, as many did, fought in World War I and my grandfather fought in World War II. Family members fought in the Korean War, Canadians fought in Vietnam, and then you move to the Cold War, and I got posted.

I was from Haines Junction — 600 people. My uncle was an Air Force pilot, flying F-18s. I thought I wanted to be just like that, so I went and joined the military and wound up in Germany in the Cold War.

We were called Cold War Cowboys over there. I knew everything about the Russian military. The uniform you wore, I could tell you what unit you were in. I could tell you the different vehicles. We studied it; we knew them well.

Then in 1990, the wall came down. I was there when the wall came down. I was there when Pink Floyd played in concert, and I still have a brick that I brought back home. But there wasn't an enemy anymore. The Russians quit playing war, and we were in a transition in our military. I decided to come back for work in the Yukon, the homeland that I missed.

When I did come back, shortly after, the Middle East conflict started, Croatia, lots of other conflicts — we had Afghanistan for over a decade, and as we move on — so this is important that we recognize because we serve. When we serve, we serve in different capacities, and within these capacities, like the Leader of the Official Opposition said, just because we didn't declare a war doesn't mean it's not a war.

I'm glad to see this government respecting the recognition and dedication of members of the Armed Forces that have honourably served our country protecting its sovereignty and freedoms of its people.

Something that is important in a northern country — and the Yukon being more remote than many for service members — in the Yukon here, you wear many hats. I'm the Minister of Environment; I've been in the military for 38 years, 39 — I can't remember, because it has been a while — but still promoting — I was at leadership training; I took three days off from the session so I could go down to leadership training to see the next round of money and funding coming to the North for Arctic sovereignty and security.

So, whether it was my grandfather who was in a trench for four years or one of my rangers who was in the Arctic at — I think we paid tribute to him last year — minus 50 — the enemy there was the wind and the chill, and the only reason that they made it was because they had the skills to live off the land. All serving members deserve fairness, respect, and recognition of their dedication to this country.

Of course, I support this motion, and I'll just close by saying something that I learned a long time ago. I learned it from someone who was a mentor to me. His name was Benny Sheardown. I came to Whitehorse to go to school for six months — I mean come and party for six months — but he asked me what I was doing with my life, and I told him I was partying, and he said, "You know what? Find something to do." I told him, "My uncle is an Air Force pilot; maybe I should join the Army." He said — and this is a motto I live by all the time: "Well, it's not what your country can do for you; it's what you can do for your country."

I'll keep doing that for my country while I can, and I think we need to support those. I appreciate this motion.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Doris Anderson: I appreciate the comments and the support for this motion. It means a lot. It's very personal for me. My family served in the military. I know I gave up a lot of family time for my husband, and it's very important. It's really important for the family members of the veterans who are still here today and understanding that this country recognizes their dedication. I certainly appreciate it. I know they will as well. We have a lot of veterans in the Yukon who have served in places like Afghanistan, and I just want to say thank you, gùnèłchīsh, from the bottom of my heart.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Are you agreed?

Motion No. 205 agreed to

Motion No. 206 — *Workers' Safety and Compensation Act* listed cancers

Clerk: Motion No. 206, standing in the name of Tyler Porter.

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

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

Tyler Porter: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Motion No. 206, which urges the Government of Yukon to engage with firefighters on updates to the list of cancers under the *Workers' Safety and Compensation Act*.

But I want to begin by acknowledging the progress that has already been made. With the recent amendments to the act, our government has extended presumptive cancer coverage to wildland firefighters. This is a crucial step that recognizes the occupational risks these individuals face while protecting our communities. I also want to acknowledge the firefighters, unions, and representatives whose advocacy and contributions have helped move this work forward.

Madam Speaker, firefighting is a demanding profession, and the risks involved are not always immediately apparent. While we often think about the immediate dangers of responding to fires, there are also long-term health concerns associated with exposure to smoke, chemicals, and other hazardous substances. As medical research advances, we continue to learn more about how these exposures can affect firefighters over the course of their careers and beyond. It is important that we take these health concerns seriously and continue collaborating with firefighters to ensure their experiences and latest research are reflected in future discussions about coverage.

Here in the Yukon, we must also recognize the different ways firefighting services are delivered. From structural and wildland firefighters to the volunteers who serve our rural communities, these individuals work in different environments and face different challenges. Their experiences can provide valuable insight into how the compensation framework should work.

Madam Speaker, the motion before us is about the government maintaining an open dialogue with firefighters as added information becomes available and remaining open to opportunities to strengthen existing protections. I think that's a sensible approach. We have taken a major step forward with the recent legislative amendments, and there is value in ensuring that the work continues in a thoughtful and informed way.

At the end of the day, the men and women who put themselves at risk to protect Yukoners deserve a compensation system that reflects our evolving understanding of the work they do. I believe this motion supports that objective, and I encourage all members of this House to support it.

Kate White: I'm delighted to be speaking today in favour of Motion No. 206 brought forward by the Member for Southern Lakes. I'm glad we're having this conversation, because the reality is that this is a conversation, I think, or actions that need to be taken on an ongoing basis. I think back to 2021 when I first met with Nicholas O'Carroll and Alex Forrest when they brought me a — I don't know — probably four-inch-wide black binder of all the research and all the information that the International Association of Fire Fighters had collected about the reasons and the support and all that research about extending presumptive cancer. The reason why they brought that is at the time, they were making a request that we extend the cancers that were covered here presumptively, and they came prepared. There have been big motions with the inclusion of wildland firefighters, and I know that the minister, in discussion here in the Assembly, has said that there will be future conversations to figure out which cancers in time.

I'm actually really looking forward to the conversation tomorrow with workers' compensation, because I think they're going to be able to help us better understand so that we can communicate to others the changes that are coming that include wildland firefighters.

I think this is an important thing when we as decision-makers and in the space as government make decisions about coverage for people who do those risky things, whether it's through the Canadian military — we heard both from the Member for Porter Creek North and, of course, the Member for Kluane, this is part of it. We need to make sure that when people are willing to put themselves at risk for the benefit of all of us, that they're supported.

I'm interested to see what that looks like as to whether or not it's through Yukon government or through workers' compensation, but I will give everyone an indication that this will be some of my questions and the conversation I hope to have with officials tomorrow, because I think it's important when we talk about specifically cancer — presumptive cancer coverage — it's understanding that as building materials change, as fires change, as equipment changes, as all these things change, it means that the risks also change and the effects of those risks change.

I'm happy to support it today. I will be the only one speaking, because it's a pretty easy one to support, but we thank the member for bringing it forward and I'm looking forward to seeing if there are others that will be added in our time here in the 36th, I think, Assembly, and if there are, that's things we should be proud of but understanding that there are going to be changes for wildland coming, which I also think is great.

Thank you to the member for bringing it forward, and the NDP will be voting in support.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I'll be supporting this motion today.

As we have discussed already this fall, municipal firefighters and wildland crews are both exposed to smoke and chemicals that we now know cause cancer. The list of cancers presumed to be work-related needs to keep up with the science.

This fall, the House passed amendments to extend presumptive cancer coverage to wildland firefighters, and we supported that change. During the debate, the Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board said that once the amendments were in place, the government would work with the board to engage unions on reviewing the list of cancers and service periods. I thank the member for bringing this forward.

Màhsi' cho.

Hon. Laura Lang: I rise today in support of the motion moved by the MLA for Southern Lakes.

This motion is both practical and reasonable. At its core, it is about listening to the people who are directly affected. These Yukoners put themselves in harm's way to protect our communities and understand intimately the risks they face on the job. Supporting this motion ensures that our laws reflect the latest understanding of those risks.

Every day, firefighters respond to emergencies on behalf of Yukoners. They serve to protect and prevent tragedy. The

long-term health consequences of repeated exposure to toxic substances in these situations are real. Over the years, research has continued to strengthen the connection between firefighting and an increased risk of certain cancers. As building materials, household products, and industrial substances have evolved, so too have the hazards firefighters encounter.

The motion before us does not predetermine an outcome. It calls on the Government of Yukon to engage firefighters in discussions about updating the list of presumptive cancers under the *Workers' Safety and Compensation Act*. That is an entirely reasonable request.

Who better to inform this work than the firefighters themselves? They understand the realities of the job, and they understand the occupational risks they face. Their experiences, along with the expertise of medical professionals, should help guide any review. Updating legislation and compensation frameworks should not be viewed as a one-time exercise. As science evolves, governments have a responsibility to examine whether existing protections remain appropriate. Ensuring that presumptive cancer coverage reflects current knowledge helps provide certainty and supports for workers and their families when they need it the most. Yukon firefighters serve us, and in turn, we need to be willing to listen and serve them.

Supporting this motion is good governance. It highlights this government's focus on evidence-based decision-making, and it acknowledges that those most affected by those policies should have a voice in shaping them. For these reasons, I am very pleased to support this motion and encourage all members of this House to do the same.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Tyler Porter: I just want to start by thanking all the members in this House today for their contributions to this motion. I do appreciate the opportunity to bring this motion forward, and I do recognize the important work firefighters do across the Yukon. As a past wildland firefighter who spent some time on the fire line and has been in the smoke, I do see how important this is, and I just look forward to seeing the conversations continue and building on the progress that has already been made, and I look forward to seeing this motion passed today.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Are you agreed?

Motion No. 206 agreed to

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 207 — Appointments to the Yukon Human Rights Commission

Clerk: Motion No. 207, standing in the name of the Hon. Laura Lang.

Speaker: It is moved by the Minister of Justice:

THAT the Yukon Legislative Assembly, pursuant to subsection 17(1) of the *Human Rights Act*, does appoint Amna Bhatti and Gary Whittle to the Yukon Human Rights Commission for a term of three years, effective November 21, 2026.

Hon. Laura Lang: I rise to speak to Motion No. 207 regarding the appointment of Ms. Amna Bhatti and Mr. Gary Whittle to the Yukon Human Rights Commission. The Yukon Human Rights Commission consists of five members. The terms of two individuals are set to expire on November 20, 2026. These positions were advertised and applicants were reviewed by the all-party Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees. The committee recommended that Ms. Bhatti and Mr. Whittle be appointed as members to the Yukon Human Rights Commission for a term of three years, effective November 21, 2026.

These applicants will bring a variety of skills and expertise to the commission, and I look forward to my colleagues supporting this motion to appoint them both to the Yukon Human Rights Commission. I would just like to take a moment to thank both Ms. Bhatti and Mr. Whittle for putting their names forward to take on this important work, and I encourage all members of this House to support this motion and the appointments of Ms. Bhatti and Mr. Whittle to the Yukon Human Rights Commission.

Carmen Gustafson: There's not too much to add to this — just that we will be supporting the appointment of Ms. Bhatti and Mr. Whittle to the commission.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Are you agreed?

Motion No. 207 agreed to

Motion No. 208 — Reappointment to the Yukon Human Rights Panel of Adjudicators

Clerk: Motion No. 208, standing in the name of the Hon. Laura Lang.

Speaker: It is moved by the Minister of Justice:

THAT the Yukon Legislative Assembly, pursuant to subsection 22(2) of the *Human Rights Act*, does reappoint Roxane Larouche to the Yukon Human Rights Panel of Adjudicators for a term of three years, effective immediately.

Hon. Laura Lang: I rise to speak to Motion No. 208 regarding the reappointment of Ms. Roxane Larouche to the Yukon Human Rights Panel of Adjudicators.

The Yukon Human Rights Panel of Adjudicators is made up of seven adjudicators who receive complaint referrals from the Yukon Human Rights Commission. The term of one individual is set to expire on December 12, 2026, and this position was advertised. After review by the all-party Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees, it was recommended that Ms. Larouche be reappointed to the Yukon Human Rights Panel of Adjudicators for a term of three years.

I would like to thank Ms. Larouche for putting her name forward to continue her service on this board, and I look forward to having my colleagues support Ms. Larouche's appointment.

Carmen Gustafson: Once again, I'm just rising to support the appointment of Ms. Larouche to the Human Rights Panel of Adjudicators.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Are you agreed?

Motion No. 208 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 51 — Department of Community Services — *continued*

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services, 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: Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services, in Bill No. 204, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2026-27*.

Hon. Cory Bellmore: I would like to thank officials Damien and Marie-Alexis for joining me again today to continue discussion on Vote 51.

I believe we left off a while ago with a question from the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin regarding sports infrastructure, and we ran short of time. So, I would just like to say that I do know that the Sport and Recreation branch has done an inventory of all the sport and recreation facilities not too long ago, and while there's no sport infrastructure plan, sport infrastructure is part of the information that we're collecting as part of the community infrastructure planning from communities and sporting groups.

Debra-Leigh Reti: I guess there's a new question here now with the possibility of a games coming to our town. Maybe in the future, are we looking at developing a sport infrastructure plan for the future? I'm not sure if that is on the table as of yet.

Hon. Cory Bellmore: Obviously, this is a really new and exciting opportunity for the Yukon, and we haven't yet discussed whether a sport infrastructure plan would be something that's necessary for the games specifically, but just generally, as part of the community infrastructure planning, communities are always bringing forward their needs, and quite often, recreation infrastructure is part of that information.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Can the minister share if the long-term planning that was promised in the platform is still a commitment, or has it been folded into the sport tourism plan?

Hon. Cory Bellmore: I do think the work that's being done on the community infrastructure development plan is the long-term planning for community infrastructure, and it does include sport and recreation infrastructure as well as other infrastructure needs in communities, and the sport tourism plan is a separate plan that we're working on with our partners at Economy, Tourism and Culture.

Debra-Leigh Reti: In regard to the sport tourism plan, has the department met with Sport Yukon about this plan yet?

Hon. Cory Bellmore: While the sport tourism plan is being led by the Department of Economy, Tourism and Culture, we do meet regularly with Sport Yukon and do have those discussions when information is available. But specific information on that planning is best directed to that department.

Debra-Leigh Reti: A few questions in regard to my community of Old Crow. The minister had mentioned last month that she's looking forward to visiting Old Crow. I can tell you, I met her son recently in Old Crow. But can she tell me when she's planning to go and, if nothing is booked yet, would she commit to getting there before the end of the year?

Hon. Cory Bellmore: I don't currently have travel booked to Old Crow, although I am very much looking forward to it — and even more so with stories from my son being there. I do understand the Premier has a trip booked before the end of the year to Old Crow.

Debra-Leigh Reti: That's really great to hear — I would like to hear more on that when the Premier plans to go.

My other question here is: In April, the minister told me that the water and sewer agreement still works but that negotiations on a new one have started. Can she give me an update on where those talks are at?

Hon. Cory Bellmore: I don't have that information available today, but I will commit to getting it back to the member.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Can the minister share when was the last time officials met with VGFN on the new agreement?

Hon. Cory Bellmore: The officials have met with VGFN this past summer — following our discussion in April — and we look forward to just meeting again with the new leadership there.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Is the minister able to share the results of that conversation in the summer?

Hon. Cory Bellmore: I don't have that information available, but if there is information other than what I have already agreed to share, I'll include that.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Aside from the new agreement, there's also the talk about moving the lagoon and the waste facility, and the minister had also said in April that she would meet with VGFN.

Has the minister reached out to VGFN, the new chief and council, in regard to this big project of moving the lagoon and waste facility?

Hon. Cory Bellmore: I have not had the opportunity to discuss either of these projects directly, but I do understand that as part of the ongoing work for the community infrastructure plans, the department has been meeting with officials in Old Crow and getting their priorities on different infrastructure in the community.

Debra-Leigh Reti: My last question would be: Will relocating these facilities possibly be part of the new service agreement discussions?

Hon. Cory Bellmore: The specific service agreement that we currently have that is being worked on will keep its own timeline for that work that's underway, and when the new infrastructure is being planned and developed, then discussions about operations will happen at that time.

Debra-Leigh Reti: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister and the officials, and I look forward to being updated on the future meetings with VGFN.

Kate White: I'm delighted to join the conversation again since the November 3 conversation with Community Services. During debate on amendments to the *Residential Tenancies Act,* I asked the minister if there was any intention to increase support or staffing at the residential tenancies office, and I believe at the time, she told me that she believed it was adequately staffed.

Can the minister let me know if she believes that the residential tenancies office currently has the human resources required for possibly what's coming starting in December?

Hon. Cory Bellmore: I do believe that the residential tenancies office is currently adequately staffed. The same answer that I gave previously during the discussions on the RTA is that we will monitor the needs there as operations continue.

Kate White: One of the things that, during debate, I highlighted as a concern was when removing rent control for trailer parks, what that might do, and unfortunately, one trailer park is living that experience right now. The reason why I was asking if there was additional capacity at that office was because the minister assured me there was, but I'll note that this is the response right now that comes via e-mail, and I know this because I'm cc'd on all the e-mails going to the RTO right now.

I'm just going to read what comes back. It says — the Yukon residential tenancies office: "Thank you for your inquiry. Your e-mail has been received, and a reply will be sent to you when possible. Due to an increased number of inquiries and applications and a temporary decrease in capacity, response times for all inquiries and applications are slower than usual. Thank you for your patience. If you have submitted an application of any kind, please call to pay the associated application fee by credit card as soon as possible, and you may also come to the office located at 307 Black Street in Whitehorse to pay the fee in person from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. There is a fee waiver application available to those who qualify, and if you think you may qualify to have the fee waived, please request a fee waiver application, and one will be e-mailed to you."

I'll note that if I was to e-mail the RTO right now — which happened this morning — this is the response that is sent back. In a response from the RTO, they are saying that due to a temporary decrease in capacity and an increased number of inquiries and applications, response times are longer than usual.

I'm going to ask the question again: Is the minister confident that the Yukon residential tenancies office has the resources and the capacity to meet current and forward demand?

Hon. Cory Bellmore: I do believe that the department is adequately monitoring whether the staffing in that office is good and that they will provide the services necessary for the potential uptick in applications that may be seen as we discussed previously and that if there are changes necessary, we will be informed of that.

Kate White: I'll note that this is the case right now. That is an e-mail that's being sent saying that there's a decrease in capacity and an increase in inquiries. I'm going to note my concern, and again, it's mostly in support of staff.

One of the things I raised in debate on the amendments brought forward by the minister to the *Residential Tenancies Act* was how to ensure that rent increases didn't remove, for example, a landlord's obligation to their tenancy agreement with tenants. The reason why I asked about that — and I definitely asked about that in terms of mobile home parks — is because there are very real consequences.

I think the minister knows about it, because she's been cc'd in some of those e-mails. But there was a decision found in favour of a tenant who filed a dispute resolution complaint this summer where it was found that the landlord was in breach of contract. The landlord was directed to resume the garbage collection service, but he only did it for the one tenant.

Other tenants in the park had concerns, because obviously, they also had signed the same contract, which now had been recognized as being in breach, and started the process, including communicating back and forth with the residential tenancies office. The office had reached out to the park owner, the landlord, who had indicated that they were willing to make changes if there was a collection of names and they would act on that. A tenant sent out e-mails to all their neighbours. More than 44 people responded to the RTO to say that they were interested in getting their garbage collection.

This started happening on a Monday or Tuesday. On a Thursday, the landlord had sent out an e-mail to the entire park that said if people want a garbage collection, it was going to be an additional $100 a month in pad rent.

The park has broken their lease — their obligations — they were found to have broken that. One person, long before the changes of the RTA, filed a formal complaint — it was found in their favour. Their neighbours started to react, and since that time, the changes to the RTA have happened.

Now what the tenants are asking is: If we have to follow our obligations of the lease agreement, why doesn't the landlord? The landlord was found to be in breach — directed by the RTO to pick up the garbage — others made inquiries. The landlord has since sent out an e-mail saying that it's going to be an extra $100 a month in pad rent. The tenants right now are trying to understand how that works, because come December 1, they can get a notification that there will be an increase for $100 a month, and there's no guarantee that their garbage will be picked up.

One of the questions I asked in debate is: How is the minister confident that both landlords and tenants will follow those agreements, those contractual agreements, those signed leases? There's already an example.

I'm looking for direction from the minister if she has suggestions or advice for tenants in that mobile home park, and I'll leave her to answer that.

Hon. Cory Bellmore: I am aware of the situation that the member is speaking of but will not disclose the information or speak to it directly here today.

What I will say is that the tenants and the landlord both have the opportunity to file with the RTO the issues that they are having with their contractual relationships. Those adjudicators do good work in going through the file to make sure that they understand what's going on. There were other protections that were left in the RTA when those changes were made specifically for mobile homes. I do believe that the folks who are working hard in the office are making the calls that they see necessary as far as the legislation is required.

Kate White: This isn't a criticism to the folks in the office. This is me asking the minister — based on her assertions that contractual obligations would be honoured and this wasn't going to affect that and the concerns I raised — how was that the case? Because this is a very clear example of a contract being breached — the decision being found in favour of the tenant — so the landlord did breach the contract. Other people who signed the same contracts reached out for a clarification and direction from the RTO with additional questions.

The legislation amendments have changed now, and so now there's a park where there's been a clear breach of the tenancy agreement by the landlord. It has been found already by the RTO — the good folks at the RTO.

Since that initial decision was found and there was a movement within the park for others to get their garbage picked up, the landlord sent out an e-mail saying if you want your garbage picked up, it's an extra $100 a month. So, some of the questions that the tenants have are: Is that not a retaliatory response — saying that if you want your garbage picked up, which was a clear breach of contract, that would be $100 additional per month to pad rent?

I'll ask the minister: Does she understand that to be a retaliatory action?

Hon. Cory Bellmore: What I'll say is that I don't have enough of the details to answer the question that the member is currently asking me. I don't know all the details of the specific situation and that is information that has been provided to the RTO to make the decisions that they have made.

I recommend that if the tenants reached out to the RTO, that they do that good work with the good folks there that are going through these files, as well as the landlord if there's concerns, and I'll also note that it is November 18. This legislation takes effect on December 1, so that would be part of the information that they should share if they're reaching out to the residential tenancies office.

Kate White: That is a great foray into another section. So, for example, this was a question that was sent to the RTO, and then I'm sure the minister can answer. It says: "I would like you to explain to me what the new legislation coming into effect December 1st 2026 will mean and the impact of this new legislation on anyone putting in a complaint." I'll ask the minister to answer the same question that was asked to the RTO.

Hon. Cory Bellmore: I only sort of caught most of that question, but what I would say is that if somebody's putting in a complaint to the RTO, that they are engaging with that office, and the legislation gives guidelines on how to deal with the complaint that they're putting in.

Kate White: I'll note that the response from the RTO was a bit different.

The next question the tenant asked — it says: "I would like to know if the landlord's email indicating that if we want our garbage picked up we will have a $100/month increase in pad fee - is considered retaliatory action."

To the minister: Is that considered retaliatory action? Again, the landlord was found in breach of contract and directed to pick up the garbage of one tenant. Other tenants would like the same. The landlord sent out an e-mail to all tenants saying if they wanted the garbage picked up, it would be an additional $100.

The tenant is asking: Is this considered retaliatory action?

Hon. Cory Bellmore: I'll just say the same thing that I did on the question that was asked already. I don't have all the information of the specific situation, and I would be remiss to talk about it on the floor here today. What I will say is that both the tenant and the landlord have the opportunity to work with the residential tenancies office, with all the information present, so that decisions can be made appropriately.

Kate White: When we were having the conversation during debate, I was told often that these were hypotheticals, and so I'm here to say that it's not a hypothetical at all — it's not a hypothetical. The question from the tenant was: "I would like to know if the landlord's email indicating that if we want our garbage picked up we will have a $100/month increase in pad fee - is considered retaliatory action."

I'm going to read the response from the RTO. It says — and I am reading it: "Unfortunately, this would be considered legal advice and not something I can answer. Ultimately, it would be at the discretion of an adjudicator to make any findings they deem necessary and to determine the dispute should a formal application be submitted. In other words, if an application for dispute resolution were submitted to our office and a finding on whether an action was retaliatory was seen as necessary to deciding the outcome of the dispute under the *Residential Tenancies Act*, only then, and only after considering the submissions of both sides, would such a determination be made by the adjudicator."

The reason why I want to read that in right now is, again, a real-world example of what is happening right now. The challenge is it's not December 1 yet. Folks in this park understand it. The breach of contract happened in the summer; it's still happening. It's going to happen every week as long as the garbage isn't picked up. That decision isn't going to be any different.

Folks in the park are trying to understand where they stand, because after December 1, they could get a notification that there's going to be a $100-per-month increase, and it may or may not mention because of garbage pickup. If it's mentioned

because of garbage pickup, they could challenge it. The RTO could find in their favour, and then the landlord can reissue a different notice of rent increase for $100 without mentioning garbage pickup.

The tenants want to know: How are they supposed to ensure that their contract, the legally binding contract that they signed with their landlord, is also being honoured by their landlord? Because there's been a breach of contract; the landlord isn't doing it. There's been the decision, and now they're stuck in the spot where there's a concern about a $100-per-month increase.

I'm asking the minister again: Does she believe that with the changes that she brought forward, folks within mobile home parks — both the landlord and the tenant — have to live up to the obligations of their renting agreement?

Hon. Cory Bellmore: What I will say is that landlords and tenants have to live up to the legislation as it is written, and again, it wouldn't be appropriate for me to talk about specific cases that may or may not be in the office of the RTO that they're currently dealing with.

I can say that the folks at the residential tenancies office do provide fair and expedient and accessible dispute resolution for landlords and tenants, and they do that good work often and work the best they can to find the best outcome they can with the legislation as it's provided.

Again, I will say that I've heard of the situation. I do not know all the details of the situation, and it would be wrong for me to comment on it one way or the other if in fact it is an item that will lead to adjudication through the RTO.

Kate White: Again, it goes back to how is a tenant, whether they're in a mobile home park or in a rental unit, protected from the legislation where if they file a complaint and it's found in their favour, they can face a rent increase or in the cases of outside a mobile home park, they can face an eviction notice.

My question for the minister is: How are tenants going to be able to ensure that, when they live up to the spirit and intent of their lease agreement, so does the landlord? How does the minister envision this to happen?

Because here's a real-world example again of the consequences, and come December 1, we're going to see other examples. I'm just asking for the minister to walk me through how she believes that folks in mobile home parks are protected under the legislation from retaliatory actions if they file a complaint and they win the complaint. How do we make sure that they don't face rent increases because of those complaints or that they don't face harassment because of those complaints? That's my question for the minister.

Hon. Cory Bellmore: I think we've talked about this at length in the RTA debate about these potential hypothetical situations that will work their way into real situations at some point in time that will be adjudicated through the residential tenancies office. But I do believe that when I talked about it before, I also talked about the fact that there's always information that we may not be aware of. When I say that we don't have all the information, that is the information that is provided during that process with the adjudication, the application and the work that's being done. That's how I will answer this question.

I will say that if the tenant or a landlord believes that something is not correct, they should file or work with the residential tenancies office with the legislation as it is at the time when that's happening to receive the outcome necessary.

Kate White: Again, when we discussed this initially during Committee of the Whole debate on the changes to the act, the minister talked in hypotheticals, and I'm here to say it's not hypotheticals. It's not hypotheticals right now — it's not at all.

The reason why I'm trying to get a sense of how the minister understands this is because going to adjudication right now, it could be found that it is retaliatory action, but it doesn't prevent the landlord from increasing the rent. There's no protection from that.

Tenants are, I think, fair in asking: Well, what does this mean for them as far as their obligation under the rental agreement but also the landlord's obligation under the rental agreement?

I'll try that again for a response from the minister, but this is no longer hypothetical — this is happening. It's happening in real time, and unfortunately, I honestly believe this is the first. There will be others.

Hon. Cory Bellmore: As I said, I do understand. I do have some information on this specific situation, which I will not talk about specifically here. But what I will say is I don't know that I have all the information of this specific situation, and if we just say "if tenants think", it is a hypothetical situation, so there are two different situations that are being talked about here. One may be working through the residential tenancies office, and I do hope that everybody on both sides provides all the information needed to make a decision.

Other folks who are unaware of what their rights are or what their contracts require, they should visit the residential tenancies office to understand better how that fits them.

Kate White: I'm hoping that the minister then can walk us through section 136 of the *Residential Tenancies Act*, which is titled "Offences and penalties". Clause 1 says: "A person who contravenes or fails to comply with any of the following provisions commits an offence: (a) subsections 13(1), (2) or (3) [Requirements for tenancy agreements]". It goes down — security deposits, pet damages; it goes on through many different things: timing of rent increases, tenant obligations, landlord obligations for repair and maintenance — I think that one's probably quite relevant — but then clause 2 says: "Every person commits an offence who coerces, threatens, intimidates or harasses a tenant or landlord (a) in order to deter the tenant or landlord from making an application under this Act…" — one could consider receiving an e-mail saying there would be a $100 increase on your rent to be intimidation — "… or (b) in retaliation for the tenant or landlord seeking a remedy under this Act."

I want to know the minister's interpretation of section 136 under part 8, "Offences and penalties", of the *Residential Tenancies Act* and how that will play out.

Hon. Cory Bellmore: I do appreciate the vigour at trying to get these answers from the *Residential Tenancies Act,*

although I do not have a copy of the *Residential Tenancies Act* with me here today, because we were not debating the *Residential Tenancies Act*. Also, the section I believe that is being asked about was not a change in the recent changes to the *Residential Tenancies Act*. I'll just ask the member, if this is a question that cannot be answered by somebody who is wondering if this affects them as part of their contract for a residential tenancy, that they bring that information forward. Otherwise, I don't have that information here.

Chair's statement — Relevance of debate

Chair: Order, please.

The Committee seems to be debating a bill that has already passed the House, and I'm just going to draw attention to the proceedings of Committee of the Whole, and Standing Order 42(2), which states that: "Speeches in Committee of the Whole shall be strictly relevant to the item or clause under consideration."

I'm going to leave you with that for now.

Kate White: My understanding is that the Department of Community Services is responsible for the *Residential Tenancies Act*. We're discussing Community Services. I have questions about the existing clauses, how it pertains to the changes made by the minister, and so those are the questions I'm asking today.

I did send the minister an e-mail quite some time ago asking specifically if, in a case of multiple tenants in one area, the expectation would be that each tenant would have to pay the fee. This was an e-mail that I sent, and I'll try to find it now, but I sent it quite a long time ago. I sent it on October 5, and I'll read from that.

It says: "After all was said and done …" the tenant "…won his RTO dispute, which is great news. What is not great news is that the decision will only see garbage picked up for him and not all of the people in the park. As you might imagine, upon hearing of this victory and seeing his garbage picked up, his neighbors want to know why they aren't seeing a similar return of service.

"As a decision has been made in this case, will each of his neighbors be required to pay the fee, complete the complaint (it will be the same documentation and evidence as already submitted) identify the file number and request the same treatment?"

I sent an e-mail in October, prior to the tabling of the changes to the *Residential Tenancies Act*, asking if each of the tenants in that park would have to pay the fee and file the same complaint — I didn't hear back.

Maybe the minister could let me know if the idea would be, if in something, for example, like a trailer park with 150-plus tenants, if a decision was made, if the expectation was that each of them have to pay the fee to file the same complaint referencing the number with the same documentation in order to be granted the same rights.

Hon. Cory Bellmore: I will revisit the e-mail that was sent to me, and I'll work with the members at the RTO. I will have the information provided and prepare responses if that has not already occurred.

Kate White: I'll just let the minister know that I re-sent the e-mail now, and so I think what I'm indicating is that there are going to be ongoing concerns.

I have lots of questions about other legislation that has been indicated that may or may not be reviewed, whether we talk about dental professions to allow dental hygienists to operate independently, whether it's a review of the *Municipal Act* and others. I will signal that between my colleague and me there will be lots of questions going forward, but I also have concerns about recent changes. I spoke at length — 12.5 hours, I think — about them.

We're seeing real-world consequences now, and come December 1, I unfortunately believe that we'll see more, and so concerns I'll note right now are about support for the staff at the RTO, knowing that right now an e-mail is going out saying that they are facing an increase in inquiries and have a lower capacity. I want to make sure that those folks have the support that they need. The minister has assured this House that they have, and so I'll leave it here, but I'll definitely be back to talk about this in the spring.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services?

Seeing none, we'll move to line-by-line.

Unanimous consent to deem all lines in Vote 51, Department of Community Services, cleared or carried

Kate White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 51, Department of Community Services, cleared or carried, as required.

Chair: The Member for Takhini has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 51, Department of Community Services, 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 $10,834,000 agreed to

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of nil agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of $10,834,000 agreed to

Department of Community Services agreed to

Vote 3 — Department of Education

Chair: The matter before the Committee is now Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 204, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2026-27*.

Would members like to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 204, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2026-27*.

Hon. Scott Kent: I would just like to introduce the officials who are here to support me today: Deputy Minister of Education Paul Moore and Assistant Deputy Minister of Corporate Services and Programs Kate Durand. I would like to thank them both for coming and also thank the officials who are back at the Department of Education monitoring proceedings and sending information as needed.

I just want to take a brief moment to present the Department of Education's *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* for 2026-27. The department is requesting a net increase of $7.751 million in the supplement. All changes are within the department's O&M budget under Corporate Services and Programs.

Of this amount, $7.491 million is time-limited funding provided by the Government of Canada through the *Canada-Yukon Early Learning and Child Care Agreement*. This funding will support Yukon in achieving and maintaining the targets set out in the agreement. It will also support the continued delivery of affordable, accessible, inclusive, and high-quality early learning and childcare across the territory.

Since universal childcare was introduced in April 2021, there have been reduced costs for families and increased support to licensed early learning and childcare programs. Parent fee reductions paid directly to operators save families up to $8,400 annually for each child enrolled in a licensed program.

The supplementary budget also includes an ongoing increase of $260,000 for the Child Development Centre. This funding reflects the cost of living and market increases included in the centre's recently ratified three-year collective agreement. The Child Development Centre plays an important role in helping Yukon families and young children access inclusive early learning and therapeutic services. Department staff continue to work collaboratively with the centre to address the financial impacts of its collective agreement and support the continuation of these services.

Madam Chair, the supplementary budget provides the funding required to maintain affordable early learning and childcare and support the important services delivered by the Child Development Centre. With the support of this Assembly, we will continue investing in services for children and families while putting the needs of students at the centre of Yukon's education system.

Now, just before I turn the floor back over to members opposite for questions, I just want to take a brief moment to wish my dad's cousin Doug Kent a happy 100th birthday. He's turning 100 on December 2. His wife, Eileen, is a very young 99, and they just recently celebrated their 75th wedding anniversary in October. They live in a suite in a continuing care home in Regina, and I just wanted to give a shout-out to my dad's cousin. My dad and him were born in the same year. My dad has since passed away, of course, but a happy 100th to Doug, and I wish him and Eileen all the best.

Linda Moen: Thank you to the officials that are here and those that are back in the department to provide information about the questions that I have as the official critic for Education.

I know that the minister said that it was a supplement and some of it was time-limited on early childhood learning. But I do have a number of questions, probably on priorities — and an opportunity to get some answers to some outstanding questions that I have and to have a conversation for all the Yukoners who are listening — to school boards, to people that have come to me with concerns, some of the networking opportunities that I've had, for me to get a better understanding of this portfolio, and also to give the department an opportunity to promote some of the great work that they're doing.

As somebody who has children in education, I think this is an extremely important file. I do believe education is a key component to helping end poverty, which I know is sometimes overlooked and overshadowed and not brought up enough times in this Assembly. But I know it affects a great number of Yukoners, so I'm into promoting education, early childhood education and post-secondary. As I stated before in this Assembly, my grandmother always said that we're lifelong learners.

I'll take this opportunity to have a conversation and start with some questions on something that's been on people's minds, which is the independent review board. I don't see any dollars allocated to this, but from my understanding, there are going to be recommendations coming.

Does the department have any estimates of what may be allocated to implement the recommendations?

Hon. Scott Kent: As members know, the amount allocated to the panel for them to do their work is $250,000. That's in the current budget. There may be an increase that will be identified in a subsequent budgeting exercise — that's for the panel themselves to do the work.

But when it comes to the implementation piece, those numbers will be included in the next budget. As I mentioned earlier today in Question Period, there are some initiatives underway right now that don't have a specific cost with them — some of the things that we've been doing. But when it comes to identifying implementation items that have a monetary request, those will be included in most likely the next main estimates for 2027–28.

Linda Moen: From my understanding, this was a fulsome review. It was also in the party platform that they were going to do that. There was some mention today from the minister on even the *Education Act*. From my understanding, those require resources, contractors, maybe additional staff. It sounds like there are talks already for those recommendations to be implemented.

Would the department be able to give me an estimate on what it may look like?

Hon. Scott Kent: We won't have those estimates yet. I would expect them as we get toward the final report at the end of the year, and then we'll look to the next main estimates to be able to identify the expenditures.

But maybe this gives me an opportunity to give an update outside of what I mentioned in Question Period today, with a little bit more time to give members and Yukoners listening a sense of where we're at with implementing the recommendations in the June status report. After receiving the panel's final report at the end of the year, an implementation plan will be developed. We are working in the interim on implementation, as I mentioned earlier today, and taking steps

to implement recommendations based on the panel's initial June findings. We'll make those public as soon as we can, as I mentioned. We're looking for the proper reporting format to be able to reflect the changing nature of the implementation.

I'll just go through the four highlights or the four recommendations and what's been done — just some high-level information about what's been done to date. Some of this, I spoke about in Question Period today, but I'll just repeat it now so it's in one spot in Hansard.

With respect to addressing political interference, we're ensuring that the appropriate delegations are in place so that decisions can be made and implemented without political involvement. A recent example is the delegation of the authority to issue guidelines for the implementation of special education under section 15 of the *Education Act* to the department. Previously, it was housed at the minister's office, and now it has been delegated down to the department for that work.

Also, separating the dual roles of the Department of Education, the department's reviewing its policies and procedures toward ensuring that they reflect the roles of ministerial versus school operational authorities. The department is working on targeted amendments to the *Education Act* and missing financial regulations as well as work to update the funding criteria and formulas for school boards to create a clear, predictable, and transparent funding structure.

When it comes to the recommendation around strengthening inclusive education supports, we recognize the need to bolster inclusive education supports. We've added specialist positions, including two new nursing positions in 2026, and we're looking to identify supports to reduce wait times after students are referred to specialists, increase early screening and targeted interventions, and provide supports needed to improve learner outcomes.

Finally, when it comes to creating a robust accountability system, the department supports the importance of that system, and early work is underway to release data in real time as it is available rather than waiting for the annual reporting cycles. The integrated outcome strategy for Yukon learners is built on a system of identifying indicators for each learner outcome and measuring and monitoring progress as a system against those outcomes. Work is underway working with First Nation educators and other partners to develop these indicators and metrics, and the department is reviewing and updating onboarding processes, working in partnership with school boards and other individuals who would have interest in that work.

Linda Moen: I'm hearing the term a number of times, and just so we all have the same understanding, can the minister's officials give me a definition of what they consider "political interference"?

Hon. Scott Kent: I think the easiest way to explain it is that we need to have a clear delineation between the day-to-day operations of the school and then what the minister would be responsible for, which would be setting policy or setting monetary or budget appropriations for each activity within the department. I think that's the easiest way to explain it. I know that the panel goes into more detail in their June status report of some of the concerns that they have heard, but I think just trying to keep separate the operational and day-to-day piece from the department, keep that out of the minister's office, and then the minister sets overall policy.

I think an example is with respect to the Robert Service School shop teacher issue that we've discussed in the Legislature before. I think if, as the minister, I were to intervene and assign a specific teacher to one school, that could be considered political interference, but instead, what I have done is, on the policy side, asked the department to review the rural staffing allocations so that it's fair for all schools across rural Yukon and it's not just predicated on adding one position to one specific school. I think that would be the example that I would use.

Linda Moen: Would it be fair to say that's department-wide, or is that just for the Department of Education, or is that for all departments?

Is that from the Cabinet that's making those decisions, or is it as the Minister of Education — that's what he's deciding for his department?

Hon. Scott Kent: This is in response, of course, to the independent review panel that was set up to look at the Department of Education — and that's what this is focused on — the Department of Education, and, of course, political interference was something that was identified by the panel in their June status report.

They said that there are a number of recommendations. They have recommended to establish a quality assurance committee, which would be an independent body to review and resolve concerns regarding services, processes, and administrative decisions and limit ministerial involvement in day-to-day operations. That's a summary of their report. Obviously, there's quite a bit more detail in the report itself.

As I've mentioned, we're working to limit the ministerial involvement in the day-to-day operations, and work is underway on the best way to establish some sort of a quality assurance committee or something similar that would address the other part of that recommendation that the review panel put forward.

Linda Moen: It's very interesting to hear this. Seems like the department is going to be championing something that I haven't seen any of the departments' willingness to delve into what is "political interference", make a definition, and then see it in operation in real time, which is very interesting.

As somebody who served on a former chief and council in my previous role, we had very clearly defined lines right from the beginning that we were political versus what administration has done. It is interesting to see the department championing this, and maybe other departments will see and take on some of those successes as they navigate and go through this.

Continuing on to the independent review board, what is the oversight looking like? We have recommendations that are coming in. They're compiling information. They're hearing from school boards. They're hearing from teachers. They're hearing from educators.

What is the oversight going to be?

Hon. Scott Kent: I think much of the oversight will be, of course, in how we respond to the recommendations as well as ensuring that those responses and actions are public.

I spent a number of years on the Public Accounts Committee with the Member for Takhini, the Leader of the

Official Opposition, and others in the House. I think that the PAC requests of departments to respond and report back on progress with respect to the Auditor General recommendations were welcomed. I would like to see some sort of a model based on that when it comes to responding to the panel recommendations, that we don't just do it once and then it's set in stone — we do it a number of times.

When it comes to the oversight, as I mentioned in my earlier response, we're still exploring the quality assurance committee. I know there is a recommendation in the October report around the establishment of an education advisory committee. There is an education advisory committee that exists today. It is not perhaps as active as we would like it to be, but there are some options around using that model to assist us with the implementation of the independent report.

Of course, there are a number of internal resources through the Corporate Services and Programs branch that are also assisting with the oversight and the implementation.

I know that my colleagues and I want to make sure that this is a very open and transparent and public-facing implementation. I know that the panellists were quite clear when they began their work that they didn't want to go through the work and put together this report and just see it end up on a shelf. I know that is not my intention as minister, and it's not what my colleagues would like to see.

We have begun working on implementation, and we'll continue to do that. As I mentioned earlier today, as soon as possible, I will make sure that the initial report on progress is available publicly to Yukoners to look at.

Linda Moen: I'm thankful that the changes that are coming are going to be public. I think it's really important for parents and students, for educators, for anybody involved in the education system, school councils that are responsible for their school growth plans, and administrators — of the direction that the department will be going on and undertaking. It has a lot of moving pieces. It affects all of the Yukon. We have schools in all of our communities. It's going to be just a lot of moving pieces. I think reporting and updating as it moves along as changes are going and happening is very important.

Can the department tell me not only that they're going to be tracked and they're going to be public, but how are they going to be measured and resourced? It sounds like there is going to be pivoting or shifting priorities. Maybe the department can clarify some of those for me.

Hon. Scott Kent: With the recommendations that have been put forward, like any recommendations that come to us in a similar report or similar work, there are those recommendations that are easier to implement and those that are a little bit more difficult or may take some more time.

With respect to the implementation plan, we do have up to a year after the final report to develop that. That's where we'll set priorities and then, of course, budget items for those recommendations that require additional resources will be included there. I'm hopeful that it doesn't take that entire year to implement. I know that, as I've mentioned, there are things that we can implement rather quickly, but through the development of that implementation plan, we'll make sure that priorities are set and, where we can or where we need to assign additional resources to a recommendation, we'll do so.

Just wanted to quickly, before sitting down, also add some of the highlights from the fall status report. The June status report seemed to get a lot more attention than the fall one, but there are some important recommendations in there as well. I've already talked about this, but it would be to create an education advisory committee to review recommendations and work with the department to develop that full implementation plan.

Also, fund upgrading for students who graduate without the prerequisites or academic preparation needed to pursue their educational goals — this is certainly something I've heard as I've been on the job as Education minister for almost a year now. I've had a number of meetings with First Nation governments, the Chiefs Committee on Education, and others, and this is something that has come up in a number of those meetings as a gap, and I believe that's primarily where the panel heard that was the basis for where the panel made this specific recommendation.

Another highlight is to establish an oversight process to monitor and support each high school student's pathway to graduation and then finally to connect timely recruitment and reliable employment processes with effective onboarding, supervision, and robust ongoing professional learning.

One of the other things that was identified in that fall report as well is with respect to staff housing, and I'll just pivot and put my Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation hat on for a second. I know we have a five-year capital plan that we're working on and will show where we will be building additional staff housing in Yukon communities. Of course, that plan is also a living document and may have to be adjusted depending on things that happen in specific communities or needs. But I think it's a great start to addressing some of the housing challenges that we see in rural Yukon when it comes to staff.

I've mentioned this before. Not only do we need quantity of staff housing, but we also need quality staff housing for those professionals that work for the Yukon government outside of the City of Whitehorse.

Linda Moen: Thank you. That was probably on page 6 of my questions, so we will get there. I have a number of questions not only from Hansards but from Question Period and, again, from people that I have engaged with and the work that we do when we're not sitting.

Going back to this, I'm glad to hear that there's an education advisory committee.

If the minister can tell me who may be engaged in that and what stakeholders will be invited — how does that work? Can he explain that process? Who will the stakeholders be, and how will they be engaged throughout this process?

Hon. Scott Kent: Thank you, and I appreciate the question from the member opposite, because the education advisory committee was established a number of years ago and it has a fairly extensive membership, but I don't know that the committee has met in recent years. You can look on the website to find the last minutes, and I think you'll find that they are from a number of years ago.

But when we talk specifics and assigning some of what the review panel was looking for as far as the duties of the education advisory committee, I think what we need to do is

stand the committee up again and take a look at its mandate and its membership.

Right now, committee members include representatives from Yukon First Nations and key education partners, and I'll go through this list, because I think it will highlight how exhaustive a list it is, and perhaps we need to refine the membership to ensure that there are opportunities for this work to be done. It's: Association franco-yukonnaise; Association of Yukon School Administrators; Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees; Autism Yukon; BGC Yukon; BYTE; Catholic Education Association of Yukon; Child and Youth Advocate Office; Child Development Centre; CSFY; Communities Building Youth Futures Yukon; Department of Education senior leadership; educators appointed by the deputy minister for rural, urban, elementary, and secondary schools; First Nation Education Commission; First Nation School Board; Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon; Yukon Parent Advisory Committee; school councils; Yukon Association of Education Professionals; Yukon Child Care Board; Yukon First Nation Education Directorate; Yukon University; and youth representatives.

I think that those of us who have been in meetings could probably appreciate the length of time it would take just to do the roundtable of introductions at a committee that could be so broad and diverse.

This is a serious matter, obviously, but I want to make sure that we establish the committee, put the terms of reference in place, assign the work that was recommended by the review panel, and make sure that the education advisory committee feels like they have a voice and an opportunity to provide input as well as oversight into the implementation of the review panel's recommendations.

Linda Moen: From my understanding, that education advisory committee was not part of the independent review process. Correct?

Hon. Scott Kent: I won't go through the list again, but I believe that most if not all of those organizations were able to provide input into the review process, but the education advisory committee itself was not, I don't believe, contacted by the review panel and stood up for any type of input into the process. But again, as I mentioned, I went through that fairly lengthy list, and I'm sure that most if not all of those organizations have provided input or have met with the review panel at one time or another.

Linda Moen: I think it would be extremely important that if they're going to resurrect this education advisory committee, for them to have an understanding of the influence that they're going to have on the departments going forward. That list not only tells me how important education is to a lot of groups but how many organizations and stakeholders are feeding into those decisions that will lead the department to making some very important decisions and very strategic moves in terms of the budget, so to speak.

Then that would lead into my next question: How are they going to prioritize all of them? Listening to the amount of stakeholders, the resources that it may take, can the department lead me through how they are going to prioritize all those different moving pieces to give direction to the department?

Hon. Scott Kent: What we're looking at doing is addressing the mandate and the terms of reference and the membership of the education advisory committee, and the recommendation from the review panel is for that committee to review recommendations and work with the department to develop a full implementation plan. As I mentioned, we have up to a year after the tabling of the final report to develop that full implementation plan. That's not to say that work won't be underway. We're not waiting until the full implementation plan is done, but that work will be done in conjunction with the department and priorities will be set, as I mentioned earlier. Priorities will be set and resources allocated as needed for the adoption of the recommendations in the panel's report.

Linda Moen: I'm glad to hear the minister said that this is not a report that's just going to be shelved — that there are going to be actions behind this, but we, as in government, know that when we're talking actions, that also requires additional resources to make that happen. Just from what's been shared a bit, I know that's going to require quite a bit of resources, not only resources but also full-time staff equivalents, teachers, EAs. It's going to be quite big and a large undertaking. That's probably why there's a year for them to implement that.

But this government has — and I have to say it, because it has been said so much in this Assembly — that with this fiscal situation we're just hearing competing factors now of how important this work is, the resources that it's going to take, but we have a government saying they have limited financial capacity.

How do they plan to make this happen?

Hon. Scott Kent: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I appreciate the question from the member opposite. Of course, we'll be looking to get a sense with that final report and then the development of the implementation plan for exactly what resources will be needed. There are options, of course, to reallocate existing resources where possible. Of course, like all budgeting exercises, there are choices to be made and as the Minister of Education, I'm part of a broader team in Cabinet Management Board that would set the priorities.

As the member opposite mentioned, this was a priority for our government during the last election. It's part of my mandate letter back to the Premier. I'm pleased that we were able to move so quickly to get the work started.

I should take just a moment as well to thank the four members of the panel. I know they have been extremely busy. They have had dozens and dozens of meetings with education stakeholders, and I think some of those meetings are emotional and draining for those panellists. But I think obviously they're extremely committed to this work and seeing the education system in the Yukon changed and changed for the better. I do want to thank Lorraine Taillefer, Gillian Staveley, Greg Storey, and Judith Arnold for their work to date, and I look forward, of course, to their final report.

But again, when it comes to resources, we need to get a better handle on exactly what that's going to look like to do this: what we can reprioritize within the department and what we would be looking for new resources for the implementation.

Linda Moen: Would I be so bold as to say — would they be looking at requesting funds from the contingency?

Hon. Scott Kent: As I mentioned, I think it's too early. We don't have what those cost estimates would look like. I believe we have an opportunity to have some of the additional resources that may be required in the main estimates, so that wouldn't require contingency. But again, I think at this point it's too early to say where we're going to be, what additional resources would be required, and which resources we can reprioritize or refocus within the existing budgets.

Linda Moen: Very interesting — just some of the information that the department has provided — we're seeing population increase in students; we're seeing modulars being put into different schools across the Yukon. That tells me there are already dollars being invested just to house students, not including full-time-equivalent staff or the resources that it would take to get the school equipment and stuff. Sitting here observing and hearing as this goes on, that's what I'm seeing. It's going to be interesting to see how the department prioritizes again all of that information and competing priorities from everybody who wants the same outcome for all of our students.

I've mentioned this many times in here about equity — how does that look? How does that play out for rural Yukon students? Again, just wanting my observations to be noted here before we start going forward.

It's interesting, too, that the minister mentioned the Auditor General report. He opened the door; I will go through it. I've heard from other departments too now that have fully accepted all the recommendations from various Auditor General reports.

Can the minister tell me — or his officials: Is any of this work being done a duplicate of previous Auditor General reports?

Hon. Scott Kent: The member opposite references the 2019, I believe, Auditor General's report on kindergarten to grade 12 education in the Yukon, and I think that's certainly one of the documents that the panel has looked at; it's not the only one. I think we all know there are a number of studies and reports that have been done over the past number of years, and I'm sure that in their review and in their development of their recommendations, they perhaps took some pieces from each and every one of those reports.

But maybe I could just give a bit of an update on progress with respect to the 2019 Auditor General's report. That report made recommendations related to student outcomes, inclusive education, and Yukon First Nation cultures and languages. Since 2019, the Department of Education has taken action in each of these areas and has provided public updates on its progress. That was what I mentioned earlier in the reports back to the Public Accounts Committee, and when I was on the Public Accounts Committee with the Member for Takhini, we had the Department of Education come back to the House and appear again to provide us with an update on their work. Work continues to improve student outcomes and address gaps affecting Indigenous students, rural students, and students with special and inclusive education needs.

Within the 2019 Auditor General of Canada's report, recommendations 42 and 47 addressed educational outcomes for Yukon students. Recommendation 70 addressed inclusive education, and recommendations 89, 93, 99, and 109 addressed Yukon First Nation cultures and languages.

In 2025, the department released the *Integrated Outcome Strategy for Yukon Learners* in response to recommendation 42. Work is underway to finalize an implementation plan and develop indicators to track progress on the 14 learner outcomes identified for the kindergarten to 12 system. The department reports publicly on K to 12 education through the data reports — we're looking to move away from just annual reports and have real-time data available. We have some "How Are We Doing?" reports on Yukon First Nation student outcomes as well as monthly school enrolment updates. There are a host of things, and I'm sure that as members go through those reports of the past and other reports, they'll find some similarities.

I feel that the panel has brought that work together plus the information that they have reviewed and received from stakeholders that they have been engaged with to come up with these specific recommendations for us to implement.

Linda Moen: 2019 was quite a number of years ago. In that time, that's a whole set of learners, and I know this Assembly doesn't like examples, but that would be the difference from somebody being in grade 6 years ago that would be in high school grade 12 right now. Some of those recommendations and changes could have helped them succeed, put in if they needed additional resources, if they needed an EA, if a school needed an FTE at that time. Time is of the essence when we look at these reports, why they matter, the impacts that they have on student population, on parents, on people trying to navigate the system.

We talk about gaps and barriers, low graduation rates. All of this comes to, again, what I mentioned earlier: addressing a causal factor like poverty. When we look at education and we want the same outcome for all of our learners from when they start from early childhood all the way up to being successful in post-secondary, I think people get an understanding and an idea of how much work goes into this.

When we have a report going back to 2019 that we're just still talking about in 2026, it gives me concern. I know that the minister has echoed those same things, saying that he didn't want this report to be shelved and that they want actionable items coming from this.

But again, I'm hard-pressed from this government saying how they're fiscally restrained, but I'm seeing a lot of resources needing to see actions coming out, and I don't want to see where priorities are being shifted, our resources being reallocated, and something else not being looked at or identified.

If we look at all the stakeholders that he just listed, can the minister tell me who will be consulted on that final report? Who will have a final say to say yes, this is the direction we want the education system going into?

Hon. Scott Kent: I believe we're back to speaking about the panel review, so I'll respond to that. Obviously, there's still some work that the panel has to do. As to that list of organizations, I'm sure that the panel has met or reached out to all of those individual organizations, and if they haven't, there's still an opportunity, of course, to provide input.

The panel also put out a survey online for individual Yukoners to fill out who would like to. I know they're also engaging with administrators and staff in various schools around the territory. They have done a bunch of that work into the fall months, and then, of course, I think they want to hear back as much as they can. Obviously, they'll be spending a

great deal of time writing the final report here, but they did assure me at our last meeting that they still are taking meetings with First Nations or schools or other partners that haven't had an opportunity to provide their input.

I've said this on a number of occasions that the final product will only be as good as the input provided. I think that it's important and it's incumbent upon those with an interest in our education system to ensure that they provide their feedback and their input to the panel. I think they'll find that much of that is reflected in what has come forward.

When it comes to the implementation piece of it, as mentioned, the panel did recommend the establishment of an education advisory committee. We'll commit to doing that, but again, it's something that we would have to work on the mandate and the composition and the terms of reference for what that committee would look like and how they would engage with the Department of Education to develop that full implementation plan. We certainly want to hear from as many voices as possible.

As I've mentioned, we commit to ensuring that the progress reports on the implementation are made public as they change throughout the months as we move toward the full implementation plan and then the subsequent work and resourcing to ensure all of this work is done.

As the member opposite mentions, 2019 was a long time ago. I was education critic and, as I mentioned, on the Public Accounts Committee for some time during that intervening period. I think some of the information that myself and my colleagues in Opposition at the time received led to our commitment to establish this panel to review the education system.

I'm very pleased that in less than a year we already have two reports: the summer status report and the fall interim reports. Then we look forward to the final report, which will be just over a year after our government was sworn in.

While I certainly appreciate concerns from the members opposite about us moving quickly, it is all to say as well that we are continuing to invest in students. The member opposite referenced capital investments such as modulars in schools that are pressed on enrolment. But there's also investment in programs. I mentioned the two registered nurses and additional inclusive education supports that we invested in last December's supplementary budget. I think there are a number of other issues that we're looking at as well.

When it comes to how students are doing overall, Yukon student performance indicators are generally holding steady. Foundation skills assessment and graduation assessment results slightly improved in the most recent academic year of 2025–26. Attendance has somewhat recovered since the pandemic, and grade 10 numeracy shows gradual improvement over time. Chronic absenteeism and numeracy achievement continue to be areas of concern, particularly for rural and Yukon First Nation students.

The 2025–26 graduation analysis is still underway and will be included in the next Yukon-wide report. Based on 2024–25 results, graduation rates have remained generally stable.

I know that we all want to see improvements when it comes to student performance like the ones that I mentioned, and I know that that's something that's shared no matter what side of the House we're on, no matter what party we're affiliated with. We want to use the recommendations as well as information from the other reports that we have to make sure that we continue to see improvements and address areas of concern. The work certainly isn't done yet.

Linda Moen: I will assure the minister that I have 10-plus pages of questions. We're going to get to some of those issues that he brought up.

I'm trying to go in a manner that I can really get a good picture for the Yukoners that are listening, have a guided conversation, and again, issues that I've heard during Question Period having an opportunity to expand and elaborate and request more information, I think, is extremely important.

I'm very interested in that graduation analysis. From my understanding, if things are steady, then that means First Nation graduates are still only at 50 percent, which is a great cause of concern.

Since the minister again opened the door about school capacity and infrastructure, I'll walk through that door.

Can the minister tell me how many schools are at capacity or are going to be over capacity?

Hon. Scott Kent: I know we touched on this in the fall capital debate for education, but I think it's worth restating here today because this has come up recently in Question Period, and I know it's a concern for many Yukoners, especially those who live in Whitehorse, because that's the area where we see the most strain on the system.

A school with an operational capacity rate of less than 60 percent would be considered underutilized, and facilities that are over 80 percent would be considered at capacity. A school with an operational capacity rate of 100 percent, of course, would be considered full.

From May 2021 to May 2026, the average operational capacity rate for all urban elementary schools increased 2 percentage points overall, from 98 percent to 100 percent. On average, the Whitehorse schools are full.

From May 2021 to May 2026, the average operational capacity for all urban secondary schools increased 21 percentage points, from 73 percent to 94 percent. The first figure that I quoted was for urban Whitehorse elementary schools, and then the second one was for the high schools.

In May 2026, the average operational capacity rate for all rural schools was at 36 percent. The highest rate is 54 percent for Robert Service School in Dawson, and the lowest rate is 13 percent for Del Van Gorder School in Faro. Of course, that school was built at a time when the mine was operational and was built for a population much larger than exists in Faro today. As community demographics shift, many rural schools are significantly under capacity.

In the fall capital budget, we voted $4.8 million for modulars. Essentially, what that's going to do, coupled with the money that's in the mains for this year, is provide us with four modular classrooms that will be deployed in the Whitehorse area. Two of those will be going to CSSC Mercier, the francophone high school here in Whitehorse. We have at least one assigned to Dámbü Tän Kets'ádań Kų, which is the new elementary school in Whistle Bend, and there is a possibility that the fourth one will also be deployed at that school.

Two at Mercier, two at Dámbü Tän Kets'ádań Kų, and then next year we'll also be able to construct two additional

modulars for deployment. We haven't determined where those will go yet. They will be constructed next year, and then will be in place for the 2028–29 school year.

Obviously, there is a significant amount of investment that we need in Whitehorse-area high schools. The immediate fix or the short-term fix is modulars, but I think we have to look at the longer term when it comes to space additions in Whitehorse-area high schools.

I've had conversations with all of the high school councils as well as the CSFY school board. CSFY has put together a very robust capital planning document that we can use to plan out the future for French first-language instruction here in the city of Whitehorse and beyond as well. There is, of course, the Programme Confluence in Dawson City that is operating as well.

But that said, we need to have these conversations with the high schools. Each high school is different in the Whitehorse area as to what their needs may be on the capital side of things.

Of course, F.H. Collins — after 10 years and two portables, they're still at or slightly over capacity. St. Francis of Assisi, I believe, will be establishing a wait-list, and if not, there are wait-lists for the two Catholic elementary feeder schools in Whitehorse that go into Saint Francis. Porter Creek currently has some capacity for additional students but would also like to see some sort of addition. I think the bonus with the secondary schools in Whitehorse is that we do have the space on the current footprint to add on, and I would be remiss as well if I didn't mention the Wood Street Centre and the fact that it is an extremely old facility as well. With the establishment of the Wood Street Centre Advisory Committee, we look forward to hearing from them on what their needs might be as far as capacity. I guess, as I've mentioned, sequencing would be modulars for the short term but then work on additions to the Whitehorse-area high schools.

As well, of course, we're building a new École Whitehorse Elementary School. Work is underway on that project. Of course, there's a city process that we have to go through. We certainly want to thank members from all sides of the House for voting in favour of us pursuing the Valleyview site in consultation with the important stakeholders that will be on the project advisory committee, including the City of Whitehorse, both the Kwanlin Dün and Ta'an Kwäch'än First Nations, as well as representatives of the school community, representatives of Sport Yukon, and representatives of the Valleyview Community Association.

I think the work on that school will be important, especially when we set the capacity of it, because early indications and plans that were put forward under the previous government, I think, set the enrolment at 600. One of the chiefs, when I was talking to them on the school location, mentioned to me that they certainly didn't want to see us adding portables shortly after the school was open, something I certainly agree with. I want to make sure that, even if the school is under capacity when it opens, it can grow into the bigger school that it is. Of course, the French immersion program is extremely popular in Whitehorse and not only at École Whitehorse Elementary School but also at Selkirk Elementary School, where there is a French immersion program.

That's the story when it comes to Whitehorse, but we're also looking at rural schools. We're in the process or close to finalizing the process of standing up the building advisory committee for the replacement of the community school in Teslin. We have representatives from the Teslin Tlingit Council, the Village of Teslin, as well as representatives from the school community on that.

I also went to Haines Junction recently to look at what is going on in that community, so perhaps, obviously, that would be a priority replacement as well, just given the age and the seismic issues with that school.

Linda Moen: Wow, if other departments could be so generous with the information that's provided from one question, we probably wouldn't have so much debate. Thank you for that. Very interesting that we talked about modulars, but modulars also need teachers. It will be interesting to see how they're going to work out this funding formula to have teachers in those modulars.

Maybe the minister or his officials can tell me what they're doing in the interim right now to address the overcapacity in those schools. 21 percent is quite concerning. That sounds like additional resources. So in the last few minutes that we have, if they can explain what they're doing right now, not long term, to address the overcapacity.

Hon. Scott Kent: I apologize for the longer answer, but there's a lot of stuff going on and a lot of balls in the air when it comes to the capital side of things.

As I mentioned, in the short term, the interim would be the modular classrooms. That's what we'll deploy to address overcapacity. I believe Mercier is certainly seeing some challenges, and one of the elementary schools in the Whitehorse area, Hidden Valley Elementary School, is also seeing some challenges. We need to address some concerns there when it comes to capacity. But in the short term, we will be deploying modulars, and then the medium to longer term would be additions or new builds.

But, Madam Chair, seeing the time, 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: Madam Chair, 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 5:27 p.m.

The following legislative return was tabled today:

LR-36-1-46

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Kate White related to general debate on Vote 2, Executive Council Office, in Bill No. 204, *Second Appropriation Act 2026-27* — Cabinet Office budget (Dixon)