

Whitehorse, Yukon**Monday, November 27, 2006 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Tributes.

TRIBUTES**In recognition of White Ribbon Day**

Hon. Mr. Fentie: It is my honour to rise in the House today to acknowledge White Ribbon Day, also known as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, which takes place November 25, each and every year.

Wearing a white ribbon signifies a man's pledge not to commit, condone or be silent about violence against women and girls.

I am indeed heartened to see a roomful of white ribbons here today.

The purpose of the white ribbon is to demonstrate men's commitment to working toward gender equality by speaking out about discrimination and violence against women. The ribbon represents our collective commitment to challenge sexism in our everyday lives. Our commitment to ending violence against women is absolutely fundamental to creating communities of peace and safety for women and girls. We in the Yukon have long been committed to building healthy communities. This day, and the next couple of weeks leading up to December 6, Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, helps to focus and strengthen our efforts in achieving this goal.

I am proud to be wearing a white ribbon today, and I am also proud to be part of a government where, two years ago in November, members in each seat in this Legislative Assembly agreed unanimously to support a public education campaign on preventing violence against women and children. The campaign's posters and ads provide suggestions for concrete action in speaking to those people who know or suspect that a woman is living with violence.

From the overwhelming response to the campaign, we know that throughout Yukon there is a strong will to continue to enhance our ability to support women and children who are experiencing violence. As men, we make our choice to speak and to act when we know violence is taking place. Our sisters, nieces, mothers, aunts and our children need us to demonstrate leadership and strength in our allied role to challenge and prevent violence through our actions and through our words.

Without our action and commitment, women and girls will continue to experience barriers to equality. We, as men, must strive to become allies with women to ensure that gender equality is realized in the Yukon, not least through the creation of

safety and respect for all women and girls. This is the challenge that any man can choose to take.

Mr. Inverarity: I rise on behalf of the official opposition to pay tribute to the White Ribbon Day for the elimination of violence against women. Wearing a white ribbon is a personal pledge never to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women. November 25 is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. In Canada we wear this white ribbon until December 6, the anniversary of the Montreal massacre and Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

Violence against women includes physical and sexual assault, sexual harassment and psychological and emotional abuse. Not all violence leaves visible scars. Emotional violence includes regular subjection to demeaning jokes, domineering forms of behaviour and sexual harassment. Wearing a white ribbon provokes discussion, debate and soul searching among men. The ribbon is a catalyst for this discussion; it is a catalyst for change. Respect for girls and women and equality between men and women are preconditions to ending this violence. This won't happen overnight. Real solutions are truly long-term solutions. As men who care about the women in our lives we can take responsibility to help to ensure that women live free of fear and violence.

We must teach our children by example that all forms of violence are unacceptable. We must pledge not to remain silent and pledge to challenge the men around us to act to end this violence. Let us all work together to change our attitudes and our behaviours.

Thank you.

Mr. Cardiff: As a Canadian man, it's my honour to rise and recognize all those men who are wearing a white ribbon today. The White Ribbon Campaign started in Canada and begins on November 25 each year. It commemorates the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. From that day until December 6, when together we mourn the tragic deaths by shooting of 14 women in Montreal, men are urged to wear the white ribbon.

It is our public demonstration in support of individuals and of organizations working for the elimination of violence against women.

As we look back each year at this time it is with dismay that we are aware of the continuing incidence of physical and sexual abuse of women, of economic and emotional coercion and even murders of our sisters, our mothers and daughters.

The disturbing statistics bear repeating: nearly 200 women are killed in homicides in Canada each year; one in five women is a victim of sexual assault in her lifetime; aboriginal women are especially at risk for violence — four times the rate of non-aboriginal women.

Underneath much of this violence against women is the belief that women should be subordinate to men. The recent announcement of funding cutbacks to the federal women's program, which is mandated to ensure that public policy is equita-

ble for women as well as provide funding to women's organizations seeking equality for women, is disturbing.

Along with the funding cuts, the words "women's equality" have been struck from the mandate of that federal program. Women are now barred from lobbying government for the advancement of their equality, and many women's programs across the country will be closing. We can only imagine how many more women must suffer violence as a result of inequality because of this short-sighted move that shuts off important resources and policies. As men, and as legislators, we cannot allow ourselves to ignore the hard facts that women live with. We must recognize that income gaps for women create poverty. There are homeless women who are forced to trade sex for a place to sleep. Substance abuse accompanies intolerable social conditions. These are facts that are at the root of violence against women.

Let us wear our white ribbons with pride, knowing that at the same time we are also working hard to eliminate violence against women.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In recognition of the 34th Annual Geoscience Forum

Hon. Mr. Lang: I rise today to ask my colleagues in the House to join me in paying tribute to geoscience and the 34th Annual Geoscience Forum. The latest in exploration and research as well as industry information is being showcased at the annual forum, opening in Whitehorse today and wrapping up on November 29. I would like to thank the Yukon Chamber of Mines for all the hard work they have done organizing this forum. The Yukon Geoscience Forum is well respected among industry, government and academia as an event that presents the latest information on exploration, development and technology associated with the mineral and oil and gas sector of the territory. The chamber expects a record attendance of over 350 participants from across Canada, including geologists, scientists, academics, service and supply companies, investors, prospectors, placer miners, mining and oil and gas companies, and government representation.

2006 was a banner year for exploration and mining activity in Yukon and, of course, we expect 2007 to be even better.

In the past four years, exploration activity levels in Yukon have increased from \$7 million in 2002 to over \$75 million in 2006. Exploration activity levels are predicted to remain high in 2007 with total expenditures again in the \$70-million to \$80-million range.

Sherwood Copper's high grade copper/gold Minto mine will start production in 2007. This company has already invested more than \$50 million this year alone to bring this project into production. I encourage my honourable colleagues to attend the presentations, poster displays and trade show at the forum.

Our geologists will be updating participants on the results of this year's field work as well as updates on some of the many exploration projects that started this year.

I want to take this time to congratulate our team of geologists at the Yukon Geological Survey for their excellent work and recognize their central role in the forum. We all

acknowledge the crucial role the survey plays in supporting the management and development of our resources.

I want to say in closing that the Yukon government is pleased to support the Geoscience Forum. Expansion of our scientific and technical knowledge of the geology of the territory is vital to understanding how we can best manage our non-renewable natural resources. Knowledge is the key for successful development, balanced land use planning and wise stewardship of our resources.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Are there any further tributes?
Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Ms. Horne: I would like all members of this Assembly to join me in welcoming our guests who have braved the frigid weather to be here for the *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act* announcement. Inspector Tracy Hardy is here on behalf of the RCMP. From the Downtown Residents Association: Diane Brent, John Pattimore, Brian Eaton, Rachael Grantham, Roxanne Livingstone and from the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, Rick Karp. I would like to thank each of these groups for their work in developing this important legislation.

I would also at this time like to recognize our former MLA for Pelly-Nisutlin, Dean Hassard.

Thank you.

Speaker: Are there any further introductions of visitors?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Speaker: Under tabling returns and documents, the Chair has for tabling the Conflict of Interest Commission annual report for the period ending March 31, 2006. This report was distributed to Members of the Legislative Assembly and to the media this past July.

Further, the Chair has for tabling a report of the Clerk of the Assembly made pursuant to subsection 39.6 of the *Legislative Assembly Act*.

Are there any further documents or returns for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 31: Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Mr. Fentie: I move that Bill No. 31, entitled *Act to Amend the Income Tax Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. Premier that Bill No. 31, entitled *Act to Amend the Income Tax Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 31 agreed to

Speaker: Are there further bills for introduction?
Are there any notices of motion?

NOTICES OF MOTION

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I give notice of the following motion:

THAT the honourable members Steve Nordick, Gary McRobb, Steve Cardiff, Hon. Elaine Taylor, Darius Elias and Hon. Brad Cathers be appointed to the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges established pursuant to Standing Order 45(1);

THAT the committee elect its chair from the government caucus members appointed to it;

THAT the chair of the committee be required to participate in all votes before the committee;

THAT the said committee review, as necessary, such standing orders as it may decide upon;

THAT the said committee, following the conduct of any such review, report any recommendations for amendment to the Assembly;

THAT the said committee have the power to call for persons, papers and records and to sit during intersessional periods; and

THAT the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly be responsible for providing the necessary support services to the committee.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT the Hon. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 45(2), be appointed chair of the Members' Services Board;

THAT Hon. Dennis Fentie, Arthur Mitchell, Todd Hardy and Hon. Brad Cathers be appointed to the Members' Services Board;

THAT the Board consider:

- (1) budget submissions for the following votes:
 - (a) Legislative Assembly,
 - (b) Ombudsman (including Information and Privacy Commissioner),
 - (c) Conflicts Commission, and
 - (d) Elections Office,

and

- (2) policy questions concerning matters such as:
 - (a) space allocation,
 - (b) staffing,
 - (c) caucus funding,
 - (d) Media Gallery House rules, and
 - (e) *Hansard*,

and

THAT the Board fulfill its statutory responsibilities including those in the *Legislative Assembly Act*, the *Legislative Assembly Retirement Allowances Act*, the *Elections Act*, the *Conflict of Interest (Members and Ministers) Act*, *Ombudsman Act*, and the *Cabinet and Caucus Employees Act*.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT the honourable members Arthur Mitchell, Steve Nordick, John Edzerza, Hon. Glenn Hart, Don Inverarity, Hon.

Marian Horne and Hon. Patrick Rouble be appointed to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts established pursuant to Standing Order 45(3);

THAT the said committee have the power to call for persons, papers and records and to sit during intersessional periods; and

THAT the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly be responsible for providing the necessary support services to the committee.

Finally, I give notice of the following motion:

THAT the honourable members Steve Nordick, Darius Elias, John Edzerza, Hon. Brad Cathers and Hon. Jim Kenyon be appointed to the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments established pursuant to Standing Order 45(1);

THAT the said committee have the power to call for persons, papers and records and to sit during intersessional periods;

THAT the said committee review such regulations made following the date of its appointment as it may decide upon;

THAT the said committee review such other existing or proposed regulations as are referred to it by the Assembly; and

THAT the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly be responsible for providing the necessary support services to the Committee.

Mr. Mitchell: I give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that

- (1) social assistance rates are too low;
- (2) it is unreasonable to expect people to live on a little as \$159 a month for food and \$390 a month for housing;
- (3) the Yukon government, thanks to ever-increasing transfer payments from the Government of Canada, has funding at its disposal;
- (4) the Yukon Party promised during the recent election campaign to increase social assistance rates; and

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to increase social assistance rates immediately.

I give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that

- (1) an increasing number of Yukon citizens are unable to afford sufficient and nutritional food to maintain a healthy diet;
- (2) traditional non-governmental organizations cannot keep up with the demand for emergency food provision to needy people; and

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to provide the funding to the Anti-Poverty Coalition to start up a new permanent Whitehorse food bank.

I give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that

- (1) our children are our most precious resource;
- (2) early childhood education, including preschool educational opportunities, increase children's likelihood of success in school and in their future careers;
- (3) an increasing number of parents rely on their children's attendance at daycares and day homes;

(4) all parties represented in this Legislature have publicly indicated their support for increasing support for daycare and day home providers;

(5) the Yukon's childcare system is in desperate need of a cash infusion;

(6) the Yukon government, thanks to ever-increasing transfers from the Government of Canada, has funding at its disposal;

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to expeditiously increase the childcare subsidy paid to parents by \$100 per child per month and the direct operating grant paid to daycare and day home providers by 25 percent; and

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to investigate additional options to encourage and reward the improvement of daycare and day home employees' professional and educational certifications.

Mr. McRobb: Mr. Speaker, I give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to cease all efforts leading to the continued privatization of the ownership, operations and maintenance of our highways system and equipment.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that:

(1) the development of land for residential, recreational, commercial or industrial purposes should be done in a planned and coordinated manner;

(2) it is the responsibility of the Yukon government to ensure that all public and private interests are provided with a fair opportunity to be represented;

(3) the best approach to ensuring fair representation is using a comprehensive land use planning process based on open and meaningful consultation with all those affected; and

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to use comprehensive land use planning preceding the development of lands in the territory.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that:

(1) operators of Yukon's highway lodges and other rural businesses are important tourism ambassadors who provide necessary services to our highway travellers and communities;

(2) tougher government regulations pertaining to water and sewer systems and to also the removal of contaminated soil have placed severe financial burdens on these businesses;

(3) the government is already in the business of loaning money for infrastructure upgrades; for instance, the rural electrification and telecommunications program loans property owners up to 25 percent of assessment value to be repaid on taxes for a period of up to 15 years at zero cost to the taxpayer, while the rural domestic water well program provides similar relief up to \$50,000; and

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to develop affordable and practical incentive programs for Yukon small businesses to offset the high, upfront costs of upgrading their

water and sewer systems or cleaning up contaminated soils to meet government standards.

Mr. Elias: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that

(1) the Government of Yukon has a major role to play in protecting the environment, especially in light of climate change;

(2) the Government of Yukon recognizes that climate change is impacting the north now and with greater effect than on other regions of Canada;

(3) the Government of Canada and the Yukon have yet to make the necessary substantial commitment and availability of resources to seriously address this forthcoming crisis; and

THAT this House urges the government to immediately identify this matter as a priority item and that it engage the Government of Canada and formally request that Canada make available its full resources to combating this issue and, since time is of the essence, that this happens without further delay.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that

(1) the Government of Yukon has a role to play in protecting the Yukon fur industry and maintaining the trapping lifestyle;

(2) the Government of Canada has negotiated a trade agreement with the European Union to establish international, humane trapping standards called the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards;

(3) the Yukon has until October 1, 2007, to implement the new standards through trapping regulations; and

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to implement a no-cost trap exchange program that allows trappers to comply with the new agreement.

I give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that

(1) the Government of Yukon has a responsibility to educate all children in a manner that maximizes their ability to learn and prepare themselves to be productive and happy members of society;

(2) the Government of Yukon has an opportunity to enhance the success of First Nation children by exposing them to land-based experiential learning;

(3) the community of Old Crow would be an ideal site for a major pilot project on land-based experiential learning; and

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to commit its considerable resources toward increasing the cultural awareness of all children in teaching they receive and, in the case of First Nation children, this cultural awareness take the form of land-based experiential learning.

Mr. Fairclough: I give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that

(1) the people of the Yukon are concerned over the financial expenditures of building the athletes village;

(2) the significance of this expenditure means many other projects will be placed on hold or not happen at all; and

THAT this House urges the Minister of Community Services to have the Auditor General of Canada, upon completion of construction, investigate how the Government of Yukon turned the athletes village from a \$3-million project into a \$33-million project.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that

(1) the Government of Yukon has the responsibility to prepare and be prepared for any emergency or natural disaster that might befall our territory;

(2) there is no greater role for a government to perform than protecting the very people that we are a servant to; and

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to prepare an annual report to the Yukon Legislative Assembly on the state of the Yukon's emergency preparedness, and that the Emergency Measures Organization appear annually before the Legislature.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that

(1) the Government of Yukon has a responsibility to develop and implement regional land use plans;

(2) the citizens of Yukon feel enough time has been spent studying this situation; and

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to develop a strategy in consultation with other governments and stakeholders to complete all regional land use plans within 10 years.

Thank you.

Mr. Inverarity: I give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is of the opinion of this House that

(1) the Yukon Party promised and did not deliver new animal protection legislation during its first term in office;

(2) existing animal protection legislation is not working;

(3) Yukoners are deeply concerned about several recent high profile cases of animal abuse; and

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to bring forward new omnibus animal protection legislation.

I also give notice of motion:

THAT it is of the opinion of this House that

(1) the public has made clear its desire for more effective and useful legislation than is currently provided in the current *Landlord and Tenant Act*;

(2) the Yukon Party government was previously notified that this is a growing public concern;

(3) the Yukon Party government has ignored this issue for the past four years;

(4) the Yukon Party government did not mention this important public issue in their 2006 election platform or in the Speech from the Throne; and

THAT this House urges the Yukon Party government to conduct public consultation on the outdated *Landlord and Tenant Act* and bring forward amendments by the spring sitting of

2007 to make the legislation more effective, useful and responsive to both landlords and tenants.

I give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that

(1) the Yukon Party government stopped construction of the new Whitehorse Correctional Centre when it was elected in 2002;

(2) the Yukon Party government has studied this issue for four years;

(3) the existing correctional facility is beyond repair and needs to be replaced;

(4) the election campaign of the Yukon Party government promised new construction and a new correctional facility, though it was not identified as one of the government's priorities in the Speech from the Throne; and

THAT this House urges the Yukon Party government to demonstrate its commitment to this initiative and fulfill its election promise by

(1) identifying the location for the new correctional facility;

(2) releasing information to the public regarding the cost of construction of the new correctional facility;

(3) setting the date when construction for the correctional facility will resume; and

(4) tabling a budget that includes the necessary funding to complete the construction of a new correctional facility.

Mr. Cardiff: Mr. Speaker, I give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that

(1) recent federal funding cutbacks for adult literacy have resulted in the closure of literacy programming across Canada;

(2) the Yukon Party election platform states that literacy is a priority because it is a fundamental building block of education;

(3) lack of funding will seriously affect essential literacy work at the community level throughout the Yukon; and

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to provide bridge funding for Yukon literacy programs and to urge the Government of Canada to reinstate funding for adult literacy to at least the previous amount.

Mr. Edzerza: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that

(1) the *Children's Act* is of tremendous importance to all Yukoners, especially First Nations.

(2) a working group was established many months ago to complete a review of this act;

(3) the review has been delayed beyond reason, with the result that a draft of new legislation is still not available; and

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to assign the highest possible priority to expediting the review of the *Children's Act* so that the recommendations from the working group can be embodied in a new act that reflects Yukoners' concerns, without any further delay.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Are there any further notices of motion?
Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act

Hon. Ms. Horne: I am pleased to announce a new initiative to make our communities safer and healthier places to live and work. The safer communities and neighbourhoods, or SCAN, legislation has now been proclaimed and is ready to be put into action.

I am pleased to inform the House that the SCAN unit will begin its operation on Wednesday, November 29. Yukoners have united to take action against drug dealing and drug use, bootlegging and substance abuse.

I would like to thank those Yukoners, including our guests from the Downtown Residents Association, the Council of Yukon First Nations and others in the gallery for their work on this legislation. We have heard their concerns and we have responded with the Yukon substance abuse action plan. The action plan is a coordinated response to substance abuse in the territory and includes safer communities and neighbourhoods legislation as one of its measures. This new legislation provides a confidential, timely and effective way for Yukon citizens to take action against harmful behaviours that damage communities, families and individuals.

The *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act* was passed with the support of all parties of this House. The *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act* is a compliance-driven process that is designed to address the social disorder that is caused by drug dealing, bootlegging and other related activities.

The process is initiated when a confidential complaint is received from a member of the public. The identity of the complainant is confidential and will never be revealed — not to the neighbours, not to the police and not in court.

When a confidential complaint from a member of the community is received, a SCAN officer will undertake an investigation. Every effort will be made to resolve the complaint in an informal way. If, however, an informal resolution is not possible, the SCAN officer may seek a court order to remove the tenants and to close the house for a period of time.

Our goal is to make our communities more liveable by removing drug dealing and bootlegging.

The government is adopting a coordinated approach, including First Nation and non-government organizations, in all stages, from development of the legislation to implementation, to evaluation. The government is also coordinating resources such as treatment programs, counselling services, and alternative housing. We are committed to continuing to dialogue with NGOs on how to best implement SCAN. We look forward to ongoing dialogue with First Nations governments about the application of SCAN. A cooperative working arrangement will be developed with First Nations prior to this legislation being administered on First Nation land.

The safer communities and neighbourhoods legislation provides a well-structured, well-coordinated approach to community problems. One house, one street, one neighbourhood, one community at a time, we can put a stop to activities that negatively affect our health and safety. I am pleased to inform the members of this House that the pieces are in place for this work to begin.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Fairclough: Mr. Speaker, I'll be brief in my comments to this ministerial statement. I would like to thank the minister for bringing this statement forward. It's not a common thing in this House any more, Mr. Speaker, and I thank her for her bravery.

Mr. Speaker, normally, ministerial statements are about new government initiatives and announcements that we haven't heard yet. This is news that was announced last spring. As the minister said, we all unanimously agreed to legislation on the floor of this House, and we expect it to move forward. Also, Mr. Speaker, it was announced in the throne speech by the Premier. People have been hired, and we're now looking for an office for them to operate out of. We have many questions on this matter, and we'll be asking the minister about that in the future.

There is the *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act*, Mr. Speaker. That is one thing, and there is also the commitment by the Premier in the throne speech, in the platform, about having zero tolerance for drug dealers. We are going to be keeping government accountable to their promises to Yukoners on that matter, because the Premier said in this House and in the public in the spring that the drug dealers should be packing up and leaving now. Those were very strong words coming from the Premier. We want to see this government kick into action in that regard.

He also said in the throne speech that the government will ensure that drug dealers leave the territory and there are many problems that we have now — not just with drug dealers, but bootleggers and so on. Throughout this sitting and the next one we will be holding the government accountable for their promises.

We do have a few questions, though, and we want to know how this will be done — how the government intends to have the people leave the territory and when, how they are going to deal with First Nations on this matter, particularly on reserve land, and we want to know what the budget is for the office. I am hoping the minister in her response can answer some of these questions here today because she does have a couple minutes.

We want to know how many people have been hired and does she feel that this is an adequate number.

We would also like to know why it took six months to proclaim this legislation. Maybe the minister can answer that and why it wasn't done on Thursday.

Mr. Speaker, the public does have high expectations and they are bringing forward their issues to us and we will be asking the questions in the House. I am hoping that the minister does have answers for us.

Mr. Cardiff: I'd like to congratulate the minister on her first opportunity to speak to this Assembly. As all members in this House are aware, the *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act* was passed unanimously, as the minister said, by the 31st Legislative Assembly. As the Member for Mayo-Tatchun said, there's nothing really new here or particularly controversial in the minister's statement.

Still, we on this side of the House are grateful to the minister for providing an update as to the status of the legislation and where this program is going. We're pleased to see this public initiative finally getting underway.

The NDP caucus is particularly pleased to see this legislation move forward, since it originated largely due to the efforts of the Member for Whitehorse Centre to bring attention to the urgent need for taking action against drug use and drug dealing in all our Yukon communities.

I know the Member for Whitehorse Centre, if he knew this was happening today, would be very pleased to see that the legislation has reached this stage in its development and that we're moving forward on that.

So on his behalf and on behalf of the third party caucus, I am pleased to offer our support to the government to make this important initiative work for Yukon people and for all Yukon communities.

Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Horne: I would again like to acknowledge those who contributed to the development of this act: the community members in the gallery, department officials and the members of this Assembly who came together.

As our government has stated very clearly, we have no tolerance for those who seek to destroy our communities and neighbourhoods. We do not accept and we will not accept behaviour that makes our communities more violent or threatens the safety or well-being of our citizens. In preparing myself today for this address, I was struck by just how much damage the abuse of alcohol and drugs does to individuals, to families and to communities of which I am well aware. This act is all about stopping that destructive behaviour.

In closing, I would like to remind our guests and my fellow legislators that this safer communities and neighbourhoods legislation is one component of a much larger substance abuse action plan. This is an action plan that was developed in partnership with stakeholders from across the territory. Mr. Speaker, by working together we are going to help people who have addictions receive the treatment they need. We are going to help people heal; we are going to help children and young adults avoid falling victim to the abuse of drugs and alcohol and we are going to make our communities safer, healthier and happier places to live.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Are there any further ministerial statements? This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Social assistance rates

Mr. Mitchell: I have some questions for the Minister of Finance. Thursday's throne speech outlined the priorities of this government for the coming years, but helping some of those most in need was not on the list. I'm referring, of course, to the fact that any increase in social assistance rates was left out of the speech.

As we all know, social assistance rates have not been increased in the Yukon since 1991. We all know that everything costs a lot more than it did in 1991, 15 years ago, yet we are asking people to get by on \$390 a month for rent and \$159 a month for food.

The median rent in Whitehorse is \$675 a month. How is someone supposed to get by on \$390 a month for rent when an apartment rents for \$675 a month?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I would point out to the leader of the official opposition that we committed during the fall election campaign, which concluded in October, to reviewing social assistance rates and we are committed to doing that. I recognize the member's concern. We are particularly interested in not only ensuring the adequacy but in reducing financial disincentives that make it difficult for people to move off social assistance into the workforce. We will be doing a review and I would point out to the member opposite that in fact Yukon social assistance rates remain among the highest in the country. But, despite that fact, we will be reviewing the adequacy of them.

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for that response. Yes, during the election campaign, his governing party did promise to increase social assistance rates. I think that additional reviews and studies and consultations are long past due. The people who are living on these amounts are struggling now. Last week, there was a Speech from the Throne that did not mention social assistance rates. On Thursday, there was a supplementary budget that revealed the government is sitting on some \$85 million in net financial resources, thanks to massive transfers of money from the Government of Canada, yet there was no money indicated for social assistance increases. This is a problem that the government knew about going into the election, and it had plenty of time to get increases into the supplementary budget that was tabled on Thursday. They have failed to do so.

Can the minister or the Premier explain to people being asked to live on \$390 a month for housing and \$159 a month for food why they were left out of the budget? Why could they not spare a few dollars of the \$85 million that they have squirreled away?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: You know, Mr. Speaker, it is important that we deal with these matters in the correct context. Let me first deal with the throne speech itself. One of the main pillars of the throne speech and of the blueprint for Yukon's future is quality of life. Of course, that means those in need are certainly going to have the full attention of government.

Secondly, I am going to take exception to the constant theme by the official opposition, the Liberals here in the territory, of federal largesse and point out that there is fairness in the

distribution of wealth in this country. The Yukon is getting its fair share, but the official opposition conveniently ignores the increased own-source revenues in this territory that are being invested in quality of life. We are going to look into social assistance rates, but we are also going to look into, along with the rates themselves, how we can get more people into the workforce and off social assistance. That is the way to the future.

Mr. Mitchell: I thank the Hon. Premier for that response. There has been no suggestion in these questions that it was not our fair share — rather that we do have sufficient funds thanks to receiving those additional funds.

This Yukon Party government has been talking about an emphasis on social issues as it begins its second mandate, but it has failed to act. It is time to act. They are talking about disincentives. No one is considering that trying to live on \$159 a month and perhaps having that increased would be a disincentive to working if it were possible to obtain work.

We have been calling on the government to increase social assistance rates for a number of years. The government has the means to do it. They are sitting on \$85 million but they don't seem to have any for the least fortunate in our society. It is not a new issue that requires a lot of study. The government had plenty of time to make necessary changes but it has simply not done so. When is this government going to stop nickelling-and-diming the less fortunate of our society and increase social assistance rates, as it promised in the election campaign?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Let me repeat for the benefit of the member opposite: we are going to deal with social assistance rates, but we're also going to deal with other matters that pertain to quality of life. I think that's important.

What is somewhat confusing here is that this member, a few short weeks ago, was making claim in the public that the interim financial statement that showed this very healthy surplus the Yukon has available — this member was trying to articulate to the Yukon public that, in fact, the finances of the territory were not as we presented but that we are in deficit.

The confusion here is: which is the Liberal position? One day they're saying we're in deficit; the next day they're demanding we spend some of this healthy surplus, which, by the way, was created by sound fiscal management.

Mr. Speaker, quality of life means all Yukoners and it includes those in need. Quality of life in this territory will improve through the course of this mandate.

Question re: Childcare funding

Mr. Mitchell: We'll continue to talk about quality of life. I have a question for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Our childcare system is in dire need of a cash infusion. We've heard over and over again from parents and daycare operators that the system is running on empty. Will the minister give Yukon families the assurance that his department will, without further delay, increase the childcare direct operating grant to licensed childcare centres and family day homes by at least 25 percent and increase the subsidy to qualifying parents by \$100 a month?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I note that the leader of the official opposition is taking the opportunity again to express his views on the matter. I would point out to the member that we have

stated very clearly, both prior to the election campaign and during the election campaign, that we recognize this issue. Under our government's watch, during the last mandate, we provided the largest single increase to childcare that has ever been provided in the Yukon and assisted Yukoners in receiving it.

The situation we're in, as many childcare operators and parents understand, is the fact that years of neglect by NDP and Liberal governments in addressing the funding needs here created a requirement that we deal with this in several steps. The first step was an increase of some \$900,000 per year to the direct operating grant, raising the total investment in childcare to \$5.3 million per year. The next stage will be a five-year plan to succeed the four-year plan, and we will be working together with childcare operators, with workers and with parents to lay out this plan and ensure that the Yukon's childcare system is not only strong today but continues to grow stronger and to address the challenges that it faces to ensure that every parent has access to affordable childcare when they need it.

Mr. Mitchell: In the interest of maintaining a collegial atmosphere, we'll talk about the fact that we seem to agree: we agree on the need for increases. The need is real and it's urgent.

There are people pulling their children out of daycare, as we speak, because of a lack of affordability due to the operators' need to raise their rates to pay their employees. There's no real need for additional dialogue; it's time for action.

There's also a need to raise the income cut-off to qualify for the subsidy by at least 25 percent. Keeping families' noses just above the water is not enough. We as a society have to do more than just apply band-aids.

Will the minister confirm that his department will adjust the income cut-off levels to reflect the 2006 cost of living realities?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I will attempt to be collegial but I must correct an inaccuracy in the leader of the official opposition's comments. For him to suggest that a 40-percent increase to the direct operating grant — some \$900,000 per year — is merely a band-aid is an inaccurate term.

In the 2006 election, we committed to delivering the territory-wide childcare and early learning strategy for children and for parents based on the following priorities: creating more available spaces for children of all ages, especially those younger than 18 months; reducing the rates that parents pay for childcare; increasing financial support and reducing disincentives, such as taxes, to allow parents to participate in the labour force; ensuring that parents with children in kindergarten are not charged full-time preschool rates for their children; and working together to develop a new five-year plan to address issues of concern to day home operators and childcare centres, including training, education and wages for staff; a greater focus on early learning for preschool children; and collaborating with First Nation community groups and non-governmental organizations to provide an integrated system that better serves the education and cultural needs of parents and their children in all Yukon communities.

Mr. Mitchell: Considering that the minister is the Health and Social Services minister, I don't want to get into a debate about band-aids with him.

I am not today just speaking about childcare, but I am speaking about quality childcare. Cash is desperately needed in the system but there is a great deal more required, Mr. Speaker. The children the system is designed to serve are our most precious and vulnerable resource. Making it affordable is the first component, but it is certainly not the only one. Ensuring the childcare workers see this as a reasonable career option is also important as it will lend stability to the system and greatly enhance the quality of the programming these centres can offer.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister indicate if his department has held any discussions with the childcare providers regarding the role of childcare workers as a viable and attractive career option for young Yukoners, and if not, will he give his undertaking to initiate such discussions?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I lay out again to the leader of the official opposition our commitment to working on the development of a new five-year strategy for addressing the needs within childcare together with operators, with workers and, most importantly, with parents to ensure that we work together in identifying what steps need to be taken to reach the goals I outlined in my response to the member's previous question.

We are very committed to addressing these needs. I would point out to the member opposite that, under our watch, the Yukon's funding for childcare — our investment in the system — became the second-best funded system in the country. We recognize there are still pressures. We are committed to working with operators, with parents, with workers to develop a plan to address those needs. We will do so in a timely manner, but we are not, unlike some, going to simply pull figures out of the air without doing our due diligence.

Question re: Canada Winter Games, athletes village

Mr. Cardiff: Mr. Speaker, once the Canada Winter Games have come and gone, one of the two buildings that will serve as the athletes village is supposed to be turned over to the Yukon Housing Corporation. Apparently it is going to be used for affordable housing, although we are not sure exactly what the minister means by affordable. We have had some differences of opinion on that.

The cost per unit has certainly not been modest; and, in fact, this could possibly be some of the most expensive residential real estate in the Yukon. So my question for the minister is this: what will the rental cost be per unit, and when will these units be available for occupancy by the public?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: The Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors will be meeting in the next month or two to make the determination of exactly how the units will be let out. That, of course, is in their purview, and it's not a political decision by any means. The affordable housing plan, which the member opposite well knows, is a federal program and it includes the federal definition of the word "affordable" — that definition being "for a period of 10 years will not exceed the average for that part of Whitehorse or Yukon" or wherever it happens to be. So at the moment I believe it's about \$675 for a one-bedroom apartment and so on. Those statistics are all on

the Web site. We're awaiting that information from the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors. They will do their good work so they will be available as close to the end of the games as possible.

Mr. Cardiff: I hope we'll eventually be able to get through to this minister that "affordable" means something that people can afford — period, full stop. In a market with the average home starting at \$266,000, and government-owned building lots coming on-line at close to \$100,000, the question of affordability in the real estate market is a big issue.

What income level does this minister anticipate will be needed for someone to take up residence at this new facility, which is far away from most of the community amenities and where public transit is, at best, a sometime thing?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: The definition of the word "affordable" is a federal definition under the federal act. It's not the dictionary definition, I would agree with him, but perhaps he should read the documents and understand that we're not talking about the dictionary. The term is under the federal program.

The cost of the buildings at this point, and once they are done, will be approximately \$225 per square foot. Having toured through the housing, officials of Nunavut, Northwest Territories and Yukon were all impressed that that actually puts us at the lower end of similar construction. To refer back to a motion that was placed on the floor earlier, the \$3 million originally estimated for an athletes village was an estimate within the documents filed by the host society. It was never at any time a document that was filed as a budget by the Yukon government under any stripe. It is simply an inaccurate way to look at it.

Again, the uses will be assigned by the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors and we look forward to their good work.

Mr. Cardiff: Well, Mr. Speaker, a lot more planning obviously needs to be done before this so-called affordable housing becomes a reality. For one thing, the site that these buildings sit on doesn't even have the correct zoning at this time. It's zoned for public services, and it needs to be zoned for residential multiple housing. According to the city's zoning guide, an application for a change in zoning takes six to nine weeks and must address the concerns of land owners in the area. Can the minister tell us when Yukon Housing Corporation intends to begin this process and what he plans to do if the City of Whitehorse exercises its lawful authority and turns down that zoning application?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: Again, the use of that building — and I would remind the member opposite that we're only talking about half of that project. The other half of it will be turned over to Yukon College for use as student family residence — and affordable residence. But again, that will be under the control of Yukon College. Because there is no mortgage on either building, these will provide revenue streams, as well, for both the college and for Yukon Housing Corporation. How those units are designated depends on the good work of the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors. It is not a political decision at any level. They may be used for housing at market

rents for people who apply for them. They may be used for social housing, which is 25 percent of income geared to income housing — rather than use the words “social housing” — and that will be a decision that will be made again by the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors. I am certain that they have considered all options as well as the zoning options and zoning problems when the site was first chosen by the previous Liberal government.

Question re: Smoking in public buildings

Mr. Edzerza: My question is for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Study after study has shown that tobacco is the leading preventable cause of death in Canada. The Yukon government has had a tobacco-reduction strategy in place for a number of years. Yet, in spite of that, Yukoners hold the dubious distinction of being among Canada’s heaviest users of tobacco products. Why is the Minister of Health and Social Services refusing to take the most logical course of action, which would be to ban smoking in all public buildings in this territory?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I appreciate the Member for McIntyre-Takhini’s concerns. We are certainly very concerned with the high rate of smoking among Yukoners. I would point out that we have not ruled out the possibility of developing smoking legislation at some point; however, it is not the appropriate time to do so. There are significant concerns in rural areas of the economic impacts of a territory-wide ban.

Every municipality in the Yukon has the ability to implement its own legislation to restrict smoking. Two have chosen to do so. There are others that are gravely concerned about the impact on local cafes, bars and highway lodges. The Yukon government, throughout its workplaces, remains a smoke-free environment.

Under the territorial health access fund plan allocated, we have also allocated over \$2 million toward public health campaigns, including our increased investment in the QuitPack initiative and other measures aimed at assisting people in breaking the addiction. We are not simply putting the problem out of sight and out of mind, but actually helping people address their personal addiction to smoking that is having a personal effect on their health no matter where they are doing it.

Mr. Edzerza: Some would probably argue that the appropriate time was many years ago. Almost every other Canadian jurisdiction has some sort of legislation in place, or in the works, to ban smoking in public places. The City of Whitehorse had the wisdom and the courage to ban smoking in bars and restaurants.

The minister recently attended the annual convention of the Yukon Medical Association and, once again, the territory’s doctors unanimously urged him to implement a territory-wide ban.

Why is the Minister of Health and Social Services taking direction on public health from municipalities and chambers of commerce and ignoring the professionals who spend every day dealing with the impacts of smoking on people’s lives?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: The government must consider the total effects of any piece of legislation. People depend on their livelihoods — that must be taken into consideration. Every

municipality within the Yukon has the ability to implement legislation restricting smoking. Two have chosen to do so.

I would point out to the Member for McIntyre-Takhini that in one of the newspaper articles covering the Yukon Medical Association AGM, which I attended, the reporter for that newspaper asked the former president of the Yukon Medical Association why municipalities had not implemented legislation. That individual, the doctor, noted at that time that the Yukon Medical Association had in fact written letters to municipalities, urging them to do so. In some cases, they had received responses and noted that, in some cases, the responses were — I believe the term used was “nasty”.

Municipalities and smaller areas of the Yukon are often very concerned about the impact such legislation would have on the local café or restaurant or highway lodge. So I think we’re all agreed on the need to address the smoking rate.

I see I’m out of time.

Mr. Edzerza: It almost appears that maybe the minister supports the business more than the health, and I think that’s a shame.

Mr. Speaker, when public drinking was outlawed, there were complaints. When seat belts became mandatory, there were complaints. When bike helmets became mandatory, there were complaints. But each of these things was the right thing to do, and the government of the day had the courage to do it. Banning smoking in public buildings or where employees are required to work will save lives. It will also save hundreds of thousands of dollars in health care costs. Even the minister’s advisors in the business community must understand that.

When will the minister demonstrate some leadership by banning smoking in public buildings, simply because it is the right thing to do?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I find it difficult to respond to the emotion in the Member for McIntyre-Takhini’s question. I think what needs to be noted here is that we all recognize the need to reduce the rate of smoking. The question is whether this should be done through prevention and education and by helping people themselves break the addiction. Mr. Speaker, most people who smoke have tried to quit at some point. Most people who are smokers do not want to be smokers. Simply shoving the problem to their own homes, where they smoke around their children perhaps, does not solve the problem.

The idea that a ban on smoking in public places would end the problem of smoking addiction is simply not a well-founded idea. The solution to addressing this problem has many components. We believe that, in spending financial resources, it is better to invest significantly in education and assistance to those who are smokers and to try to prevent young people from becoming smokers rather than to dedicate those dollars toward enforcement, because as the Whitehorse example has proven, smoking legislation is entirely and completely useless without enforcement.

Question re: Domestic animal protection

Mr. Inverarity: Mr. Speaker, I have some questions for the Minister of Community Services.

In 2002, the Yukon Party promised new animal protection legislation. In 2003, the Yukon Party wrote stakeholders prom-

ising new animal protection legislation, and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources said, “Our government realizes the need to address problems with the status quo.” In 2004, the ministers wrote more letters again, making the same promises, and again in 2005 and 2006 the government had meetings and discussions about new animal protection legislation. In the end, four years have passed by and no new legislation has been produced. In a recent election campaign the Yukon Party promised again to work with stakeholders to review and modernize legislation pertaining to domestic animal control protection. When is it that there will be a commitment to fill this and have the legislation presented?

Hon. Mr. Hart: I appreciate the question being asked. I advise the member opposite that we met with the stakeholders this summer with regard to the situation he brought up in his motion. We spoke to both Mae Bachur and the facility in Dawson. We have their support on the action being taken for us and are currently in review of other jurisdictions on how they handle their situations. We anticipate having the findings of that report early in the new year.

Mr. Inverarity: Yukoners have been waiting patiently for this government to act. They waited four years and nothing has happened. Yukoners do not want to be in the same boat for another four years.

We currently have a number of different pieces of legislation to deal with animal cruelty and the protection of animals. The problem seems to be that there is no coordination between the acts and nothing ends up happening.

There was a very high-profile incident in Dawson where some 70 dogs were killed and nothing was done about it. The minister needs to act to try to prevent this kind of thing from happening again. When will this legislation be ready?

Hon. Mr. Hart: That situation in Dawson is a Criminal Code act and is dealt with under the federal process, not under ours. But, to not make the matter a small issue, this is something we were very concerned about. One of the issues in dealing with situations like this throughout the Yukon is ensuring that the RCMP have scientific information that they can utilize when they go into situations like the ones the member opposite referred to. As I stated, we have met with both the associations and the stakeholders. They have indicated that they are satisfied with the direction in which we are going. As the member opposite indicated, we never promised legislation in 2002 — we indicated that we were going to look at the act and go forth on that issue. We are moving forward to that process. We are reviewing the other jurisdictions. We anticipate having a report, as I indicated, to move forward on an action plan. We will again get together with the stakeholders and move forward from there.

Mr. Inverarity: Mr. Speaker, Yukoners are very leery of the commitments that the minister is making today, and I think rightfully so. People watched for four years while the Yukon Party ignored this issue. Let’s hope that it doesn’t happen again. Advocates of the new legislation have been pressing the government to create an omnibus legislation — in other words, a roll-up of all the current acts dealing with animal protection and having them in one piece of legislation. Is this the

approach that the government intends to follow, and when will the public consultations begin?

Hon. Mr. Hart: We have got together with stakeholders on animal issues, and we’re looking for what other jurisdictions are doing. We’re waiting for that report to come and we will come forth; once we have that report, as I indicated, we will have another meeting with stakeholders. Once we have that, we will come forth with our public consultation on how we’re going to deal with the animal issue. Right now, all our legislation indicates that what we have out there is enforceable. The RCMP have indicated that they can work with our current legislation. So right now it becomes a case of how we’re going to enforce the rule on one particular aspect, and we’re currently looking at that, and we intend to bring it before the House in the new year.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ADDRESS IN REPLY TO THE SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Mr. Nordick: I move

THAT the following address be presented to the Commissioner of Yukon:

MAY IT PLEASE THE COMMISSIONER: We, the Members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly, beg leave to offer our humble thanks for the gracious Speech that you have addressed to the House.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. Member for Klondike

THAT the following address be presented to the Commissioner of Yukon:

MAY IT PLEASE THE COMMISSIONER: We, the Members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly, beg leave to offer our humble thanks for the gracious Speech that you have addressed to the House.

Mr. Nordick: I am truly honoured to rise here today to represent the constituents of the Klondike in the Legislature. I am also deeply indebted to my campaign manager and volunteers. Without their support and the core support of my riding association, I would not be here today.

All of us here have one or two people in our lives who, if it were not for them, we would not be the individuals we are today. The individual in my life is my loving wife, and I would like to say a special thanks to her.

I would also like to thank the former Klondike MLA for the work he has done for my community and the Yukon in general.

I have enjoyed the time working with the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation in building a successful business. The information I gained is truly priceless and will benefit me in moving forward today.

Exploration in the mining industry in the Yukon plays an integral part of our economy, and I have had the privilege to work hand-in-hand with many of the hard-working individuals

who have helped provide the backbone of our economy. My hat goes off to them for the struggle that they have endured in the past. I will work diligently to bring their concerns forward, to continue on the road to a successful, long-term resource economy.

While I see the impacts that exploration and mining have on the Yukon, we cannot overlook the strong impact that tourism brings to this territory. I have experienced first-hand and have worked with many tourism operators and businesses in the Yukon. I look forward to working through the many challenges the industry faces. We do have a wealth of opportunity ahead of us.

The Klondike is lucky to have such a strong group of people living in our community. This is proven in the success of the associations like the KVA, KIAK, DECAS and the Dawson City Chamber of Commerce, to name a few.

I look forward to continuing to work with the City of Dawson's mayor and council and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in's chief and council to greater enhance the collaborative decision making that is mutually beneficial to all the Klondike's residents.

Mr. Speaker, the Yukon Party was given a second mandate to govern on October 10. I am proud to join their team and help move our Yukon forward. I am dedicated to ensuring that our communities, especially Dawson City, have an effective voice in the Legislature. I would also like to help us not forget that the Yukon is made up of a diverse population spread over a wide geographic region. Sometimes we as individuals forget that there are other citizens of the Yukon around us. They, too, have great ideas and strengths. We cannot forget that we are here to speak on behalf of all the people of the Yukon. The youth, the elderly, the unemployed, the poor, the wealthy — we are all equal, and we must build a future together that has a clear vision for a bright future for everyone. We need our communities to be safe and to prosper. Our communities must not be allowed to shrink in population.

A Yukon with no urban communities would be — Mr. Speaker, I cannot even imagine a Yukon without communities. I have a story about the Yukon and one of its communities. This story is about Duff Pattullo and the Yukon school question. He was a resident of Dawson City who became the Premier of British Columbia. Although the Fathers of Confederation delineated the responsibilities of the federal and provincial governments with some precision in the *British North America Act*, conflicts over the actual exercise of sovereignty have proven to be an enduring theme in Canadian history.

Built into the federal system from the beginning has been a tension between two fundamental rights: the right of the junior governments, the provinces, to full sovereignty over the jurisdictions assigned to them in the act, and the right of the national government to protect minority rights when these were threatened by the exercise of provincial powers.

The greatest potential for conflict has been in the explosive mixture of language, religion and education. At Confederation, the existing educational arrangements in Canada west and east were enshrined in section 93 of the *British North America Act*. The pattern thus set of public and of separate or dissentient

schools was adapted with little difficulty to the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland.

The west, however, was a different matter as a balance of religious and linguistic forces there took some time to be settled. Manitoba, with a population of roughly half English-speaking and half French-speaking, in 1870 modelled its education system on that of Quebec. British Columbia, on the other hand, entered Confederation in 1871 with a single unilingual public school system. In the Northwest Territories the federal government made provisions for a bilingual denominational-based education system in 1875.

The balance of power in western Canada shifted from French-English parity in the 1870s to an English language predominance in the 1890s. A sectarian education system in Manitoba was one of the first casualties of this. Manitoba ceased to be a bilingual province and replaced its existing education systems with the single public one.

Similar pressure was applied to remove minority educational and linguistic rights in the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta when they were formed in 1905, but the federal government was able to preserve a dual public and separate school system in the new provinces.

The issue of minority language and religious rights in education again emerged in 1912 when Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec absorbed contiguous portions of the territories. In the latter two cases, existing education systems were compatible with the territorial ones so the absorption of the territory did not extinguish minority education rights in the territory. In the case of Manitoba, however, it did. Catholic residents of the Northwest Territories had the right to separate schools; those of Manitoba in 1912 did not.

Once more, in 1916 and 1917, conflict over language, religion and education surfaced in Manitoba and Ontario. These conflicts were the last school questions until the 1970s when, for the first time, the pattern of the assault upon French language or Catholic minority rights was altered. This time the conflict broke out in Quebec.

In all cases provincial rights ultimately prevailed over minority, reflecting the growth of the power of the provinces since 1867. Minorities, however, were not always French speaking and Catholic. English-speaking Catholics were also recognized minorities — sometimes in alliance with their French-speaking co-religionists, sometimes in opposition.

For half a century after the elimination of French language instruction in Manitoba and Ontario no school questions troubled federal-provincial relations. On one occasion only did the old conflict threaten to emerge. The old combatants of religion, minority and provincial rights — but not language — came into conflict. This was in the unlikely combination of British Columbia and Yukon in the 1930s. On this occasion provincial rights did not prevail. The Premier of British Columbia attempted to annex Yukon to British Columbia, and the unanticipated effect of rekindling old sectarian passions with the annexation of the Yukon were not worth another disruptive schools question. Its survival as a distinct political unit was ensured by one small Catholic school in Dawson City.

The Liberals had defeated the Conservative government of British Columbia in 1933, promising “work and wages”. In practice, this meant that the Liberal government showed considerably more compassion for victims of the Depression than the Conservatives. It ensured that conditions grew no worse but they ran up a huge deficit. With limited further action, the premier achieved some success but he could not defeat the Depression on his own. By 1937 he was looking to renegotiate British Columbia’s fiscal arrangements with Ottawa and to stimulate employment by developing the province’s natural resources as a way out of its difficulties. “We have an empire of natural wealth, with the power of a village council,” he noted. As a member of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, he was aware of the potential wealth of northern forests, fisheries and mines. He recognized the importance of the revival of gold mining in Alaska, Yukon and B.C.’s interior in the late 1930s and the economic potential of a road link between Alaska and Washington State.

The Premier of B.C. felt that if he could join the Yukon to British Columbia, the Alaska Highway would be built. British Columbia stimulated the exploration of Yukon resources in a manner the federal government could not. Employment opportunities throughout B.C. and in the Yukon would reduce the number of unemployed. He had a highly personal vision of the benefits that annexation of Yukon would bring to B.C. which, although not clearly thought out, came very close to achievement.

The B.C. premier at the time was no stranger to the Yukon. He had been part of the first party of federal civil servants sent here in 1897, and he rose to become Assistant Gold Commissioner. He left government service in 1901 and operated a brokerage firm in Dawson until 1908 and continued to be active in the Yukon Liberal Party. He participated with great gusto in the turbulent politics of both the party and of the territory. He left Dawson City for Prince Rupert in 1908, but retained close business links with Dawson until World War I. His contact with Yukon political affairs was less strong, and he held the memory of corruption, partisanship and incompetence, which had been the dominant character of Yukon politics in his day, long after such conditions had passed.

By the late 1930s, Yukon was a mere shell of what it had been when he was in Dawson, but it was administered with efficiency and honesty. It was one thing to propose the annexation of Yukon but quite another to effect it. Like those portions of the territories annexed by Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba in 1912, the territory was entirely the property of the federal government. It could be disposed of as Ottawa saw fit. The Premier of British Columbia was not legally obliged to persuade Yukoners to join the province. He had only to convince the federal authorities that Ottawa and the province and perhaps even the territory would benefit by such an action.

The federal government had taken little interest in Yukon in years. Since 1918 there had been no public sector development of any sort beyond the provisions of the absolute minimum of administration.

Ottawa had to subsidize what little territorial administration there was, so it regarded the Yukon as a liability. After

their return to power in 1935, the Liberals were looking for ways to reduce the federal deficit. If the premier was able to present the annexation of the Yukon by B.C. as a federal economy measure relieving Ottawa of a liability which cost more to administer than it returned, the Prime Minister might be receptive to the idea.

The initial suggestion that British Columbia might take over the administration of the Yukon was apparently made by the federal minister of finance in 1936. This appealed to the B.C. premier. He immediately wrote the prime minister suggesting that, on the basis of his own experience 30 years earlier that, “we have found long distances administration not as understanding as it might be,” and that because of similarities between British Columbia and the Yukon’s mining industries, the territory might “be more beneficially administered as part and parcel of British Columbia rather than sort of a ‘side show’ by the Dominion government.”

The prime minister responded that he had made a similar suggestion before, “so our minds are eventually running along similar paths.” That was hardly confirmation, but it was a basis for proceeding. Late in 1936, the B.C. premier began negotiations with the federal minister of finance and the federal minister of mines and resources over the terms of the transfer. He was in a hurry and hoped to be able to use the annexation in his campaign for re-election in 1937.

By April, the two governments had agreed to five terms, which he announced with a flourish on April 26. The terms were (1) that the federal government retain essential functions — post office, national revenue, justice and Indian affairs; (2) the federal government would pay the provinces \$125,000 a year for five years as a special grant; (3) reservations for Yukon Indians to be mutually agreed upon; (4) delimitation of the British Columbia-Northwest Territories boundary; and (5) settlement of other problems “to be mutually agreed upon.”

He injected the issue directly into the election campaign. Since the transfer might be ratified by the Legislature at its next session, the Premier intimated that the vote of the people in the upcoming provincial election would be taken as an indication of the willingness of British Columbians to accept the additional territory. No vote was required in the Yukon, which was directly under federal control.

It appeared to be a most impressive coup. Opposition there certainly was from the Conservatives and the CCF in British Columbia, both of which were caught off guard by the boldness of the premier’s move and from all of the local press, except the *Vancouver Sun*. Similarly, the immediate reaction of Yukoners was wholly negative. The council telegraphed a memorandum to the federal cabinet expressing its opposition on the grounds that Yukoners were not consulted and that British Columbia mining laws were inappropriate to Yukon conditions.

But such opposition did not matter. Although legislation confirming the transfer had still to be passed for the provincial Legislature and the federal Parliament, the federal government told both the British Columbia press and the Yukon Council that the premier’s statements were “substantially correct”. All the B.C. premier had to do was win the 1937 provincial election and proceed as he saw fit. Not surprisingly, he brushed

aside expressed opposition to his chosen scheme and insisted upon a broad view. The premier stoutly refused to meet detailed objections to the scheme. He spoke of the boundless wealth of the Yukon and its tourist possibilities.

The B.C. Liberals won the 1937 election, although they lost three seats. Yukon annexation was not an important issue, but the Premier could argue that his victory gave him a mandate to proceed, even if more cautiously than originally intended.

The election meant that the opposition in British Columbia no longer mattered. The force of the Yukon opposition probably surprised him, but his intention to annex the territory was unaffected by it. To the objection that Yukoners had not been consulted and that they would pay heavier taxation as British Columbians, he merely responded that with a population of only 4,000, half of it native, he would not acknowledge the right of such a small group "... to forever retard the development of a vast territory." In a response to the Dawson Board of Trade's objections to annexation, he was even blunter: "...It does not seem reasonable that the destiny of a territory as large as the Yukon should be finally determined by the few residents living there."

More significant was opposition from mining companies under Yukon laws and paying only federal taxes. The premier said annexation would take the territory "out of the hands of 'big companies' and give it back to the 'small man'". He had to qualify his remarks by praising the "splendid work" of the two large mining companies operating in the Yukon but added that in such a huge territory, "there should be the opportunity of increasing the population by means of small operations." In direct correspondence with the Yukon Consolidated Gold Company, the largest operator in the territory, he indicated his desire not to threaten its investment, nor disrupt its operation, but he made no promises that British Columbia mining laws or taxes would not apply to the Yukon.

By September of 1937, he was ready to proceed with the final negotiations over annexation and was even talking about including the Mackenzie Delta of the Northwest Territories in British Columbia as well, but the federal government now shared none of its enthusiasm for the transfer. In early October, annexation still appeared to be inevitable, even to the Yukon's Member of Parliament.

The B.C. premier went so far as to announce the signing of the tentative agreement for the transfer. Three days later, he suddenly reversed himself and suggested that "action to include the Yukon within the boundaries of B.C. be held in abeyance until consideration could be given to the Report of the Commission" on Dominion/provincial relations. The federal government agreed with enthusiasm. According to the prime minister, the premier's request merely postponed annexation until such questions as parliamentary representation and the distribution of electoral districts could be resolved. While important, these were minor problems that could be settled with little difficulty.

A "new aspect" to the question of annexation, and one that could not be resolved so easily, was the question of schools, specifically the right of a Yukon Catholic minority to separate

schools. This right would have to be extinguished or extended to the Catholic population of British Columbia if annexation were to proceed. By the fall of 1937, this problem was apparent to the federal government and was being brought to the attention of the provincial government.

Had he not been mesmerized by such abstractions as "boundless wealth" and "immense development" and had he paid as close attention to Yukon social and political history as he had its economic decline, the premier would never have suggested annexation of the territory in the first place. Indeed, had he been more willing to consider the history of British Columbia's relations with the territory, he would have realized the impossibility of annexing the Yukon without sectarian conflict.

The Yukon was originally part of the vast "North-West Territories", which Great Britain transferred to Canada in 1870. In 1895, Ottawa created a "Yukon district" within the territories and put small populations of the district under the administration of a North-West Mounted Police inspector. Three years later as a result of the gold rush, Yukon was detached from the N.W.T. and established as separate administrative unit. One effect of this process was that, unless otherwise amended, the laws of the territory applied to the Yukon.

In 1875, the federal government had made provisions for separate schools in the territories through section 11 of the *North-West Territories Act*. In spite of the later loss of French language rights and the elimination of a totally denominationally based school system, it was accepted that once a public school district was established, the religious minority — usually but not always Catholic — could organize a separate school district within the boundaries of the public school district and finance it by means of levies on the separate school supporters. Thus, in theory, Yukon had a dual-education school system from at least 1875. In fact, there was no formal education of any sort in the district at the time.

On the eve of the gold rush, 20 years later, there was only one Anglican-run and funded mission school for a few native children at Selkirk. The gold rush transformed Yukon, bringing in a large white population that demanded services such as education, making possible the establishment of a local administration and creating a tax base to finance it.

According to a study of the Yukon education system done for the government in 1912, the first request for a school in a major Yukon centre was in Dawson, dated November 1898. Nothing resulted from this; the government was overwhelmed by more pressing problems at the time.

In May of 1899, the territory's Commissioner was able to get around to the question of education. He had the *Public School Act* of the North-West Territories as a basis for action so he convened a meeting of the Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian clergymen in Dawson to discuss the establishment of a school.

The clergymen had worked well together in providing other services, particularly health, and they presumably shared a common concern for the moral welfare of Dawson residents, which others lacked. All had some experience with education. He hoped to discuss "the opening of public schools to be conducted on non-sectarian principles as far as religious exercises

were concerned.” He obviously wished to avoid the sectarian conflicts over education that had so recently embroiled other regions in Canada and hoped the clergy felt the same.

The four met and recommended that a school be established as soon as possible, that it be a non-sectarian public school and that the local school board have equal representation from the different faiths. These hopes seemed attainable.

One of the four, however, could not go along with the recommendations and immediately informed the Commissioner that he did not agree. Not surprisingly, it was the Catholic priest. He was an Oblate, 58 years old, when he arrived in Dawson in July 1898 as vicar general and superior of the Yukon mission under the Bishop of Mackenzie. He was experienced in frontier education and conditions and was probably aware of the minority education rights in the territories. Certainly the Bishop was. In Dawson, the Catholic priest requested a separate school for Catholic children, which would be financed by taxes of the separate school supporters and by a government grant. Soon after he had refused to go along with Protestant ministers in establishing a public school, he petitioned the Commissioner for the establishment of a separate school, which he had built, supplied and could staff with the Sisters of St. Anne.

In the meantime, the territory’s Commissioner was trying to organize a public school. He passed a school ordinance, then ordered the necessary books and supplies. In early October, the school for 167 children of school age in Dawson needed only a letter from Ottawa “in some way empowering the new council when it shall organize to go ahead in the matter of schools”, and naturally books and supplies to start. But the books and supplies did not arrive. They were lost when the boat they were on, the *Stratton*, sank. Faced with the prospect of no public schools in 1899, the council then announced to the public that anyone starting a school would get a grant to maintain it. This announcement was all that the Catholic priest needed. His refusal to participate in the public school, his initiative in building a separate school that opened in September of 1899 with 37 children and the problems of the northern shipping meant that there would be only one school in Dawson ready in the fall of 1899, St. Mary’s Catholic School.

The Catholic priest applied for the grant in January 1900. The school was inspected and the grant approved. To the intense annoyance of the Anglican Bishop, this meant that St. Mary’s, in fact, was Dawson’s public school. The Commissioner’s education ordinance was a slight modification of the Northwest Territorial School Ordinance of 1896. However, it remained a dead letter until a public school could be established. “In the meantime,” the municipal committee of the Yukon Council recommended that Yukon Council “should be prepared to make a liberal grant toward the maintenance of any school that may be established in which the teaching and general carrying on of such a school was made along the lines of Northwest Territorial Ordinance.

St. Mary’s fit the conditions perfectly so it received the “liberal grant”. This served to establish the crucial precedents that it was to be publicly supported and that school funding in the Yukon would be by means of government grants. The pre-

cedents were important. Once a public school finally opened in the fall of 1900 and an expensive public school building was erected in 1901, government support for St. Mary’s could have ceased. In fact, it did not, and a policy originally meant to apply “in the meantime” was buttressed by the precedent, followed by the 1901 “Ordinance respecting schools”, to ensure that Yukon was to have both public and separate schools.

The 1901 ordinance was merely a stop-gap measure, and it was not until 1902 under the new Commissioner that a full school ordinance was introduced to the Yukon Council. Based closely upon the 1901 Territorial School Ordinance, it was 17 pages long, containing over 100 clauses. In its massive detail, defining such crucial issues as the assessment and the collection of school taxes, the establishment of public and separate school districts, the provisions of separate schools outside the organized towns, the election, composition and duties of the school boards, et cetera, it was a most impressive document. However, in the absence of either a public or a separate school board and of the assessment of school taxes, it meant nothing.

When the territory’s legal advisor attempted in 1912 to determine the legal basis of Yukon’s dual school system, which was established in spite of the previous Commissioner’s wish for a non-sectarian public school system, he discovered that no sums were raised by assessment for the support of either school, that the public school was always maintained by council grants and that he could not find that the steps for the formation of a separate school district were taken as required by the ordinance, the Commissioner in Council passed grants for its maintenance.

The establishment of St. Mary’s separate school was a surprisingly peaceful affair. The 1902 ordinance was introduced to council on Monday and assented to by Friday, undergoing only minor modifications en route. This apparently caused some surprise. One newspaper, the *Klondike Nugget*, had expected the bill to be a bitter bone of contention. The territorial Commissioner and seven of the 10 council members were Protestant, but none opposed the principle of funding separate schools or grants for St. Mary’s. All appeared to accept that the Catholic minority in the Yukon had the same rights as the minority in the territories.

Several other reasons could be advanced for the lack of opposition to the separate schools. The Sisters of St. Ann’s ran a good school and demanded far fewer resources than the public school, and it was smaller. At the time of its establishment, St. Mary’s was only a quarter of the size of the public school. It grew 42 percent by 1912 and fell to as small as seven percent in the early 1930s, coming close to disappearing. It managed to climb back to 22 percent of the school population in 1937. Clearly the figures given reflect little more than relative proportions. More samples would be necessary to state exactly the relationship of the schools. What they do indicate, however, is that Catholics were a minority in Yukon’s total population, an observation borne out by census figures. Clearly Catholic educational rights were not deemed dependent upon numbers.

At least twice before 1937 — in 1905 and 1912 — the issue of British Columbia’s annexation of Yukon came up. Both times the question was associated with similar controversies

over boundaries and educational rights elsewhere. In 1905, the two new provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta were created and their northern boundaries set at the 60th parallel of latitude. In 1912, Manitoba was also extended north to the 60th parallel. At the same time, Ontario and Quebec extended their boundaries to Hudson Bay.

In 1905, a Toronto newspaper, the *News*, introduced the question of minority language rights in the Yukon into its larger campaign against the Liberal government and the separate schools question in the two new provinces. As a weapon with which to beat the federal Liberals, Yukon minority rights proved quite ineffectual, but the *News* did succeed in bringing awareness of separate schools in Yukon to the attention of a wider public than might otherwise have been known.

Thus, when the rumours flew around Dawson in 1905 that the prime minister intended to transfer Yukon to British Columbia, two B.C. politicians — one Liberal, one Conservative — referred to the existence of separate schools in the Yukon, the absence of such schools in British Columbia and the likelihood of sectarian conflict in British Columbia if annexation were to proceed, as a reason for opposing it.

Again, in 1912, the intertwined question of Yukon separate schools and the annexation of the territory by British Columbia emerged. The context this time was set by the debate over the expansion of Manitoba's boundaries northward. This involved the likelihood that minority rights to separate schools in the area being annexed would be suppressed — exactly the same issue between Yukon and British Columbia in 1937.

As early as 1904, the Apostolic Delegate in Ottawa had urged the boundaries extension of Manitoba be linked to the reestablishment of separate schools in the provinces. The prime minister was having enough difficulty at the time in maintaining of the Catholic minority's right to separate schools in Alberta and Saskatchewan. He refused to raise the issue of Manitoba's northward extension, particularly on the terms the delegate suggested. Under such volatile conditions, Manitoba remained with its existing boundaries, but the pressure for northward extension remained.

By 1912, the federal Liberal government had been replaced by the Conservatives. They were no more anxious than the Liberals to rekindle the Manitoba schools question, which would inevitably result if minority rights to separate schools were pitted against provincial rights within the new Manitoba.

The question of British Columbia's annexation of Yukon lay dormant for the next quarter century, until the issue was raised in the 1937 B.C. provincial election campaign.

The Yukon's Member of Parliament brought the issue of Yukon separate schools to the national stage and placed it within its historic context. In the course of an interview with the *Globe and Mail*, she said, "Of course, the very question that arose at the time of the extension of the boundaries of Manitoba will also arise when British Columbia's boundaries are extended, for under section 28 of the *Yukon Act*, provision is made for education in the Yukon and the establishment of either Protestant or Roman Catholic separate schools. No similar provisions, as far as I can recall, exist in the laws of British Columbia."

Much closer to home, and less easily dismissed as partisan opposition, was a memorandum from the provincial Deputy Minister of Mines and Resources. He informed the premier that a senior member of the Geological Survey of Canada, who had spent 16 field seasons in the territory, "appeared to be quite optimistic" about the Yukon's mineral wealth and the probability of annexation. However, "the only doubtful point he raised was the matter of public schools."

Such warnings made no impact and he was obviously contemptuous of the threat one small school in Dawson posed to his grand scheme. He plunged ahead with his plans for annexation through the summer of 1937. Ottawa, however, proceeded more carefully. Where the British Columbia premier regarded annexation primarily in economic terms, the federal Minister of Mines and Resources realized there were legal questions that had to be addressed, particularly those relating to the suppression of minority rights. To this end, the department's legal division prepared a lengthy memorandum on the proposed transfer. The memorandum discussed that in the case of the transfer of the Yukon to B.C., the federal government would be placed in the position of either abandoning the rights the minority in the Yukon had enjoyed for 30 years or insisting that B.C. make provisions for separate schools in its educational system in order to accommodate these rights. The legal advisor then concluded by pointing out that while the federal government had the legal right to dispose of the Yukon as it saw fit, political questions were more important. Unless the transfer of the Yukon was accomplished with the consent of the people of the Yukon, the government would be faced with the two above-mentioned questions involving the moral, if not legal, rights of the minority on the one hand, and the provincial rights on the other. The problem would have to be handled with great care and diplomacy to avoid creating another severe and heated controversy over the presently slumbering religious question.

The minister probably received the memorandum in mid-summer and relayed news of its implications to the cabinet. This would have stilled what little enthusiasm it felt for the transfer.

By September, a month before he requested that the question of annexation be set aside, the B.C. premier received the first intimation that the slumbering religious question was moving. It came in the form of a resolution from the Orange Order in British Columbia. The order read, "That whereas according to press reports, the Government of British Columbia has under consideration the taking over of the administration of the Yukon Territory; and whereas at the present time education in the territory is controlled by separate denominational boards; therefore, be it resolved that the Right Worshipful Grand Orange Lodge in Annual Session assembled declare its unflinching stand against such a system being in any way recognized where the Government of British Columbia has administrative jurisdiction".

The B.C. premier does not seem to have responded to this resolution beyond acknowledging, through his secretary, receipt of this resolution, the "contents of which have been noted." A month later he requested a postponement, not abandon-

ment, of the question of annexation, evidently not yet concerned about the implications of the Orange Order resolution.

Still bubbling with enthusiasm about the “new spirit” and “development” in the north, he wrote the prime minister in December to suggest the extension of British Columbia might include not only Yukon but the Mackenzie Valley portion of the territory. This was the last positive statement he made about annexation. At the same time that he was suggesting further expansion of British Columbia to the prime minister, a second missile arrived from Vancouver Protestants, finally penetrating his disregard of the political implications of annexation. The secretary of Vancouver General Ministerial Association saw them more clearly than he did and asked “whether the proposed absorption of the Yukon Territory by the Province of British Columbia is to make the question of separate schools for Roman Catholics an issue in the public life of this province”.

The premier responded angrily that he was “sorry to think that an influential body such as yours should give me credit for so little intelligence as to think that the reason for the proposed extension of the boundaries of British Columbia is as suggested.”

It was not just the Orange Order and the Vancouver General Ministerial Association that displayed awareness of the implications of annexing Yukon for education in B.C. For the first time members of the province’s Catholic minority realized that they had a potential issue for pushing the cause of minority educational rights in British Columbia. They also had the vehicle for publicizing their case at hand through the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations.

In February 1938, representatives of the Catholic minority of British Columbia presented a brief to the commission. Much of its contents were predictable but, toward the end, they introduced an unusual argument, referring to the proposed annexation: “It is not our purpose in this brief to oppose such a plan, but we submit that if and when annexation comes to pass, Catholic education ought to be protected and the school rights enjoyed by the Catholic minority in the Yukon extend to the whole Province of British Columbia as then constituted.”

The B.C. premier could dismiss warnings of sectarian conflict from Yukon and Conservative Party partisans, deal with federal reluctance to awaken the “slumbering religious question” by postponing annexation, and write privately to Protestant opponents of annexation that neither the provincial nor the federal government wished to impose separate schools on the people of British Columbia. But once the representatives of B.C.’s Catholic minority openly pointed out the education implications of annexation, neither Victoria nor Ottawa could consider the question further.

Yukon’s independence was preserved, but not by the argument that its citizens and major corporations opposed annexation, nor by the defence of its territory by the federal government. It was saved by the principle of minority educational rights expressed by one small separate school and 15 students in Dawson and the threat that either extension or abandonment of this principle posed for British Columbia’s, or Canada’s, political life.

In April 1938, the *Dawson News* reported with obvious delight that the federal government saw the prospect of effecting economies by the annexation of the Yukon to B.C., but another question that had not been thought of bobbed up, and it had to do with sectarian schools. In the Yukon Territory, there were minority rights that would not be surrendered lightly. Nevertheless, uniformity in educational practices in all parts of this province, old and new, would be necessary.

In early 1939, Yukon’s outspoken Member of Parliament had the last word addressing the House, according to the *Calgary Herald*. “She expressed the opinion that the separate school question would, in the end, form the greatest obstacle to the Premier of British Columbia’s carrying through his annexation scheme. ‘This problem,’ she remarked, ‘might easily become a second Manitoba schools question,’; while the number of Yukon residents involved is not as large, the principle involved is the same.” So ended the Premier’s attempt to annex Yukon to British Columbia. No further reference to this issue was made.

As an economy measure, the federal government was quite willing to turn the administration of Yukon Territory over to British Columbia in 1937, although it did not share the premier’s personal enthusiasm for the transfer. The objections of B.C.’s two opposition parties could be overcome by electoral victory. They were, and nothing more was heard from them. The expressed opinion of Yukon residents, almost unanimous in their hostility to annexation, and the concern by mining companies operating in the territory that they would suffer financially had to be taken more seriously.

The question of electoral boundaries and of the provincial representations were nuisances, but they could be dealt with. There was no greater enthusiasm for the premier’s scheme in British Columbia, but neither was there significant opposition. In the summer of 1937, nothing appeared to stand in the way of the annexation of Yukon to British Columbia to the economic benefit of the provinces and territories and the nation. But by not studying the question of annexation more carefully and failing to see the most important issue was not economic but legal — and threatening to become political — the premier almost provoked a Yukon schools question.

As in the cases of Manitoba and of annexation of contiguous districts of territories in 1912, either the religious minority in the area to be annexed would have to surrender its rights to separate schools or the province would have to sacrifice its provincial right to determine its own educational policy.

Religious conflict and the clash of two absolute rights threatened to tear British Columbia, and Canada, apart as they had done before. In the case of Manitoba, the desire by the citizens of the province for New Manitoba was overwhelming, but no such passion existed in B.C. In Manitoba an apparent compromise was possible in 1912. In British Columbia there was no such basis. The threat of revived religious tensions and of an unwinnable conflict between minority and provincial rights stopped British Columbia’s annexation of the Yukon.

In the end, after the defences of federal protection and B.C. opposition failed, all that saved Yukon as an integral political unit was the right of Yukon’s religious minority to separate

schools — a right exercised in Dawson City at St. Mary's School.

Mr. Speaker, the little bit of history I just shared with you is one of many that proves how vital Dawson City and the Klondike was to the success and survival of the Yukon. My colleagues and I will work together to ensure that the Klondike and other communities in the Yukon remain a vital and essential part of the future.

We will accomplish this by sticking true to our mandate, by practising good governance while building safer communities and protecting the environment while promoting a strong, diverse private sector economy. We will work closely with all Yukoners to build a brighter future.

I pledge to the people of the Klondike that I will be a strong voice for them. I will hear what they have to say by our informal conversations on the street and in the coffee shops as well as during my regular constituency meetings.

I would like, once again, to thank the people who elected me. I am truly honoured to be here today.

Mr. Mitchell: First of all, let me say how honoured I am to rise here today to represent the riding of Copperbelt. Last week marked the first anniversary of my election to this Legislative Assembly in the November 2005 by-election. Because that election occurred in the middle of the fall sitting of the 31st Legislative Assembly, there was not a proper opportunity to thank the constituents of Copperbelt for their confidence in sending me here to represent them.

Last month they again expressed their confidence by returning me to this Legislative Assembly to represent them in the 32nd Legislative Assembly, and so I want to thank them.

I also want to thank all the volunteers who worked so hard on my behalf during the election, as well as on the behalf of the Yukon Liberal Party, which I have the privilege to lead. As you know, Mr. Speaker, we are all here thanks to the hard work of many volunteers and, while it is not proper to name them, I do want to acknowledge their efforts in my election campaign here today. I will try to make them proud of their efforts by my activities in this Assembly.

Finally, I want to thank my wife Nancy whose patience, love and tireless support mean more to me than I can possibly express here today.

The riding of Copperbelt, which was once part of both Whitehorse West and Mount Lorne, has rapidly grown to become the largest riding by population in the Yukon. There were almost 1,800 voters enumerated in Copperbelt in this general election, and the riding continues to grow through the development of the final stage of Copper Ridge and the future development of Fox Haven and Mount Sima and Whitehorse Copper subdivisions.

While some people confuse Copperbelt with Copper Ridge and think the riding is largely suburban in nature, I would like to note for the record that this riding is incredibly diverse and includes areas along the Fish Lake Road beyond the city limits, with spectacular scenery and expansive ranches, and moving south, incorporates much of the newer portions of Copper Ridge, all of Granger, all of Hillcrest, Ear Lake Road, Lobird,

McLean Lake, Squatters Road, Canyon Crescent, houses and businesses along the Alaska Highway, MacRae, Mount Sima, Whitehorse Copper and Pineridge.

The riding includes two schools, Elijah Smith Elementary and École Émilie Tremblay. There are three MLAs who live in this riding and they include one member from each of the political parties represented in this Assembly.

The communities and housing stock range from large ranches to suburban houses, apartments, industrial areas that also include living quarters, country residential homes, trailers, and even campers and tents. The issues raised by constituents are diverse, and often the positions of the residents differ from neighbourhood to neighbourhood or even from street to street. In many ways this single riding represents a bit of a microcosm of Yukon because it is both urban and rural. It is a tremendous challenge and a privilege to try to represent those diverse views, and I hope the residents will understand that I cannot always take one side or another on some issues as I have to represent all the people.

I very much appreciated the input and suggestions I received while visiting at my constituents' doors during the by-election and again during the general election as well as during my summer walk-about at constituency meetings and barbecues.

As this is my first opportunity outside of today's Question Period to address all members of this Assembly, I would like to congratulate every member of this body on your recent electoral success, whether you are a re-elected incumbent or one of our four newest members, the public has shown their confidence in asking you to represent them in this arena. In some cases they may have supported us largely based on party affiliation and in other cases their vote may have been primarily personal. But in every case, they have entrusted us with the responsibility to look after their welfare in the decisions we make, the legislation we debate, and the budgets that we pass. We must all work harder to live up to their expectations and remember that the decisions we make here impact on every Yukoner and indeed on the future of Yukon itself.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Hon. Premier, the Member for Watson Lake, and the leader of the third party, the Member for Whitehorse Centre, for the opportunity we shared during the recent election to publicly debate and discuss the issues of the day. The debates were largely issue focused, and there was little personal animosity shown by any of the leaders during the debates. That is a standard that we should strive to maintain as we debate the issues in the coming months and years.

Mr. Speaker, I hope you will grant me some latitude in what I am about to say, because I will be departing somewhat from parliamentary tradition. There are 17 of us here today, and one member who is conspicuously absent. I am speaking, of course, about the leader of the third party, the Member for Whitehorse Centre. During these past months he has been fighting a personal battle that is far more serious than an election campaign. He has taught us all a lesson in courage and conviction and perspective. I want to say for the record that our thoughts and prayers are with him today as he undergoes medi-

cal treatment for leukemia. I believe in the power of positive thinking and also in the power of prayer, so I know that the Member for Whitehorse Centre will prevail in his struggle, will regain his health, and will be rejoining us here in Yukon before too long to raise the issues he believes in on behalf of his constituents and all Yukoners.

Mr. Speaker, as I stand here today, I recognize that I have come to this point in my life in a somewhat unusual manner. I was first elected as the leader of the Yukon Liberal Party and then elected some five months later to a seat in this Legislative Assembly. As I earlier noted, I arrived in the middle of a sitting, and the learning curve was certainly steep. If I have erred or fallen short at times, I apologize and thank you for the latitude you allowed me during the last session.

I would also like to thank my former colleague, the former Member for Porter Creek South, who assisted me in jumping into this Assembly in midstream, so to speak.

She served for 10 years as the Member for Porter Creek South and, while we may all disagree from time to time over the issues, I think we can all agree that she set the bar high when it came to representing her constituents. I can tell you that she also set the bar high when it came to assisting me in assuming a role that had formerly been hers, and she did so with grace and dignity. I want to acknowledge that here today.

I'd like to turn my attention to the Speech from the Throne. The speech opens with a somewhat self-congratulatory statement about the dedication and hard work that has led to a vibrant Yukon economy. It cites increasing population, rising property values, lower unemployment and greater financial health of the Yukon government.

Anyone who has been paying attention over the past four years knows that unemployment has been dropping across western Canada. Property values have skyrocketed in Vancouver, Victoria, Edmonton and Calgary, as well as across the western United States. As an example — I won't give too many, but I know the Minister of Economic Development enjoys statistics from time to time — from a recent publication by RBC Economics, over the past year, the second quarter of 2006, year to year change, in Canada it's 10.9 percent and in British Columbia it's 21.6 percent — that's housing affordability. So housing prices have gone up. In Alberta it's 28.1 percent. Indeed we've seen these same trends here in Yukon. There's lots more information here if anyone is interested — the source is RBC Economics.

As we previously mentioned in this body, that's a bit of a double-edged sword because, while everybody enjoys the thought that the equity they have in their home has increased, if you are a homeowner, and your house has now become a more significant investment, as mentioned here it also affects affordability and it means that more and more young families have to struggle to own their own home and people have to struggle to afford renting any kind of home at all.

Four years ago this government promised to develop a sustainable economy that is based on the private sector rather than on transfer payments from the Government of Canada. In fact, the biggest change in Yukon's financial health has been the result of massive increases in federal transfers, which are now

over \$200 million a year more than they were when this government took office.

Indeed, Statistics Canada has recently indicated that the growth in the Yukon's economy has been primarily driven by increased government spending. Yes, the private sector has grown, but this government cannot point to very many government policies that have resulted in increased growth other than the increase in government spending. Again, as the Premier has indicated, we are entitled to those increased payments based on our having the right and desire to enjoy the same quality of life in the Yukon as elsewhere. Nevertheless, we would like to see more expansion of the private sector economy, more diversification, and more rural economic development.

Yes, we have seen large increases in mineral exploration, but that is obviously the result of the sharpest increase in base metal prices in most of our lifetimes as well as more than a doubling of the price of gold. What we have not seen, unfortunately, is an end to the population migration from many of Yukon's rural communities into Whitehorse. What we have not seen is a genuine diversification of the economy at the community level. What we have not seen is enough evidence of a bright future in Ross River or Carmacks or Mayo. We need to work harder to see more of that.

There were some good promises made in this short Speech from the Throne. There are some positive ideas included and I will highlight some of the new ones later. Unfortunately, many of the commitments in this Speech from the Throne have been copied almost word for word from the government's previous Speech from the Throne, the 2003 speech: completing and fully implementing land claims, making First Nations full partners in the economic development of the territory, a vision of an affordable quality childcare, caring for citizens from the very young to the very old.

If this were Hollywood, this throne speech might have been entitled "Imagine the Future II: the Sequel". Seniors in Watson Lake have had to imagine they have a new multi-level health care facility for four years. Seniors in Dawson not only have to imagine they have a new multi-level health care facility, they even have to imagine there's an agreed-upon set of plans. Seniors in Haines Junction must continue to imagine they will get the seniors facility they've been asking for.

What is new in "Throne Speech II, the Sequel", is that now seniors in Teslin can also imagine they will get a seniors facility. Seniors and elders in Ross River will have to imagine this government is thinking about their need for an elders facility at all.

I'm not going to spend much time analyzing the speech or criticizing it because my criticism would not be about what the speech said, but rather about some of what it didn't say. For example, as was noted earlier today, there was no mention of the need for a major overhaul of social assistance rates. While property values and rental rates have been increasing along with the cost of food, heating fuel, gasoline and almost everything else in Yukon, there has been no increase in the support for Yukon's neediest people. A single person on SA still receives the same \$390 per month for rental assistance as they

did four years ago, or in fact 15 years ago. Does anyone in this Chamber honestly believe you can rent anything decent to live in today in Yukon for \$390? Of course you can't, so SA recipients routinely spend a portion of their food allowance on rent and utilities. We all know that; it has been well covered in the newspapers and on the radio, yet this government is sitting on some \$85 million in surplus funds, or net financial resources. It doesn't require a study or another consultant's report to know there are people going hungry today in Yukon.

We know there are people living in Whitehorse today who are virtually homeless. They aren't living on the street in winter, like they do in Vancouver, because our winter weather doesn't allow for it. They're couch-surfing, they're crowding multiple families into one-bedroom apartments and, sometimes, they're even trading sexual favours for a warm place to stay.

We know this, yet we don't have a permanent food bank; we don't have reasonable social assistance rates, and we don't have a youth shelter. The Yukon Liberal Party presented a well-thought-out plan for improving funding for childcare in our election platform. It addressed the needs of the daycare providers by increasing the direct operating grant. It addressed the needs of parents by increasing the subsidy and the thresholds for qualifying for it. It promised to end the territorial tax clawback of the federal childcare grant, which goes to all parents of preschool children. It supported daycare workers by offering incentives to increase their level of training and qualification. Now, when we first announced our plan, the Premier criticized us for providing some costing estimates. We felt that that was the responsible thing to do, so I am very pleased to see that the speech from the throne includes a commitment to delivering a territory-wide childcare and early learning strategy. I agree that we should consider the learning aspects and the educational aspects of preschool childcare. In fact, long-term, I believe we will only have stable, affordable, top quality preschool care if we take a comprehensive look at how we fund and provide it. Perhaps we need to focus more on the educational aspects and look at other jurisdictions both in Canada and worldwide where this care is provided in an educational setting, and the providers are paid and treated as educational professionals. In the near term, there needs to be increases in the direct operating grants and in the subsidy levels, because more and more parents are finding they cannot afford the rates that the existing daycares are forced to charge if they are going to pay their employees enough to retain them.

I know that the Hon. Minister of Health and Social Services earlier today noted the increases that have occurred over the past several years in those rates, but I would again point out that, over the past several months, daycare providers have continued to say that they cannot pay their employees enough to retain them under the existing rate schedule. They have had to raise their rates, and more and more families have had to find alternatives because they cannot afford to put the children in daycare.

Indeed, in some cases, I have been told by constituents that it is actually more affordable to hire a nanny to live in their home and look after their children than to put their children into daycare. And we can debate the pros and cons of that ap-

proach versus the daycare approach, but not everybody is in a position to take that step.

Another area of continued need in Yukon is access to family physicians. A year ago I suggested some ways of helping to address this problem. In fact the Liberal Party tabled a motion on implementing a system of tuition subsidies, tuition bursaries and tuition forgiveness programs to encourage more Yukon students to pursue a medical career and return to Yukon and more Canadian doctors to consider practising medicine in Yukon.

At the time the Acting Minister of Health and Social Services suggested it takes seven years to grow a doctor, that this was a national problem and that we should spend our time on matters where we can have an impact.

Well, I am glad that the current Health and Social Services minister decided to pursue these suggestions and has begun to implement them. Similarly I am glad to see this government is planning to introduce another idea we championed during the election campaign, by developing a trial program for collaborative health care clinic. I encourage the government to consult with the Yukon Medical Association and the Yukon Registered Nurses Association to develop a fair compensation schedule for health care professionals who choose to practise in the trial program, so that there is a level playing field for those doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and pharmacists who continue to work in the traditional model where they are responsible for their own overhead. The goal should be to enhance the options and the ability for Yukoners to access quality health care, but to do so while avoiding any economic hardships for the current practitioners.

Now, a few promises made during the recent election were in fact previously made in the election material of the Yukon Party during last year's Copperbelt by-election and again in the Legislative Assembly, but were noticeably absent in the throne speech. To use a favourite expression of the Member for Whitehorse West, I would be remiss if I didn't mention them.

The first is the long-awaited extension of Hamilton Boulevard to connect to the Alaska Highway near the South Access, and the second is the building of a Copper Ridge school.

There are now more people living west of the Alaska Highway in the subdivisions of McIntyre, Arkell, Granger, Logan and Copper Ridge than in any other area in Whitehorse, but there is only one road in and out: Hamilton Boulevard connecting to the Alaska Highway opposite Two Mile Hill. Hamilton Boulevard is becoming increasingly busy and, with the construction of the last phase of Copper Ridge and the increased use by all residents of Whitehorse of the Canada Games Centre, that traffic is only going to increase.

Additionally, for those people living above the round-about, there is no other way out except for an unmaintained emergency route. Were there to be a forest fire or an accident in or above the round-about that prevents access down Hamilton Boulevard, we would have a very difficult situation. We've already witnessed that on a couple of occasions: when there was a forest fire threatening the Logan subdivision several years ago, there was a great deal of consternation and almost panic of people feeling they may need to get out; and again,

during the strange events in Yukon of 9/11, when people were trying to decide whether they should go back to their homes or to some other area and we had some concern that there was only this one way out.

I hear this issue again and again from my constituents and I'm sure the Member for Whitehorse West also does. So, while I didn't necessarily expect to see it mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, I'm looking forward to the government announcing a firm timetable for the construction of this road, as was previously promised.

The Copper Ridge school is a very interesting topic. First it was promised by a Yukon Party candidate in writing during last year's by-election; then the Education minister said in the Legislative Assembly that there actually were no plans for a new school, that it was just a promise by a candidate; then it was again promised by the acting Education minister; then an access to information application revealed the existence of a departmental recommendation that an elementary school be built on the land set aside for this purpose and a provisional budget was provided.

Then the Education minister indicated that the funding would be seen in the main estimates, but in the spring there was no such funding in the main estimates. More recently, the school has reappeared, rising somewhat like a phoenix within the Yukon Party's 2006 election platform, but there was no clear indication whether it would be a primary school or a secondary school — just a new school in the Copper Ridge area. Now I know that the government has initiated a study of capacity in the Whitehorse school system, to be done independently of the Education department. I also believe that the land that is currently available is sufficient for an elementary school, but may be too small for the footprint of a secondary school.

We note that we currently have four secondary schools in Whitehorse. We have F. H. Collins, Porter Creek Secondary, Vanier and École Émilie Tremblay. I do understand that F.H. Collins is an aging facility and will need at some point to be renovated or even replaced, but I also know that there are more houses going up in Copper Ridge, there will be more houses going up at Whitehorse Copper and that they have been turning children away from Elijah Smith Elementary for the past two years already.

Parents who are moving to Copper Ridge, Granger and Logan don't want to have their children bused right past Elijah Smith to other schools — and largely that has been Takhini Elementary School. Takhini Elementary will not be able to accommodate them all, and it also is an aging school.

Parents in Hillcrest do not want their children to be bused up and down the Alaska Highway when they can walk the trail right to the school.

Parents in McIntyre may not be happy if their kids cannot attend the school that is right across the way, a school that has endeavoured to lead by providing a cross-cultural environment.

As I said, we already have four secondary schools. Where I grew up, we lived in a city of some 75 thousand people, almost two and one-half times the population of Yukon. We had numerous elementary schools so that children could walk to school and attend school with the other kids in their neighbour-

hood, but we only had two junior secondary schools and two high schools. We had the Catholic high school and the public high school. Surely in a community of 23 thousand people we can get by with four secondary schools.

Secondary schools are very expensive because they need wood working, metal working, automotive shops and science labs. I believe that most parents would be more amenable to having their sixteen-year-old children drive or take a bus to school than their five-year-old children.

So I encourage this government to stop playing this shell game around this school and honour the commitment to build another elementary school in the largest population centre of Whitehorse.

Another Yukon Party election commitment that has been included in the Speech from the Throne is to address climate change. Just a few years ago, the Premier and Minister of Environment was publicly questioning whether climate change had any real scientific relationship to greenhouse gas emissions and human activity, or whether it was perhaps just part of the endless cycles that have existed throughout the eons. Now, I am glad that the Premier, the Minister of Environment, has finally accepted that climate change is real and may even be the most important challenge we face in our lifetime. I am encouraged by the commitment to establish Yukon College as a major climate change research centre of excellence. But I am somewhat concerned by the inclusion of the construction of a cold climate innovation cluster at Ayamdigt Campus of Yukon College as part of the approach to addressing climate change.

I don't wish to debate the pros and cons of such a facility, except to say that it has little if anything to do with addressing climate change. It is, in fact, as it has been presented by its proponents, a commercial venture. It hopes to attract large industrial and commercial clients to test their products and materials in super cold conditions. Now, we may sometimes, especially lately, experience some very cold conditions in Yukon. But this facility is intended to artificially create that environment. It could just as readily be built in Florida, if one wanted to expend enough energy to create the cold conditions. It has nothing to do with studying and mitigating the effects of a globally warming climate. If anything, one would have to construct a warm climate innovation cluster to address that, so I would encourage the Minister of Environment to be clearer in discussing his proposal and to support it on its own merits rather than as part of a climate change strategy.

Mr. Speaker, if we are going to have a positive impact on slowing and eventually reversing the current warming trends that we call climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, we must take positive steps to do so. That includes such things as providing targeted government assistance for Yukoners to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. It includes improving sustainability and efficiency of Yukon government buildings and operations. It includes working with community partners to develop a biomass community heating system where and if that makes sense.

It includes examining and assisting Yukon communities to implement more district heating, and it includes confirming baseline conditions and working collaboratively with industry

and government and others to establish targets for greenhouse gas emissions. I would also encourage this government to be proactive in urging the Government of Canada to get back on-side with most of the international community in restoring its commitment to meeting the targets established under the Kyoto Protocol.

We know that climate change and global warming is having rapid and dramatic effects in Yukon already. We've seen what has happened with the beetle infestation and the massive beetle-kill we've experienced when, only a few years ago, our extended cold winters would kill those beetles and prevent them from surviving in large numbers through the winter.

We've seen effects on the Porcupine caribou herd, which is threatened and has reduced in size. We don't know why, but it may partially be a result of these effects. I would encourage this government to continue to be clear and supportive of the Yukon's position on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and continue to oppose drilling there, continue to work with our friends in Alaska and express our opinion in a non-combative way — I know the Premier is a strong believer in a pan-northern approach — but continue to lobby for the importance of the resource that migrates to and from that area.

Another promise made in the Speech from the Throne that echoed promises made in the recent election campaign was that there will be zero tolerance for drug dealers and that the enforcement provisions of the substance abuse action plan will be utilized to ensure drug houses are shut down in Yukon. We heard more about that in the ministerial statement earlier today.

Those are laudable goals and we can certainly support those goals. I know that fighting substance abuse and closing down drug houses are top-10 list leaders of my constituents. I do have to ask, however, why after four years this government has suddenly come to the conclusion that there will be zero tolerance for drug dealers. What was the tolerance level previously, one must wonder. Was it a 20-percent tolerance, a 30-percent tolerance? Of course not. Of course we should have zero tolerance.

What are the concrete plans for achieving this? Are we going to increase funding for additional police officers in our policing agreement with the RCMP? We haven't heard this but we would be supportive if this is proposed as a practical solution or tool. Is the government going to direct judges to hand out stiffer sentences? Of course not — that is not in their power to do so. Are they going to change the penalties for repeat offenders? Again, the government does not have the power to rewrite the Criminal Code of Canada.

The government should be careful not to suggest to the public that it is going to do that which it cannot. That's not responsible governance. As for implementing the *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act*, which was unanimously supported and passed by all members of the 31st Legislative Assembly, a good start would have been to have the act proclaimed sooner. As of last week it was still awaiting proclamation; we are glad that it has now been proclaimed. So, yes, we are pleased with today's announcement that the office is finally opening so that citizens can report illegal drug activity and other illicit activities occurring in their neighbourhoods and so that

the enforcement officers can do the job that they are hired to do. But considering how often this legislation is championed publicly by this government, they perhaps should have moved more quickly to have this done.

On this topic, Mr. Speaker, when I visit within the neighbourhoods and communities in the riding, I am amazed at how frequently members of the public point out to me and say, "Look, number so-and-so, across the street or up the street or around the corner, that's a drug house. Why isn't something being done?" I diligently report what they say to members of the RCMP, and inevitably the RCMP is already aware of the fact that there is suspected illicit drug activity going on in those houses. So I do hope that this legislation will be an effective tool in addressing this, and I would also point out that although the public may sometimes be frustrated by the apparent lack of activity, the RCMP has to build a criminal case, they have to do their due diligence, they have to do the research and the investigation to make sure that, if they make arrests, they will hold up in the court system. I encourage everybody to have confidence and show patience toward the hard-working police officers. They are not unaware of the problems but they too have limitations on what they can do.

Mr. Speaker, I was encouraged to see this government reverse its earlier approach to the needs of the Yukon Family Services Association outreach workers and the No Fixed Address Outreach van and increase the funding support for this program. That is something I lobbied for in this Assembly, and I want to thank the Minister of Health and Social Services for responding and doing so. Harm reduction as practised by the Outreach van workers is one more tool in the battle to reduce substance abuse, or at least minimize its effects.

I will also commend the government for announcing that it will be focusing on new drug treatment options and facilities in the coming months and years to help deal with the plague of addictions and the recidivism that occurs and to help families and individuals who are struggling with this. So that is something that we can support.

I also want to thank this government for its promise to expand funding of support services provided to children with autism to include children with other severe disabilities. This is something that has been raised by several of my constituents, and I do thank the government on their behalf.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne stated that the government was committed to addressing the need to increase skills and trades training and to work toward ensuring that more Yukon students succeed in graduating from high school and pursue post-secondary education. We on this side support those goals, of course, and we look forward to seeing the specific actions to achieve them.

We also note the commitment in the speech to implement the findings of the education reform initiative. There are many rumours or stories that have circulated about this initiative and its long-awaited report papers. We are curious — indeed eager — to see the results of the educational reform project, and we hope that its findings will not be changed or altered to suit the philosophy of the government. Even if it is not possible to implement all suggestions made in a public process like this, it is

important to maintain the confidence of the participants that their input will be considered and their work will be available for public discussion.

To do otherwise only frustrates those who participate in good faith and reduces the likelihood of future participation of members of the public in similar reviews and processes.

There was mention in the throne speech of assisting potential employees to enter the labour market and help fill existing vacancies. One does have to ask, Mr. Speaker, how a government can, on the one hand, take credit for turning around the economy, take credit for lowering unemployment rates, take credit for improving financial health, but at the same time claim — as was recently done — that the problem of employee shortages is not of their making but is just a nation-wide phenomenon. You can't really have it both ways — if you want to claim that you have improved the economy, then you also have to assume the share of the responsibility for helping to create a labour shortage. The planning to address this problem should have commenced long ago.

While the Economic Development minister was travelling abroad to China and attending ministerial conferences elsewhere in Canada, his government was failing to direct its officials to apply for inclusion of Yukon in the new federal programs to shorten the wait times for the immigration of additional temporary workers.

British Columbia and Alberta were doing the hard work to be included in the first implementation of the new procedures. Our officials have publicly stated that there was no direction provided before or during the election for them to do the work for Yukon to be included. They have publicly stated that our needs are not that great — just a few hundred workers compared to the thousands needed in our neighbouring provinces. That logic could be applied to almost every area that relates to our smaller population. I don't think the hoteliers and the food service retailers and the merchants who are struggling to attract and retain enough employees to keep their doors open want to hear that their needs are relatively small or that the government was distracted by the election that it called.

I know that the local Filipino community has been lobbying for some time for a reduction in waiting times for temporary workers from the Philippines. They have friends and families who would love to come to Yukon to work the jobs that are going unfilled.

Also noticeable by their absence from this Speech from the Throne was any mention of long-awaited legislation — legislation that has been studied and promised and postponed for the first four-year mandate of this government. I'm speaking of a number of items. I'm speaking of the long-overdue amendments to the *Workers' Compensation Act*, which were scheduled to be introduced by 2005, according to the requirements of the previous act. This act is of prime importance to both workers and employers. The quality of workers' lives and the costs incurred by employers are all vitally affected by this act. We know that we will not have time to debate a new or amended act in this short session. Will we be seeing this legislation in the spring along with the main estimates? Will it be next fall? Workers and employers want and need to know.

Similarly, there are the long-delayed revisions to the *Children's Act*. Now, children in care is an emotional issue for Yukon families. We know that many of the children who are affected by this legislation are First Nations children, and we know that First Nation leaders have been very unhappy, very frustrated by both the current protocols in practice and by the delays and the process of developing a new act. This government was not able to bring this legislation forward in the past four years. When will we see a new act? Next spring? Next fall? This is legislation that affects the very lives of children and families. It's time to do the hard work and bring forward this legislation.

Another area that has continuously been discussed but not completed is addressing the recommendations of the Privacy Commissioner over the past few years about changes needed in the access to information and privacy legislation. Now, it has been stated that this is a complex and difficult series of steps, and it has been stated that we are looking to other jurisdictions to see how they address this. But again, we ask when can we expect to see this come forward?

Yukoners are also demanding new omnibus legislation for the protection of animals and the prevention of cruelty to animals. There was no mention of this in the Speech from the Throne either. We've all heard some of the terrible reports in the media on abuse of animals and some horrible things that have occurred. There are many studies that also show that children and adults who will abuse or hurt or torture animals are more likely, statistically, to also commit violent offences against other people. So there may be a predictive effect there, but at least we can try to do something to protect the animals. They count on us to look after them.

Yukoners have also been waiting patiently for a decision to move forward with the construction of a new Whitehorse Correctional Centre. The current facility, as we all know, is overcrowded, deteriorating, less than safe and does not provide the proper facilities for rehabilitation programming. The previous Liberal government had commenced construction of a new facility. This government halted that project and, at various times, has described the former plans both, on one hand, as being a Cadillac facility and, on the other, as simply being a warehouse.

This government undertook a lengthy consultation process to determine what a new facility should look like and where it should be constructed. In the end, the recommendation of the report was to build it at the location where it currently is. I was somewhat surprised to see no word of that commitment in this Speech from the Throne about moving forward to address the needs of both inmates and workers by replacing that facility.

The Speech from the Throne promises to provide access to land for Yukoners. I have to ask why it took until the final weeks of this government's first mandate to sign a land development protocol with the City of Whitehorse. We witnessed the debacle last year when the same block of land in Porter Creek was apparently promised by three different ministers to be used for three different purposes. We have seen endless delays in the construction of the Whitehorse Copper country residential subdivision.

The most recent delay in not getting the surveying done so lots could be sold this fall, as promised, has been attributed to bad weather conditions. What a surprise — inclement weather in the Yukon. How unusual. I have to ask what happened. Did the dog eat the weather reports? That's not a very good excuse.

These endless delays in planning for an orderly process of land disposition and subdivision development have resulted in great uncertainty for both contractors and individual Yukoners alike. Traditionally the Yukon government had a policy of maintaining a two-year supply of lots so there would be certainty and so contractors could plan for their construction season. The artificial shortage that has resulted from the lack of planning by this government has pitted contractor against contractor and Yukoner against Yukoner competing for the few available lots. We've seen contractors forming shell companies to have a better chance of access to the few lots that exist. We've seen Yukoners complaining that the lot disposition process is unfair. None of this needs to happen if we simply make sure to plan in a timely manner and have sufficient lots available so everyone has an opportunity to purchase a lot and build a home, or build a home on a lot if that's what they do for their livelihood.

The Speech from the Throne says the government is committed to working constructively with all members of the House to improve the operation of its committees and the proceedings of this Legislature. We strongly support that goal and urge the government to approach it in a non-partisan way. There are 18 members of this Legislative Assembly and, although we represent three political parties, we first and foremost are here to represent Yukoners.

The decisions we make will affect future governments and Yukoners for years to come. No party should use its majority in government to promote its own agenda as to how this body works, or to construct a legislature that favours the government side over the opposition in its workings. From time to time, we will all likely find ourselves sitting on both the government and opposition sides of this Assembly.

It is crucial that we work to improve the operation of this body for all MLAs on behalf of all our constituents. I look forward to that process, and I implore all of us to avoid allowing it to deteriorate into party positions. This is one area where we can perhaps learn from our neighbours to the south or as close by as Alaska; I do recognize that the American system is constructed differently from our parliamentary model, but they do seem to make better use of all members of their legislative assemblies on all-party committees and they seem to provide for more free votes and, as a result, more consensus decisions. While the concept of confidence votes that we employ may prevent our ever achieving that level of cooperation it is still a goal that we too should aspire to.

Mr. Speaker, in this government's first Speech from the Throne, it promised to establish a commission to examine electoral reform. In the end, it contracted with one individual to undertake this review and the report that came back stated that Yukoners weren't interested in electoral reform. That is surprising considering the amount of effort and energy that has since been contributed by the volunteer organization called The

Yukon Citizens for Electoral Reform. That group asked each of the three political parties whether they would commit to establishing an independent and representative citizens' commission on electoral reform with a mandate to research various options and inform, as well as consult, the public. Both the Liberal and the New Democratic parties committed to doing so in their election platforms, and I look forward to seeing whether this government will move in that direction, which seems to have increasing public support.

Mr. Speaker, we had several discussions and debates in this House last year during the former session, revolving around ethics. Some members took it very personally and felt that they were being accused of lacking in ethics. The fact is, the public demands we observe the highest professional and ethical standards. They are entitled to that expectation. This government indicated in their first throne speech that they would seek an all-party agreement on a code of conduct and decorum in the Legislature. The Liberal Party tabled legislation in the 31st Legislative Assembly to address some of these issues. We again promised to table legislation regarding ethics and integrity in government in our election platform. That included addressing the issue of any Cabinet minister being more than 30 days in arrears in outstanding debts to the Government of Yukon and also provisions for the removal of MLAs if they are convicted of serious criminal acts during their time in office.

I would encourage this government to bring forward such legislation so that the public can have confidence in their MLAs. It is discouraging when some members of the public state that they simply assume all politicians are the same when they learn of the poor actions of any politicians anywhere. That is not something for us to be proud of and we need to take positive actions to change that perception.

I think that this is common in many bodies and to just add a little levity to it, I have a couple of short quotations from Winston Churchill — sort of on two sides of the issue. When asked what qualities a politician required, Churchill replied, "The ability to foretell what is going to happen tomorrow, next week, next month and next year, and to have the ability afterwards to explain why it didn't happen". Unfortunately, that is the view that the public has of us. But he also said something else and I am cognizant of it today, and while I have criticized the government for moving too slowly in some directions, I have tried also to commend the government for some of the positive things I do see in the Speech from the Throne, some of the positive things I saw in their election platform that I hope to see occurring in the coming months and years. That would be a quote from Winston Churchill where he said, "Of this I am quite sure, that if we open a quarrel between the past and the present, we shall find we have lost the future". We'll all have to strive to remember that.

I could go on at some additional length, but I know that there are some other members who are eagerly awaiting their turn. I do want to thank the Member for Klondike for the very interesting history lesson that he prepared and presented to us today. I appreciate the non-partisan way in which he noted that a Liberal was being more sympathetic and showed more sensi-

tivity to the issues than a Conservative. I equally understand that sometimes the other way can be the case. We should all remember that.

In closing, I will both congratulate the government on its re-election and remind them that it is time to take off the training wheels, to roll up their sleeves and get to work. I urge them to remember that the margin of victory in their majority government was small and that there are eight members on this side of the House who were sent here by their constituents to raise their issues and concerns.

I look forward to the coming discussions on the supplementary budget; I look forward to this government keeping its many promises to Yukoners; and I look forward to providing constructive suggestions this government may choose to employ and constructive criticism when it seems warranted.

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: I, too, would like to review some of the things contained within the Speech from the Throne, but also just to lead off again, as others have, with the fact that I'm very honoured to be elected to serve another term as the Member for Porter Creek North. I would like to thank the citizens of Porter Creek North very much for allowing me to represent them and to continue on our pathway to growth and prosperity by maintaining the direction that was established by my government in the election of 2002.

Porter Creek North is an interesting riding. It grew out of the southern end of Laberge, what was then known as the Lake Laberge riding. It brought the more urban bedroom community out of what was essentially a rural riding and brought it in with the rest of the north end of Porter Creek. There is still a very diverse and wide range of people within that. There are trailer parks; there are homes on very large lots and there are smaller homes on smaller lots. There are apartments in the back of shops in industrial areas. There's an interesting little part that, to most people, looks like a little street sign but goes into a whole community that is affectionately known as "the compound". Not only is there a cluster of houses, but a small remnant of one of our most active farms.

There's a little of everything within Porter Creek North, and that's what makes it so interesting. I'll get to some of the things in terms of going through it during an election, which is always a really interesting time. I think most of my constituents know that I was foreseeing having some difficulty getting around during the election. I'm pleased to report that, with only a couple exceptions, I made it to virtually every doorstep. I only fell off one of them, so I was pleased with that.

I had the chance to talk to a huge number of people with a huge number of issues. The one thing that I found most interesting during that time was the fact that no one issue stood out like it did in the previous election. In the previous election, of course, it was economy, it was jobs, it was people — one person was working on his truck, and as soon as he could get the truck done, he was gone. There were single parents who were living here while their spouses were in British Columbia and Alberta, working. We saw very little of that during this election. But we had a sampling of virtually everything else in terms of issues: childcare, daycare and education have always

been big issues in Porter Creek North; drugs, also rebounding up in that area; concerns over future development of the lower bench and, as the population moves to the north, most people, I think, are very suspicious of the fact that they will run into similar problems that Copperbelt and Whitehorse West have seen — a massive influx in population and probably a concurrent need for services. We're going to need a youth centre as this develops in Porter Creek. We don't want the kids to go downtown. We are going to need other services. We are going to need a little bit more shopping services into Porter Creek. Schools — we have Porter Creek Secondary School, which is already at capacity. So again, if you add, coming out of that planning charette in Whitehorse, as many as 8,000 to 10,000 people, you're going to have a huge school issue.

So those are some of the interesting things that are coming out of certainly my riding.

Looking back at the Speech from the Throne, our vision was building Yukon's future together — a clear vision for a bright future. It was built really on four pillars, if I can speak for a few moments about those pillars. One was achieving a better quality of life by building healthy, safe communities with skilled and adaptable people — the safer communities and neighbourhoods plan, the drug strategies, education reform — all these things are going to be looking at how we can continue to build that healthy and safe community and continue with what I am convinced are some of the most skilled and adaptable people. You have to be at 40 below — the adaptation is striking.

The second pillar was protecting Yukon's pristine environment — preserving our wildlife and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Those impacts are dramatic as we are sort of seeing over these last few days. I think we all do have to agree that when you look at climate change, I think we are getting the bulk of the proof that there is a human cause to this, but at the same time we do have to recognize that there is fluctuation within the world and there has been historically. We can't rule that out. To my mind, it is happening a little too fast to be natural, but you know there are arguments on both sides of the coin. But we have to look at that climate change and we have to look at cold weather adaptation. They do go hand in hand, and I disagree with my colleague opposite who sort of indicated he didn't see the relationship between the two. As we deal with cold climate and cold weather, we see cars sitting on the streets running. Are there better ways to heat the cars so that we don't have to be pumping that massive amount of carbon dioxide into the environment? We see people going back to wood heat which is nice until you get over to Riverdale and get into the inversions and realize that you can't see across the street. All these things do go hand in hand. You always have to remember that while we are trying to keep the cold out, there are other climates in the world that are trying to keep the heat out. It is a similar technology for the most part, and it is this sort of relationship that we want to look at in terms of where we are going with that sort of research.

Number three is promoting a strong, diversified private sector economy by developing Yukon's vast natural resources, wilderness tourism potential, agriculture, arts and culture, in-

formation technology, film and sound, as well as the traditional industries of outfitting and trapping and other such relationships.

I think we have to look at all of these. Certainly what's under the ground is as important — but perhaps not more important — than what's above the ground in our vast natural resources. The mining community — and the Geoscience Forum that's going on in Whitehorse right now — is working very hard to bring these two industries, these two cultures, these two areas, basically together — that we can mine and we can do it in a responsible way with full respect for the environment. It's very, very necessary to bring those together. I think that anyone who has seen the mining remediation in Viceroy, up in the Dawson area, can see that it looks more like a golf course than a mine.

Wilderness tourism potential — a huge market there. Is that what's going to carry our economy? Not likely. It's just too small in the overall dollar value, but it's still a part of the diversification. It's something that has to be respected. It's something that has to be developed, and developed in a responsible way.

Agriculture — if you look at the value of the classes of soil, I think the best soil in the Yukon is class 5, and that's only in a couple of very small areas, one of which was developed into a golf course. We have to look more responsibly, I think, at agricultural development and what we can produce up here. We're not going to grow bananas, unfortunately. That's just a fact of life. But there are things that we can develop. It's maybe not likely that we can develop the beef, hay and grain to sustain them, but there are other agricultural pursuits that would work. And I still maintain that there is a vibrant potential for the use of berries. That has come out in a number of studies done so far. I think most Yukoners would agree that berries grow very well up here — cranberries, blueberries, gooseberries to a degree. There are things that we could do with those berries. We could develop what is native to the Yukon and what is possible for the Yukon to develop.

Arts and culture — I don't have the figures in front of me, but we spend something like eight to 10 times the national average on arts and cultural activities within the Yukon. Some of the statistics are really quite amazing in terms of what we have out there. That's something to be very proud of and something to continue to develop.

Information technology — 98 percent of homes have access to broadband high-speed Internet. That compares to somewhere in the range of 62 percent in Ontario. I invite anyone who is listening to come to the Chamber of Commerce luncheon tomorrow. I will be passing on an award I had the honour of receiving in Toronto on behalf of our information technology people within the Yukon government — a world-class award. It basically came to fruition here in the Yukon, something to be very proud of.

The film and sound industry — the shooting of a short movie here, there's a BMW commercial coming up, *Northern Town* continues, there are other series and movies that are developing. We're rapidly becoming Hollywood north. Even the series that just finished filming put something like \$1.7 million

into the Yukon economy. What people on the street see is a bunch of people running around at one of the hotels and tying up the convention centre for a couple of weeks — the reality is that pumped \$1.7 million into the economy here.

I think the people who say we're not diversifying the economy are really not looking at the overall picture.

The fourth pillar is practising good governance with strong fiscal management in a climate of cooperation, collaboration and partnership with our First Nation governments, our two sister territories, our provincial counterparts and the federal government. Over the first four years of our mandate, we've proven that. We've come from a very shaky fiscal framework to being one of two jurisdictions in all of Canada with no net debt and money in the bank — the other one being Alberta. We probably don't even have to explain that.

What most people don't understand is that when you put that financial statement in terms of per capita — and I agree we're always arguing that per capita isn't the best way to look at things — if you took that positive balance in terms of per capita, the Yukon is well ahead of Alberta in terms of fiscal stability.

Some of my Alberta colleagues enjoy that statistic, but it is true, and it is something that we can be very proud of.

The leader of the official opposition mentions many times the amount of money coming in from the federal government. Again, it's our fair share, and I have to echo our Premier's concern and confusion when we are told one week that we are wrong, we are misinterpreting, we have the wrong data and that we are in fact broke and then the next time they are saying that we have this pile of cash and we should be spending it. I will pay homage, I guess, to the Member for Kluane, and his permission to use the phrase "awash in cash." We're doing well. I don't think we're either awash in cash or in financial trouble, but we have the ability to do what we need to do and what we want to do. The trick is to determine how we're going to do that and how we're going to utilize those resources. Many of those funds coming in from the federal government are earmarked for major capital improvements. Our job is to look at those capital improvements in terms of what is going to support the infrastructure, what is going to support future development. We have to use it for other things, of course, but we should be looking at what these improvements are going to do in the long run, how it is going to diversify the economy, and how we are going to utilize what comes out of the other end.

The leader of the official opposition mentioned that I like statistics — I always enjoy statistics. The one statistic, of course, he didn't mention was from the Mining Association of Canada, which looked at the amount of spending over the last few years on mineral exploration, finding new mines and on mine development — getting those mines ready to go into production. Yes, this is driven to a large degree by world mineral prices. I emphasize "world". They are the same prices here that they are in Prince Edward Island, Alberta, Dubai — they're world prices.

In the last year that they have full statistics for, the entire nation of Canada increased just short of 17 percent — 16.3 percent or something like that.

The Yukon increased 147 percent — almost 10 times the national average.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: I agree with the member opposite that a lot of that is going to China.

Ten times the national average that we did compared to the rest of Canada with the same world mineral prices. If the member opposite still thinks that the Yukon economy is the result of world mineral prices, then I really have to question his understanding of those statistics.

Coming back a bit to Porter Creek North and some of the things that we heard on the doorstep — one of the issues is a city issue, not a territorial issue. But in the absence of riding representation within the city, I heard clearly on the doorsteps that people wanted me to talk about it so I've approached the city to look at what's going to happen with the Stan McGowan Arena once the games are over. Right now it's storing an awful lot of equipment and this sort of thing for Canada Winter Games. But what happens when it is decommissioned and taken out? Do we retain it as a skating rink? Well, probably that's not the wisest use of it with Takhini Arena and the new Canada Games Centre. Are there other potential uses? Many people in the area feel that that's a perfect location for a youth centre and for other youth and community-related activities and they would like to get involved in that.

At the same time I've been strongly approached by the film and sound people, primarily the film people, who look at the Stan McGowan Arena as a potential excellent location for a film studio — another possibility. So, we will certainly be working very assiduously with the city on that to determine the best use for the Stan McGowan Arena, and again it's a city issue and city determination but we'll certainly keep working on that.

One of the biggest issues I heard on the doorstep surrounded childcare and daycare. Most people seem to agree with me that simply increasing the direct operating grant was not the way to go. They had problems with the Liberal platform immediately increasing the direct operating grant. We had increased it \$900,000. It seems to me it was something like 40 percent, and very little, if any, got into the hands of the daycare workers. That's a fact.

We did a pretty good job of proving that simply increasing the direct operating grant didn't work, and it's likely it wouldn't work again. There has to be a better way of doing it, so we're looking at bringing everyone in and having a talk, having a good meeting to come to a consensus with the parents, the workers and the owners. Some of the solutions that seem easy to people on the doorstep would step on the private operators and would cause them grief. Somewhere in between, as most things, is reality, and hopefully we'll come up with something that makes good sense.

Another thing we heard a great deal about on the doorstep was corrections. People seemed to be very happy with the approach to corrections reform, to looking at this in a much broader sense. The briefings we've had on it have been impressive. The group that has been looking at this has done an excellent job. In my opinion, it has been very worthwhile waiting,

putting programs together. When we took office, the jail that was on paper did not look at content nor at programs. The only program I could see in there that made any sense was a basketball court design where they could have regular basketball games. That's not what a correctional facility needs. There's so much more we should be looking at there. I'm very heartened and thankful that groups like the Elizabeth Fry Society are now forming in the Yukon and will start helping us with their good work.

The Elizabeth Fry and John Howard societies have a very long involvement in North America and Canada and are very good in terms of background material and things that we can pull on that.

Some of the other things that came up — again the athletes village. The member for the third party asked questions about it today. I think people are beginning to really understand what happened there. The host society, in putting in the bid basically set — the member opposite said \$3 million but I believe it was actually \$2.7 million to house the athletes. I drew in the last session the analogy to this as someone sponsoring a team and having a budget when they go there to pay the hotel bill. It wasn't for anything permanent; it wasn't to build anything; it wasn't a Government of Yukon budget item. People keep referring to it as a budget. It wasn't — it wasn't ours. It was an item that was placed by the host society within the bid for the Canada Winter Games.

Once people realized that this was not possible — and it is not possible for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the whole structure of the Canada Games is that everyone works on an even basis. In other words all teams, all athletes, eat in the same facility, live in the same facility, are transported by the same buses. No team can say that they got a better meal or a better night's sleep. It has to be even. And why anyone would have thought that for \$2.7 million they could have provided this — I wasn't at the meetings and I don't know, maybe there was a plan, but it certainly didn't materialize. In the end, nothing could be done.

There was a nice architectural drawing of little star things with a central facility and pods going out to trailers. It was over \$3.5 million to clear and service that land before they built anything. So again, how they thought this was going to be done, I am not sure, but I wasn't at the meetings.

The next thing that was looked at was trailers and several members opposite have stood and said they have been to Canada Winter Games in other parts of the country and they went off very well using trailers. What they didn't realize, of course, was the huge bill for those trailers. In our case, the best estimate we ever got early on was \$16 million and the last one was \$20 million. That is for trailers to come up, set up — same servicing — be used and then they leave.

Yukon gets zero. They get nothing out of that \$16-million to \$20-million investment. And that wasn't something we were prepared to do. Certainly it wasn't something I was prepared to do.

So, by accessing some of the affordable housing — a program under the feds and other funds — we put up two buildings. They're basically being built for other purposes and

loaned to the Canada Winter Games Society for that two-week period. One will be turned over to the Yukon Housing Corporation and used for affordable housing. The other one will be turned over to Yukon College for an affordable family student residence. Those buildings will belong to each of those organizations. In the case of Yukon College, it will be turned over to Yukon College. It will be turned over mortgage- and debt-free. However they structure it is their business, but it could become a very interesting revenue stream for the college while serving the needs that they have there.

The buildings are built to green home standards. The best way to describe green home standards, which is a made-in-Yukon solution — most of our building people refer to it as R-2000 on steroids. It far exceeds the R-2000. It is incredibly efficient to heat and maintain. We have had challenges. For instance, the hot water facilities have had to exceed what you would do for that building normally because you have 1,800 kids taking showers every day. So, we've had a few challenges in the design. But even with those challenges, the final cost of those facilities will be \$225 per square foot, and the Yukon Housing Corporation, the Nunavut Housing Corporation and the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation all agree that that is actually on the low end of construction for anything of similar quality.

In the Yukon Housing Corporation building, the electrical outlets are slightly higher, and the electrical switches, security and heating controls are slightly lower to accommodate wheelchairs. All doors are wheelchair accessible. All bathrooms are fully accessible and equipped with safety bars and such. It has low-profile carpeting, with very good transition from the floors to the carpets. All of it has been done in consultation with various organizations and looking at disabilities and construction for the disabled.

Heating, ventilating and air-conditioning are in every room, which far exceeds the requirements for northern building, again, necessary for that short term when there are a number of students in there. They're built with good laundry facilities, good storage facilities. I could go on and on. In the Yukon Housing Corporation facility, they're built with the capacity for Lavalier alarms, so that if someone falls they can pull the Lavalier alarm and summon assistance. Has it been designed as a seniors building? It has been designed for seniors as one potential occupant. It has been designed in order to allow people to age in place and to stay there as they need more and more of these amenities, but it won't be a seniors facility, per se.

Will it be affordable housing? According to the Canadian program that we're in, we can charge no more rent than the average for a period of 10 years. Does that mean that it will all be market housing? No, it doesn't. It depends on how the college or the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors want to use it. It will have the capacity to become geared-to-income rent. Some of it will, because it will be affordable housing. People can move in there, go on the rent-geared-to-income program, pay 25 percent of their income to rent, and Yukon Housing Corporation will pick up the rest of the rent. Is it a social housing building? No, it is not. Again, the breakdown on

how it is used is determined by the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors.

We're very proud of what has happened with that athletes village. I use the term "athletes village" because that's where the media have sort of put the whole thing, but the reality is that it's an athletes village for two weeks, but it is a building that has been designed with at least a 50-year occupancy in mind, and probably much beyond that, so we have some very, very good-news stories there.

In achieving a better quality of life, we will provide Yukon students with the fundamental skills necessary to prepare them for jobs, responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning. We'll do this by implementing the major education reform project, implementing the relevant obligations of the Government of Yukon according to the terms of land claim agreements. We will continue to support literacy as a priority, because it is a fundamental building block of education. We do differ from our federal government on that, and we will continue to do what we can to support literacy.

We'll continue to provide assistance to children with special needs through the Youth Achievement Centre and through other means. We'll commit ourselves to constructing a new school in the Copper Ridge area, as the Department of Education determines exactly where — although we pretty well know — and what the grade distribution will be. That's all being studied under the good direction of our Department of Education.

We will also expand and support the alternative education and apprenticeship programs and post-secondary education by implementing a comprehensive skills and trades training strategy. We will continue to expand education and training programs in areas of particular relevance to the north, such as First Nation governance, mining, tourism, resource management, construction north of 60, health care professionals, care providers of different types, and teachers.

We will continue to support alternative programming at the Individual Learning Centre. It encourages high school dropouts to return to school and re-engage in learning, a very good success story.

Our government will also recognize the pursuit of education in the striving to attain one's personal best through student financial assistance by continuing to implement the Yukon excellence awards to include grades 9 through 12, continuing to index the Yukon student grant and continuing post-secondary opportunities for Yukon students.

We will recognize the contribution of teachers to the success in the education system by participating in the awarding of people for excellence employee recognition program. We will continue to provide opportunities for Yukon teachers to upgrade and expand their skills and give priority to Yukon resident teachers for employment in Yukon schools. We'll support the Yukon native teacher education program that is open to all Yukon graduates to obtain their education degree in the Yukon for work in the Yukon.

In dealing with alcohol and drug abuse, our government will implement the Yukon substance abuse action plan. This will primarily be accomplished by providing resources directly

to NGOs — or non-governmental organizations — that are on the front lines in delivering action items relating to four strategic directions, which include harm reduction action items, prevention and education action items, treatment action items and enforcement action items.

In protecting our families we will accomplish this by providing support for the operation of the VictimLINK crisis line in place for all Yukoners in need of immediate assistance. We will continue to implement training initiatives for victim service workers, transition workers, justices of the peace and members of the RCMP regarding anti-violence initiatives, including the provisions of the *Family Violence Prevention Act*.

We will continue to implement a multi-departmental approach and actions focusing on zero tolerance of violence against family through the development of a long-term public education awareness campaign responding to and preventing family violence. We will also ensure victims of abuse have access to a safe place and support services through the victim services family violence prevention unit and other departments and agencies. In creating safer communities we will implement the provisions of the *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act* legislation, according to the substance abuse action plan.

We will also implement the corrections action plan that I referenced earlier, and that includes measures to address the construction of a new correctional facility, or facilities, to replace the Whitehorse Correctional Centre. We will develop programs, services, treatment, and case management and programs more meaningful than a basketball court. We will develop human resources through training and support. We will address community capacity development; we will address victim and family services. We will address information and communications through handbooks, articles, et cetera, and governance issues such as legislation in a disciplinary complaints process, policies and others.

We will work with First Nation governments, communities and non-government organizations and others to provide access to land-based camps, treatment centres for inmates at the Whitehorse Correctional Centre, and offenders supervised in the community. We will continue to ensure community notification of high-risk sex offenders.

In assisting elders and seniors we will accomplish this by continuing to increase the inventory of affordable housing for seniors and elders in the Yukon and continuing to ensure that seniors and elders are able to remain in their home as long as possible by increasing home care and other services.

By building seniors and elders housing that enables couples with different medical needs to continue living together as long as possible. We will accomplish it by enabling elders and seniors to live in their own home communities as long as possible; to complete the construction of the multi-level-care facilities in Watson Lake and Dawson City and the seniors facility in Haines Junction, which I understand has a complete foundation and we're starting the stick-built components of that, as we speak.

We'll consult with elders and seniors on the need for senior facilities in Teslin and other communities, and we'll continue to index the 35-percent increase in the pioneer utility grant.

We'll continue to support non-government organizations that provide support services to elders and seniors.

In caring for Yukoners, we will implement a strategy for recruitment and retention of doctors and other health care professionals through various programs while always remembering — unlike some members opposite — that this is a national program and that everything we do to solve the problem is usually exactly what the other jurisdictions are also doing.

We'll work with members of the health care community on a pilot project to establish a collaborative medical practice to help meet the health care needs of Yukon families. We will work with the federal government to expedite the immigration of health care and other professionals into the territory.

We will reopen the Thomson Centre with 44 continuing-care beds and establish a palliative care unit at the Thomson Centre, something I think all members of this House have supported during the last term.

We will provide support services for children with severe disabilities, such as cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, Down's syndrome, in addition to the services already provided to children with autism, and create a family support for families with disabilities unit.

In caring for children, we will deliver a territory-wide childcare and early learning strategy for children and parents, which will create more available spaces for children of all ages, especially for those younger than 18 months. We'll reduce the rates parents pay for childcare. We will increase financial support and reduce disincentives, such as taxes, to allow parents to participate in the labour force, thus ensuring that parents with children in kindergarten are not charged full-time preschool rates for their childcare.

We will eliminate the clawback of the child tax credit from income tax, although my understanding is that a degree of this is a federal issue and we will certainly be working very hard on that.

In promoting arts and culture, we will work to assist and further promote Yukon's artists and musicians, including emerging artists, supporting creative and entertaining venues for the benefit of our visitors and for Yukoners. We will also continue to work cooperatively with the Kwanlin Dun First Nation government and other levels of government to enable Kwanlin Dun to complete its proposed cultural centre on the Whitehorse waterfront.

We will recognize the important role that arts and culture play in contributing to the social and economic life of Yukon by providing assistance to arts and cultural organizations and Yukon artisans and by promoting exhibits, concerts, festivals, multicultural events and programs.

In supporting sports and recreation, we promise to make the 2007 Canada Winter Games in the Yukon a resounding success and a memorable experience for Yukoners and our guests alike and make sure that that leaves a lasting legacy and provides facilities for future sports venues.

The one thing we did not want, Mr. Speaker, were trailers that would be then hauled out.

We will maintain and enhance the quality of Yukon's natural environment for present and future generations through eco-

system-based management conservation of resources and protection and maintenance of biodiversity. We will meet Yukon's obligation to establish special management areas and habitat protection areas under the land claim settlements. We will plan, establish and manage a system of wilderness preserves, natural environment parks and ecological reserves, Canadian heritage rivers, campgrounds and recreational sites. We will implement our celebrating Yukon parks initiative that showcases Yukon parks, including the establishment of a storefront office, and expand the park officer program to promote security in the campgrounds.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I could go on for a long time, but Yukoners were asked to imagine a tomorrow where we were asked to share a vision for achieving a better quality of life, where we share a vision for managing and protecting Yukon's environment and wildlife, where we share a vision for a prosperous and diversified economy, and where we share a vision of Yukon coming of age through effective leadership, political stability, cooperative governance and strong fiscal management.

We will deliver this vision for tomorrow to Yukoners.

I thank you.

CONSIDERATION OF SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Pursuant to Standing Order 26(2), I wish to inform the House that consideration of a motion for an address in reply to the Speech from the Throne shall take place on Tuesday, November 28, 2006.

ADDRESS IN REPLY TO THE SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Hon. Mr. Cathers: It's a pleasure to be back here in the House and replying to the Speech from the Throne, and to see familiar faces back here and welcome some new ones. I look forward to working together over the next five years to address the priorities of Yukoners, ensuring that together we can imagine a tomorrow and build a tomorrow that is better and brighter than today, and work together to strengthen our territory for all Yukoners, providing a climate for prosperity for all individuals.

Now, in 2006, of course, as you know, Mr. Speaker, our government, the Yukon Party, ran on a platform of building Yukon's future together — a clear vision for a bright future — with the slogan, "Imagine Tomorrow". In imagining tomorrow, we focused on four pillars that we structured our platform around, those being a better quality of life, the environment, the economy and practising good government.

In implementing these, there are many factors to the issue, and I would like to speak primarily about matters within my portfolio as Minister of Health and Social Services and, of course, as Member for Lake Laberge representing my constituents.

Lake Laberge, as I have previously mentioned to the House and will continue to do so, is a riding that is very different in character from any other in the territory. We have the largest population of Yukoners living outside a municipality. We have the majority of the Yukon's farms and a very high percentage of small businesses and people who live and work

on the land and have larger tracts of land than is common in municipalities. It is a very difficult area to campaign in, simply due to the long driveways and the lack of street signs and how spread out it is. One positive area in that regard that we were able to deliver in the last mandate was putting up signage on a number of the secondary roads that had not had any name identification in the past. That, of course, is of benefit not only in fire protection and provision of ambulance services and police, but it is beneficial in terms of even everyday things such as package delivery. A few years ago, someone showed up at my doorstep looking for a completely different road that was miles away and had no idea where they were, and it was delivering from a local company I won't name here in the Assembly. Their delivery driver had absolutely no idea where to look to simply deliver a package that had been ordered by an individual. So it is beneficial for purposes such as convenience and even getting things like that to one's house.

Other areas that are of priority, of course, to my constituents, include infrastructure. Cellular phone service is very important. We have seen some enhancement in that and want to ensure that ultimately, through the cellular project that the Yukon has invested in in partnership with Latitude Wireless, the service in the periphery of Whitehorse — including, and especially for me, of course, my riding of Lake Laberge — improves to a level where most people do have that service.

This will result in safety and conveniences we use cellphones for from day to day. Today, as we increasingly become an electronically-based society, many of us use cellphones as almost an extension of our body and become somewhat dependent upon them. It's a pretty important communications link, needless to say.

One characteristic of my riding, with the high population being outside of Whitehorse, is that many people do commute into work or travel into Whitehorse for business, so there's a very high usage of the infrastructure. Issues such as highway safety, brushing of the ditches, the width of the road and intersections are all very important to many of my constituents. In moving forward over the next five years, I look forward to working on some of the commitments we've made, such as widening the Hot Springs Road and the construction of a sports lane alongside it, beginning the upgrade of the Mayo Road to a 100-km-per-hour standard between the Takhini River and Fox Lake campground. That would be a multi-year project due to the sheer magnitude of it, but the engineering has been done for the long-term planning to ensure that, as investments are made in pavement improvements to create a smoother highway, we consider what needs to be done for other elements of safety.

Some of the intersections, such as the Alaska Highway-Mayo Road intersection, are of significant concern to many people due to people going through it too fast on the Alaska Highway and people not stopping, and people coming off the Mayo Road who don't stop when they should, perhaps. There needs to be improvements there and it's something we're committed to.

In the last mandate, the establishment of the domestic water well-drilling program was an initiative that I was particularly pleased with and proud of. It was suggested originally by

constituents of mine and, working together with my colleagues, we were successful in implementing that program, based on the rural electrification and telephone program. It has been very successful outside of city limits. I hope that we will be successful in working with the City of Whitehorse in extending it to within city limits, particularly for areas such as Hidden Valley and MacPherson, as that was the original concept within the program, but we do need the agreement of the City of Whitehorse even when we are providing the funding for that, due to the structure of the caveat placed on the title that ensures, of course, the repayment of that money.

Other areas that I was pleased in the last mandate to be able to work on included changes to the agricultural policy and the purchase of the new mobile, red-meat abattoir, which we certainly hope will have the intended improvements in allowing Yukon red meat producers the ability to sell their product to market. Prior to this, there was no ability to have that product inspected and thus restaurants and supermarkets were unable to carry that product. This will allow the beef or the elk or the pork or bison to be inspected and sold at retail locations, including supermarkets and restaurants. I hope and believe that, over the years, it will create significant increased ability for producers to actually make money in the business and create a self-sustaining agricultural industry, increasing our local production of food and having a greater reliance on locally grown, healthy food for which the money goes into the Yukon economy when you and I purchase those products for our families. It also provides benefits in terms of food security, should anything ever happen to our transportation links.

There are the obvious benefits of simply knowing where the food comes from, which is going to become increasingly important within today's society, as we grow collectively more conscious of healthy living, healthy eating and the need to consider what we are putting into our bodies so we can maintain a healthy lifestyle.

With that in mind I would also like to touch on a few areas — particularly with the Speech from the Throne and the priorities that we have laid out as a government for moving forward. Many of these are within health care and that, of course, is something that is very important to my constituents, like most other Yukoners.

In the past several years, there have been issues with Yukoners not being able to get access to a family physician and the care they need in a timely manner. One of the initiatives that I'm proudest of — I would say the initiative that I am proudest of in my almost a year as Minister of Health and Social Services — has been the health human resources strategy. The strategy was developed largely through the hard work of officials within Health and Social Services and I certainly appreciate their efforts in working with me, and with the professions that are affected, in meeting the policy objectives that we set out and providing the plan and the details of that plan for investing and ensuring that Yukoners have access to health professionals when they need them.

This is but one step in addressing these issues. Nationally, we have a growing shortage of health care professionals that will increase due to the demographics of our population. We

will be facing increasing challenges in attracting health professionals in every jurisdiction in Canada, including physicians and nurses. We need to take the action now. We have seen the problem in the past, and currently, where some Yukoners do not have access to a family doctor.

As a government, we are fully and completely committed to doing what we can to ensure that they do have access to the health care they need, when they need it. We will not be satisfied until that occurs. We are committed to taking the necessary steps to providing that access to care that is so critically important to Yukoners.

As I said, improving access to health care and ensuring every citizen has access to the care they need in a timely manner is a matter of top priority. In the health human resources strategy, we have allocated \$12.7 million over a five-year period, with the key aim of improving recruitment and retention of health professionals to address current shortages, such as family physicians, and to avoid anticipated shortages in some of the other professions, to which I referred.

Our ability to make the investment was due to the success of the pan-northern approach in working with the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. That largely is due to the efforts, of course, of the Premier in taking the lead in working with the premiers of those two territories. This has extended into other matters, which I will touch on in a few minutes, as we have extended it throughout government and working together when we're dealing with the federal government.

Were it not for the pan-northern approach taken by our Premier and the premiers of N.W.T. and Nunavut at the First Ministers meeting in 2003, when they walked out on the then prime minister at a nationally-televised press conference, we would not have gained the historic recognition of the inadequacy of per capita funding arrangements north of 60. The fact that per capita funding does not work well in our large jurisdictions with our large land masses and sparse and spread out populations has been a matter that has been brought forward by many governments of all three territories for years. But for years, there was no success on that front. It was an issue that the federal government had never moved from; they had never been prepared to acknowledge it. It was only due to the pan-northern approach and the high profile that the three premiers gained that created the public recognition nationally of the sense of that argument, of the absolute irrefutable logic of the argument and forced the prime minister to take the action that was necessary due to public demand for that — for fairness.

As well, for the recognition of that need in keeping with the Canadian value of ensuring that we have some distribution of national programs and assistance and equalization to provide all regions of the country with the ability to take care of the needs of their citizens in addressing the basic needs, including health care, infrastructure, et cetera, in ensuring that nationally we have a good standard of living and have access to the services that we value so deeply in our nation from coast to coast.

Through that pan-northern approach of the Premier's — the direct result of the recognition by the federal government of the need for base funding, in addition to per capita funding, was a negotiation of the territorial health access fund, which

provides Yukon with \$21.6 million in base funding over a five-year period. We have allocated the majority of that fund to the health human resources strategy, and that, of course, is \$12.7 million for the strategy.

One key component of the health human resources strategy is aimed at improving Yukoners' access to family physicians through two programs.

The first of these is the medical education bursary, under which Yukoners attending medical school are eligible for \$10,000 assistance per year. After graduation, if they enter medical residency in a Yukon family practice, they are eligible for an additional \$15,000 per year. I'm extremely pleased to tell members that we are already supporting five Yukon students currently in medical school, including one who is doing his residency in family medicine.

The second program is the family physician incentive program for new graduates. Under this program, we provide financial assistance to Canadian citizens who recently graduated from medical school in exchange for five years of service in the Yukon. Over the term of the agreement, the Yukon government will provide \$50,000 to each doctor who is approved under this program. The intent of this program is to assist new physicians in repaying their student debt and, of course, to attract them to the Yukon.

One of the reasons we chose to establish this program was the Yukon Medical Association's support for this concept. At their 2005 AGM, they passed a motion that read as follows: "THAT the Yukon Medical Association encourage the Government of Yukon to consider repaying portions of a new physician's accumulated debt in return for service to try to improve our ability to attract new graduate physicians to the territory."

Quite simply put, it was the support by medical professionals, including the Yukon Medical Association, for the programs under the health human resources strategy that led us to establish the programs in the manner they were done. We wanted to provide the incentives that would work for those professionals. We spoke to those professionals and asked them what they wanted, and it's simply not accurate for any member of this Assembly to suggest that the idea sprung from their head. This idea has come from the public and from the health professionals, and we as a government are very pleased to act upon it.

I announced the launch of the family physician incentive program in August of this year, and I'm pleased to be able to tell you that it's now up and running and the first physician has been approved under that program, by the name of Dr. Huey Chau, and he will be opening a new practice here and seeing new patients in late January.

A new component of the health human resources strategy that will be rolled out in 2007 will provide additional support to the physician residency program so we can accommodate more physicians in doing part of their residency rotation here in the Yukon. These initiatives will not solve all our problems but they are a start. Challenges in today's health care system will not be resolved overnight but I'm confident that, by continuing strong working relationships between government and health professionals, we can overcome those challenges together.

Other areas of our health human resources strategy include the health professions bursary through which we are now supporting five Yukon students studying medical imaging, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and licensed practical nursing. As well, the bursary is open to other professional areas identified as priorities, such as pharmacy, speech language pathology and audiology, medical laboratory, dietetics and dental therapy.

In addition, under the health human resources strategy we quadrupled our investment in the previously existing nursing bursary. As a result we are currently supporting nine nursing students at various stages in their studies with an additional four to start in the next fiscal year.

As we continue to work on our health human resources strategy, we will be looking at alternative ways of providing health information and services to individuals.

Finally, on the health human resources strategy, I would like once again to express my thanks to the staff of Health and Social Services for their tremendous efforts in bringing the health human resources strategy to fruition under what were very tight timelines.

Another area that we will be working on, as I have noted previously, is the collaborative practice health care clinic. We committed in the election to establishing a collaborative practice health care clinic as a pilot project, and this is an idea that has been used in other jurisdictions. It is not a new one. Areas such as Prince Edward Island and Sault Saint Marie, Ontario, for example, have implemented this type of clinic with some success. It is a useful tool in providing access to primary health care for patients.

The idea of such a clinic is that it brings together a number of health professionals from various disciplines to one location to work together for the greater good of the patient and to improve their health. This is something that we are committed to working with health professionals on, with those who will be affected by this in ensuring that we develop a successful model that will be an enhancement to the system. It is certainly not a replacement for the family physician. It is a component of the system. It has provided access to care for some who prefer such a system and for others who may not have access to a family doctor but have provided the access to the care they need through such a clinic. But this is, as I say, an enhancement to our existing system. The primary health care within the Yukon, the vast majority of non-acute primary health care, will continue to be delivered by family physicians and, of course, in rural areas the community nursing centre will continue to be our first line of action in helping Yukoners deal with their health needs and receiving advice.

We're also working on the development of providing Yukoners access to a 24-hour nurse information line that will give Yukoners the ability to pick up the phone and get that access to care without having to travel to actually visit an emergency room or doctor or nurse, which, of course, should be of assistance to all Yukoners, but is of particular use during non-business hours and for those who have mobility issues so that it may not be easy for them to go immediately without making prior arrangements. This is something, I should point out, that

has actually been done in most jurisdictions in Canada and has been very successful.

Another area we provided an increase to this year and will be continuing that funding to is the medical travel program. In July, we increased the medical travel provided to Yukoners under the travel for medical treatment program from the previous level of \$30 a day to a new level of \$75 a day. As well, we made the subsidy effective on the second day of travel rather than on the fourth day, as had previously been the case.

We also increased the subsidy for travel within the Yukon from 18.5 cents per kilometre to 30 cents a kilometre and, for the first time, this subsidy is now being provided to people who live in rural areas outside of communities, such as my constituents in Lake Laberge.

Another issue that is of high priority for us in moving forward is addressing the interests of elders and seniors, and this includes expanding home care services and re-opening the Thomson Centre to provide continuing-care beds to address the waitlist we currently have in that area and to make beds available on a go-forward basis to address future needs. Going beyond that, we'll also be working together with seniors groups and Yukoners with disabilities in doing the planning for future continuing-care facilities to provide that access, not only in Whitehorse but on a Yukon-wide basis. We're committed to the completion of the construction of a multi-level care facility in Watson Lake and to the construction of a multi-level care facility in Dawson City, as well as working together with Yukon Housing Corporation, which has the lead on the Haines Junction assisted-living project, the seniors central residence, to bring that to fruition.

We will continue to work on addressing needs for seniors facilities in communities such as Teslin so we can help seniors and elders remain in their homes as long as possible through the expansion of our home care services and to remain in their home communities as long as possible through the expansion of continuing-care and assisted-living facilities within their communities where there is sufficient demand and where it is feasible for us to provide those services.

With regard to the reopening of the Thomson Centre, it will provide continuing-care beds and a palliative-care unit within that facility. That has been something that Yukoners have been asking for for many years, and we are committed to the establishment of that unit to provide that care, at what is such a very difficult time for those who are reaching the end of their life and for their family members who, of course — it is one of the most difficult times and experiences that anyone can face, when a beloved family member is in such an unfortunate situation.

Moving on to happier subjects than end-of-life care, another area I'd like to address that is within the area of Health and Social Services is the issue of support for families of children with severe disabilities. In the last mandate we provided support to parents of autistic children and provided them with more control in determining how their children would be raised and the assistance and education and therapeutic services being provided to their families. I'm very pleased that we have committed to expanding that support to children with other severe

disabilities such as cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy and Down's syndrome.

My colleagues and I believe that we need to help Yukoners. It is important in an area like this, when you have families that face significant challenges and costs in raising a child who has special abilities.

We believe that support to the families of children with autism has been a successful initiative although it is still a new initiative. We're pleased to expand that, and we'll be creating a unit within Health and Social Services to support families of children with disabilities. The end goal of this is to increase the support and to help those children reach their full potential and increase their access to learning, enabling them to better take care of themselves and to function within today's society.

The implementation of the substance abuse action plan is another area that I would like to address. That, of course, is another key priority for our government. We are focused on strategic directions of harm reduction, prevention and education, treatment and enforcement. We have an approach of zero tolerance for drug dealers, and I am very pleased and commend my colleague, the Minister of Justice, for the announcement today of the *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act* moving forward and the fact that we will have that office up and running — that is an important component.

Some of the components that fall under Health and Social Services include our partnership with Justice on the domestic violence treatment option, also known as the community court or problem-solving court. In a linked area, we support work on treatment options and facilities to help those who are addicted to drugs and breaking their addiction and achieving a long-term resolution of their addictions — which of course have not only a dramatic negative impact on society but on those individuals and their families.

One of the initiatives that we supported to that end, of course, was the operation of the Outreach van, which we have provided for a term of one year. Between Health and Social Services and the Women's Directorate, we will be providing \$153,000 over the one-year term from when the agreement was structured, to assist them in continuing their operations in providing that service primarily to people who may not access other service streams and service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, looking at the clock, I believe I am running out of time here, so I will condense a little bit. I thank the members of the opposition for their assistance.

Another area that we are committed to working and moving forward on as a government is building on the success that we have achieved in working with childcare operators and workers in implementing the four-year plan for childcare that we had in the last term — completing that with a review of the regulations, which is nearly complete — and working together, most particularly working with parents, in moving forward to develop a new five-year plan based on the priorities of creating more available spaces for children of all ages, especially for those younger than 18 months, reducing the rates parents pay for childcare, increasing financial support and reducing disincentives such as taxes to allow parents to participate in the labour force, ensuring that parents of children in kindergarten are

not charged full-time, preschool rates for their children, and developing a new five-year plan to address issues of concern for day home operators and childcare centres including training, education and wages for staff, and a greater focus on early learning for preschool children and collaborating with First Nations community groups and non-governmental organizations to provide an integrated system that better serves the educational and cultural needs of parents and their children in all Yukon communities. As well, in partnership with the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, we continue to emphasize the need for a national childcare agreement with Canada that reflects the needs of the north, particularly in terms of the need for base funding within that agreement.

As I mentioned before in the House — but I will mention it again for the benefit of new members — in February of 2006, early in the term of the new federal government and as early as possible that I was able to arrange a meeting with ministers in Ottawa, I made a trip to Ottawa specifically to meet with ministers, including Diane Finley, Minister for HRSDC, which is responsible for the childcare funding, to make our concerns clear to them and to make our requests known. Certainly we have not had quite the degree of success to date that we would like, but we will continue to press the issue and recognize that in the timing of their budgetary cycle, perhaps they were not prepared to address it at that time and hopefully they may reconsider next year. We will keep our fingers crossed.

We will continue to make this clear through pan-northern efforts and through initiatives such as jointly signed letters to Minister Finley.

Mr. Speaker, another area that we're committed to moving on is a review of social assistance rates. We want to ensure the adequacy of those rates and we want to reduce the financial disincentives that make it difficult for people to move from social assistance into the labour force on either a full-time or a part-time basis.

In working with the Department of Education, my colleague, the Minister of Education, and I recognize the linkages that are presented in terms of training and skills. There will be a significant focus through education in enhancing the skills and trades training through Yukon College, as well as through improving the access to those programs that help people develop trades skills and supporting initiatives aimed at getting those who may not traditionally consider a trades career — young girls, for example — to consider this as an opportunity and to work on the development of increased trades and vocational opportunities within the high school system.

Mr. Speaker, I see I am running very short on time here. I have much here that I would like to mention. I'm sure I'll have opportunities on further dates within this session to discuss issues with members and with you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the attention members have shown this afternoon.

I would commend the Speech from the Throne to the House and note my strong support for it. It is the overview of how we will be moving forward as a government in addressing the interests that Yukoners sent us here to represent. Ultimately, of course, Mr. Speaker, you know that as an MLA, my priority has always been and will continue to be to represent my

constituents. I will continue to do so as an MLA and as Minister of Health and Social Services for as long as I have the opportunity to serve in this role. I will continue to make efforts to the very best of my ability in addressing health care needs of all Yukon citizens, planning not only for today and for the next five years, but in laying out a plan in partnership with health professions and department staff and the Hospital Corporation in laying out the groundwork that needs to be done to ensure the Yukon health care system remains strong for the next five years, 10 years, 15 years, and 20 years.

As always, we're committed to addressing things on the social side.

I see I'm out of time, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for your attention and look forward to hearing members of all sides of the House.

Mr. McRobb: I'd like to start by congratulating you, Mr. Speaker, on your re-election. As I look across the way and to my left, the old adage comes to mind: the more things change, the more they stay the same. The relevance, of course, is the high number of incumbents returned this past election.

Let's just review what happened in the previous few elections. In the previous election of 2002, a 10-seat government had only one incumbent returned. I will take this opportunity to thank the former Member for Porter Creek South, Ms. Pat Duncan, for her 10 years of dedicated service in this Assembly, to Yukoners and to her constituents, and I wish her all the best as she pursues other interests and spends more time with her family.

In the election before that, in 2000, only half of a 10-member NDP majority was returned, while the Yukon Party was reduced to only one member, the former MLA for Klondike, Mr. Peter Jenkins. Although he and I had our differences over the years, I'd like to say he always contributed to the debate and sometimes even was the subject of the debate, Mr. Speaker.

Seldom was there a dull moment with him around; his surprise floor-crossing a year ago tomorrow was a good example of that.

In the election previous, back in 1996, where there are three survivors still here — the Premier, the Member for Watson Lake; the Member for Mayo-Tatchun; and I — that's the election when we were first elected, and only two incumbents were returned from the previous majority coalition Yukon Party government.

So, with all these changes in recent elections, things are much the same this time. In fact, 14 of 18 incumbents have been returned this time — thus, my point. Of the four incumbents who weren't returned, two chose not to run, as referenced earlier, and two were defeated. I'd like to recognize the contributions made by those two people from Vuntut Gwitchin and Pelly-Nisutlin.

I always enjoy these opportunities to reply to the Speech from the Throne, probably because it presents a rare opportunity to speak virtually on any topic which, obviously, any listeners we have, have surmised by now. I particularly enjoyed the historical lesson about Duff Pattullo, and I recall the book

about him that I gave to my father for a birthday present a few years ago. We were raised in Coquitlam and New Westminster, where the Pattullo Bridge still exists — he was a large part of that community — and of our family's past place of residence.

As members may have sensed from time to time over the years when I'm speaking, too often I'm not allowed to say what I'd like to say because it wouldn't be allowed in here. How's that for a personal disclosure, Mr. Speaker? Of course, the reason these suppressed views wouldn't be allowed in here is because they wouldn't fit within the scope of debate.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Mr. McRobb: Thank you — a friendly interruption, Mr. Speaker.

There is another reason I like throne speech replies — as members know, I'm always very succinct in my comments. And if we were limited to only one topic, I'd run out of things to say long before my 40 minutes was up.

I really enjoy these occasions to respond to the Speech from the Throne because a member can virtually say whatever comes to mind on any subject providing, of course, the language meets with your approval, Mr. Speaker.

Before I get on to a more serious matter, I want to express some reservation about some of the directions the government is taking, about some of the promises, and so on. But before we get to the bad news, I would like to acknowledge something positive, and that is I really believe that an atmosphere of cooperation is growing among all sides in here, and there are a number of factors leading to that. Probably the most pronounced reason is that, following an election, one can assume the atmosphere has been depoliticized and for good reason. We just came through an election campaign where there were a lot of accusations and debates and challenges and a lot of things said, as there generally are in elections in our country. Preceding that in this Legislature, there were a lot of political comments made — especially in the last sitting in the spring of this year — that weren't all that constructive. I am talking about comments from both sides of the House. Given the large percentage of returned MLAs, we recognize this is the time to set aside our political differences and try to work for the common good of Yukoners who put us here in the first place. That is the challenge.

I know I've spoken to several members about this. I believe it's incumbent upon us all to be as professional as we can be and try to use the experience we've earned over the years to make this a better place to work. One of the items high on my agenda is legislative reform — legislative renewal. It's all the same to me. It means making changes to the way we conduct the public's business in this Assembly.

The positive news, aside from this new mood that I'm sensing, is that there in fact has been a material change in a very important instrument to help bring about this legislative renewal, and that is the membership on the committee that deals with rules in this House. The committee is named the Standing Committee on Rules, Election and Privileges, or known by the acronym SCREP. For years, it has been kidded that it was the "scrap at SCREP," and for good reason, Mr. Speaker. The government side held a majority on that commit-

tee. That led to common disagreement between the sides. It also led to a lack of any meetings in the past three years. That leads to dysfunction. I think all members recognize that.

Mr. Speaker, in several of your rulings, you might refer members to SCREP on the particular issue you're ruling on. In the past, members would smile at each other and think, yeah, right, as if that is going to happen. The opposition parties were always reluctant to convene a meeting where they can be out-voted and where the government can pass new rules that provide it with an advantage.

So, the opposition members were always reluctant and the government was reluctant, too — probably fearing reprisals in the media for doing that. The committee became non-functional. That didn't help the situation in this Assembly.

I think we all sense, through the government's agreement to equalize the membership on SCREP, there's a new reason for hope that things in this House will change for the better — hopefully the sooner the better.

I have one reservation about it that I'll put on the record now, and that is that the change is a part of some political party's agenda. That is why I tabled the motion I did on opening day that the whole process should be as non-partisan as possible. These changes shouldn't be part of any party's agenda. These changes should be based on what all members see as a sensible and constructive way to proceed and the best way to do the public's business.

I'm hoping members will see the virtue in that and will get on with that agenda and make this a better place to work and also a place that will be more appealing to women members from our public. As it stands now, only two of 18 members are women: the Member for Whitehorse West and the new Member for Pelly-Nisutlin. I'd like to congratulate her on the record for her election. That represents about 11 percent of the members in here. That's not even close to the 50 percent that should be set as a goal.

I believe there are a lot of changes that can be made to make this place more functional, where members can demonstrate more cooperation and more respect for each other and, at the end of the day, be more constructive in dealing with the public business. That's what really counts to the people who put us here.

We just came through an election campaign and, if anybody didn't hear comments to this effect from the public, then I would say you are awful hard of hearing, because it's on the minds of a lot of voters. They want to see the way we do business improved. I still believe we're not nearly as bad as our Canadian Parliament is. A lot of that credit goes to you, Mr. Speaker, and your predecessors. Simply the type of behaviour and especially the level of heckling allowed in Parliament — in the House of Commons — is beyond anything that would ever be considered here.

But not everybody draws the distinction between the two Houses. When they hear on the news some clips from Parliament, some people — the people less-informed about the political situation in Yukon — assume it's happening in here. There's quite a difference. We know the childish behaviour, the heckling and the shouting we hear from Parliament Hill simply

would not be allowed in here. We have an opportunity to go a big step further and really make this place a model for other legislatures to consider when reviewing their own system.

Mr. Chair, one of the items in the Liberal platform that received virtually no press was the commitment to examine other models of government, including the consensus-style government in the Northwest Territories.

My perception of what was behind that promise was to look at legislative reform and also to look at electoral reform, and — even larger than electoral reform — look at the whole system of party politics or independent politics and so on and try to make some good judgements on what could be the best system for the Yukon.

We know we follow the British parliamentary model. There are several variances under that umbrella even within Canada. Look at Australia, look at New Zealand, and look at Scotland where they designed a unique system to best suit their own needs. There are similar models in N.W.T. and Nunavut. We have an opportunity to do what is best for our territory too.

That larger plan was not in the Yukon Party's platform so I don't expect it to be coming forward, but in terms of legislative renewal, obviously there is a lot there we can deal with.

Speaker: The time being 5:30 p.m., the House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

Debate on Motion No. 27 accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

The following Sessional Papers were tabled November 27, 2006:

06-1-2

Conflict of Interest Commission Annual Report for the period ending March 31, 2006 (Speaker Staffen)

06-1-3

Absence of Members from Sittings of the Legislative Assembly and its Committees: Report of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly (dated November 23, 2006) (Speaker Staffen)