

Whitehorse, Yukon
Monday, May 28, 2007 -- 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.

Introduction of visitors.

Returns or documents for tabling.

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling a document entitled *A Northern Vision: A Stronger North and a Better Canada*.

Mr. McRobb: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling two documents pertaining to the rate stabilization fund.

Speaker: Are there any other documents for tabling?

Are there any committee reports?

Are there any petitions?

PETITIONS

Petition No. 3

Mr. Hardy: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling a petition bearing the names of 2,517 Yukoners that calls on the Legislative Assembly to affirm that it wishes to see the rate stabilization fund continue as is, indefinitely.

Speaker: Are there any further petitions?

Bills to be introduced.

Notices of motion.

NOTICES OF MOTION

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon, in collaboration with the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Government of Nunavut, to pursue the pan-northern vision for the three territories outlined in the document entitled, *A Northern Vision: A Stronger North and a Better Canada*.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to accept its legal obligation to engage in meaningful consultations with First Nations on decisions affecting them.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to continue funding the rate stabilization fund for the protection of Yukon electrical consumers and to reintroduce the conservation incentive aspect of the program that it axed in 2003, a decision that consequently drove up the cost of the program, sent the

wrong price signals to consumers and opposed energy conservation values.

I give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to ensure its House leader abides by the long-standing agreement between all House leaders to identify the topic and department related to the day's ministerial statements during the morning meeting of the House leaders.

Speaker: Are there any further notices of motion?

Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Childcare funding

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I rise today to inform this House and all those present of enhancements this government is making to improve Yukon's childcare system for children, parents and childcare workers. The Yukon government's current investment in childcare stands at \$5.3 million per year.

Members will recall that this is \$930,000 more annually than was invested in childcare four short years ago at the beginning of this government's first mandate.

Last week we announced that a further \$500,000 will immediately be put toward improving the wages of childcare workers in the Yukon and increasing the parent subsidy. This is part of \$5 million in new investment over the next five years that will be used to further enhance this government's support for Yukon's childcare system.

In the second year, \$1 million will provide additional enhancements to the wage and subsidy areas and provide an investment in training for childcare workers.

This will assist in the recruitment and retention of workers in this vital area. In the third, fourth and fifth years, the new investment will be \$1.1 million, \$1.2 million and \$1.2 million, respectively. This ultimately makes the Government of Yukon's annual investment in childcare \$6.5 million.

We anticipate that wage increases will take effect July 1 for workers. Increases to the parent subsidy program are anticipated to be in place by the fall, in time for the new school year.

In addition, a \$1.3-million one-time childcare capital fund has been established. This fund will focus on creating more spaces for children younger than 18 months, providing new spaces in Yukon where the supply is not adequate and new spaces that better serve educational and cultural needs of parents and children.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very positive action that delivers on our election commitment to childcare in Yukon. It will benefit children, parents and childcare workers.

Mr. Mitchell: We are pleased to see this government has responded to a situation that has been in dire need of improvement for some time now. However, we are not satisfied this minister has done nearly enough.

Last Thursday, the minister made a quickly thrown together announcement in response to learning of a delegation of childcare providers who were planning on visiting the Legisla-

ture. This minister on several occasions has told this House that his department was taking the time to do this right and, when they were finished, there would be an announcement.

We are very disappointed, as are many in the industry, with this sudden rush to announce half measures.

The minister has repeatedly stated that he was consulting with the daycare representatives. These same representatives tell us they have not been properly consulted. The minister has stated he was awaiting a report from the Yukon Childcare Association. The association tells us that no such report was ever requested, yet today this minister is suddenly making these hastily put together announcements.

This government has been sitting on the \$1.3 million of federally provided monies since 2005, yet today it still doesn't have a developed plan on how to use these funds to improve the capacity of the system and is forced to create a childcare capital fund while it continues to study this situation. Why has this government not been able to develop the solutions in the almost two years since these federal funds were provided?

The amount of money that is allocated to the childcare system today is entirely insufficient, especially in light of the fact that this government has an \$85-million surplus. Qualifying parents may get a small increase; however, this will not even match the increase the childcare providers are being forced to pass on to them.

The potential increase in pay for workers is also very meagre. These are dedicated and, in many cases, highly trained people who deserve a decent wage. They work for low hourly wages, many do not receive any benefits, and the increases that may result from today's announcement will, for most, not even match what they would be paid in jobs requiring far less training and education.

Yet these dedicated workers are entrusted with caring for and educating our most precious resource, our young children. What is also lacking is any support for those parents who do not currently qualify for assistance. We have spoken with parents who will be paying \$1,400 to \$1,500 per month for two children, and this announcement does nothing to help those parents.

Mr. Speaker, since the \$500,000 is described as being for wages and parent subsidies, there is nothing in the first year's funding that will build sustainability into the system. Mr. Speaker, childcare and early childhood educators need a long-range plan, a plan with vision and a plan that is properly funded. This announcement today is severely lacking in detail, in direction and in commitment.

Mr. Edzerza: Mr. Speaker, the additional funding to childcare the minister has announced is welcomed by childcare providers and parents. Some daycares are not full because they cannot find enough staff to work for the poor wages. This will help; however, it is not enough.

Overall, Canada spends 0.25 percent of its GDP on early childhood programs, while other developed countries spend up to two percent. Across Canada, governments are cutting back on social programs and are not supporting them. While the

economy becomes stronger, indicators of social health have not.

Canada dropped from fifth to 25th place on the children's index, which is rated on measures such as enrolment in daycare and nursery school, among other measures. The minister says the territorial system is one of the strongest systems in the country, second only to Quebec.

Quebec spends nearly \$2 billion per year on childcare. That is nearly double what we spend per capita. We have a long way to go. Childcare is not about babysitting; it's an education program. All childcare workers should be qualified early childhood educators with the minimum two-year diploma -- they are not.

In the Yukon, government expenditures per child for childcare are \$5,462. The Department of Education's annual report says that expenditures per student are \$13,710. The difference is because childcare and childcare workers are not valued in the same way as the elementary school system, but the early years are when a foundation of intellectual and psychological health is made. It is an extremely important investment in our children's future and in our own future.

Territorial childcare regulations call for special equipment, providing nutritious food and staff training. Territorial childcare regulations cause financial problems for daycares. The minister agrees that the regulations are problematic.

In August 2006, he said they planned to review the regulations last fall. Where is that review now? The minister should urge the federal government to pass Bill C-303, the early learning and childcare bill introduced by Denise Savoie, MP from Victoria. It would set standards that have to be met before federal money is transferred to the provinces and territories. No doubt those standards would also mean an increase in federal funding and, most certainly, passage of the bill would mean a more responsive childcare system.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I thank the members opposite for their comments. I know it must be very difficult for them to present a positive vision in this Legislature.

I would point out that their remarks -- the Leader of the Official Opposition in particular -- centred on a criticism that it was not enough and I would again remind the member that it is far more than the Liberals did when they were in government. Under the previous Liberal government, annual investment by YTG in childcare stood at a mere \$4.4 million. It has already increased to \$5.3 million under this government's watch and it will further increase to \$6.5 million -- reflecting over the period of the two mandates an increase of 50 percent, Mr. Speaker.

I do thank the members for their comments. I would note also in reference to the Leader of the Official Opposition that, once again, he does not seem to be taking the time to listen to the announcement that was made and to reflect that in his statement. Noting that when the press conference was held the other day, I made mention very clearly to reporters that at this time we were announcing the overall numbers but we would address the consultation requirements and our commitments by sitting down with the operators prior to announcing the details of this funding. This was the overall scope of the numbers.

Again, the member has it wrong in referring to a report from the Yukon Childcare Association when it was in fact -- as stated several times in this House -- the Yukon Child Care Board and it was a report on regulations, not on funding.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for McIntyre-Takhini for his comments and noting that in fact, nationally, cutbacks are often the order of the day in social programs when in fact this government is stepping forward with a significant enhancement to the existing services, following up on the four-year plan done in the last mandate wherein we increased the direct operating grant by 40 percent, some \$930,000 annually, by adding more money that will ultimately provide a further increase of \$1.2 million annually. We are keeping the commitments we made during the election and we've done the work to determine the appropriate level of investment to make needed and meaningful enhancements to the existing system. We announced the overall numbers today and will announce the finite details once we have sat down to consult with the operators and provided them with the plan that we have developed.

The difference between the government and the Official Opposition Liberals in particular, I think, is very clear. We do our homework and we deliver on our promises, whereas, like their national colleagues, the Liberals, reflected by their time in government here, are a lot of talk and not much action.

The initial four-year plan was developed with the full participation and concurrence of the childcare community and we'll proceed with the new five-year plan in the same manner -- continuing to provide one of the best, if not the best, childcare systems in the country.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: First Nations, government relations with

Mr. Mitchell: I have some questions for the Premier.

On Wednesday morning, the Supreme Court of Yukon released a decision that clearly demonstrated that this government is not working properly in a government-to-government fashion with Yukon First Nations.

The case brought forward by the Little Salmon-Carmacks First Nation involves a 2004 agricultural lease that was given out by this Yukon Party government. The judge ruled that the Yukon Party government failed to adequately consult with the affected First Nation and with the trapper who had a trapline in the area.

Last week the Premier told this House that he was busy analyzing the decision and that he had not decided whether or not the government was going to accept the decision. He has had four days to look it over with his officials. I am asking again: does the government accept the ruling that came down on Thursday?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Well, Mr. Speaker, only the Leader of the Official Opposition could extrapolate from a decision by the courts where people, First Nations or otherwise have the right to access -- extrapolate from that decision on a specific case for a specific matter a government's relationship with First Nations. Only that member could come up with that.

Well, that's not the case. Furthermore, this member as early as this morning would not take any position on the court's decision. No matter how hard the reporter tried, the member skated and ducked any statement of position on this. Where is the member's conviction to ask this side of the House a question of this nature?

Furthermore, I'm not analyzing the decision at all. We have the Department of Justice and many capable people who are analyzing the decision as we speak. We'll allow them to take the time to analyze the court's decision and come back to the government with their recommendations and findings. That is how the system works. That's how the process works, but if the member is going to stand on his feet and make the statement that the government side does not consult with First Nations, the member is going to dig himself a very deep hole.

Mr. Mitchell: On Wednesday the Supreme Court sent this government a clear message that they have legal obligations they are not meeting. The Premier stands here today and is still refusing to state whether or not he accepts this decision. We accept the judge's findings and we want the government to do the same.

The judge had some very strong criticism of how this government treats First Nations. He said the government conducted only courtesy consultations that were not meaningful. He said, "The government failed to meet the standard of reasonableness." The judge outlined the next step for the government to follow on page 43 of his ruling. He said, "What is required is that the Yukon government accept its legal duty to engage in a meaningful consultation directly with the First Nation." There must be a dialogue on a government-to-government basis and not simply a courtesy consultation.

Is the Premier prepared to accept the advice of the Yukon Supreme Court and consult directly with the First Nation on this issue? Yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a new one on me. I thought the courts provided rulings, not advice, so we'll look at the ruling. The government side in no way views this as advice from the court. It's a ruling on a specific matter with respect to a specific case. I repeat: only this member can extrapolate it to the length that he has.

This is not a question of our obligation to consult with First Nations overall and our duty under the agreements, whether they be the final agreements and self-government agreements or not. It doesn't even speak to the fact that we have an obligation to consult with Yukoners in general. This is a specific matter and it's a very unique matter in terms of an application for land in a certain region of the Yukon, but for the member to suggest what he is suggesting -- I'll be very diplomatic about this -- the member is incorrect, but there's another term for it.

Mr. Mitchell: This Premier can try to narrow the focus of this all he likes, but a Supreme Court Judge had some very strong words about how this government treated a First Nation. He did not think much of this government's cursory approach to consultation. This is a decision that has implications throughout the Yukon, not just in Carmacks. The judge said this Yukon Party government conducted only courtesy

consultations; they were not meaningful. The judge urged the Yukon government to accept the legal duty to engage in a meaningful consultation directly with the First Nation.

It's very disturbing to watch the Premier stand in this House and refuse to accept responsibility for the actions of his government. The judge's decision was quite straightforward in many respects. He told the government to raise the bar on consultations. He urged the government to get back to the drawing board and resolve this issue. When is the Premier going to fix the problem that he himself has created by failing to adequately consult with First Nations?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member wants to move from a narrow issue to broadening the issue about consultation. Does the member consider the Yukon Forum a courtesy consultation? Does the member consider the *Co-operation in Governance Act* a courtesy consultation; the *Children's Act* review, correctional reform, education reform -- courtesy consultations? The northern strategy investment plan, the trilateral target investment plan, the northern housing trust investment plan -- all courtesy consultations? The placer authorization a courtesy consultation? Working group successor legislation -- that's all established -- courtesy consultation? The north Yukon land use plan: the member's calling that courtesy consultation? The forest management plan in Kluane, with Champagne-Aishihik -- courtesy consultation? The lot development plan with TTC in Teslin -- courtesy consultation? Oil and gas dispositions -- courtesy consultation? Hiring of DMs is courtesy consultation in that member's mind. What about climate change, the work we do with resource councils, the Fish and Wildlife Management Board, the bilateral agreement with the Kaska that we established, and of course the stewardship council -- courtesy consultations? The member has to raise the bar, not the government side.

Question re: Rate stabilization fund

Mr. McRobb: Earlier today, there was a petition presented organized by the Utilities Consumers' Group urging the Yukon government to continue the rate stabilization fund. There were 2,517 names of Yukoners on that petition: 2,100 from the greater Whitehorse area, 150 from the Mayo district and 250 from other rural areas in the territory. I understand there are more names to come, Mr. Speaker.

The Yukon Party's intention to abolish the rate stabilization fund will cost each Yukon consumer some \$400 each year. Those most affected are seniors, low-income earners and the demographic known as "the working poor". The upshot of this petition is clear: the government must reconsider its rather heartless and ill-conceived decision to discontinue the program. Will the Energy, Mines and Resources minister do that?

Hon. Mr. Lang: We didn't discontinue the rate stabilization plan. We've continued it for 12 more months at a 50-percent level.

By the way, the member opposite is wrong on his figures. This government will deal in facts and we'll work with Yukoners to get a rate reduction, not subsidization -- rate reduction.

Mr. McRobb: It's important to note that the Yukon Party decided to abolish the rate stabilization fund in the ab-

sence of public consultation. This was yet another backroom decision.

Now that the minister has been made aware of how 2,500 Yukoners are opposed to his decision, he should reconsider his backroom approach to abolishing this popular program.

There's something else we'd like the minister to consider, and it was a point of a notice of motion introduced earlier today: reinstate the conservation incentive aspect of the rate stabilization fund that he ceremoniously abolished in 2003. This would decrease the cost of the RSF, send proper price signals to consumers and uphold energy conservation values. Would he do that?

Hon. Mr. Lang: For the member opposite to talk about 2003 when we're in 2007 -- and we have been charged with the management of the Energy Corporation. We did form the government on November 10. Yukoners voted for this government to move forward in the economic development of this country. Also, the members opposite live in a different world -- completely different. At the end of the day, we're looking at conservation. We're looking at managing our energy resources and not having hidden subsidies so people don't understand what the real cost of the product is. But, by doing that and looking at rate reduction, we can do both. We can conserve our energy. People can pay a true figure at the meter for their power and still come out a winner.

Mr. McRobb: This minister and his Yukon Party colleagues abolished the conservation incentive aspect of the RSF four years ago. This ill-conceived decision was also made in the absence of public consultation and, instead, was hatched in the backroom upstairs, just like his decision to abolish the RSF entirely. In the face of now knowing how the Yukon public has reacted, the minister must realize he has a public duty to reconsider his draconian actions.

This government is sitting on an \$85-million surplus. This is not a matter of having to deal with a tight budget. The minister is swimming in cash. This government can easily afford this. Will he now do the right thing and listen to the people who signed the petition and continue the program, along with the original conservation incentive? Will he do that?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I remind the member opposite that we've had an election since 2003 and the Yukon picked the Yukon Party to lead the territory for the next five years. We are charged with the responsibility not only of creating economic opportunity in this territory, but conservation -- not just lip service, like the member opposite can do. We have to have a solid balance between the environment and economic development.

We think this is a great fit. We are taking industry and putting them on hydro, and we are moving forward with an application for a rate reduction in the new year. This is a win-win for everybody in the Yukon. This looks at expanding our hydro grid, it looks at conservation and it looks at economic development. This is a win-win for all Yukoners.

Question re: Landlord and Tenant Act review

Mr. Hardy: The current *Landlord and Tenant Act* outlines very specific responsibilities for either side in the equation. But even those few responsibilities are frequently being ignored by both tenants and landlords. Many tenants are living

in deplorable, unhealthy conditions their landlords refuse to fix. Landlords complain that tenants are flouting their obligation to pay rent on time. There is no mechanism in the act or regulations to resolve landlord and tenant disputes, it has no teeth and it is not responsive to real needs.

Is the Minister of Justice reviewing the *Landlord and Tenant Act* and will she be bringing forward amendments to it, or at least modernizing the regulations?

Hon. Mr. Hart: The *Landlord and Tenant Act* provides responsibilities for both the landlord and the tenant in the act. It provides provisions where both have obligations. They are identified in the act and the matters are a private law for either party to enforce by a legal process.

When conflicts arise, rental officers advise the landlords and tenants of their rights and responsibilities and mitigate the disputes to encourage voluntary compliance. Upon written request, they will refer the clients to the appropriate authorities when required.

Mr. Hardy: That was very nice that he read off some of the rules, but it doesn't answer the problems that we are facing out there. There has been a lot of media coverage over the last couple of months about some of the conditions out there.

We all know of examples of housing that we wouldn't allow our pets into. Families are living in units with broken windows, rotten floors and black mould. Some housing is not safe from fire hazards. The tenants in these units cannot afford \$200,000 condominiums that are being built right now, and this government refuses to do anything about the lack of low-cost housing. Since they have no other options, tenants rely on their landlords to maintain their property in a state of repair that is described in the act as "good, safe and healthy" and we see a lot examples where that is not the case.

Until we have a modern act with some teeth in it, what is the minister doing to ensure that landlords in the Yukon are complying with the law and not just hoping that they will voluntarily?

Hon. Mr. Hart: In the Yukon a landlord and tenant can make an application to a judge, at no cost, for a health, safety and maintenance standard, established by law and enforced. A judge may authorize these repairs and costs to be paid by the person responsible for the repair.

Mr. Hardy: It gets really, really tiring on this side of the House to listen to how this government passes the buck and expects people to hire lawyers when they hardly have the money to feed their families. In other jurisdictions, the health of people living in rental units is of a concern and they have done something about it. For instance, Alberta has detailed minimum housing and health standards in its regulations. That province demands that housing be safe and secure. The regulations spell out what that means, from ventilation and heating to the water supply and lighting, as well as sleeping space and smoke alarms.

Until we can get a better act in place, will the minister at least commit to having the department research legislation and regulations in other jurisdictions with a view to improving our regulations to protect tenants from unsafe and unhealthy living conditions?

Hon. Mr. Hart: When it comes to the health of a facility, Health and Social Services does provide that particular service if there's a question of health. In regard to reviewing other jurisdictions, we are currently doing an internal review of the *Landlord and Tenant Act* to see what we can come up with to adjust it on both sides, but the member opposite must understand that it's an important balance that has to be maintained between the landlord and the tenant. We can't put laws and regulations in effect that swing to the advantage of either way, so it's a very important balance that must be maintained and I believe that, after a review that's done internally, we will be able to ascertain where we go from there.

Question re: Contractor policies

Mr. Hardy: My question is for the Minister of Community Services. Over the past couple of years, we have seen a boom in new home construction in the Yukon. We've also seen a dramatic rise in real estate prices. Many families are in the position where their life savings are tied up in the building of a home they have waited years to own.

What protection is there for new homeowners when the contractor does a crummy job or doesn't complete the work on time or won't show up to fix substandard work? What protection is there?

Hon. Mr. Hart: Obviously we have avenues available for people to try to recuperate their losses or get action when a builder is away. They can go through the Office of the Ombudsman and get processed there. If it's dealing with shoddy work, there's working with our review office, checking on the licences and permits so they can follow up through that particular process. Finally, there's a legal aspect which the member opposite indicates may be difficult, but that may be the final course that's required to get action on both sides.

Mr. Hardy: So from my understanding, really, there isn't that much out there in warranty programs -- is that what the minister is saying?

Mr. Speaker, it's ironic you can get a seven-year extended warranty on your car. You can even get an extended warranty on a \$30 toaster, but when it comes to the most expensive purchase a family will ever make, the best you can get is a one-year warranty that doesn't have any teeth in it. Other jurisdictions such as B.C. and Ontario have distinct legislation to protect homeowners. As a result of the leaky condo scandal in B.C., there is now a Crown corporation called the Homeowner Protection Office, which administers the *Homeowner Protection Act*. What is the minister doing to beef up protection for homeowners in the Yukon? Will we see any legislation to do that under this government?

Hon. Mr. Hart: There previously was a warranty program for new house construction back in 1978 or 1979. After a period of time, though, many of those contractors went out of business, and therefore the warranty basically had no value. When people buy their houses, they have an obligation with the contractor to ensure they get a warranty prior to the house being turned over to them.

Mr. Hardy: Mr. Speaker, even this government has its own nightmare stories about substandard construction. The Dawson City recreation centre and the infamous Thomson Cen-

tre are just two examples that spring to mind. But we don't even need to look that far. The room we're in right now has a roof that has been repaired at least twice and it still leaks. I don't know how many times we have to come in here and see a leaking roof. I've been here for eight years, and it has happened at least three times that I know of. The difference between the government and private homeowners, though, is that government has the financial resources to take contractors to court. Most families can't afford that option. When all their money is tied up in building their own home in the first place, they don't have much left. Will the minister make a commitment to start looking at a homeowner protection act so that hard-working Yukon families aren't at the mercy of builders who can't or won't provide the quality of workmanship that they are paying for and should have a right to expect? It's the biggest purchase of their life. Will they do that?

Hon. Mr. Hart: Well, the buildings he brought into question weren't built under this government's watch. But in essence, I'd like to state for the member opposite that I will investigate the issue that he brings forth and report at a later date.

Question re: Childcare funding

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, on May 24, the Minister of Health and Social Services announced the long overdue funding increases for childcare in the Yukon. He said there will be \$500,000 immediately put into improving wages and increasing the parent subsidy program. If that money were to be split equally between parent subsidy and employee wages, then, based on the 576 children whose parents currently qualify for the subsidy, that works out to a \$36.17 increase per child. Many centres and day homes have increased their fee by \$100 per month. I am told there are more on the way. This will not do, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister now admit that he has dropped the ball after countless months of preparation, and will he bring forth a package that will actually reflect parents' ability to pay?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I recognize that the Leader of the Official Opposition is desperately trying to play catch-up on this file here. When they were in government, they completely mismanaged this file. They did not invest in this area. They only engaged in empty rhetoric, as we see yet again.

We saw very clearly in the election campaign that the Liberals were arbitrarily naming numbers. Both this government and the NDP recognize the need to do a planning process and to identify the needs and to work with the stakeholders on addressing that. I point out to the member opposite that this increase -- the increase will amount to \$1.2 million annually, which is on top of the \$930,000 annual increase this government already did. The total level will stand at \$6.5 million at the end of this mandate, coming from a mere \$4.4 million under the Liberals' watch. It's very clear who is investing in Yukon childcare.

Mr. Mitchell: As a minimum, there should have been an immediate increase of 25 percent to the direct operating grant paid to daycares, \$100 a month to the subsidy to qualifying parents and a 25-percent raise to the income cut-off to qualify. Daycare providers told us this was the minimum that would

address the problem. We therefore consider this the minimum contribution government should make, Mr. Speaker.

Why could this minister not, with the government's \$85-million surplus, at least have addressed the immediate short-falls?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I point out to the member opposite that it was this government in the last mandate that increased the direct operating grant funding by 40 percent. That's four zero, Mr. Speaker, a \$930,000 annual increase. We have now added to that the investment that will total \$500,000 this year in increase and, by the end of the mandate, will total \$1.2 million per year. The Yukon's childcare system is currently the second-best funded system in the country. We are once again investing further in increasing the level of funding to this, a stark contrast to the opposition members who, when they had a chance to do something, did absolutely nothing. The Liberals stand on their record on childcare is years and years of empty rhetoric -- we take action.

Mr. Mitchell: Yukoners waited years for this government to act on childcare. Now, after all that time, we get less than half of what is required and the details are shrouded in words like "additional enhancements." This announcement does nothing to address that middle-income parent who doesn't qualify for any assistance. There is nothing here to build sustainability into the industry. There is nothing for the 1,165 children whose parents don't qualify for assistance. There is nothing to assist in additional programming.

The pay raise for childcare workers -- based on a 50:50 split between parents and the daycares and 250 employees -- is less than 50 cents an hour -- not much of an increase for people who are already severely underpaid.

Will the minister admit that this announcement falls far short of what is immediately required and will he expeditiously rework his plan to reflect the real needs of Yukoners?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: What this minister will admit is that the Leader of the Official Opposition really needs to pull out a calculator and do some more research. Once again he is so far off the facts that it just isn't funny. I feel sorry for the member opposite. Once again, the Liberals are not reflecting the facts in this Assembly.

It is this government that invested into childcare in the last mandate, far more than any previous government -- an increase of \$930,000 annually over the mere \$4.4 million annual investment under the Liberals when they had their chance at government. We are going to add to this by a further \$1.2 million by the end of this mandate, which would be a 50-percent increase over where it stood when we took office.

This is a significant investment. This is an investment beyond what any other jurisdiction in the country, save and except the Province of Quebec, has done. We are very proud of our record. We are proud of what we are going to do. We are following through on our commitments that we made to Yukoners and we will do that. The members opposite -- I know they are desperately trying to play catch-up on this file, but they are so far off the facts that it isn't funny.

Question re: Land availability

Mr. McRobb: Let's take a look at the Yukon Party's election platform and its record. The platform promised to ensure there is a constant two-year supply of residential lots in the Whitehorse area. However, Yukoners know all too well that the Yukon Party government is not living up to its promise.

Contractors looking to build homes are very concerned about this government's failure to deliver on this commitment. A number of people are facing layoffs and hardship as a result of this government's inability to plan for the future. This lot shortage is also making it more difficult for people to purchase an existing home and is driving up rents for those looking for a place to live. This government has had four and one-half years to tackle this problem but it has failed to do so.

Why has the minister responsible failed to ensure land would be available for people and contractors?

Hon. Mr. Lang: When we took office four years ago, the Liberal government of the day sold fewer than 40 lots in a 12-month period. By our economic management of the economy, we find ourselves selling 200 to 300 lots a year. We are working with the city and the other municipalities to make sure that they can inventory the land. The problem and the challenge is, Mr. Speaker, that we have created an economy where the demand is outstripping what we have available.

We are doing our job: working with the city, expanding their inventory and the inventory of the other municipalities so that we can address this issue. In the Yukon's inventory of today, we sell more lots in a month than the Liberal government did in a year. That is success. Now we have to work at the other challenges.

Mr. McRobb: He can't have it both ways, Mr. Speaker. The minister can't blame the city. It wasn't the city that promised to ensure there is a constant two-year supply of residential lots in the Whitehorse area; it was the Yukon Party. We have now reached a point where there are no government lots to buy in the Whitehorse area. Nothing will be available until at least 2009.

In 2005, the Yukon Party received a consultant's report that found there is a lack of overall clear direction with respect to a Yukon government land disposition. Let me quote from the report: "No vision and no strategy to guide the process" and "no overall land management or land disposition policies." That report also found massive amounts of political interference in the process.

Amid this chaos, can the minister tell us how many building lots will be available this year and next year?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, I remind the member opposite the government of the day has to deal with facts. The fact is that we're working with the city as a partner and with the other municipalities as partners on this challenge of internal land issues. We have created an issue where there is more demand than lots. That doesn't mean there aren't more lots going out. We have 190 going in the Copperbelt area.

But we have an issue with land internally. We work with the city to address their concerns internally, and we certainly are working with other municipalities that are also seeing some pressure internally. Mr. Speaker, we're working outside the

Whitehorse periphery to put rural residential lots together. Mr. Speaker, we're working in partnership with the Teslin Tlingit to put out rural recreation land. The facts are that we're working on the issue. It is a challenge and has been a challenge. As our economy grows, the demand for lots will grow. Mr. Speaker, I remind the House that four years ago the government of the day sold fewer than 40 residential lots in a 12-month period. That speaks volumes on their management of the economy at the time. We would sell that in a month if we had those lots available.

Mr. McRobb: Those aren't fully serviced lots.

The same report found that the government failed to deliver a priority to departments to prepare a comprehensive overall land management strategy. I quote again from the report: this government has opted instead for the status quo, which has created many land disposition crises. Despite having received this advice 18 months ago, the Yukon Party government has ignored it, leaving us without available building lots today. Without an overall plan and available fully serviced lots, contractors are forced to lay off workers, and Yukoners looking to build a home in our capital city are out of luck. This demonstrates that the Yukon Party has done a poor job of planning, resulting in uncertainty and hardship for Yukon businesses and people. Its platform said one of the highest priorities would be to streamline the land application process.

When is the government going to meet that commitment, and when will more lots become available?

Hon. Mr. Lang: We are doing just that. I thank the Member for Kluane for bringing it up. We are working with the city. We are working on streamlining our protocol. We are working at getting land available out into Yukoners' hands. This government is doing a lot of work with the city, our partners and the other municipalities.

Rural residential -- we are addressing the issue. We look forward to more lots coming out for the next season, internally in the City of Whitehorse and also on the periphery of Whitehorse. We are doing our job, Mr. Speaker, the job that this government was elected to do.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair: Order please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 6, *First Appropriation Act, 2007-08*. Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 6 -- First Appropriation Act, 2007-08 -- continued

Department of Tourism and Culture

Chair: The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 6, *First Appropriation Act, 2007-08*, Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture.

Hon. Ms. Taylor: Mr. Chair, it is indeed my honour and privilege to speak to the 2007-08 budget for the Department of Tourism and Culture.

I'd first like to go on the record with respect to the operation and maintenance budget and then follow with the capital budget.

I would like to just open my remarks this afternoon by extending my heartfelt appreciation to the officials within the Department of Tourism and Culture for all their hard work and effort over the many years. I have had the privilege of being able to serve as the minister responsible over the last coming up to five years. I am very appreciative of that particular post and very appreciative of the hard work and services they do provide.

It's a very critical role that the Department of Tourism and Culture plays day in and day out. It continues to be the largest private-sector employer in the territory. It is by far a very large economic generator in the territory and I rely very much upon the advice that is provided by the department as well as in partnership with industry. I believe that we have been able to work very collectively and very closely with industry over the last number of years. It is certainly our intent, going forward, to continue that close relationship with industry.

The operation and maintenance budget is \$15.8 million in support of the ongoing programs and services, along with the staff and resources needed to provide these services.

This past year we enjoyed the very many successes offered through sport tourism as we celebrated the 2007 Canada Winter Games. Mr. Chair, we showed the south that we can be an economic engine and certainly a place of opportunity. To the many people who devoted so many hours in preparing for the 40th anniversary of the Canada Winter Games, I say thank you.

In the days following the closing ceremonies of the Canada Winter Games, as the many visitors, athletes, coaches, parents and media made their way home, we know they all took away stories of the beauty of the north and the friendliness of our people. Taking advantage of these games, the Department of Tourism and Culture launched a national marketing campaign, a joint initiative with the Department of Economic Development designed to promote and celebrate Canada's north to southern Canadians. It's a great place to live, to visit and to invest. The pan-northern approach showcased the three territo-

ries as an emerging and vibrant region that offers tremendous investment and tourism opportunities.

I'm pleased to share with you that the national marketing campaign organizers have received hundreds, thousands -- numerous -- emails and other forms of correspondence from a variety of people who were duly impressed and who continue to be impressed with the campaign. They saw promotional spots played on national television or at a theatre or read the free-standing inserts for print media, taking the time to put their congratulations in writing. This speaks highly to this pan-northern approach that has certainly shown the rest of Canada just what we have to offer here.

In order to keep the momentum going and to take advantage of the awareness generated in southern Canada, the Department of Tourism and Culture has designated an additional \$400,000 in funding toward a follow-up marketing campaign after the national marketing campaign has been completed. This money, added to the \$700,000 that remains from the national marketing campaign, will leverage further promotional opportunities to encourage Canadians to embrace Yukon as a destination of choice within Canada.

With the opportunities for Yukon to be prominently displayed, we are also very much committed to continue with the implementation of the Yukon tourism brand, which was launched just over a year ago.

\$100,000 in new money will continue the work the department began last year with industry, communities, First Nations and other Tourism and Culture proponents to implement the tourism brand and tag line, Larger than Life.

Beginning in December 2005, the brand initiative was led and supported by the Yukon Tourism Marketing Partnership Senior Marketing Committee. The Larger than Life brand reflects what motivates people to visit and live in the Yukon -- that is, the large open spaces, the majestic wilderness, the northern lights, the midnight sun, our natural phenomena, our friendly communities, and a great environment to relax in and enjoy all that we have to offer.

Research is showing that people want vacations that offer personal experiences. They want to learn to explore, to generate their own stories. They want authentic product and access to First Nation arts and crafts and they want to immerse themselves in a culture, an environment, and a way of life. We can very much offer those larger-than-life experiences and many layers of tourism products, services and holiday experiences.

Operation and maintenance budgets are very important to assist non-government organizations and their activities, and the 2007 budget provides important funding transfers for many groups' and associations' facilities and events. Last year a commitment was made by our government to the Yukon Quest International Association to assist them in increasing the amount of the purse with a contribution of U.S. \$50,000 for each of two years. We were able to fulfill this commitment in a two-year contribution agreement for the races both this year and next year.

The Yukon Quest International Sled Dog Race is a very important event for promoting the Yukon to the world and showcasing our winter tourism potential.

One of the identified projects in the northern strategy is to develop a First Nations tourism strategy and associated program in partnership with Yukon First Nations Tourism Association. \$75,000 has been identified in this year's budget with an additional \$450,000 being provided in the next two fiscal years. The department will certainly work with Yukon First Nations Tourism Association to develop the strategy. That will certainly assist First Nations to prepare for tourism growth in the territory, especially around authentic native arts and crafts and tour packages that offer traditional product and services to our visitors.

This worthy initiative supports our government's vision to strengthen governance, partnerships and institutions.

The department provides close to \$1.4 million in supportive marketing operations overseas that manage travel-trade programs and media partnerships.

There is also close to \$5 million for marketing operations, North America. That supports the brand implementation as well as a number of touring programs, including the joint Yukon-Alaska program, gateway cities, Web-site enhancement, public relations activities and electronic marketing.

The media relations program for North America is currently operating under the theme "Assignment Yukon." That was identified as a priority by the Senior Marketing Committee.

This year the department will support media relations with \$155,000 for initiatives such as the Larger than Life brand that will be showcased at a number of various events and travel trade places.

The department will host media familiarization tours of up to 40 travel journalists, I understand, in this year alone.

Last September, Yukon was one of five destinations in Canada to successfully host a group of top media from the U.S. organized by the Canadian Tourism Commission, giving them a Canadian trip of a lifetime to the Yukon.

Other destinations that we continue to showcase include the Klondike, the Southern Lakes and all areas of the Yukon.

There is \$267,000 for Web-site development and support. At this time we are developing an interactive strategy to address the growing use of Web-site and electronic marketing by tourism worldwide.

The department also provides just over \$1.2 million in operations funding for tourism-related stakeholders and events, including the Yukon Convention Bureau, Wilderness Tourism Association of Yukon, Tourism Industry Association of Yukon, Yukon First Nations Tourism Association and so forth.

Mr. Chair, we are also working closely with community groups in tourism, arts, culture, heritage and historic sites to grow and develop our important human and natural resources in the world. In this budget, \$1.5 million will be spent supporting arts-related groups and arts initiatives such as the Dawson City Arts Society and the Yukon Arts Centre Corporation. Museums will also be receiving just over \$1.28 million in direct support. We are also very pleased to continue to support archaeology, palaeontology, geographical names and licensing of scientific research.

Mr. Chair, we continue to work with First Nations on a number of heritage-related sites, to the tune of almost \$900,000. That is identified in our capital budget.

This year's capital budget contains \$5.4 million and, as I mentioned earlier, it is integral to the growth of the arts, heritage and archival communities as well.

Our government will continue to demonstrate our openness to work with stakeholders and what is important to them. We'll continue to work together with our clients and all orders of government, First Nation governments, to preserve our past while planning and preparing for the future.

One of the forward-thinking capital initiatives that we did launch a few years back is the tourism cooperative marketing fund, worth \$500,000, as a means to re-energize and revitalize tourism activities.

This budget continues to support this marketing fund in direct funding to market-ready businesses, First Nations, municipalities, organizations and partnerships in the promotion of Yukon's tourism product. This past year, the tourism cooperative marketing fund -- TCMF -- approved 82 marketing applications for almost \$350,000 with a total contribution from industry just shy of \$700,000. There were also 66 trade and consumer show applications for almost \$150,000 -- again, with matching dollars from industry, for a total of \$300,000.

This year, \$400,000 will continue to be supportive of the Yukon scenic drives initiative, which was first launched about three years ago. We have four scenic drives -- highways -- on the Web site: the Alaska Highway, Klondike-Kluane loop, the Golden Circle route and the Silver Trail, with the remaining three in production to be completed this year. They are the Dempster Highway, the Campbell-Canol route and Southern Lakes.

Interpretive signage is a huge component of this scenic drives initiative. In fact, it's almost \$200,000. A significant increase in interpretive signage along our highways will be dedicated to areas such as the new White River bridge, Stewart River and Frances Lake viewpoint. All will be done this year. Accompanying the interpretive signage will be an electronic marketing campaign, as well as production of a direct mail fulfillment piece promoting the scenic drives initiative to be available in all of our communities.

In addition, we have identified \$140,000 to assist with staffing of our historic sites interpretive signage program, maintenance costs of highway rest stops and the replacement interpretive panels for two sites on the Alaska Highway and Klondike Highway. \$192,000 is being allocated to product development and resource services. A further \$136,000 will go toward industry research and strategic planning. That will allow for partnerships and projects to assess tourism potential, business opportunities, as well as measure the success of tourism initiatives that add value to our economic infrastructure.

Resources are also put aside for activities to enhance marketing tools, such as Web sites and the *Yukon Vacation Planner*. We will also continue our successful strategic partnerships with Yukon's closest neighbours -- Alaska, Alberta and B.C. -- to benefit the tourism industry. We will continue to work closely to build on the successes of the Condor flights from

Frankfurt, Germany, to increase visitation from the Japanese aurora borealis viewing market, and continue to promote enhanced air access to Whitehorse from southern Canadian and U.S. cities.

Another important joint initiative is the cruise ship industry. Again, we will continue to work with our partners in Alaska to increase capacity while working on opportunities for joint marketing campaigns.

As I alluded to previously in the operation and maintenance, in the capital budget we are providing \$500,000 for the arts fund, an important funding program that supports artists in communities in a number of creative endeavours. We have also identified \$65,000 for the craft strategy. We will continue to build on our partnerships with the Yukon Convention Bureau, in terms of providing \$43,000 for sport tourism opportunities, as well as the Culture Quest program in partnership with the Yukon Arts Centre at \$143,000.

I know that I am running out of time very quickly here, so I will try and sum up. As I mentioned earlier, we are building on monies for our museums. We are also, of course, pleased to assist with \$220,000 for the First Nation cultural centre assistance program. In terms of building on First Nation heritage-related projects, we are also pleased to provide nearly \$900,000 in funding for various projects, including Fort Selkirk, Rampart House, Fortymile, and so forth.

Heritage attractions site support receives \$125,000 to continue work at a number of our heritage institutions historic sites maintenance and inventory receives about \$355,000 to provide funding for the historic properties assistance contributions and support work at particular sites such as Robinson Roadhouse and Montague Roadhouse.

We were pleased to increase the historic properties assistance program last year. I believe that was our third increase to that program. When we took office, it was \$25,000; it's now sitting at \$100,000. We are also pleased to provide \$225,000 in federal funding to the historic places initiative, a great collaboration across the country to celebrate and recognize historic sites in the country.

We are also pleased to provide additional monies in support of ice patch research and protection, as well as in support of First Nations community archaeology.

We are pleased to continue to provide exciting initiatives undertaken by the Yukon Archives. We are allocating \$80,000 to conserve and protect our documentary history and another \$50,000 to ensure these records are made available to the public.

I know I'm running out of time, so I'll just wrap it up. I look forward to questions coming forward from members opposite and I thank you for your time, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Elias: I took full advantage of the Tourism and Culture budget briefing on April 24 of this year, where I met with Tourism and Culture senior staff and asked many detailed questions. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank those senior officials for their hard work in answering my questions over what was approximately an hour-and-a-half session. It was very informative and a learning experience. They provided a level of detailed information.

They provided clear, straightforward answers to my questions and I received a rather open examination of the Department of Tourism and Culture budget.

Before I get into what we actually discussed, I would take this opportunity to recognize that the Gathering of Northern Nations Aboriginal Tradeshow and Cultural Expo during the Canada Winter Games was nothing short of exceptional. I attended it over the days it was there and I just wanted to extend my congratulations to the organizers and the people who took part in putting that expo on. It was nothing short of exceptional, and I just want to take this opportunity to recognize that.

During the budget briefing session, I asked questions related to: the national marketing campaign; domestic marketing initiatives; repatriation under chapter 13 of the *Umbrella Final Agreement*; quantifying tourism indicators; helping local hunters and trappers associations; regional, North American and world marketplaces; Tourism Senior Marketing Committee; museum funding; the gateway cities program; multi-facility adventure travel; Destination: Yukon; and the active tourism plans throughout the Yukon and visitor statistics. We talked about the four existing cultural centres in Pelly, Carmacks, Dawson and Teslin and the funding around those areas. I asked questions about the biggest impacts in terms of economic development with regard to tourism. We covered adventure travel and meetings and conventions, and the fly-and-drive market and rubber-tire market. I also asked questions with regard to my constituency and I asked about Rampart House and the new visitor reception centre. As you can see, the Tourism and Culture senior staff and I had quite an exemplary budget briefing.

In light of this, I have only four questions for the minister. What are the targets of the Department of Tourism and Culture and what indicators does the minister use to measure the department? What is the minister's plan for advancing cultural centres in other Yukon communities and/or a centralized cultural centre for all regions to participate in in Whitehorse? In the department's marketing plan, what are this year's performance measures and targets? I checked on the Tourism and Culture's Web site this morning and I did not see the 2006 tourism season statistics. My final question is: when are those going to be released? Those are the questions I have for the minister today.

Hon. Ms. Taylor: Mr. Chair, I'll try to answer the questions that have been raised within the time allotted. That's a mouthful of questions, so it may take me a second or third time around, but I will attempt.

Just getting back to the member opposite's comments about the Gathering of Northern Nations, our department was very, very pleased to provide support of around \$100,000 directly to the Yukon First Nations Tourism Association Board to help sponsor that great event. Bar none, it was an exceptional event. It was a great example of collaboration that took place in the community. It was by far one of the most popular attractions in the city during the Canada Winter Games. I know I had the opportunity to go through the actual event on a number of occasions, and I continued to be wowed each time by the calibre of product that was showcased during the event and the

number of performances. The only thing that I heard as a criticism is that it should have been held longer.

But I think that, as we go further in partnership with the First Nations Tourism Association in developing a First Nations tourism strategy and a blueprint for further actions to continue to grow tourism potential, that will be an event that has raised the bar in terms of providing a quality, outstanding product in such a way that was so respectful of First Nation culture -- what the Yukon is all about, each of the respective First Nation governments' history, their heritage. It was done very well. I certainly can't congratulate them enough.

In terms of the tourism statistics, I understand that information will be posted in the next few weeks. I can't put an actual target date on that, but it will be very soon, as I understand.

In terms of the priorities for the Department of Tourism and Culture, as I outlined in my opening remarks, we really do work hard to work in collaboration with our partners in industry. Through the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon, we have a Yukon tourism marketing partnership. We work with the Senior Marketing Committee, which is comprised of a number of very dedicated, talented individuals who possess great expertise and experience in terms of marketing the Yukon. We do work with them; we take their lead.

As the member opposite referred to, tourism is all about delivering and working in very close partnership with industry to ensure we have measurable results so that if, in fact, we don't do well, we can go back to the drawing board and see if we can retool, regroup or perhaps try something else.

We have been able to foster such a very positive working relationship with industry over the last number of years. I am very appreciative as the Minister of Tourism and Culture to have them there with us in terms of providing recommendations and that insight that is so very important, not just on the local level but certainly on the national level, and looking outward as well.

I think that tourism here in the Yukon has advanced substantially. The industry itself has matured very greatly. One only has to take a look at the product deliveries over the last number of years, in terms of working on strategies, so that we can execute marketing campaigns that will deliver.

Strategic priorities have been identified by our Senior Marketing Committee for this particular fiscal year include building upon the Yukon tourism brand. As I mentioned, housed within this particular budget is an additional \$100,000 for replacing all our Yukon highway signs. I'm sure if any of us have taken a trip down the road, as I have, and I actually broke down -- but I won't get into that -- you will see all of the refurbished Yukon highway signs saying Larger than Life. I think they're very well done, and I think that the Department of Highways and Public Works, in collaboration with our Department of Tourism and Culture, has done a very good job in terms of turning over almost all 112 highway signs in the territory. I think we missed one the other day, though, at the border, if I'm not mistaken, but we're working on that as well.

Dollars also will be going forward in terms of providing some additional photo shoots to be done in collaboration with Yukon photographers. One of the highlights, of course, of the

brand -- all the research that was taken to come up with a new Yukon tourism brand incorporated the wide open spaces, the natural phenomena of the midnight sun, the aurora borealis and, of course, our very scenic wilderness beauty. So it is our intention to work with our photographers over the upcoming year to come up with some additional photo shoots to build upon those actual images and articulate those in all our campaigns.

Also within that \$100,000, we will be coming up with a brand toolkit, so to speak, so we can build on those efforts to incorporate Larger than Life within all our campaigns across the government and all our respective departments and agencies.

The brand toolkit will also be used by the private sector. Again, it's just building on that reach. As I mentioned earlier, the success of the tourism brand is only as good as how many partners extend its reach.

The other strategic priority identified by the Senior Marketing Committee is the Web site. We were able to extend the reach of our Web site a couple of years ago by increasing the dollars available. In fact, we were able to put out for tender fairly recently, within the last six months, an RFP for a new Web site enhancement. It's an interactive strategy, as I seem to recall. Within the interactive strategy is a new and improved Web site.

I had a wonderful opportunity to take a briefing during the annual general meeting of the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon that the department put on -- again, they brought in their partners. It was very exciting how interactive the Web site will be. Its launch is due to take place later on this fall. We are probably looking at October, maybe November. The actual cost of that particular contract is just over \$600,000, I seem to recall. It's a fairly large chunk of dollars but knowing the trends in the travel trade these days, the Web site is certainly the way to go in terms of marketing Yukon as a destination.

I think it's fair to say that when we -- probably most of us in this room and outside of this room -- book a ticket or take a look at what travel trends there are, there are numerous Web sites to obtain information. Certainly this is going to be an information-gathering point. It's going to be very interactive and very competitive in the marketplace as well. So we're really excited to see the actual launch of the Web site.

In terms of media relations, that is the third priority identified by SMC. We were able to increase the number of dollars allocated for media relations. I think I mentioned earlier, we host a number of different travel trade operators and journalists from all over the world to come and take part in all jurisdictions in the Yukon. In doing so, these particular writers or authors are able to help tell the story about the Yukon to the rest of the world at minimum dollars -- I like to say. The return on investment, as I seem to recall, is that for every dollar invested in that particular area, we get \$9 in return, so it's a very good investment.

I should add that we were very appreciative of the coverage that was garnered through the national marketing campaign thus far, not to mention the unprecedented level of broadcast coverage that was negotiated by the Canada Winter Games

Host Society. That has created numerous print articles and stories about the Yukon being a great place to visit, but also to do business and a great place to live as well.

The national marketing campaign, building upon the successes of the marketing campaign -- that has been another targeted priority of the national marketing campaign. We're really pleased to build upon the successes of the marketing campaign identified. In this year's budget, we have \$400,000 additional money. With that, coupled with the \$700,000 identified in this year's budget for the completion of the marketing campaign, we will be able to stay in the marketplace, so to speak. A whole host of things have occurred through the marketing campaign in terms of being showcased in just about every cinema possible in the country. We have had a number of public relations events that our Premier and the two premiers from our sister territories were able to take part in recently in Toronto -- some very key business-related events with tourism potential.

Again, those particular events have garnered and generated many print articles as well.

We will over the course of the next few months be able to build and also to evaluate the success of the national marketing campaign to see what actually worked, what didn't work. By and large, I think that we can all concur that it has been very successful to date. The company that won the contract did an exemplary job in terms of working with industry to fulfill that particular campaign. I can't say enough about it.

We will continue to review all of our programs, as we have done, and I think that the member opposite was provided a copy of the strategic plan for the Department of Tourism and Culture as well as a copy of the report card. In the report card, it actually specifically states what all our target potentials are. For example, in the adventure program North America, we have gateway cities. We have \$200,000 identified for this year's gateway cities. Again, without having to read the actual report, the deliverables we hope to achieve are outlined. At the end of the year we will be able to see if we garnered that and more and see if it is worthwhile to continue the way that we did.

Gateway cities, I just have to say, has been a very successful campaign. It targets the cities of Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton. We have been able to partner with, in particular, Air North in most, if not all, of our ventures through gateway cities. They have done a very good job in terms of getting the message out. One only has to take a look at the Air North gateway getaways this spring and fall that have brought in hundreds and hundreds of visitors that we would not have necessarily seen earlier during the shoulder seasons. That has really led to bums in seats and that is what tourism is all about -- to get them here and to continue to build upon those successes.

In terms of the adventure program Yukon Wild, we're really pleased again to be able to partner with the Yukon Wilderness Tourism Association in delivering the wilderness adventure program. Again, there is a goal. There are a number of objectives outlined in the strategy that I don't think I have to repeat. But those are just some of the key strategic areas. So in terms of priorities, we take the lead from industry, and we are

working with industry. We will continue to do that and are very appreciative of having them here.

In terms of marketing targets and indicators, there are a number of border-crossing statistics as well as airline passengers, as well as registrations at our visitor information centres. Those have all been pretty consistent over the last number of years -- I think probably the last 20 years, if I'm not mistaken, if not longer. So they may not be the best in terms of performance indicators but, if anything, they provide that continuity that is really important.

In terms of amounts of money spent in each market segment, whether that be tourism or touring, adventure, meetings, conventions, incentive travel, fly-drives, et cetera, we are all working to meet those priorities identified by Senior Marketing Committee. In terms of providing up-to-date performance measurements, as in the past, every four years, we will work with industry to provide a visitor exit survey. The last one, I believe, was done in 2004. In fact, in 2004, I think we spent just over \$400,000 for that particular survey, but it's a very comprehensive, detailed survey. It breaks it down by particular regions and is a very useful piece of information.

In terms of being able to improve upon providing more readily available, accurate information, we continue to talk with industry and work with industry to come up with new and improved ways, just as all jurisdictions do -- we constantly strive to as well.

We continue to look for more visitors who have more high yield and spend dollars in the territory -- perhaps there is less impact but they are spending more dollars. We have seen a lot of that, especially through the fly/drive markets, wilderness tourism, and through our meetings, conventions, incentive travel, and a number of different markets.

Again, we are very appreciative of the diverse marketing efforts that we have incorporated here in the Yukon. That is what it's all about: branching out, but also placing our money where the best return on investment is.

As I mentioned before, for every marketing campaign within our report card, we do measure how many visitors actually come here because of that particular campaign. And through the visitor exit survey, we are also able to ascertain how many dollars visitors spend in more finite detail, according to what region they are able to visit.

I am about to run out of time, if I haven't done so already.

Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Seeing none, we will proceed with line-by-line debate.

Mr. Elias: I request the unanimous consent of the Committee to deem all lines in Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, cleared or carried

Chair: Mr. Elias has requested the unanimous consent of the Committee to deem all lines in Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, cleared or carried, as required. Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures
Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the
amount of \$15,766,000 agreed to
On Capital Expenditures
Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$5,455,000
agreed to
Department of Tourism and Culture agreed to

Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: We will take a five-minute recess for officials to change.

Recess

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

Department of Community Services -- continued
On Capital Expenditures -- continued

Chair: The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 6, *First Appropriation Act, 2007-08, Vote 51, Department of Community Services.*

On Solid Waste -- continued

Chair: Is there any further debate on the solid waste line?

Solid Waste in the amount of \$170,000 agreed to

On Flood/Erosion Control

Flood/Erosion Control in the amount of \$750,000 agreed to

On Equipment Purchase

Equipment Purchase in the amount of \$10,000 agreed to

On Road/Streets Upgrade

Mr. Fairclough: I would like to ask the minister to give us a breakdown on that line, please.

Hon. Mr. Hart: Funding in the amount of \$1,550,000 consists of \$650,000 for a second access in Carcross; \$100,000 for improvements to roads in various communities, emergency projects in various communities as they arise, and development of a long-term plan and cost estimate for upgrading in unincorporated community areas to a standard that meets the Roads and Transportation Association of Canada guidelines, and \$800,000 for the Taku subdivision second access.

Mr. Fairclough: Were there any projects that the minister did not list? I heard a couple of the communities, but if there are projects under this amount, can he send that to us by legislative return?

Hon. Mr. Hart: This consists of three items in there, as I indicated -- \$650,000 for the Carcross project, \$800,000 for the Taku subdivision, and \$100,000 for improvements to various roads in various communities throughout the Yukon.

Mr. Fairclough: Over the years, I have been asking this minister to look at making improvements to one road in the community of Pelly Crossing. I believe the government may have a misunderstanding about this road. It's the one that's on the other side of the bridge that goes toward Pelly Farm. There were some improvements to the road on the back side of it -- it was chip sealed and so on -- but the minister said that it was a

First Nation road, when in fact it was a government employee who put that road in. They have been asking for improvements to that road.

When can we expect government to assist this unincorporated community in fixing the road up and putting chip seal on it?

Hon. Mr. Hart: As I indicated previously, this road is on First Nation land. This road is maintained by Highways and Public Works under their rural roads program. Any improvements to this particular road will be done under that, if it was to be done. As I mentioned, this road is on First Nation land.

Mr. Fairclough: Mr. Chair, in the past, it did not stop government from making road improvements to communities. An unincorporated community can't have government assistance?

I'd like to ask the minister to look into this matter and I'll ask the question in the fall whether or not the government is willing to help out the First Nation to make this road improvement.

Hon. Mr. Hart: I request the member opposite to ask that particular question to the Minister of Highways and Public Works.

Road/Streets Upgrade in the amount of \$1,550,000 agreed to

On Canada Strategic Infrastructure Fund Projects

On Dawson City Sewage Treatment

Mr. Fairclough: I'd like to ask for a breakdown on this line item also.

Hon. Mr. Hart: \$1 million is toward design and construction of the sewage treatment facility in Dawson City.

Mr. Fairclough: We all know that the Dawson water licence runs out in a year's time. I would like to know whether or not government feels that they will meet their deadline in building this new facility. I would like to know where and what the final cost would be.

Hon. Mr. Hart: The Dawson City water licence -- we're under court order. The member opposite might be thinking of the Carmacks water licence.

Mr. Fairclough: No, I'm talking about the Dawson City sewage treatment facility. I know that theirs does run out in a year's time. I would like to know whether or not government feels they can meet this deadline to construct this treatment facility. I would like to know where and what the cost is.

Hon. Mr. Hart: We are in the process of getting our information ready for court at the end of June. We will be proceeding with that process. If we are successful under YESAA, the project completion date is anticipated in 2011-12 for that particular sewage facility.

Dawson City Sewage Treatment in the amount of \$1,000,000 agreed to

On Carmacks Sewage Treatment

Mr. Fairclough: I believe this is for planning money but I would like the minister to detail what exactly this money is for and if it's more than that. In the previous year, there was \$3.4 million in the budget. Can the minister tell us what happened to that money? Is it back in general revenue?

Hon. Mr. Hart: The money has been revoted. The \$764,000 toward planning and design is to begin the construction of a sewage treatment facility in Carmacks once they have made the choice of what selection they will go with.

Mr. Fairclough: Time is going by and this project does not seem to be taking off. Can the minister tell us what involvement his department had in trying to change the minds of the community about a different system and why that was?

Hon. Mr. Hart: We weren't trying to change the minds of community members on anything. The Yukon government is basically partnering with the municipality on the commitment to design and construct a new sewage facility. They asked for our assistance in getting the information out to their constituents so a decision can be made on behalf of the citizens of Carmacks, and that's exactly what we did. We provided assistance, as per the request of the mayor and council. Once they make that decision, we will be advancing as quickly as possible.

Mr. Fairclough: Well, what the department did when working with the community is suggest an aerated lagoon in a swamp in downtown Carmacks. I think that was wrong of government to look at that.

Is the minister aware of the results of the survey that the village and the government conducted over the past little while? What are his comments to them?

Hon. Mr. Hart: We are aware of the results from the town, but once the town goes through its process and makes its decision and gets back to us, we will advance.

Mr. Fairclough: Well, the minister seems to be in close contact with the village. Can the minister tell us what the final date would be for completion of this system and what the cost is now -- whether or not it has changed? If it has increased, will he let us know?

Hon. Mr. Hart: I will be meeting with the Mayor of Carmacks tomorrow and I anticipate that we will get some indication of exactly what our timelines will be.

Mr. Fairclough: I appreciate the fact that the minister is meeting with the mayor. I am sure that the mayor will tell the minister the results of the survey and that they are looking at the membrane system and not the aerated lagoon.

The minister didn't say what the final cost would be to put this system in place. Can he tell us?

Hon. Mr. Hart: Until we get a decision on what we are going to specifically build, we won't have a cost that I can provide to the member opposite.

Mr. Fairclough: I am disappointed that the minister does not have figures in front of him. He knows full well that the membrane system has been looked at for the last two years and the dollar amounts have been put forward. Because this is a project that is a bit old, the numbers could have changed. I thought perhaps the minister would have paid attention to that and could show what the increase would be.

Carmacks Sewage Treatment in the amount of \$764,000 agreed to

On Carcross Waterfront

Mr. Fairclough: Can the minister provide a breakdown on that amount, please?

Hon. Mr. Hart: The \$1.5 million is to start construction on the Carcross waterfront project, with emphasis specifically on the bridge walkway.

Carcross Waterfront in the amount of \$1,500,000 agreed to

On Whitehorse Waterfront

Mr. Fairclough: Same thing, I would like a breakdown. Also, could the minister tell us -- there was \$7.1 million in the previous year -- how much of that was spent? Is this a revote? Can he explain those two years' differences?

Hon. Mr. Hart: The money for last year was expended. We are awaiting the final confirmation from the City of Whitehorse. The \$4 million is for construction work on the Whitehorse waterfront this year to finish the paving and the consultation with regard to the waterfront development.

Mr. Fairclough: I guess I have one last question. The Kwanlin Dun First Nation has been in discussion with the government on waterfront development. Is any of this money earmarked for that, or where are the discussions taking place with Kwanlin Dun now?

Hon. Mr. Hart: Kwanlin Dun is involved in our group that is operating on the waterfront. They are providing input with regard to landscaping and development in and around their property area. But we don't have any specific agreement with them with regard to the cultural centre.

Whitehorse Waterfront in the amount of \$4,000,000 agreed to

On Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund Projects

On Mayo Community Centre

Mr. Fairclough: I'd like to ask the minister for an explanation of that, please.

Hon. Mr. Hart: Mr. Chair, the balance is for completion of the Mayo Community Centre. It is basically just for the cleanup and demolition of the old facility.

Mr. Fairclough: Mr. Chair, I didn't hear the last part of what the minister said. It's for cleanup and what?

Hon. Mr. Hart: And demolition of the old facility.

Mr. Fairclough: Okay. I didn't quite hear. It was demolition of the old facility. Were there any monies that went to the upgrade of the ice-making plant out of this \$477,000?

Hon. Mr. Hart: With regard to the ice-making plant, that's part of the overall project, and it's being dealt with under that budget.

Mr. Fairclough: I understand that there was a problem with it and it needed to be fixed and upgraded. That's why I asked the question. If so, are there any problems with the ice-making plant now? Did it require extra money to bring it up to standard?

Hon. Mr. Hart: The member is correct. There were concerns and difficulties with regard to the ice-making machine. They have been worked out with regard to the warranty, and we believe it is being rectified.

Mayo Community Centre in the amount of \$477,000 agreed to

On Champagne and Aishihik First Nations: Water, Sewer and Road Improvements

Mr. Fairclough: I'd like the minister to provide a breakdown for that amount, please.

Hon. Mr. Hart: \$415,000 is for the completion of the water and sewer roads project in Champagne and Aishihik First Nations.

Mr. Fairclough: Water, sewer and roads -- the minister said. But is any of this work done on First Nation land?

Hon. Mr. Hart: It's all on First Nation land -- it's in their application.

Mr. Fairclough: It just doesn't make sense when I've asked the question in regard to Selkirk First Nation and doing road improvements there -- and the reason was that it wasn't First Nation land and this one is on First Nation land. It just doesn't make sense that the minister has two standards.

Hon. Mr. Hart: There was an MRIF application. The First Nation put up one-third of the cash and it was accepted by the MRIF board for the application to go through.

*Champagne and Aishihik First Nations: Water, Sewer and Road Improvements in the amount of \$415,000 agreed to
On Lakeview Avenue: Water and Sewer Installation*

Mr. Fairclough: I'd like to ask the minister for a breakdown, please.

Hon. Mr. Hart: \$285,000 is for Lakeview Avenue water and sewer in Watson Lake.

*Lakeview Avenue: Water and Sewer Installation in the amount of \$285,000 agreed to
On Selkirk First Nation: Small Diameter Piped Water*

Mr. Fairclough: I'd also like a breakdown of this amount -- what the money is going to this time around. Also, from what I hear, this project is already overbudget by some \$2 million. I would like confirmation on that and whether or not this project is proceeding at all.

Hon. Mr. Hart: The \$1,718,000 is for the small dam or piped water project for the Selkirk First Nation. The First Nation has made a request to the MRIF board for increased amounts for this project. We anticipate the project to proceed, but we will be awaiting the decision of the MRIF board.

Mr. Fairclough: Can the minister tell us what the increase amount is?

Hon. Mr. Hart: The project is still before the MRIF analysis board.

Mr. Fairclough: I'm sure the minister knows what the amount is. Can the minister tell us what it is for? Is this for the pumphouse? Is this increase for the pumphouse or is it an overall cost to the project?

Hon. Mr. Hart: I'm sure it is to do with all aspects of the project. They have had to review the entire project and I anticipate -- I can't pick out any one specific item, but it is covering the whole project.

Mr. Fairclough: I know the minister must have details on this project. He can't not have it in front of him. It is important because the price of the project has jumped by some 40 percent, I think, from the last time numbers were thrown out in regard to this small dam to pipe water to a distribution system. I am hoping to get some details on it.

I'd like to ask the minister about the department's involvement in the different contracts in regard to this particular pro-

ject. Who rejects them and who accepts them? Is the department involved in accepting and rejecting the different contracts for this project?

Hon. Mr. Hart: This is a First Nation project. INAC is heavily involved in this process. We are simply a funding provider under MRIF. If it comes through the process, that is one of the items for the approval board.

Mr. Fairclough: Is the department involved at all in accepting or rejecting any contracts with regard to this project?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Mr. Fairclough: The minister called this a pilot project -- is that still the case? The Little Salmon-Carmacks First Nation had a very similar project to put into the community. Is the department going to test to see how this works before looking at any other communities doing the same thing?

Hon. Mr. Hart: The member opposite is correct, this is a pilot project. As he also indicated, there have already been several issues with regard to the project to date. Thus, we are not going to proceed on any other project until we see the analysis that comes out of this particular project and the results thereof.

Mr. Fairclough: That could take time. The completion of this project could be a couple of years down the road. Can the minister tell us when he expects to see this project completed?

Hon. Mr. Hart: I have no specific date for the member opposite. Until the analysis is completed and brought forward to the MRIF board for review on the actual project, I will not have a specific number, I will not have a specific item as to where the money is going to be spent, and I will not know if the project will go ahead or not until it has gone before the board.

Mr. Fairclough: There's not much that the minister can say on this project. It's a major project in the community. It's about safe drinking water. Can the minister tell us what the status is of the Little Salmon-Carmacks First Nation proposed project -- same thing, small diameter piped-water distribution system?

Hon. Mr. Hart: We are awaiting the analysis on this particular project. When the analysis is provided, we will do the review and the MRIF board will decide whether or not the project goes ahead. We have set aside this money so that, based on what we currently know today, we can go forward.

Mr. Fairclough: I'm assuming the minister's talking about the Selkirk First Nation project. Little Salmon-Carmacks First Nation has one similar. The two First Nations have worked together on this. I would like to ask the minister what the status is of this project in the community of Carmacks. He didn't answer the question. Can we expect approval or government support on this project?

Hon. Mr. Hart: There is no application before the MRIF board for us to review for Carmacks.

Mr. Fairclough: Has the department worked at all with the community of Carmacks and the small diameter piped-water distribution system?

Hon. Mr. Hart: INAC is working with the Carmacks First Nation, and until they get their situation rectified in Pelly, they're not prepared to go ahead either.

Selkirk First Nation: Small Diameter Piped Water in the amount of \$1,718,000 agreed to

On Takhini North Infrastructure Replacement

Mr. Edzerza: Can I have a breakdown of that, please?

Hon. Mr. Hart: The \$1,400,000 is for the Takhini North project in Whitehorse and is to do with replacement of pipe and drainage facilities in that area under the municipality of Whitehorse.

Mr. Edzerza: I'd like to ask the minister if this has anything to do with all the controversy that has been going on within the Takhini North area and the tenants having to be financially responsible for some of the water lines that are going to their houses.

Hon. Mr. Hart: The Takhini North land development project is being managed by the City of Whitehorse and the Yukon government and Canada have approved the city's application under MRIF for funding of the sewer and water mains component of the project.

However, connecting the private residences to the sewer and water mains is not an eligible expense under MRIF funding.

Mr. Edzerza: I believe I asked questions about this in Question Period and, if my memory serves me right, I believe the minister said that if the city made requests of them, they would consider complying with them. I was wondering if the minister could elaborate on that.

Hon. Mr. Hart: The city can make amendments to the project and they could be looked upon, just as we are doing on several other projects, but regardless of the situation, expenses on private property are not eligible expenses under MRIF.

Mr. Edzerza: Have there been any requests to the government from the city with regard to the issue that several private homeowners are facing with regard to this infrastructure?

Hon. Mr. Hart: No.

Takhini North Infrastructure Replacement in the amount of \$1,400,000 agreed to

On Liard First Nation: Two Mile Road

Mr. Fairclough: I would ask the minister for a breakdown and rationale of this expenditure.

Hon. Mr. Hart: The \$278,000 is for the Two Mile Road project with Liard First Nation and is basically to deal with chipsealing.

Mr. Fairclough: Now, I asked the question about the Selkirk First Nation and the chipsealing on that road and I was constantly told that it was First Nation land, even though the Government of Yukon's Highways and Public Works department put that road in. Is the minister, then, encouraging the Selkirk First Nation to go through MRIF for this road upgrade?

Hon. Mr. Hart: I think the member opposite has probably seen the light. If he wishes to have the First Nation make an application under MRIF, they could still make an application. I will say, though, that it doesn't guarantee that the application will be approved. It still has to meet the criteria of

the program. If they come up with their one-third of funding, they might be eligible.

Mr. Fairclough: I would like to ask the minister to open his eyes, because they don't have to go through this process. Government could make a commitment like they have in the past to make road improvements, whether they are on First Nation land or not. That is just a comment.

Liard First Nation: Two Mile Road in the amount of \$278,000 agreed to

On Whitehorse: Hamilton Boulevard Extension

Mr. Edzerza: Could I ask for a breakdown of this, please?

Hon. Mr. Hart: The \$5 million is for the Hamilton Boulevard extension and it is for design and construction.

Mr. Edzerza: Is the minister familiar with the Yukon asset construction agreement?

Hon. Mr. Hart: Yes, I am.

Mr. Edzerza: If the minister is familiar with that, that is good because I would like to ask the question on behalf of some of my constituents with regard to this project. One of the questions that I ask today is: why did the government spend two years consulting with Kwanlin Dun First Nation and then stickhandle through this portion of the agreement?

Hon. Mr. Hart: We spent a considerable amount of time with the First Nation on trying to see if we could get the road extension to fit through their land claim area. However, we were unable to do so and thus were forced to go a different route through the area to achieve our goal of a second access.

Mr. Edzerza: There appear to be conflicting stories here between governments. Once again, I think it's sort of the story like David and Goliath -- Goliath being the Yukon government and having all of the means of being able to find ways around honouring this agreement with Kwanlin Dun.

Upon speaking with members of the other government, it was brought to my attention that they had complied with everything that the government was requesting of them -- information -- only to be told at the end of the day that the route was changed.

It was brought to my attention that it was brought on as a surprise to the First Nation, so maybe the minister can explain that part of it. Was it a surprise, or does the First Nation have some information mixed up here?

Hon. Mr. Hart: As I indicated, we did some extensive consultation with the First Nation on this particular route. We have been in direct contact with the Land Claims and Implementation Secretariat on this issue. We have followed every piece of advice and we are in total compliance with the *Umbrella Final Agreement* with the First Nation with regard to this particular project.

Mr. Edzerza: Again, Mr. Chair, I fail to see a real benefit in this kind of agreement if the government is going to seek out loopholes that they can use to their advantage. That appears to be what happened with this issue. It's a sad day for a First Nation that negotiated such an agreement in good faith, only to find out at the end of the day that there are ways they don't have to be honoured. I think that the government has an obligation to do everything they can to honour these agree-

ments and not to try to find ways around it. However, it appears that the deal is basically done.

I have another question for the minister with regard to Hamilton Boulevard. I know Kwanlin Dun has requested that there be traffic lights put in by the gas pumps there. I've also heard that there may be intentions of another roundabout going in there. Can the minister confirm to me today that there are no intentions of putting a roundabout in front of that store?

Hon. Mr. Hart: I wish to assist him with his previous question with regard to working with the First Nation. In this particular case, the City of Whitehorse made the application to MRIF, not the Yukon government. We have honoured that agreement with the Kwanlin Dun First Nation. For example, with Whitehorse Copper, we did honour that agreement and we were able to put them into a contract whereby they got considerable amount of work for road clearing and grub clearing in the Whitehorse Copper area, because that was there. This is a city application on MRIF and therefore it doesn't meet the requirements under that particular agreement.

With regard to city lights at the gas station, that's a municipal issue because that's an existing roadway -- Hamilton Boulevard -- within the City of Whitehorse and that's something that will have to be made by the city. There is a roundabout intended at the Lobird connection on the extension for Hamilton Boulevard, but it is still up to the city to make that decision.

Mr. Edzerza: It appears that sometimes the city has jurisdiction and they can basically request these things from the government and they're complied with. The roundabout at Elijah Smith Elementary School was totally rejected by Kwanlin Dun, but it still was put in. As this is still a development of Hamilton Boulevard, it would appear that the Yukon government and the city really didn't complete their job when it came to the community of Kwanlin Dun.

We do find it curious as to why there are traffic lights coming out of the Canada Games Centre versus a community? It sounds like that has to be taken up with the city versus YTG. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Hart: That is correct because, once the project is complete, we turn that operation over to the City of Whitehorse and they are responsible for maintaining it.

Mr. Edzerza: I just have one last basic comment with regard to what the minister said about a wood-slashing contract for Kwanlin Dun. One of the comments I've heard from some of my constituents is that when it's little bucks, yes, we'll agree with it, but when it comes to the big dollar projects, it appears to be a different story.

Mr. Fairclough: I'd like the minister to tell us whether the \$5 million earmarked for this project now -- what will the final cost be of the Hamilton Boulevard extension?

Hon. Mr. Hart: It's not final yet, of course, but the approved budget cost is \$15 million.

Mr. Fairclough: The minister said there were discussions with Kwanlin Dun on this matter and the government decided not to work with Kwanlin Dun any more. I would like to know what the problem was and why they were excluded.

Hon. Mr. Hart: As I stated, we continue to work with the Kwanlin Dun. The alignment of the road is such that, if they chose to develop their land, it could easily be connected at a later date. We anticipate working with them in the future so it would be to our advantage to ensure our relationship stays as it is. But, as I stated earlier, the roadway cannot be accommodated through their land, and that was the major issue.

Mr. Edzerza: I just have one more question with regard to that, Mr. Chair. If Kwanlin Dun chooses to hook up their lands now to that road, would those roads be at the expense of Kwanlin Dun?

Hon. Mr. Hart: We made allowances for it to be hooked up at a later date. Typically, as I stated earlier, it is on First Nation land, but that doesn't mean that the government of the day wouldn't look at the situation when it arises.

Whitehorse: Hamilton Boulevard Extension in the amount of \$5,000,000 agreed to

On Unallocated/Administration

Mr. Fairclough: Even though it's \$150,000, I'd still like to ask the minister for a breakdown.

Hon. Mr. Hart: The \$150,000 is for the administration of the MRIF program. It is for our audits. It is for doing the analysis, and it is for covering the secretariat.

Unallocated/Administration in the amount of \$150,000 agreed to

On Prior Years' Projects

Prior Years' Projects in the amount of nil agreed to

On Canada/Yukon Infrastructure Agreement - Prior Years' Projects

Canada/Yukon Infrastructure Agreement - Prior Years' Projects in the amount of nil agreed to

On Community Library Development Projects

Mr. Fairclough: I'd ask for a breakdown.

Hon. Mr. Hart: Mr. Chair, it consists of six projects: \$30,000 for the minor renovations to the Whitehorse Public Library; \$10,000 for the security system; \$30,000 for the library electronic databases; \$10,000 toward signage at the public libraries, production of Yukon Public Library promotional poster, and anniversary celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the Yukon regional library system; \$20,000 for community library upgrades; and \$30,000 for the community library building in Carcross.

Community Library Development Projects in the amount of \$130,000 agreed to

On Dawson City Infrastructure

Mr. Fairclough: Once again, a breakdown on that line item.

Hon. Mr. Hart: This was used to address the infrastructure needs in Dawson City, excluding the sewage and recreation centre projects.

Mr. Fairclough: If the minister doesn't have it in front of him, can he give us a list of those projects?

Hon. Mr. Hart: We are awaiting the City of Dawson to identify the specific projects for us. They have hired an engineer and identified the amounts already, and we are awaiting that information.

Mr. Fairclough: I'd ask the minister to forward that information to us, please.

Dawson City Infrastructure in the amount of \$792,000 agreed to

On Prior Years' Projects

Prior Years' Projects in the amount of nil agreed to

On Land Development

On Industrial

Mr. Fairclough: I would ask for a breakdown again on it.

Hon. Mr. Hart: I'll provide a breakdown. It consists of two projects: Dawson Callison industrial subdivision of \$250,000 and the planning of future lot development in the Hillcrest/Burns Road area of \$1 million.

Mr. Mitchell: Could you provide more detail of the work contemplated on Hillcrest/Burns Road?

Hon. Mr. Hart: It is for the construction of an eight-lot subdivision adjacent to the Alaska Highway at Burns Road.

Mr. Mitchell: Could the minister give us some details on the time frame for this subdivision? Is it all intended to be covered under this year's main estimates?

Hon. Mr. Hart: We are in discussions with the City of Whitehorse under our land protocol agreement and we're awaiting a response from them as to which way to proceed with this particular project.

Industrial in the amount of \$1,250,000 agreed to

On Residential

Mr. Fairclough: I'd like to ask for a breakdown to clearly tell us where this money is going -- to which communities and so on.

Hon. Mr. Hart: This is for six projects in the Whitehorse periphery residential: \$250,000 for BST road surfacing at the Hot Springs Road subdivision; \$5 million for the development of 30 lots in the Grizzly Valley area; \$175,000 planning and detailed engineering of 20 to 25 lots at Mount Lorne; and \$250,000 for planning of 100 new mobile home lots in Arkell; \$1 million for the completion of the Mount Sima Road project and Whitehorse land development; and \$6.25 million for the planning and subdivision development in the Porter Creek lower bench and Porter Creek Pine Street extension.

Mr. Fairclough: The government said they've taken a lot of time to develop this budget we're debating now. Obviously there's a demand for more lots in and around Whitehorse. In the fall, can we expect a supplementary budget that addresses more lot development in and around Whitehorse?

Hon. Mr. Hart: I think as a government we've demonstrated that we're behind making land available for Yukoners. We have the money set aside, but we have a land protocol agreement with the City of Whitehorse and we have to wait for the green light from them to proceed on these projects. In essence, we've identified these projects to move ahead and we're waiting for them to move.

Mr. Fairclough: Has the department worked at all with the two First Nations -- Ta'an Kwach'an and Kwanlin Dun -- to provide any lots for development on their settlement lands?

Hon. Mr. Hart: We can provide assistance on First Nation land, but right now our development of lots is based on the recoverable from the sale of the lots themselves.

Mr. Edzerza: I'd like to ask the minister for a little bit more detail on the mobile home lots in Arkell.

Hon. Mr. Lang: We're waiting for the result from the referendum. The money is in place and we're just looking for the green light from the city to go forward.

Mr. Edzerza: Where exactly is this land located? Is this the green buffer zone between the Kwanlin Dun community and that mobile home park that's in that area?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Edzerza: I have a question about that. I was on Kwanlin Dun council when the relocation agreement was constructed. If my memory serves me right, that buffer zone was never supposed to be removed from there. That, I believe, may have been a condition of the relocation agreement. Have you checked with the relocation agreement to see if in fact this might be violating that agreement?

Hon. Mr. Lang: It comes under city zoning and so it's in their jurisdiction. There had been lots designated there many years ago that weren't acted on, so we're just waiting for the referendum to come through. The city is going to be working with the First Nation and moving forward, if in fact the green light is given to move forward on that expansion.

Mr. Edzerza: I guess the minister may have partially answered my next question, because I wanted to know if Kwanlin Dun was in agreement with removing that buffer zone.

Hon. Mr. Lang: The territorial government is a development arm of this project, so it is under city zoning. It would be under the city's watch that those kinds of questions would be answered.

Mr. Mitchell: I believe it was last year or the year before that there was a series of spot land applications on the Fish Lake Road and then the ability to stake land was withdrawn or put on hold while the department was looking at a comprehensive land use policy for the area.

Can the minister report on what progress has been made on developing such a policy and what the status would be of those applications that were put in abeyance?

Hon. Mr. Lang: We certainly did have the spot applications and there were quite a number of them. It grew from a spot application to an actual subdivision and we had to re-address that because of the size of the application and had to work with the Kwanlin Dun First Nation and other stakeholders to address the issue. As the minister here today, I would say it's a work in progress and we are looking, not only there, but at other areas in Whitehorse where lot expansion would be successful. That grew out of being a spot application in the process of how it unfolded at the time.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Chair: The Hon. Premier, on a point of order.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: It is customary in Committee of the Whole to debate the department that is up for debate, but the questions being asked at this point in time are questions that

relate to the purview of the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, which is a department that has already cleared. I would suggest that we get back to the debate for Community Services.

Chair: Mr. McRobb, on the point of order.

Mr. McRobb: On the point of order, Mr. Chair, I think the Premier is off base on his understanding of which departments have cleared. Department of Energy, Mines and Resources hasn't even been called yet, so he is wrong on that one. Second, it's really tough to distinguish whose responsibility these lots really are.

As indicated in the auditor's report, there is chaos between these departments and we thought it would be prudent to ask the questions to the minister now because there is a lot of confusion.

Hon. Mr. Lang: Moving in a very receptive way, I would like to go on.

Chair: Order please. Is this on the point of order, Mr. Lang?

Hon. Mr. Lang: No, it isn't.

Chair's ruling

Chair: There is no point of order. Mr. Mitchell.

Mr. Mitchell: Again, I will ask the questions and I will say in the spirit of cooperation, if the minister can assure me that he will answer these questions under the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources and would prefer to do so, I have no problem with it. But because of the way in which these two departments interact, I wanted to ask the questions today to make sure that, when we got to Energy, Mines and Resources debate, I wasn't told that I should have asked these questions under Community Services.

Hon. Mr. Lang: It is certainly always better to ask the questions pertaining to the department we are in at any given time during this budget debate. I can inform the member opposite that we will do just that when we get into the Energy, Mines and Resources budget.

Mr. Mitchell: I'm wondering if the minister can clarify which portion of the \$14,500,000 -- again, just if he would repeat it -- is for the lower bench and the amount -- and I know he did give this, but I missed part of it -- the amount that is for the possible extension of Pine Street.

Hon. Mr. Lang: Thank you for a moment to flesh this out. The Whitehorse land development at \$6.250 million for planning and subdivision development in the Porter Creek lower bench and Porter Creek Pine Street extension.

Mr. Mitchell: Can the minister provide a breakdown as to how much is for lower bench and how much would be for the Pine Street extension?

Hon. Mr. Lang: In answering the member opposite, you have to understand that we're just developing, so we're working with the city. Those kinds of decisions will be made at the city level, and then once we start into the development stage, the money will be allotted at that time.

Mr. Inverarity: Just on that issue, I'm wondering: there was apparently a document that was written to the City of Whitehorse, perhaps devolving or turning over the ability for

the city to manage residential development within their area -- the land use protocol agreement, I believe it's called. Could you provide a copy of that? We've asked for it in the past and have not received it.

Hon. Mr. Lang: I will get it to you as soon as we can find it.

*Residential in the amount of \$14,500,000 agreed to
On Recreational*

Mr. Fairclough: I ask for a breakdown on this line item also.

Hon. Mr. Lang: The \$500,000 for recreational is to assess potential locations for recreational lot development.

Mr. Fairclough: To assess the potential of recreational lots -- can the minister be more specific and tell us where we can expect this and what is to come out of it at the end?

Hon. Mr. Lang: The \$500,000 is for an overview of all potential recreational land in the Yukon so we are doing a form of inventory and working with stakeholders to bring something forward in the near future on potential recreational land. The \$500,000 will work toward that.

Mr. Fairclough: Does that include possible golf courses, Mr. Chair?

Hon. Mr. Lang: This is rural residential.

*Recreational in the amount of \$500,000 agreed to
Community Development in the amount of \$41,305,000
agreed to*

Mr. Fairclough: Mr. Chair, you've gone through this fairly quickly. I'm hoping the minister could answer one question in regard to contribution under community development. It's up to the minister if he wants to answer it, but it's with Canada Winter Games infrastructure money, the \$666,000; is that the last portion of money that is to come to government? Can he explain that, please?

Chair: That has been cleared already. We're on total capital for Vote 51. I'm asking members, is that agreed to?

Mr. Fairclough: I understand that, and you've gone through this quickly. I'm just asking the minister if he would comply with my question on that. If not, can we have it by a legislative return, please?

*Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$45,637,000
agreed to
Department of Community Services agreed to*

Chair: We will proceed with Highways and Public Works. Would members wish a brief recess for officials?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

Chair: I now call Committee of the Whole to order.
Department of Highways and Public Works

Chair: The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 6, *First Appropriation Act, 2007-08*, Highways and Public Works, Vote 55. We will proceed with general debate.

Hon. Mr. Lang: I'm pleased to present the first appropriation budget for Highways and Public Works for the year 2007-08. Highways and Public Works is a diverse department that constructs and maintains Yukon roads, airports and government-owned facilities and provides information management, information technology and fleet vehicle services, as well as procurement services, for the government. The branches within the department share the responsibility for planning, procurement, construction, maintenance and disposal of most Government of Yukon infrastructure and assets.

Highways and Public Works is found in and between every Yukon community. The staff within the department are the people behind the bricks and mortar, the steel and the asphalt and the computer systems who operate and maintain most Government of Yukon infrastructure and assets. The services provided by Highways and Public Works are used not only by other government departments, but also by both Yukon residents and visitors to our vast territory.

I would like to share some of my department's capital budget highlights. The planned Shakwak project will help bring the Yukon portion of the Alaska Highway to acceptable structural standards. Funds in this budget total \$29.75 million and are 100-percent recoverable under the U.S./Canada Shakwak agreement. Yukoners will benefit from the employment in these projects that will enhance the safety and condition of this section of Yukon's major tourist and commercial highway route.

A number of projects will be completed under this budget allocation. The Donjek River bridge replacement will be completed and the old structure removed with a \$7.15-million budget allocation this year.

Paving to replace deteriorating sections of the Haines Road will continue. Work will begin to improve the Haines Road and Alaska Highway intersection in Haines Junction this year. Street lights will be added, trail improvements are planned and continued consultation with the Village of Haines Junction over the intersection itself will take place.

Road reconstruction will also begin along the shore of Kluane Lake near Sheep Mountain. BST will be applied, and seeding and fertilization of the 2006 reconstruction area between Alaska Highway kilometre 1692, Silver City, and kilometre 1700 will be undertaken.

Further projects worth \$4 million under the Shakwak agreement are to complete design work for the Slims River bridge and Duke River bridge and the commencement of a two-year construction project replacing the Duke River bridge at kilometre 1768 near Burwash Landing.

The government is also responding to the climate change challenge where the highway infrastructure is affected by permafrost. I wish to share with the House today that, in conjunction with Alaskan and Canadian scientists, the Alaska Highway permafrost rehabilitation project will explore different construction techniques to scientifically test and monitor various methods of rehabilitation on sections of permafrost-rich areas of the north Alaska Highway.

Projects under the Canadian strategic infrastructure fund -- CSIF -- totalling \$6.735 million will be undertaken. As mem-

bers are aware, this program is 50-percent recoverable from the federal government.

These infrastructure projects will cover the continued work to widen and strengthen the Teslin River bridge at Johnsons Crossing with a \$6.235-million budget. The balance of the CSIF funding will be used to begin work on the replacement of the Lewes River bridge.

These and other smaller bridge rehabilitation projects are examples of sound transportation asset management, whereby key bridges are rehabilitated to meet safety standards and preserve the ongoing value of this very important infrastructure.

Other highway capital projects covered in this budget include road-surface improvements on the Dempster and south Robert Campbell highways. This budget will continue to improve the safety of Yukon highways by improving road surfaces generally and the application of BST to some reconstructed surfaces and some culvert replacements. Continuation of an aggressive right-of-way vegetation control program will also enhance the safety of our highways.

The reconstruction at the beginning of the Atlin Road will be completed and surfaced with BST. Guard rails will be installed, revegetation of the right-of-way be completed and the replacement and enhancement of the popular boat launch at Little Atlin Lake will be completed.

Mr. Chair, Yukon's airport facilities need to meet the nationally prescribed security and safety standards and remain attractive to air carriers to local operators and visiting pilots as a destination. There is \$6 million committed to construction of an addition to the Whitehorse Airport terminal building, which will accommodate federal Customs and security requirements, provide the necessary air in-transit lounge for international flights and increase the size of public waiting and commercial service areas.

In keeping with major airport improvements, \$3.2 million has been budgeted for phase 2 of the Whitehorse Airport parking lot. These improvements will provide better traffic flow to the terminal building and additional paved parking stalls for the public and commercial businesses.

On the programming side at the Whitehorse Airport, plans are underway for the expansion of aircraft rescue and fire-fighting services to 24 hours a day to meet required standards for the expanding volume and type of air traffic using the facility. This service will ensure that we are positioned to support continued growth in tourism and economic activity in the territory.

Mr. Chair, information technology, IT, is a key tool that government needs to better serve the public. This budget recognizes this and has allocated an increase of \$305,000 to add to the \$5.8-million annual funding established over the last three years. Another \$375,000 of net federal health funding brings the investment to \$6.5 million to address government-wide IT needs. These funds acknowledge the increased reliance on technology and the growth of our IT assets. With these funds, government program areas will be able to replace aging equipment and systems to better serve their client base and enhance opportunity for the growth in the Yukon's IT private sector.

Protecting the environment is a concern to all Yukoners, and another proactive step of the department is that we are replacing the older models of cars and trucks in the fleet vehicle pool inventory with more fuel-efficient vehicles that emit fewer greenhouse emissions and are more economical in terms of total cost of our ownership.

Mr. Chair, the Department of Highways and Public Works has been working in planning with the Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation and the Department of Environment for the construction of the new visitor reception centre in the Tombstone Territorial Park. This building will be constructed to the leadership for energy and environment design certified standard that has been identified in the Yukon government's climate change strategy. This construction will showcase how environment best practices can be used to build a very efficient structure in this very special geographical and relatively remote area of Yukon.

In addition to providing construction jobs, this \$1.5-million budget investment will also generate seasonal positions to operate the much larger visitor centre and create park access opportunities for tourism and cultural operators.

In terms of protecting the building assets of the government, over \$2 million will be spent on property management capital maintenance projects and contracts.

Highways and Public Works procures and manages facilities that will provide affordable, comfortable and appropriate accommodation for government and publicly funded agency program activity and to assist these agencies in meeting their objectives. This will be supplemented by more than \$8 million in capital building maintenance projects sponsored by the line departments.

Mr. Chair, the department does much more to contribute to the safe and efficient operation of the Yukon government, and to this point I would like to speak to the \$79-million Highways and Public Works operation and maintenance budget for this fiscal year by describing the important work that my department staff undertakes.

Highways and Public Works is one of the government's largest departments. It has 853 very dedicated employees. 552 of these employees are based in Whitehorse, and 301 live in Yukon communities. 85 employees work in the corporate services branch. This includes finance, contracting services, policy and communication, and information and communications technology program areas. They provide support services for the Highways and Public Works department itself, as well as information and records management services and guidance, tendering and contracting advice, IT and telecommunications services and corporate infrastructure to all government departments. 47 employees work in the supply services branch. They successfully deliver cost-effective, accessible logistical support through the provision of services related to material management, air and ground transportation, mail delivery and publishing.

11 employees work in the human resources branch and provide staffing and human resources support across the department. In these times of changing demographics and worker shortages, these hard-working people are doing their best to maintain the department's staffing levels that are required.

The Property Management Agency has 257 employees working in virtually every Yukon community. The PMA staff procure and manage facilities that will provide affordable, appropriate and safe accommodation for government and publicly funded agency program activities. This branch, and the entire department, is continually scrutinizing business processes and modifying and modernizing where necessary to better meet their objectives.

The transportation division has the greatest number of employees in the department. There are 431 staff members spread out throughout the territory to develop and maintain our transportation infrastructure, which all Yukoners rely on. This industrious group manages over 4,800 kilometres of road, 143 bridges, two ferries, one national and 13 regional airports, 23 maintenance camps and two weigh stations.

The Department of Highways and Public Works has a large and diverse mandate. We are fortunate that the Yukon has always attracted unique, talented and skilled people from a variety of places and fields of endeavour. My department is fortunate to employ many of them.

Mr. Chair, the most significant difference in the Highways and Public Works O&M budget is on the personnel side, with an increase of nine percent across the department for a total of \$1,800,000. The difference is predominantly due to reduced expenses in 2006-07, resulting from vacancies rather than an increase in the base complement for 2007-08. Recruitment is completed or underway for the majority of these positions, so estimates are for full-year expenditures in these areas in the year 2007-08.

Three important term positions are being funded in the real property management program this year to support the business process redesign project, which is underway. The objective is to identify areas for improvement of real property asset management practices and policies.

The department spoke on this initiative at some length during the Public Accounts Committee hearing as a cornerstone of the improvement strategy in this business area.

There are also small changes in the staffing complement to support expansions, including small increases in building maintenance, janitorial and security personnel under property management.

The most significant other increases are reflected within the information and communication technology branch for additional contract costs for a number of corporate information management initiatives such as ATIPP training, Web site infrastructure support and records storage requirements.

I would like to take this opportunity to provide an update on important operational initiatives that are not directly reflected in this budget. Many of these related to the Auditor General's *Transportation, Capital Program and Property Management, Department of Highways and Public Works* report. Since department officials met with the Public Accounts Committee in February, we have invested further in our department's capital budget system and are currently testing a new YESAA module that deals with the environmental screening, permitting and regulatory components of our major capital projects.

Effectively, the department will gain an improved planning tool for identifying all the key milestones by which certain steps in the environmental review process need to be started and completed in order to issue tenders to meet project timelines.

In terms of real property management and in addressing the Auditor General's recommendations, the department is using 2007-08 as a year to prepare improved information about priority needs. More realistic estimates will be developed to determine what the right level of annual maintenance is needed to improve overall building conditions and to identify balanced program growth to develop staff expertise and additional project management capacity for the ongoing years.

On another front, the work with two pilot departments is almost complete on the model for the master space plan. The work underway is to develop a macro-level approach to accessing government-wide space needs for work areas and functional groups in order to determine the appropriate space allocation.

Once the pilot department has confirmed the suitability of the model, this work will quickly expand to other departments. Work is also underway around improving our risk assessment on major transportation and building projects. This work will be integrated with the capital project priority setting as part of the 2008-09 planning cycle. The department has been gathering and looking at best practices in other jurisdictions and this information will be invaluable in developing new processes and procedures in HPW.

In closing, this budget shows our commitment to the provision of strategic, prioritized and integrated management of government infrastructure assets, the improvements of the foundation of service and operations, and continued forward movement toward sustainable prosperity.

I would be very pleased to answer questions the members may have on the Department of Highways and Public Works budget.

Mr. McRobb: First of all, I would like to welcome the officials who accompanied the minister today. I would also like to thank the many hardworking and dedicated employees in many of the several branches within this department, including transportation, Property Management Agency, French language services, the Fleet Vehicle Agency, the Queen's Printer Agency, the access to information office, airports, communications, supply services, and the many support staff and senior management. That is quite a list. To think that, just a few years ago, this department was combined with Community Services in what was known as Community and Transportation Services, certainly reminds us all that it serves many important functions for the Yukon public and for travellers in our territory, as well.

The first item of business I would like to explore with the minister pertains to the budget briefing we had with his officials about a month ago. We haven't received responses to the material requests. I would like to hear from the minister -- who stands up and likes to say how open, accountable and transparent he is -- his explanation of why that information wasn't given to us before this department was called today.

Hon. Mr. Lang: I've been informed by my staff that they are still pulling the information together and they will get it to him as soon as they can.

Mr. McRobb: Why did the minister call this department today before that information was ready? We need that information in order to formulate our questions.

Hon. Mr. Lang: In the process, departments are called up. This is why we have the minister answering the questions. That is what this is about. The department will go to work and put all the pertinent information together and it will be given but, at the moment, you have the minister and his capable staff here to answer any question the member opposite would like to ask.

Mr. McRobb: That answer is simply inappropriate. The questions we have to ask we are not sure of yet because we haven't seen the responses to questions we raised in the budget briefing.

How can the minister stand up and tout his accountability, when he knows darn well he's hiding that information from us?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I wasn't at the briefing. As the minister, I was not there to answer the member's questions. My capable staff will do exactly what they said they will do -- they will bring all the pertinent information together and he will get the information. That's how the process works. I'm here to answer questions, not to debate who did what and when. This is the Department of Highways and Public Works. I have two capable people here to support me from the department -- let's go to work and let's take a look at the department.

Mr. McRobb: I submit the minister's statement is absolutely ridiculous. We need that information in order to formulate questions. There simply isn't time to ask for all the information requested a month ago. There must be a lot of it that has been prepared. The minister is just using this as an excuse to delay.

How can he say he's accountable, yet take that position? What if this department clears before we get that information? How can the minister possibly claim he's accountable, given this situation where he hasn't provided us with the material we need in order to formulate questions for him as minister of this department?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I repeat for the member opposite. I am the Minister of Highways and Public Works. I'm prepared to answer questions. I have capable staff members here who can do just that. I am prepared to work with my department to get as much of that information in front of the member opposite as possible, but there's work to be done and the department has to do that work. They tell me it will come in due process, once they get that work done.

Again, we're at a point right now where the department is standing here, ready to answer questions pertaining to Highways and Public Works. Two capable individuals are here from the department to work with me on those answers. Let's get to work. Let's dig in here. We only have so many days left, Mr. Chair. Let's get this department behind us because we have other big departments to address here in the House.

Let's go to work, as Yukoners expect us to do.

Mr. McRobb: That reminds me of that old Meat Loaf song, *Two Out of Three Ain't Bad*.

I would like to specifically know from the minister if he's withholding information from this side of the House the department has prepared. Any of the information we asked for -- has any of it been prepared?

Hon. Mr. Lang: That's a ridiculous question.

Chair's statement

Chair: Order please. The general debate on Vote 55 has become personal. I would ask all members to have their questions pertaining to the actual department, not to the individual members themselves.

Mr. McRobb: Good ruling, Mr. Chair.

I just heard the Justice minister echo the comments of the minister himself. That's rather troubling because that means it's not just the minister who holds this opinion -- it's the whole government.

Mr. Chair, I would like to know if the department has prepared responses to any of the questions we asked in the briefing. Have they prepared them?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Mr. Chair, work is underway on exactly what the member is talking about. It will be released to him in a timely fashion.

Mr. McRobb: A timely fashion. Well, I don't know what dictionary the minister refers to, but in his dictionary, if you looked up "timely fashion", the definition would read "after the department passes in the budget" and therefore there is no opportunity to follow up with these questions. Is that what the minister wants? Does he want the department to clear before the material is provided so we can't hold him fully to account?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I am here as the minister to answer questions for the members opposite. That is what I am doing here today. We have the budget in front of the member. We are prepared here with staff to answer any questions pertaining to the Department of Highways and Public Works. The department has informed me that as soon as all those questions are answered, that information will go to all the members opposite and to all the opposition members. We are working on all levels with the opposition to get into this department and ask the questions. My job is to answer the questions and move forward.

Mr. McRobb: Well, in my recollection of all previous budget debates, I have never come across a situation like this. This is clearly another step backward in terms of open government once again at the hands of the Yukon Party. I can see that discussing this with the members opposite won't be very productive because of their attitude here today and other observations I am making as I look across the way.

The minister says he is fully prepared to answer the questions. Well, let's ask him some of the questions that we posed to officials at the briefing. Can we get a list of employees by job function within this department?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I would say that probably with all the work the department is doing, they'll answer those questions in a timely fashion, and that will be part of one of the questions that will be answered.

Mr. McRobb: And when might we expect that information? I heard at least two qualifications in the minister's response. The first one he led off with -- "probably" was the word -- and one near the end, when he used "timely fashion". On this side of the House, we're well-trained to catch those types of -- if I can use the expression -- "weasel words". And I need to hear from the minister when we can expect that information.

Hon. Mr. Lang: In a timely fashion. The department is working on the questions as we speak. Let them do their good work. We are committed to get that information over to the members opposite as soon as possible.

Mr. McRobb: Well, the minister may not be aware of this, but we in the opposition work on a schedule for debate time, and we simply cannot extend the debate for this department close to the end of the sitting. We've scheduled today, and perhaps part of the next day, whenever that might be, because the government side switches around which departments are called, so we don't know if this is even coming back tomorrow.

Will the minister undertake to ensure that we are provided with the material requested before this department is recalled after today -- I hope the minister is paying attention -- in order that we can examine that information and follow up with a second-level set of questioning or perhaps even third- or fourth-level questioning. We are simply having difficulty in even getting to the first level today with this minister.

Hon. Mr. Lang: I am here as Minister of Highways and Public Works to address exactly that -- to answer questions from the opposition on the department. I am not here to debate with the member opposite on when information can arrive. The information is getting compiled. The information is fairly complicated, so we hope the department will give him proper information, which always takes a little longer.

I am here in the department to answer the questions. Let the member opposite address the questions inside this department and we will work our way through them. We only have a few days left in this sitting, and we have other departments to address. If the member finds it hard to flesh out some questions here, maybe he should talk to the member from the NDP and maybe he could start the questions and be a little bit more positive on how to move forward.

Mr. McRobb: The minister is contradicting his own arguments. He can't have it both ways. I made the point that we have other departments to debate, which leads to the conclusion that we have to wrap up this department in a rather expedited fashion. We don't have the luxury of extending it for several days in order for the minister to finally sort through the information and filter it and give us only what he wants out of the material that has been produced by the department officials. We simply don't have time to do that.

Let's continue with the other questions that we asked the officials. Can the minister provide a list of capital projects by priority that is not in this budget?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Let's move through the budget as laid out and let's answer the questions as they come forward.

The member opposite hasn't asked one question on the Department of Highways and Public Works. That is why my two

learned friends and I are here. We will address the questions as they come forward and we will certainly get the information as quickly as possible to the members opposite. But the work has to be done internally. It's not something that appears out of the air, Mr. Chair. It's something that has to be worked on at many levels. He is asking questions about personnel. We just don't let personnel information out until it goes through a process to make sure we are not doing anything that would be inappropriate. We have certain rules in government -- or any employee has -- about information from employees.

Let's stick to the subject. Let's go back to the Department of Highways and Public Works and move through this department as the member said. We have a couple of days here where we can tackle this department, get it behind us and move on.

Mr. McRobb: The minister is not even on the same page. My question pertained to a list of employees by job function. I did not request personal information on employees. I wish the minister would perk up his ears a bit and try to at least get on the same wavelength. He refused to answer my second question as well.

Let's see about a third one: what is the status of the Dawson bridge? Does this government intend to bring forward this particular project within its term?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I will certainly address the issue about the Dawson bridge, understanding that the Dawson bridge was a priority for our government when we were elected four years ago. We looked at many overviews of how it would be done. We do not have anything in our budget this year for the bridge. I guess for me to stand up and say that it isn't a priority of this government is -- well, it is a priority of this government. I look forward in the next four or five years to directing some resources to get the bridge built. This year it is not included in our budget. Our budget is about priorities. It isn't one of the lead priorities at the moment, but our government is still committed and visualize that we will see a bridge in Dawson eventually.

Mr. McRobb: We asked officials to provide a list of which communities would be receiving cellphone coverage from this budget. That would include costs and timelines for each, as well as location of the transmitters. Since the minister says that he has all the information, let's hear it.

Hon. Mr. Lang: There are 17 communities in cellphone range now. This is a Northwestel issue -- it isn't a territorial government issue, but we've had 17 communities successfully hooked up. There are two communities -- Marsh Lake and Lake Laberge -- which will be looked at in the near future.

Mr. McRobb: Perhaps the minister didn't hear me. I requested a complete list, along with costs and timelines and the location of transmitters in each of those communities.

Hon. Mr. Lang: You would have to ask Northwestel. The territorial government didn't have any capital costs on those. Those are done by the infrastructure of the communication company that entered into the agreement for the cellphone service.

Mr. McRobb: I clearly recall the minister making a press release on this. Is he now saying there are no public funds involved?

Hon. Mr. Lang: In the agreement there were no capital costs. It was just for service costs.

Mr. McRobb: Still, the minister is lacking in information. We also requested a copy of the agreement and we know that items such as that are readily available. It has been more than a month since the briefing, yet the minister stands up and tries to get us to believe the information isn't available. Well, things don't quite work that way.

Can he provide us with a copy of the agreement? He probably has it on his desk. Can he send it over?

Hon. Mr. Lang: As I said in the past, the information the member requires will be sent to him in a timely fashion and it will be included in the whole parcel that will be sent to him in the near future from the department. The work has to be done, the work will be done and it will all be sent over as a package. At that point, he will have all of the questions answered.

Mr. McRobb: That would be a welcome surprise if all the questions were answered. Somehow I don't quite buy it. I just didn't fall off the turnip truck. We asked about the cost of the IbeX addition to the cellphone coverage.

Surely the minister must have that information at his fingertips or does he refuse to give that to us too?

Hon. Mr. Lang: That was never in the original 17-community plan, so that would be an extra that Northwestel and their partnership with Latitude Wireless would have to be looking at.

Mr. McRobb: We fully realize it's not within the plan of the 17 existing communities. That's why we're asking.

Does the minister have any information on what the cost to that added cellphone coverage for the IbeX Valley region would be? Does he have any idea at all, because we don't hear anything from the MLA for the area. We're asking the minister.

Hon. Mr. Lang: In the original plan for 17 communities -- which would cover 90 percent of the footprint of population in the Yukon -- those communities were picked and have been serviced. As far as the other servicing, work has to be done with Latitude Wireless to see what those costs would be and who would bear those costs in a future expansion of cellphone services.

Mr. McRobb: Who picked the communities?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I didn't hear that.

Mr. McRobb: Once again the minister is not listening. I asked who picked the communities that were chosen. Who picked the 17 communities?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I wasn't involved in the 17 communities that were picked, but they were picked based on population and maximizing the footprint for 90 percent of the population of the Yukon. It was done on a professional level and I certainly wasn't involved in any part of that decision-making process. The cellphone system has just been finalized in all 17 communities. Certainly Latitude Wireless is working, and I look forward to working with them in the future as the cellphone community grows. The business plan would grow to make sure all communities in the Yukon are eventually working with cellphone communications.

Mr. McRobb: Well, I can buy part of the minister's answer -- where he said it was done at a professional level and he wasn't involved.

Chair's statement

Chair: Order please.

This debate has become personal in nature and I warned members earlier not to personalize the debate. Mr. McRobb, you have the floor.

Mr. McRobb: Yes, thank you for that statement, Mr. Chair.

Obviously we are not going to get any material or information of substance from this minister. He doesn't even have the agreement for us. This whole process is turning into a lark. Here it is, the chamber of accountability for the Yukon government. We are charged with the task of trying to hold the government accountable. We need information in order to do that. The minister promised the information will be forthcoming at some timely time. Well, the opportunity for us to question him in this department could soon be over and we will have to do it without the information.

The minister doesn't seem to get it. This forum is about accountability; it's about openness and transparency in government, and all of that funnels into what is known as "good government".

We don't have the ability to force the government to take any particular action in those terms, but we do have the ability to draw conclusions, as does anyone listening and as does the Yukon public. I think a lot of Yukoners are starting to draw conclusions about what type of government this is -- whether it's good government or something less. And that relates to how open, accountable and transparent it is.

Obviously, Mr. Chair, if it wants to pull stunts like this one -- and I call it a stunt because that's what it is -- calling the department before the opposition side gets the material requested in their briefing really does make a lark of the whole process. Why do you think we invest our time to even go to the briefings?

Mr. Chair, there are questions that officials can't respond to during a meeting and it's common practice that they undertake to return with information. That's a long-standing practice of this Assembly. But when the government chooses to call a department before the information is provided, that's a different matter altogether. The minister can't blame officials for that. It is the Yukon Party level of government that decided to call this department today, and it's the Yukon Party level of government that decided to do it before providing the material that the opposition needs.

Let's make that clear for the record. It's the Yukon Party political level of government that has chosen those decisions.

Now, let's continue on with more of the questions that we asked officials in the departmental briefing. Can the minister provide us with all highway maintenance camp budgets, in comparison to the previous year, and explain differences?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I do enjoy the member opposite. He does go on.

I will remind the member opposite that there was an election in November of last year and the Yukon decided which government they wanted at that time and who they wanted in opposition. That decision was made by Yukoners.

We will put together the requests that the member opposite made. The department will do that. They will send the information down to him as it is done. As that file is put together, he will get all the pertinent information. That is how governments work.

This government is not doing anything different from other governments in the past, Mr. Chair. The member is not going to get a commitment from me or this department to do anything that is different from what we have done in the past. We had the briefing. The questions have been asked. The answers that are not readily available or agreed to -- and we agreed to get the information back to the member opposite. That is what we have done in the past; that is what we will do in the future. We're not about to change how government runs. The government has 32 days in this sitting to get through the budget. This department is up for budget debate today. That's what the government called and that is what the government will debate.

If the member opposite is not ready to debate the budget, then he had best get someone else who is ready to debate the budget that is presented to him today. That is the problem. It is not that I am not ready to debate the budget. It is the member opposite who is not prepared or equipped to debate the budget.

Let's get on with debating the budget of the day. It is the Department of Highways and Public Works. That is what I am here to talk about. Let's not waste any more time. Let's get into the debate that is at hand at the moment. Let's get it behind us. As I told the member opposite, there are a few other departments that we have to move forward on. With endless conversations in the House this afternoon, it is not getting the Highways and Public Works department debated. It is just prolonging it and it is not fair to Yukoners.

Yukoners expect us to debate the budget in a proper fashion. The opposition asks questions, I as the minister answer the questions. We had a briefing to which all of the opposition was invited. Questions were asked and we made a commitment -- or the department made a commitment -- to get those answers back to the members as soon as possible. We are doing exactly that, but the department can only work so fast. The department does an extremely good job of addressing the issues that come in front of the department on a daily basis.

The member opposite stands up and endlessly questions the department's capability to get these questions answered and out, but how in his world of reality he thinks that this stuff just arrives from the air -- that's not factual. We will do our work; we will answer the questions; we will get the report or the questions back to the members opposite and hopefully do it in a timely fashion.

I'm here as the Minister of Highways and Public Works to answer the questions of the day. I recommend that we don't waste any more taxpayers' money on issues that I can't solve as the minister -- an internal issue in the government that I have been told by my colleagues is being addressed, and will be addressed, in a timely fashion. I believe the department when they

tell me that, and I look forward to getting all that information from the department into the hands of the member opposite.

As far as the government grinding to a stop because the member opposite wants some questions answered, that's not realistic. In the real world, when questions like that are asked of government employees, they go to work; they do their due diligence. The member opposite obviously had many questions and those questions have to be looked at individually. We have to answer them in a proper, legal way to make sure the government doesn't put itself into a position of doing things that are not appropriate.

As far as the member opposite telling this side of the House -- the government of the day -- how to run the government, that ain't going to work, because this government will be run the way governments have been run for 50 years in this territory. It's done this way: we have a briefing; the questions are asked; the questions are taken back to the department and they are answered. Once all the questions are answered, the member opposite will get answers to all those questions. It might not happen today -- certainly it might not happen tomorrow -- so I would recommend to the member opposite that we go to work on the department and move forward, look forward to the questions that are going to be answered by the department and move ahead with the department. Let's get it behind us so we can discuss other departments that are important to Yukoners.

Mr. McRobb: The minister is not even on the right page. We're not asking the government to grind to a stop. It's the Yukon Party that chose to call this department today, not us. They could have called other departments -- Health and Social Services, Department of Environment and a host of others -- but no, they chose to call this department when they knew darn well the material requested by the opposition had not been provided.

The minister has also made some comments I find rather troubling. He indicated that the information requested was too onerous. However, at the time of the briefing, officials assured us the material requested was close at hand and a lot of it was standard information requested in the past. Here I hold up in my right hand a packet of information on Highway camp budgets for last year, 2006-07, that was prepared.

A lot of this is standard information. The officials knew that and we knew that. It was with the proviso that it wouldn't create a whole bunch of extra work. We asked them to provide updated numbers. Yet, you heard what the minister said -- he wants us to have government grind to a stop. Well, I submit that is not a pertinent response.

The minister also accused us of not being prepared, and he invited us to maybe get another critic up here asking questions. We can go through all our critics but, without the material requested, we certainly aren't prepared. We should have no qualm admitting that whatsoever. How can we be prepared without getting the information?

It's rather disheartening -- through my experience in this Assembly and in other forums -- to see how this compares. I will just draw a comparison to a process that is underway. That is with the Yukon Utilities Board. The information we re-

quested in comparative terms to that process is called the information response part of the process. The quasi-judicial board sets out a timeline for intervenors to ask questions. The board sets out the timeline for the applicants to respond to questions. Then there is a timeline before the hearing itself starts. Those timelines are in accordance with what is called principles of natural justice.

A part of the principles of natural justice includes the right to be made aware of the case to be met. By using its authority as the Government of Yukon and forcing the opposition to waive the right to be prepared is nothing for us to be ashamed of; it's something for the government to be ashamed of because, once again it all relates back to accountability. If the government doesn't want to meet the test of accountability, then it is using its force to deny the opposition side the information it needs.

That would be equivalent, in the Yukon Utilities Board process, for the applicant to deny intervenors information before the hearing starts. We heard the minister also explain how this department might clear before we even get the information. Well, in a similar vein, that would be unheard of. It would be a simple case for any decision made by an independent, quasi-judicial board to be appealed. It simply is not fair. It is the same in the courtroom. That's why I found the Justice minister's statement quite alarming. We have to have fair process. What the minister is doing is using his authority to ram this down our throats. It is not fair.

Maybe the minister wants to debate the budget himself, because he is the only one with all the information. I could just hear him asking questions and then standing up and answering his questions. Most certainly, if that did happen, the questions wouldn't be as hard-hitting as the ones the opposition would have asked if the material requested was at our fingertips.

The Premier is chirping away. He is in full support of this approach to evade accountability. That is fine. We don't have many mechanisms at our disposal to contest this form of dictatorship, but the public will know. They will know.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Chair: Mr. Cathers, on a point of order.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I would suggest that the member is certainly not following the standards of our Standing Orders by suggesting that the minister or the government are running a dictatorship. This is certainly not raising the level of debate in this Assembly. I would suggest that it is imputing false or unavowed motives and is using abusive and insulting language in a conduct likely to cause discord, according to Standing Orders 19(g) and 19(i).

Chair's ruling

Chair: On the point of order, there is no point of order. That is strictly an opinion.

Mr. McRobb, you have the floor.

Mr. McRobb: I call it as it is. The words might be painful for the government side to hear, but they too must real-

ize that's how it is. I can only imagine how they react once upstairs.

Now, I want to continue with some more questions asked to officials that we need. I want to follow up with the highway maintenance camp budgets because I don't believe the minister responded to the question. Can he indicate which highway camp budgets vary from last year and can he explain these variances?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I enjoyed the member opposite. We've been talking about -- or, supposed to be debating -- the Department of Highways and Public Works budget for the last hour, and we haven't done any debating. I'm not quite sure if the member opposite wants to debate the department, or does he just want to stall until such time as somebody relieves him from the question-asking process?

Obviously, the Department of Highways and Public Works highways camps would vary from year to year. That's how it's done; that's how we manage the department, and certainly, the Department of Highways and Public Works has different pressures on a yearly basis. Some have different assignments to do in specific times. Some are working on different projects pertaining to their section of maintenance on the highway. We certainly manage that and have that within the budget to do exactly that. We manage the department and we manage the individuals who work in the department to maximize the output for Yukoners on highway maintenance.

This is not nuclear science, Mr. Chair. This is organizing individuals to maximize the work that's done on our highways to get maximum benefit for the taxes that are spent on those highways.

The Department of Highways and Public Works does an excellent job in maintaining our highways on a 12-month basis. I'm not quite sure that the Tuchitua camp would have the same number of people in the summer that it does in the winter, or has the same budget line. That is why we have a department. That's why we have an administration. That's why we have a department to monitor, to make sure that we have the equipment and we have the individuals who are needed to maintain the highways at different times of the year.

Certainly the amounts vary for camps and the amounts vary because of the nature of the business we are in. We are into maintaining highways. Maintaining highways isn't just clearing snow. There is grubbing to be done. There is infrastructure upgrading that is done on a yearly basis, and certainly that involves equipment and it involves individuals.

In answering the member opposite, our camps -- the territorial government highway camps -- vary from year to year depending on the workload put on those camps.

Mr. McRobb: Again, I want to state for the record that the Yukon Party approach denies the opposition the ability to follow up in detail on any specific reduction to highway camps as well as to determine the cause for those reductions and any other variances.

What the minister is doing by withholding the information from us is making our line of questioning shallower than what it would be otherwise. If we had the material before us, I'd be able to ask about specific highway camps and ask the minister

to defend why, let's say, he reduced the budget. Instead, you heard the minister's response.

I ask you, Mr. Chair, to compare the two. On top of it all, the minister wants us to believe that the officials set the budget. Let's just clear the record on that.

Who set the budget for the highway camps? The officials or the minister?

Hon. Mr. Lang: That is quite a question. The Assembly sets the budget once it passes, if we can get to where it passes. The budget in the Department of Highways and Public Works is done internally by very capable people who administer the department. That's how a government is run. Then it goes to debate in the House. That's what this is supposed to be -- a debate where the opposition asks questions to critique the budget of the day and then it's passed by the Assembly. That's how it works. That's what we're trying to get at today. We're trying to get at some sort of debate level where we can move forward with the department and get the department behind us so we can debate other departments. We have many departments here we have to debate.

Part of our obligation as Yukoners is not just us answering questions. The opposition has an obligation to Yukoners. They were elected to be in opposition to ask the questions that are pertinent to the department that we're debating so Yukoners can get an answer. We work with Yukoners on a daily basis and we work with them throughout the Yukon, but the opposition has an obligation not to just run out the clock. This isn't a process where the quicker we can get to 5:30, the better off we are.

Let's get some questions here; let's ask about the department; let's move ahead with the Department of Highways and Public Works; let's do the Yukon's business; let's go to work and debate this budget.

Mr. McRobb: The minister might want to get to 5:30 very quickly but certainly it's not a priority for us on this side. We want the information requested in order that we can provide a reasonable level of accountability for this government. Instead, it has chosen to deprive us of that information and therefore it will escape a higher level of scrutiny. We know that's the game.

In his opening, the minister got a bit of a laugh from his colleagues when he said it's the Assembly that approves the budget numbers. Let's have a dose of reality here. The Assembly deals with voting on the budget, either yea or nay. It's the Yukon Party political level of government that sets the budget numbers. We had no say in the actual printing of the budget binder that we were provided with at the lock-up on April 19, I believe it was. That answer just simply didn't add up.

The minister would not answer the question of who set the budget, the officials or the minister himself? So, that is still up in the air, along with all the other questions he hasn't answered here this afternoon.

I am going to deviate for the time being from the list of questions we asked officials. I want to go right to something the minister said in his opening remarks. It involves a community in my riding, the community of Haines Junction. The minister said that paving improvements to the Village of Haines

Junction intersection will be done this year. I would like him to confirm that for us.

Hon. Mr. Lang: In addressing the comments that the member opposite made before he asked the question, there was an election on November 10. Yukoners picked the government of the day. The government of the day was tasked at that point with putting a budget together. Yukoners didn't pick the member opposite. They picked this side to do the job and that is our job.

In fact, the House does approve the budget. It is voted on. I know that the member opposite will vote against that budget. The majority of the people in this room will pass the budget. Whether it's the Member for Kluane or the Member for Porter Creek Centre, the majority will pass the budget. That is how this democratic thing works.

The member opposite was not successful. His platform was not successful and Yukoners voted to return this government to office.

As far as the paving and the work done in Haines Junction is concerned, we are continuing our consultation with the Village of Haines Junction about the intersection. We are working with the community at this moment. Again, there was wrong information on the floor. I did not make a commitment that it was going to be done. We will do it in conjunction with the Village of Haines Junction and resolve some of the issues they have and we have with that intersection. In the future we will be doing something with the intersection.

This government in this year's budget will not resolve that issue. We will work with the community and we will move forward once decisions are made.

Mr. McRobb: Well, here we go again. The minister likes to remind us who won the election and who lost. I would like to remind him that 40 percent of the electorate voted for the Yukon Party, not 100 percent. We have heard from several of the 40 percent who say how sorry they are now. When word of this performance gets out, there will be more who are sorer.

Now, it's rather troubling to see this minister stand up and assume that because Yukoners voted the Yukon Party to be the government, somehow they have a free pass in terms of accountability in this Assembly. That's the point he's making.

He's saying, "We won the election. We'll do things like we want to do" -- not the way they were done before in the past, or not the most accountable way -- "We'll do whatever the heck we want."

Mr. Chair, I recall this minister's comments on election night. Again he's got the we-mop-the-floor-with-him attitude. And it's not just him -- it's a lot of them over there and it's not right.

Chair's statement

Chair: Order. Earlier on in the debate, I had warned all members not to personalize the debate. This debate has become personal in nature, and I will not allow that to continue any more. If you have questions regarding Highways and Public Works, proceed, but do not personalize the debate.

Mr. McRobb: Thank you for that ruling, Mr. Chair.

Now, the minister went on to say a number of things in his opening remarks. His revisit to the question on the intersection isn't quite the way I heard it. He proudly announced that there is funding in this year's budget for that work to be done. Now, we heard him stand up and water it down.

Well, I was just in Haines Junction yesterday, and people are telling me that that project has been shelved until at least next year. Yet the minister stands up today and gives us what appears to be outdated information, as verified by his last response, in that he declined not to reiterate his commitment.

Well, again, if we can't even get to step one with this government in the Assembly while we're debating the budget for this very department with the minister responsible, then, really, what are we doing here?

I want to question him on another comment in his opening remarks. He mentioned the scientific cooperative examining the permafrost and doing some experimentation this year. I am wondering what types of experiments will be done. For instance, will some repaired sections be left to over-winter without surfacing?

Hon. Mr. Lang: In addressing the junction at Haines Junction, I remind the member opposite that we work with the community on issues like that. We and the community decided it wasn't a priority at the moment and that we would do the consultation in conjunction with the Mayor and Council of Haines Junction. They would like to see the consultation finished and move forward for the next year.

As far as the member opposite's comments about the scientific overview for permafrost, we are working with the professor on four very concentrated areas where there will be instrumentation. We are also working with the college to put an individual in place. This, again, is a work in progress. Hopefully from this overview we will get some answers on road structure, of course, pertaining to permafrost.

For the member opposite, we are moving forward. We have very highly qualified people to look at it. Of course, Yukon College will be involved. We will be addressing this so, in the future, as we build highways in the north, this will be a benefit to the construction.

Seeing the time, I move we report progress, Mr. Chair.

Chair: Mr. Lang has moved that we report progress.

Motion agreed to

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Chair: Mr. Cathers has moved that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: Order. May the House have a report from the Chair of Committee of the Whole?

Chair's report

Mr. Nordick: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 6, entitled *First Appropriation Act, 2007-08*, and directed me to report progress.

Speaker: You have heard the report from the Chair of Committee of the Whole. Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I move that the House do now adjourn.

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:25 p.m.

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A Northern Vision: A Stronger North and a Better Canada
(dated May 2007) (Premier Fentie)