

Whitehorse, Yukon

Thursday, June 7, 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.

Reports of committees.

Are there any petitions?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motion?

NOTICES OF MOTION

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to adopt and implement policies to protect workers from acts of violence or the threat of violence on all work premises or at work-sponsored activities, and to ensure that management and supervisory personnel adhere to both the spirit and letter of such policies, including the requirements to report any incidents of a threatening or violent nature.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to honour its legal obligation to consult with First Nations governments in a meaningful way on issues that affect both levels of government, and to work diligently to resolve disputes that arise from time to time in a respectful government-to-government manner in order to minimize the need for either party to resort to a litigation process that is costly, time-consuming and often acrimonious.

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

THAT this House opposes the permitting of uranium extraction anywhere in the territory before Yukon people have been fully consulted on the acceptability of such activity, or before a comprehensive regulatory regime is in place to safeguard Yukon's people, wildlife and natural environment from the negative impacts of uranium mining, including safe and effective means of dealing with what has been described as the most dangerous toxic industrial waste on Earth.

Speaker: Are there any further notices of motion?

Statements by ministers.

This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Hospital Corporation Board, relations with government

Mr. Mitchell: For the last few months, the Minister of Health and Social Services has been telling anyone who would listen that all is well at the Whitehorse General Hospital. Yesterday, the former chair of the hospital's board of governors painted quite a different picture. Many problems have been bubbling to the surface over the last two or three years. They are not the kind of problems that you can tamp down, she said. We have heard story after story about nurse recruitment, doctors, morale problems, you name it.

Throughout it all, the minister has said, "Nothing to worry about." He has expressed his full confidence in the CEO of the hospital and the new chair of the board, who just happens to be the former Yukon Party campaign manager. I have asked the minister this question before, and I will ask it again today: does the minister have confidence in the CEO and in the current chair of the Yukon Hospital Corporation Board?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Once again we have the Leader of the Official Opposition, in his preamble, putting words into people's mouths, selectively reflecting facts. It's very disappointing to see that the member has not improved his behaviour, has not followed the Liberals' own code of ethics that they held such a grand press announcement on in the last election. I would urge him to pull it off their Web site and to follow it.

As far as confidence, I have confidence; this government has confidence in all our health care workers and all the members of the Yukon Hospital Corporation Board, including the chair. We have confidence in the CEO; we have confidence in the doctors who work at the hospital; we have confidence in the nurses, the administrative staff and our health care professionals across the spectrum.

We have a very fine health care system in the Yukon. The member knows full well it is second to none in this country, and it's very disappointing to see him trying to inflame a perception of something other than that fact.

Mr. Mitchell: We do have an excellent health care system, but it's not going to stay that way unless this minister is willing to take action. There are a number of doctors who are not happy with what is happening at the hospital. They are particularly upset with the direction the hospital has been going in under the new CEO and the new chair of the board. This group of doctors recently delivered a letter to the CEO asking him to resign.

Will the minister confirm that this is the case and will he table that letter?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I have no copy of any such letter. If the member does, perhaps the member might wish to get the Information and Privacy Commissioner involved, as he suggested yesterday, to determine if he is in possession of something confidentially related to an employee of the Whitehorse General Hospital.

I have stated before, and I will state again: hospital operational issues need to be dealt with by the board that is mandated by act. We respect that board. We respect the job that they do, and we give them the freedom to do that job while supporting

them as they need to be supported. It's disappointing that the member doesn't respect their authority and would instead micromanage their operations. Again, I would point out that the member claims to respect this board and it's unfortunate to see that his words do not follow that.

Mr. Mitchell: How ironic when, only yesterday, he said that ultimately he was responsible for decisions.

Things have gone steadily downhill at the hospital since the member opposite became the Minister of Health and Social Services. The former chair of the board confirmed that in her letter of resignation and in the lobby of this building yesterday. The minister has to take responsibility for that.

A group of doctors sent a letter to the current CEO of the hospital, asking him to resign. We are already having a problem recruiting doctors, and now we're on the verge of losing some of the ones we already have because of how badly our hospital is being managed.

I'll ask the minister again, in light of the call for the CEO's resignation from a large group of doctors: does the minister have confidence in the CEO and in the current chair of the Yukon Hospital Corporation Board? It just requires a yes or no answer.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: No, what it requires is a reflection of behaviour here in this Assembly. Yesterday the Leader of the Official Opposition stood up and endorsed a letter that specifically attacked an official in the Department of Health and Social Services, and that was uncalled for. Today the member is endorsing an attack on the CEO of the hospital. Which hard-working official does the member intend to attack next for his political gain?

Question re: Hospital Corporation Board, relations with government

Mr. Mitchell: When it came time to hire a new CEO at the Whitehorse General Hospital, a hiring committee was formed. They came up with a short list. The current CEO was on the list; however, he was not the first choice of the committee. Before the job could be offered to the top candidate, the chair of the board, who happens to be the former Yukon Party campaign manager, intervened and selected the person who is now the CEO. He short-circuited the process.

A number of doctors have now asked for that same CEO to resign. They submitted a letter to that effect just recently. This is just the latest in a long line of problems at the hospital under this minister's watch. How does the minister intend to respond to this letter from the doctors, and will he make that letter public?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Once again, I reflect to the member opposite that I do not have a copy of this letter. My understanding is that, in fact, the chair of the Yukon Hospital Corporation doesn't have a copy of the letter. This was, I believe, a confidential letter between doctors and the CEO of the hospital. How does the member have a copy? Perhaps we should involve the Information and Privacy Commissioner, as he suggested yesterday? Does he have a copy of confidential employee information? It would appear that perhaps he does.

Also, if the member were talking about the full picture, he would note that the CEO of the hospital responded to concerns

that have been raised in the public by the member and by certain doctors, by confirming his desire to work with the doctors and to resolve any problems with that relationship.

I am optimistic that the CEO and the doctors will indeed work together to address any problems that may exist. I encourage them to do so and will support them to the best of my ability. I look forward to continuing to ensure that the Yukon's health care system remains second to none, contrary to the attempt by the Leader of the Official Opposition to inflame a different perception.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Order please. I've allowed members a fair amount of latitude here, but I'm suggesting if you don't want me in this debate, pull yourselves in.

You have the floor, Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, we had the former chair of the hospital board explaining how she resigned because of poor communication with this minister. She said under this minister's leadership, if you can call it that, the relationship started to go downhill and it went steadily downhill from there. Today we have word that a large number of doctors have submitted a letter to the CEO of the hospital asking for his resignation. Mr. Speaker, we have doctors who are so upset about how things are going on at the hospital they are talking about packing their bags. We need more doctors in this territory, not fewer. What is the minister responsible going to do about this letter from the doctors?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: The Hon. Member for Porter Creek North, on a point of order.

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: For the information of our fledgling member opposite, I would draw the Speaker's attention to the general statement, "A question seeking information about a matter which falls within the administrative responsibility of the Government of Yukon...", and Specific Rule 4 states, "A question must relate to a matter within the administrative responsibility of the Government of Yukon." The member opposite is continuing to talk about the Hospital Corporation Board. That is an independent board. They function independently. That is not within the purview of the Yukon government.

Mr. McRobb: On the point of order, Mr. Speaker, there is no point of order. It's another needless interruption. A question has been asked of the Minister of Health and Social Services that is very serious. The fate of the hospital and the doctors is at stake.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: I'm going to ask the House's indulgence. I want to have a chance to review this point of order, and I will report back to the House on Monday.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, it's very unfortunate to see the Leader of the Official Opposition taking this tack here. Again, I remind the member opposite that this govern-

ment has worked, and will continue to work, cooperatively and productively with the Hospital Corporation Board, including the contribution that we made when we stepped forward to address the employee pension plan deficit -- not strictly the responsibility of the Government of Yukon, but critical to protect the pensions of the employees who paid into it in good faith and to ensure the strength of our health care system. A total cost when we signed the agreement was \$17 million. In fact, that may grow, Mr. Speaker. I would point out to the member that we stepped forward with \$17 million over 10 years, contrary to what the former chair and former CEO told me, in January 2006, that no cash would ever be required to deal with this problem and only a promissory note for \$1.3 million would be required to address it.

Mr. Speaker, it was important to take this issue seriously. This government took it seriously. This government acted. We are very proud of our employees and the employees of Whitehorse General Hospital, and I look forward to continuing to support them.

Mr. Mitchell: The former chair of the board resigned because this minister was making major decisions behind the back of the hospital board. He wasn't operating at arm's length then. She wouldn't put up with the minister's high-handed approach. She blamed the minister's poor communication. The minister tried to dispute that yesterday and today. If Yukoners have to choose between this minister and the former chair, I don't like the minister's chances.

It is time for this minister to accept responsibility for the problems that are happening at the hospital. His continued political interference and his hand-picked board chair, who happens to be the Yukon Party campaign manager, created many of these problems in the first place. The doctors have clearly had enough. They want the CEO gone.

What does the minister plan to do about this?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: I am compelled to enter this debate. The member opposite has just stated that the former chair of the board resigned because of some backroom decision the minister made. I have 17 million examples of why that is not the case -- a \$17-million taxpayer investment to address the insolvency issue of the employees' pension plan at the Hospital Corporation. In fact, under the former chair's leadership, and the board itself, decisions to take contribution holidays in 2003, 2004 and 2005 were made by that very chair and that very board. We communicated so well with those people that we put in \$17 million of taxpayers' money to ensure that those individuals did not carry the liability of the decisions they made. I call that communicating. I call that upfront and centre. I call that a minister who is doing his job.

Question re: *Children's Act* review

Mr. Edzerza: It is four years this month since the Yukon Party Cabinet directed that the outdated Yukon *Children's Act* be reviewed and revised.

According to the consultation plan, the proposed content of the new bill was supposed to be decided by May 2005. The draft language of the legislation was supposed to be done by December 2005, yet this minister insists that everything is on track. Now he is promising legislation in the vague future --

maybe this fall, maybe next spring. Given this government's track record, maybe the 12th of never.

What concrete proof can the minister provide that the children of this territory will finally have the protection and support of modern legislation they so desperately need by this time next year at the latest?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: First of all, I have to point out to the Member for McIntyre-Takhini that, as he should be well aware, the Yukon's system for children in care is a very fine system. It compares very well with any system in this country of ours and I'm proud of the work done by staff. We in this government believe it can be made even better. That is why we embarked on this groundbreaking process -- working with the Council of Yukon First Nations in jointly developing policy changes and moving forward to amendment of legislation.

As has been discussed before on the floor of this House -- in Committee of the Whole debate the other day, I believe -- we covered this issue and, if the member would review the Blues, he would note that in fact this government recognized that the timeline needed to be extended based on the work with CYFN, based on the input we heard from them -- our partners -- and from the Yukon public. Rather than doing as members opposite would have us do and ram it through against the wishes of Yukoners, we work to ensure that it reflects the wishes of Yukoners, even if that requires extending a timeline beyond what we had initially hoped it would be. This work will be completed and it will be a very fine piece of work when it is done.

Mr. Edzerza: I think we can quite safely say we're all proud of the work that the staff do on behalf of government; it's the government that raises a little concern. The absence of a policy base that proper legislation and regulations would provide has serious implications, especially for children in government care and their families. Social workers feel they are operating in limbo, making do with whatever policies and standards are convenient at the moment.

Children and families are the ones who pay for fallout from this lack of direction. In the past few years we have seen the murder of an infant and sexual abuse charges against a government social worker, and we've seen questionable apprehensions and placements of children and acts of physical violence against workers. How can the minister say that the best possible steps are taken to ensure the safety of children and workers when incidents like these are public knowledge?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: The latter part of the member's question and the first part do not mesh with each other. The member claims to respect employees, yet he goes on to attack them and attack the system in the latter part of his question. That is not the government's position. We believe we have a fine system; we believe employees deal with very challenging issues on a daily basis, and they do so very well. It is a thankless job most of the time; there are many issues here. For the member to refer to problems, he needs to recognize that we take steps to review those areas and determine if there are areas that need improvement. The member needs to recognize there is no system of care developed anywhere in the world that has prevented there being problems from time to time. The impor-

tant thing is to review those problems, address them and go beyond, as we have done and are doing, to do the very best to ensure that any potential problem areas in legislation, regulations and the system are dealt with.

That's why we've done things such as increasing the resources and the number of workers in this field.

Mr. Edzerza: For the minister to say that I'm attacking staff is untrue, and he knows that. As the minister knows from my question yesterday, the lack of clear legislation and regulations has created an intolerable situation at the children's receiving home. This facility for temporary care has taken the place of a group home that was in the budget and taken out by this minister. Warehousing children and teenagers of both sexes in the receiving home is leading to big trouble.

There are no limits set on residential behaviour; there is no supervisor or management staff living on the premises or even next door. Recently a worker was physically assaulted after confiscating a weapon from a young resident. Who knows what other conflicts have gone unreported.

What measures is the minister taking to ensure workers and clients of the receiving home are safe and protected?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I think what is happening here is that the member obviously didn't listen to my replies yesterday. He must have had this question scripted and planned for today and had nothing else in the hopper. The member should be aware I addressed that question yesterday, pointing out how we have stepped forward. Since last year, for the first time, we have someone dedicated within the department to a risk management quality assurance position, ensuring that the policies and procedures, including reporting and other steps to protect the safety of employees, have clear and consistent practices around them, that a greater focus is put on this important issue, particularly for employees who are in front-line positions where they may be at greater risk, such as workers who deal with troubled youths. So we have stepped forward in this issue.

That work is being done now and I would point out to the member that this is something previous governments didn't do. We're further enhancing this area. We have invested in this budget, as I laid out yesterday, further increases both in terms of the programming support, support for more workers in this area and increased capital improvements to these areas. So we are certainly addressing these areas and we will continue to make further improvements and always will assess and address the needs of children, including the facilities for them.

Question re: Children's receiving home

Mr. Cardiff: Yesterday, this minister stated the number of reports to the RCMP from the children's receiving home have fluctuated over time and that "there were spikes and drops". Of course, he's right. Here are the facts: in 2004 there were 28 reports; in 2005 there were 17; last year there were only six; this year, January to May, there were 46 reports. If that trend continues, we can expect over 100 reports this year and that's quite a spike.

Has the minister investigated why there has been such a huge increase in the number of reports to the RCMP from the receiving home this year?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I don't mean to be insulting to the member opposite, but he needs to recognize that one of the things that causes the spikes and drops in this area, which he himself read into the record, is that the issue of dealing with children in group homes is largely related to the troubled youth who are there. If you have a particular case or a couple cases that involve mental issues or behavioural problems, those are the things that occur over time. Having someone who has more severe problems creates the potential for a spike. Those things are also addressed through areas such as the increased investment in mental health, including the creation of a position in Whitehorse for a clinician specific to youth and their problems. That is the type of thing that will be used to address areas like this, recognizing that the root cause of these problems is usually behaviour issues. We want to help the children who are troubled in this area, and that's what we're doing.

Mr. Cardiff: It's not I who feels insulted, it's the workers, it's the children who are there, and it's the public. They are the ones who feel insulted by this minister.

The policy of the receiving home is that if a worker who is assaulted wants to report to the RCMP, they have to do it themselves. The employer, who is ultimately the minister sitting across the floor, won't do it for them. Then the receiving home either has to remove the youth or the worker and a no-contact order is put in place by the RCMP. Now the RCMP is asking for a waiver to absolve the force from the responsibility if there are any further attacks. Workers are left with no protection if they return to work after reporting an assault.

How can the minister justify a policy that puts the onus on the workers to report a workplace assault to the police and then expect them to return to work with no guarantee of protection?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: What the member is failing to reflect -- and I would point out that these policies are operational matters and they are not dealt with specifically by the minister -- is that, in the wake of incidents, there is always a review done. Of course there is a review being done right now of policies, procedures and discussions with the union around reporting mechanisms, including reporting to the RCMP.

But the member should not confuse reporting to the RCMP with reporting to the department. Far more important is the reporting to the department and the review that is being done and is always done to ensure that we address the areas in the appropriate manner and, to the best extent possible, protect the safety of the workers. This is done through measures -- again, I must point out to the member -- such as our creation last year of the risk management and quality assurance position focused on ensuring that policies and procedures across the department and specifically in areas where front-line workers are exposed to greater risk, such as this area -- ensuring that those policies and procedures are up to date, are appropriate and, to the best extent possible, reduce and eliminate the risk to the employees, while also recognizing that this is a very challenging situation. That review is underway right now.

Mr. Cardiff: Well, obviously, they aren't working, or there wouldn't be calls to the police and there wouldn't be assaults taking place in the home. It's kind of ironic that while we're talking about reporting, this minister is also responsible

for the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board.

This is a government that's fond of saying it has zero tolerance for violence in the workplace. Under the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board rules, a worker who is injured on the job is required to fill out an injury report. The employer is required to file an employer's report of illness or injury with the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board within three days. Now, according to the Yukon Employees Union, that hasn't happened in the case of the assault that I was referring to. Can the minister explain why the receiving home, which comes under his jurisdiction, is not complying with the *Workers' Compensation Act*?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: That is the member's assertion in this area. I have to stress to the member opposite that in the wake of any incident, there is a review done. That is being done in this case. If there are problems in the way that an incident was handled, then the officials in the department and the union work to ensure that, first of all, steps are taken to do what can be done to prevent an incident the next time and, second, ensure that reporting is dealt with appropriately.

If there were any issues with the reporting of incidents, I am confident that the officials and the union would address this issue as the member quite rightly expects I will ask them to do, and I have asked them to do that. I have to reiterate to the member opposite: we created a position specifically dealing with risk management and quality assurance for the very specific reason of ensuring that employees are kept safe to the best extent possible, and that reporting is appropriate and everything is dealt with in the best possible manner within the Department of Health and Social Services.

Question re: First Nations, government relations with

Mr. Mitchell: Yesterday the Premier said in this House, and I quote the Blues: "Nowhere in the treaties does it explicitly express veto for First Nations, and I am saying that because the member opposite is taking a position that there is indeed a veto if there is a question of consultation."

The Premier knows the difference. This is a perfect example of how this Premier dances with his words in an attempt to justify his government's many shortcomings. At no time did any member on this side of the House ever say or imply such a thing.

Will the Premier now withdraw his misguided comments that he attributed to the opposition?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Speaking of dancing, first let me explain exactly what transpired yesterday. The Official Opposition unequivocally stated that they accepted the ruling of the Yukon court on the matter in the Paulsen case, so let me inform the House today that, given the fact that we are public government and responsible for the public interest, we are obligated to appeal the decision to ensure clarity of the agreements -- the ones the member has just mentioned -- both for the public and First Nations.

Second, instead of taking our guidance from editorials in the *Yukon News*, which cannot be validated, we took the time to access a legal review of the judge's decision, externally and

internally. All reviews provided a consensus that the judge in this case may very well have erred in his ruling; therefore, once again, we as public government are compelled to appeal the judge's ruling.

Mr. Mitchell: Now he's on the record.

The Chief Justice said there was an obligation to consult and accommodate. Obviously the Premier did not read the court's decision with due diligence. Allow me to inform the Premier what in fact the court did say: "There is no obligation to reach agreement and the First Nation does not have a veto. There is a mutual obligation to have a meaningful consultation to determine what accommodation can be made."

What part of that statement does the Premier not understand?

We on this side of the House understand it. Will the Premier now withdraw yesterday's remarks, which he attributed to the opposition, and will he commit to conducting meaningful and sincere consultations with First Nations and, where at all possible, accommodate their concerns?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Given my first answer, wouldn't it be rational to think that the member opposite would try a new question? He has just stated again that the Official Opposition accept fully the ruling in this matter. I have just stated that, given the facts I presented to this House moments ago, public government is compelled and obligated to appeal this decision. The member can quote whatever he wishes about a judge's decision, and he can quote whatever he wishes out of editorials in the *Yukon News*, and the member can quote whatever he wishes from other press releases from people who have not taken the time to fully and thoroughly analyze this decision. I submit here that the member is trying to create an ocean-sized issue on a lily pad's worth of fact.

Mr. Mitchell: What we were trying to get was this minister to be straightforward in what he attributes to others, but we didn't get that. All we got was that he is going to appeal the decision on behalf of public government.

When we talk of public government on this side of the House, we don't cherry-pick which Yukoners we stand up for. We stand up for all Yukoners: the young and the elderly, the affluent and the poor, the healthy and the ill. I remind this Premier that First Nations are Yukoners. Yukoners of all stripes realize that in order for this territory to progress and move forward, this government needs to stop their continual head-butting with the First Nations. We cannot move forward if the government is continually being dragged into the courts for failing to honour its obligations.

Will the Premier at least commit to stop making these ridiculous accusations, stop drawing lines in the sand, and stand up for all Yukoners -- and include all Yukoners when he does so -- and give this matter the dignity it deserves?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Wow, Mr. Speaker, let us talk about cherry-picking. It wasn't this side of the House that misrepresented correspondence of the Ombudsman accusing the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board of wrongdoing. It wasn't this side of the House that misrepresented a hiring policy with the Member for Kluane stating we had an actual employment office in the Adult Warehouse. It wasn't this side of

the House that made a commitment to Yukoners to conduct themselves with the highest standard of ethics and integrity and then bring all this incorrect information to this House. It wasn't this side of the House that had a citizen of this territory, who was a board member -- where the Official Opposition totally refused to provide all the facts in the matter. Why didn't that member state that the board and the chair had made decisions that resulted in insolvency of an employee pension plan that this government undertook to correct and ensure that the board members and the chair were not saddled with the liability. Let's start cherry-picking a little more, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed. We will now proceed with 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: Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 6, *First Appropriation Act, 2007-08*, Department of Health and Social Services. 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 come to order.

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

Department of Health and Social Services -- *continued*

Chair: The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 6, *First Appropriation Act, 2007-08*, Department of Health and Social Services. We will continue with general debate

Hon. Mr. Cathers: It is a pleasure to rise to again resume debate on the budget for the Department of Health and Social Services for the 2007-08 fiscal year.

This year, of course, we have invested significantly once again in the Department of Health and Social Services -- in fact, increasing that investment in this budget by \$25.2 million versus last year's budget and that being in operation and maintenance spending alone -- raising this year's total budget to \$200.9 million for operation and maintenance, added to by an additional \$12.99 million in capital funding, which is itself an increase of \$5 million over last fiscal year. That reflects a 62.9-percent increase over last year's capital budget.

I would like to once again express thanks to members for their comments in debate and, of course, express thanks to the hard-working officials in the Department of Health and Social Services for their ongoing work in this area and the significant work involved in putting together this year's budget. It is has significantly increased the investments in areas of our society.

In this fiscal year, we are launching into a number of new investments, as well as continuing previous investments in areas such as our \$12.7-million health human resources strategy, which was created last year and has already invested in areas related to the attraction, recruitment and assistance with education of health professionals. That, of course, includes the family physician incentive program for new graduates, under which we provide up to \$50,000 for recent graduates from medical school who come to the territory and commit to five years of service. \$50,000 is provided to each one of them at that time.

As well, there is the creation of the medical education bursary, under which we provide \$10,000 to Yukon students attending medical school. If they come back to the Yukon and take their period of residency here in family medicine, we will provide them with an additional \$15,000 per year to assist them in that area. This has been added to, specific to physicians, with the recent announcement last month of the four areas where we are working with the Yukon Medical Association in further enhancing this contribution to physicians, mainly to assist doctors in expanding their private medical clinic buildings to accommodate new physicians, with the criteria of that fund clearly stating that renovations must increase space for at least one new physician who qualifies to have hospital privileges.

The second initiative is providing start-up funds for physicians looking to establish a practice in the Yukon, and this is focused at experienced physicians and goes hand in hand with the family physician incentive program for new graduates, which I previously referred to: one focused specifically at new physicians, the other focused at also providing an incentive for experienced doctors who might be interested in relocating here if they agree to do so.

We are also providing physicians who preceptor a resident physician -- that being a student undergoing medical education during that period of family medical residency -- with a stipend to assist them in that area.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

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

Mr. McRobb: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, you ruled the other day about a member refraining from unnecessary repetitiveness. I would draw your attention to page 1069 of the Blues from June 5, 2007. The minister is repeating information that's already on the record, and I would ask you to be consistent with your previous ruling.

Chair's ruling

Chair: On the point of order, the Chair does not believe there is a point of order. I would urge all members, though, not to repeat unnecessarily. Mr. Cathers, you have the floor.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I know how sensitive the members are to the good news that's in this budget. They don't want to hear it again. I think the member is mistaken. He's noting information that is part of our ongoing efforts to communicate.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

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

Mr. McRobb: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, the Government House Leader is continuing to re-argue his position on the point of order. He's challenging your ruling, and I submit that is not allowed in this Assembly.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: On the point of order, I did not challenge, nor intend to challenge, the Chair on the ruling. I respect your rulings, Mr. Chair, and would urge the member to do the same.

Chair's ruling

Chair: Order please. There is no point of order. Mr. Cathers, please continue.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I know that the member is very frustrated here -- hearing the good news that is in the department -- but I would point out again that this is an important investment for Yukoners. We acted on what Yukoners told us and what health professionals told us. I would urge the members to perhaps focus on engaging in debate on the budget, rather than standing up on points of order.

The fourth area that I wanted to point out was the increased work with the Yukon Medical Association to focus on jointly developing marketing campaigns to attract new physicians to the territory. For those listening who may not have caught the tail end of my point just before, as the Member for Kluane interrupted, I should reiterate that the third point that I was raising in the most recent announcement of new programming under the health human resources strategy specific to physicians -- that we have created a stipend for qualified physicians in the territory who precept or oversee, essentially, a student of medical school during their period of family residency, post-graduation. That is aimed at increasing and enhancing the capacity of doctors within the territory to accept patients and to address that and to assist in that area.

This, of course, is added to by the areas we have invested in specific to nursing -- the expansion last year of the nurse bursary to assist Yukon students attending nursing education. That was a previously existing program but we have significantly added to it by doubling the support for students in that area, as well as doubling the number of applicants that can be accepted. This has been further added to this year by the creation of the nurse mentoring program, which had long been requested by nurses. As members will note, we are the first government to act in this area. We created this program that is focused on the areas of acute care, continuing care and community nursing. The intent of the program is for experienced nurses to transfer some of their knowledge and extensive experience in that area to more recent graduates. This is in recognition of the fact that we have a significant number of nurses reaching retirement age and the importance of transferring that

experience and knowledge on to younger, newer graduates. This will, of course, assist us in areas such as community nursing, where we have had a challenge when the long-serving nurses in those communities choose to retire. It's very difficult to find somebody with that level of experience and expertise in that area.

I am happy to advise members that, if they pick up recent copies of their newspapers, they will note that there are ads in the papers advertising the bursaries that have been created under the \$12.7-million health human resources strategy. The other bursary in this area that I did not yet mention in my remarks today is the health profession education bursary, which is again another new bursary and is to assist Yukoners in other health professions -- in addition to doctors and to nurses -- to obtain the education they need in those areas, with priority areas identified in pharmacy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, dental therapy, speech-language pathology and audiology, medical laboratory, medical radiology, dietetics and nutrition, and licensed practical nursing. That's a \$5,000 annual support to successful applicants.

A key priority of mine as minister and of this government is maintaining and enhancing the Yukon's health care system and our social safety net. We want to maintain our existing system and enhance where possible the services we provide and put a significant focus on addressing the challenges that we expect to face down the road in the next five, 10, 15 and 20 years, recognizing the problem that we face in terms of health professionals and how much of it was caused by flawed decisions made nationally by reducing the number of seats for students at medical schools and in nursing. That, of course, at that time was an attempt to control costs, but it has been shown to have been a very flawed decision that did not take the long view, did not leave us well-prepared today -- as we face retirement of the baby-boom generation in these fields that are not well staffed -- to move into the next phase here after these people retire. Because of the time involved in education, it does take years to adapt to these things and, in the face of that known demographic problem that was going to occur, it would have been a challenge under any circumstances, but the fact that flawed decisions nationwide were made back in the early 1990s exacerbated that problem. It is one of the key factors in why we as a government are focused on taking the long view in this area to maintain and to strengthen Yukon's health care system to adapt to the challenges that will be faced. We will do so in partnership with groups such as the Yukon Medical Association, Yukon Registered Nurses Association and other groups representing the professionals in this area, recognizing that as the system changes and adapts to address the problem of the demographic number of health professionals, health care professionals need to be involved in making those changes.

This government is very focused on working collaboratively and cooperatively with those professionals to develop solutions to address our common problems, because we all have the same goal in mind. We will continue to focus on those relationships and those steps forward, which will include taking action in areas such as the request to move forward on increased recognition of nurse practitioners, allowing them to

practise and utilize their talents and receive their accreditation for hours of work here in the Yukon, which would then be transferable to other jurisdictions -- not, of course, that we would want them to transfer, but we recognize that when a professional in any field moves to a jurisdiction, if their hours are not recognized and they cannot receive full credit for that and lose their certification, it deprives them of the option to move to another area and creates a disincentive for them to choose to move to that jurisdiction in the first place.

I would like to point out that these are the enhancements that have been dealt with in the last year and further continued in this budget. They include the increase to the medical travel subsidy rates from \$30 per day to a new level of \$75 per day for travel outside the territory, as well as making that subsidy effective on the second day of travel outside the territory rather than the fourth day, as was previously the case.

We also increased the in-territory subsidy for rural residents travelling to Whitehorse for hospital and special services from the previous level of 18.5 cents per kilometre to a new level of 30 cents per kilometre and, for the first time, making this coverage available to Yukoners living outside of recognized municipal areas in rural Yukon.

Once again, Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the staff of the Department of Health and Social Services who truly are hard-working, dedicated people who often receive very little credit, particularly when political debate occurs around their jobs and the work that is done in that area. It is important to recognize, and I wish to reiterate that this government recognizes the fine service they provide. The fact is that many of them have very challenging tasks to perform. A tremendous amount of stress is involved in protecting our health and the health of our families, as well as in the social area, providing the social safety net, childcare support, et cetera, for those who need it. It is truly our front-line professionals and their dedication that makes the system run and makes it what it is today. We are committed to working to ensure that it continues to be a system that is second to none in this country in the level of service it provides to its citizens, both on the health side and on the social services side.

It has truly been a pleasure to work with staff over the past year and a half -- not quite year and a half. I look forward to continuing to do so, and I look forward to continued debate with the members opposite during this sitting of the Assembly and the discussion of the budget for the Department of Health and Social Services.

I would encourage members to engage in productive debate and resist the temptation to engage in political grandstanding, which does little to serve the public interest, but instead debate the programs, services and investments and engage in a productive discussion of how we can, together as Members of the Legislative Assembly, recognize and address our responsibility to Yukoners, to our constituents.

For those of us who are ministers, we take responsibility on behalf of the territory to provide that service, to provide a good budget, to provide a good system, and to continue to take the steps forward to provide long-term certainty, continuity and quality in our system.

Mr. Mitchell: I'll thank the minister for what few new items were included in his third repetition of his opening remarks. We'll soon have them memorized.

There are some things going back to the last afternoon when we debated this, June 5. Before the minister called time, so to speak, he made some comments I think we do need to respond to. I wish the minister would follow his own advice about productive debate and politicizing things. The minister made a series of comments about pointing out members of the Official Opposition politicizing excerpts of the Public Accounts Committee reports, unlike past actions. I want to remind the minister that Public Accounts Committee is a non-partisan committee made up of members from all sides of this Legislature. If the minister will take the time -- he said he hadn't had the time -- to read about the hearings that were held here and read the reports that were made -- and I see that his colleague, the Minister of Justice is smiling because she recognizes this -- that those hearings were held --

Chair's statement

Chair: Order. In previous debates, I have given the members great latitude in generalizing the debate. I see we are off to a start of generalizing beyond Health and Social Services. I would advise members, if they do not want me interrupting the debate on a regular basis, to basically limit the debate to Health and Social Services, not public accounts. We are debating the Department of Health and Social Services. Thank you.

Mr. Mitchell: I only wanted to respond to the statements the minister put on the record the last time we discussed it and I think that would be legitimate and I certainly won't depart from anything beyond what the minister said.

The minister did say that we shouldn't quote from public accounts. I want to mention that, when we speak --

Chair's statement

Chair: Order please. I just made a statement that we are getting off topic from Health and Social Services. I would ask all members to respect my ruling and debate Health and Social Services, please.

Mr. Mitchell: I won't make any reference further to the public accounts. I'd simply say that, at hand, of course, are all documents that are tabled in this Legislature, and documents from this Legislature are the sorts of things we will refer to.

I would like to bring up the issue of social assistance rates. The minister has said a number of times that they are studying the social assistance rates, and he has talked about how at times these rates are better than in many other jurisdictions. I just want to indicate what some of these rates are: for one person, \$159 for basic maintenance, \$390 for shelter, \$400 for fuel and utilities; for two people, \$318 for basic maintenance, \$525 for shelter, \$425 for fuel and utilities; for three people, \$477 for basic maintenance, \$625 for shelter, and \$450 for fuel and utilities; for four people, \$636 for basic maintenance, \$640 for shelter, \$475 for fuel and utilities. That's per month.

Now, the minister has previously stated on several occasions that people don't have to go hungry or without shelter because the department has the ability to go outside the bounds of those rates and provide some extraordinary or emergency funding if it becomes necessary. I guess I have a few questions for the minister. How is the study coming along? How is the review of the rates that the minister has previously referred to progressing? Does the minister have a time frame in which he thinks that the department will have completed the review and will be looking at whatever adjustments they feel are justified in the rates?

Second, I want to suggest to the minister that when people are struggling -- and, generally speaking, people who have to rely on social assistance are doing so because they are finding themselves, obviously, short of subsisting without that assistance. These are people who are finding it difficult to support their family on the means that they have available to them. It is a very difficult and often demeaning procedure to have to go back and say, "I can't make it. I need emergency/extraordinary assistance." So it would be better to address these in the rate structure rather than asking people to come back and have to make special pleas for additional help.

Third, I know the minister's colleague, the Minister of Economic Development, likes to quote statistics. I'm sure the minister looks at the monthly statistics that come out of the bureau. Does the minister think that if housing is available for one person, for example, then \$390 is going to cover in any way adequate shelter -- or \$525 for two people or \$625 for three, which presumably would be either an adult and two children or two adults and a child if it's a family situation and obviously there would be a need for more than one bedroom. I know that rental accommodation in the City of Whitehorse as well as across the territory is fairly tight and these are difficult amounts.

I'd like the minister to address the social assistance rates. A frequent response by this minister and this government whenever anything is raised is that, "We are studying it, and don't ask us to cut short the studies." We see how long they have been studying the *Children's Act*, for example, and we still didn't get the legislation tabled last fall as was the minister's expectation or intent -- I believe his word is "intent". Now he has suggested that that might be this fall or next spring. So, how is it going with social assistance? When can we expect this comprehensive review to be completed?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Once again, here we go around again. In reference to the Leader of the Official Opposition's comments related to the Department of Health and Social Services, and his comments previously in debate related to the Watson Lake multi-level care facility and reference to it being referred to in the Auditor General's report on the Department of Highways and Public Works, we've gone through that. That is not in fact accurate.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

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

Mr. Mitchell: You have twice indicated that you don't want to hear public accounts raised here and indicated I should not respond to previous remarks. Now the minister is making

reference to the very same report. What's good for the goose should be good for the gander, Mr. Chair.

Chair's ruling

Chair: On the point of order, I would also like to remind all members once again to please not debate the public accounts. We are debating Department of Health and Social Services.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I respect your ruling, Mr. Chair. I was not attempting to go against the wording or spirit of it. However, the member previously made comments specifically related to an area under the authority of this department and outlined in this year's budget -- that being the Watson Lake multi-level care facility. He reflected on the comments being in the Public Accounts Committee report.

I was simply noting that that was not the case. I will move on to another area. The member asked a question about social assistance rates. I would point out to the member opposite, as I've informed him, this is far beyond a study, as he has typified it. The officials within Health and Social Services are doing an excellent job; they're doing a comprehensive review of the structure, focusing on the adequacy of the rates and on reducing disincentives that prevent people from entering the workforce, as well as providing incentives to assist them to enter the workforce.

The member should recognize here that social assistance is intended to be a safety net. It is not intended to be a long-term lifestyle choice. It needs to be adequate to address the needs of those who are forced to rely on it due to circumstances they can't control. We want to ensure everyone has the food, shelter and clothing they need to exist on a daily basis, but this is not a permanent structure.

For those who currently are covered under the social assistance structure with part of the funding, and are disabled for a long term, there is additional funding provided through the territorial supplemental allowance, which this government significantly increased previously in recognition of the fact that, for people who are in a situation for that reason, it may be a long-term situation. They need to have adequate funding available to also address the additional costs they may face as a disabled person in society.

This whole area is being reviewed because, as I pointed out to the member before on numerous occasions, we want to ensure that emergency funding is not required -- although it is available and officials ensure me that no one, contrary to suggestions and implications from members opposite, is at any point placed in peril or unable to feed or clothe themselves or their children.

The structure does address it now through emergency funding if the rates are not adequate in a specific area. The overall review is being done, focusing on the adequacy and the structure to ensure we help people get into the workforce, including addressing areas that may be there such as training and education, because it may be for those reasons that someone has problems accessing a place within the labour market. Those issues are being looked at as well.

The comprehensiveness of this review involves not only a cross-departmental review but a number of programs that have linkages to other departments. That work is being done. It is a high priority. It is well underway, but it is something we will announce when it is complete. I know how fond the members opposite are of timelines and how fond they are of saying that if something is a month past its timeline, it means things were done wrong, but the members need to recognize that doing the hard work of government, as a process evolves, sometimes identifies a need for more work to be done in that area. We are committed to ensuring that the final product is the right final product, not hitting a timeline for the timeline's sake. This area of social assistance review is a key priority, and it will be dealt with as expeditiously as we can. I look forward to announcements in the not-too-distant future. The review needs to be completed. Recommendations need to be made to me as the minister, and that is then subject, of course, to the review process by Cabinet and Management Board, which includes review by the Department of Finance, and other affected departments. The Department of Justice would be involved, of course, particularly if any recommendations include restructuring of the regulations to address rates or other areas. These are all issues that have significant impact across a significant number of departments and officials within those. For the member to suggest we should pull a timeline out of the air would simply not be appropriate. It will be done as expeditiously as possible, and I look forward to that being complete.

Knowing the officials and the work they are engaged in and the intent of this, I am confident that we will have an extremely positive outcome. I look forward to announcing that when that comes out, because I am confident that at the end of the day we will have a significant improvement in our system, which will make the Yukon's system an even better system than it is today. I think at the end of it we will confidently say that it will be a system better geared to giving people a hand up and genuinely helping them into the workforce than any other system in the country.

It will be a leader in that area. It will also ensure that for those who are forced to rely on social assistance, in all times and in all areas, the issue of adequacy is addressed and ensure people do not have to seek emergency funding for areas outside of truly extraordinary needs.

The Leader of the Official Opposition also asked about the *Children's Act*. We have discussed this matter. We have pointed out the opposition's inability to decide what their position is, whether they think this government consults too much or too little. They're focused on criticizing the government, no matter what it does. When the government, in working with partners on the *Children's Act* review, with First Nations in this area -- and when based on the input from our partner and from the public -- determines that there's a need to do further review, further discussion and to come to an agreement, rather than simply ramming things through as the Liberals did with the flawed and incomplete *Education Act* review -- or attempted to do during their short time in office -- we are actually going to do the hard work and get it done. If that requires going beyond the timeline -- and that's unfortunate -- so be it.

At the end of the day, unlike the members' practice, we're going to have a finished product that reflects the needs of all Yukoners and has had the detailed policy consideration and discussion that is necessary to ensure a good final product. That's what is going on with the *Children's Act* review.

The member should recognize this is a groundbreaking process. I would challenge the member to find another area in this country where public government is, to this extent, working in partnership with First Nations in an area that remains within the public area of responsibility and jurisdiction. While, at the end of the day, the public government must, in all areas, make the decisions that reflect the needs of all spectrums of the public, we recognize that the *Children's Act* has a significant effect on many First Nation citizens and that's why we're committed to working with them in this area, addressing the concerns they bring forward to ensure that together we come up with the solutions on how we can further improve this area -- on what is already a good system. The member should reflect on that, instead of criticizing the system and the officials who work in the system. They should recognize that we have a very fine system today but, despite that, we know there are ways that we believe it can be made even better. That's exactly what we're doing.

Mr. Chair, I would like to go back to the member's questions about social assistance. Regarding some of the rates that the member was pulling out, I want to point out that he's not reflecting areas such as the involvement of the Yukon Housing Corporation, where housing is provided to many people who are affected and who are on social assistance. They are not reflecting the fact -- and they should -- that this government took a very different approach to social assistance and that people in society who are not employed from the Liberal government did during their short time in office. What they did was drive the problem out of the territory. They shut down the economy. They had a mass exodus of population. The social assistance rolls grew significantly under their watch.

We focused on recognizing that the biggest help to people who don't have a job is to create an economy where they have the opportunity to apply for a job. We don't believe that people want to be on social assistance. Providing them the opportunity to be engaged in the workforce is important -- that and the economic benefits of moving forward, of developing the economy, of proceeding with industry and with stakeholders in this area to develop the Yukon economy rather than send it packing south in U-Hauls. Those are the most significant actions we took to address this area and to help those who are of low income or who are unemployed. The total number of people on social assistance has certainly decreased significantly below what it was at under the Liberals' watch, because those people have found jobs, and the people who are left on those rolls, considering the current challenges in many areas of the labour market actually finding employees, are people who often have other challenges preventing them from entering the labour force.

That is our biggest focus in reviewing social assistance rates and structure. We are not simply dealing with the adequacy -- although it's important and is a major area of review

under this -- but we are focusing on what is preventing these people from being able to enter the workforce. In most cases, it's by no means a personal choice or a decision. It may be an issue of lack of training; it may be an issue of challenges with entering the workforce due to financial disincentives or other areas. We're taking a look at this. We're doing a full review of this area, and we'll be stepping forward. I will point out another area on which we've made a recent announcement. It is very key and related to this area, and that is the issue of the investment in childcare. Once again, this government has further invested in it and has committed to investments in future years, because, for some people on social assistance, one of the challenges can be the cost of childcare.

That's why we have committed to further investing and to further investing in the subsidy that is provided to parents on low income to access childcare.

Once again, I remind members opposite that when this government took office, the investment in childcare was a mere \$4.4 million annually by the Yukon government. We invested and increased funding by \$900,000 per year to raise the level to \$5.3 million, which last year averaged an investment of \$5,462 per child. We have committed to providing a further increase of \$500,000 in this fiscal year and to adding, by the end of the mandate, an increase that will total \$1.2 million, raising the total annual level of investment to \$6.5 million, placing the Yukon truly at the forefront of jurisdictions in the country in terms of investment in this area.

As we are at our current level, I point out and again remind members that the territory's level of investment per child is second only to Quebec in this country. It is significantly in excess of some of the other jurisdictions in this country. We are very proud of what we have done in this area. We have already stepped forward considerably and we are committed to doing more.

That is related, of course, to the member's concerns relating to social assistance because, as I pointed out, childcare rates can be a challenge for low-income parents and can be a disincentive to those on social assistance entering the workforce if in fact they would end up with less money at the end of the day because they have several children. That's one of the reasons why we will be increasing the subsidy in this fiscal year to help low-income parents.

Mr. Mitchell: I'll tell you, Mr. Chair, that was quite another little display, but the minister wants to parse words. I think if he goes back and looks at the Blues, I said, "studying or reviewing". I used both terms because I believe I heard the minister refer to it both ways, but I did say review as well as study. If the minister wants to burn the clock talking about this, it isn't just some study.

Then he started to talk about incentives to work or not having disincentives and I'm a little concerned. I've heard this minister go there before. He is right on the edge of suggesting -- I think he is expressing his philosophical views and he went on to talk about the biggest help being a job and about past economies. I agree that most everyone wants to work when they can too, but there is a whole myriad of reasons why people

find it difficult to work. It is not just whether there are jobs available and it is not just whether they are trained for them.

Some people have problems -- and I won't elaborate on them here, but they cause it to be very difficult for people to work a regular job, or they may have children with special needs and with whom they feel they need to spend more time. There are a whole lot of reasons. They themselves may have problems.

I hope the minister will understand that, when he says we just want some arbitrary date, that's not it. On any of these things -- from the *Children's Act* to social assistance -- we could go on and on, and every answer we get is that we're not going to have an arbitrary timeline, we're not just going to do a rudimentary job of looking into something and we're going to be thorough.

While the minister is thoroughly reviewing, people are continuing to struggle. That's why they write letters; that's why they call on the opposition members. It's because they are struggling. They don't want to hear that the minister is reviewing it and the minister will be so thorough he can't even say what time frame he has asked the department to report back in.

Then to suggest that we're criticizing the department -- the minister knows full well that we recognize that the people in the department are working hard. We'd like to hear what the minister has suggested as a time frame to the department or what time frame the department has suggested to the minister within which they would be able to complete the review. That's what we've asked about.

Up until now, if people will review the Blues, they'll see that, besides repeating his opening remarks -- not verbatim but in great similarity three times during this debate -- if we ask the minister a straightforward question like when the *Children's Act* will be tabled in the Legislature or when the review will be completed, what we get is a long exposition on a whole lot of different areas because the minister wants to use up the time so we can't ask the questions. He doesn't like answering the questions.

I'll move to another area: grandparents' rights and funding for grandparents and other relatives, such as aunts or uncles who may find themselves -- and this happens a great deal within Yukon. It certainly happens within First Nations, which take a very wide view of the responsibilities for looking after children, and it happens within non-First Nation situations. I have had more than one constituent call me to say they have a problem; they need to look after their grandchildren because, for whatever reason, the adult children are not currently in a position to do so, but they're being told that, in order to get economic support -- because they're not in a situation where they were planning on raising another family and don't have the means -- they have to apply formally to become a foster parent.

I asked the minister this before, and he did agree that there were some difficult situations when we previously discussed it, but he also pointed out that there were concerns and we had to be certain. It was a complicated issue in terms of safety, and so forth. As he has continued to review this with departmental officials -- perhaps he can ask the official who is with him -- are there any plans toward making funding more accessible for

other close family members such as grandparents or aunts and uncles -- to name the most obvious ones -- who find themselves in a parental situation with minor children without necessarily having the means to do so? I was told by one constituent who called me and said, "I don't want to have to go through a process or apply for social assistance or anything else, but I am methodically cashing in my RRSPs to pay for expenses I never anticipated having." I will add that to the mix.

The minister talks about childcare, so I again will say to the minister, yes, the minister put out a news release and made an announcement. There wasn't a great deal of detail in it, other than the absolute numbers. There wasn't a great deal of explanation as to how those numbers would flow to the eventual employees and how those dollars would raise the wages of employees. We spoke with the head of the Childcare Association, as well as the head of the day home association, and they were concerned that it was not sufficient. We have heard previously, as we had put in our platform, that there was a need to increase the childcare direct operating grant to licensed childcare centres and family day homes by at least 25 percent, and increase the subsidy to qualifying parents by \$100 per month, and raise the income cut-off to qualify for the subsidy by 25 percent, and a number of other things.

The minister's new funding will come to roughly half of what we were talking about and what the Childcare Association and the Society of Yukon Day Homes had asked for. They are saying that it is not sufficient. Of course, any additional funding is appreciated, but it's not sufficient.

So I'll ask the minister if he has done an analysis, or if the department officials have, of how much funding can be expected to flow to the people working in this industry and what that will bring their pay up to, if that computation was part of coming to the dollar amount that he came to. I'm sure they weren't arbitrary amounts. He reviewed it -- he didn't study it -- he reviewed it and then he came to some numbers.

I'm going to add a couple of other things in, because I know that the minister may speak for 20 minutes each time I ask questions. I don't like to do this, but the minister has forced me to do this and I know he'll take notes.

In order to move things along, I would also like to mention to the minister I did attend the annual general meeting a couple of weeks ago of FASSY and they were disappointed that the minister couldn't make it. I listened to them and they were appreciative of the increased funding levels that they've had over the last number of years. They did still indicate that they were concerned about the fact that, every year, they find themselves in a situation as an NGO of waiting until a budget is tabled and passed to know whether or not their programs will continue to be funded.

As we tend to go into these budget sessions after the end of the fiscal year, it forces them to consider giving layoff notices to employees that they're not certain they can continue to support. I know the minister, when he stands up, will tell us how much more funding he has provided than previous governments. What I want to hear is if the department is considering multi-year agreements in the case of some of these associations

and NGOs, particularly the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society Yukon, which has asked whether that will be done.

I'm going to put a couple of others out there, because I want to try to get through some of this debate and I know that there are other members who want to speak.

Dental services -- we've heard recently about the problem of coming up with dentists to go into rural areas. We didn't have dentists in most rural areas. What we had were Whitehorse dentists who were going out and doing this. We understand that the dentists who are currently practising in Whitehorse have sufficient work in Whitehorse and are not interested in continuing with this process. So I want to know what the minister is doing about filling the gap -- no pun intended.

Also, in terms of ambulance services, there was public discussion in the past about the possibility of the construction of an ambulance station and training facility at the top of Two Mile Hill. There was some talk that it might be co-located with the new fire hall that the City of Whitehorse is building and there might be some cost-savings for the municipality and the territory involved. But the municipality has indicated that they need to go ahead with their project, and we haven't heard anything recently about the possibility of either a relocation or a second station, depending on which approach the government might take. With the continuing population growth on the west side of the Alaska Highway, as well as up and down the highway, some of the ambulance runs are becoming very long. I've been told by some of the emergency services personnel, the ambulance attendants, that in some cases -- particularly, for example, with the continued growth of Copper Ridge and the bottlenecks that sometimes occur around the traffic circle and roundabout up by the school -- they're getting beyond that critical period of time when dealing with certain emergencies -- particularly life-threatening emergencies like heart attacks -- and they are concerned. I'm wondering if any decisions have been made or if the minister can elaborate on that.

So there are a few questions that I'll leave on the minister's plate, and we'll see whether he can answer any of them.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: The member fired off a whole list of questions. The member is well aware that, in discussion here, we have a consistent pattern. If we don't spend enough time on the reply, the members complain we didn't answer the question fully and they complain about the response given; if we spend the time and answer it fully, then the members complain we're talking too long. It's very frustrating trying to give the members what they want and figure out how much we should say; or perhaps, no matter what the government does, the opposition will say it was wrong, and that's very frustrating.

We're attempting to engage in positive debate. I would urge the members to redouble their efforts to try to do the same.

With regard to the issue of timelines, which the member brought in at the beginning of his discussions, I would point out that, when the member seems to suggest that he thinks a timeline is simply an attempt to stall, he should look at our record of delivery. Yet on the other hand, when I actually remind the member of what has been delivered during my short tenure prior to the election alone, the member doesn't like to hear it.

The member complains we shouldn't be reading it, that they've heard it before.

Of course they've heard it; we announced it in the press release; it shows up on the radio; it shows up in newspapers; we refer to it in the interest of communicating with the public.

We remind the members opposite that we have a record of doing what we say we'll do and delivering to Yukoners, but they don't like hearing it. That's very unfortunate.

In the areas related to the *Children's Act* review, I told the member the best guess for a timeline during previous debate and reminded him of the process that was taken in the past and the reason we extended the timeline, which was based on the discussions and what we heard back from our partners, the Council of Yukon First Nations and the public. That identified a need to take further time to get the *Children's Act* review right and that's exactly what we did. We proceeded with that. It will come to completion, and it will be a very fine product when it's done -- I'm confident of that. It will be a significant step forward and will be a piece of legislation we can be very proud of nationally.

Again, I have to reiterate and remind members that we have a very good system today, but we're taking the step forward to further improve it.

Another area that the member mentioned was the issue of foster families. I would point out, if the member took a look at the Yukon Party's election platform, page 9, we committed to review the funding arrangement for foster families and we will do that. That is something that will be proceeded with, but the member needs to recognize that time is involved in completing all the business of review under the government's watch. Officials have to maintain the system as we review, through the policy end, how we can make improvements and enhancements.

I know it is fun for the members to stand up and suggest the government should do it faster or do it all at once, but the reason that things need to be dealt with in a coherent, staged and sensible fashion is that, if a government sets a million priorities -- like the former Prime Minister, Mr. Martin -- they risk getting into the situation where they make a whole range of promises and have everything as a top priority and, like the former Prime Minister, get absolutely nothing done and find themselves sitting on the sidelines very quickly.

We instead take a staged, appropriate approach. We let officials do the work; we work with them. That stuff, that work is being done. It will continue to be done, and we will continue to make announcements throughout this entire mandate. I'm sure the members opposite will be pulling their hair out trying to figure out how they are going to criticize, because they will recognize at the bottom of their hearts that it is a significant improvement, that they are good announcements and good work is done on behalf of Yukoners by this government and by the hard-working employees within the government, and we look forward to that debate.

I am trying to sort out the long list of the member's questions here. The member asked questions related to a new childcare act. I would point out this government, unlike previous governments, actually did what we said we would do. We not

only talked the talk, but walked the walk, giving a significant investment -- an investment far beyond what previous governments have done -- increasing by \$900,000 the total annual investment in childcare, bringing the total level to \$5.3 million or, last year, an average investment of \$5,462 per child.

I have to emphasize that again to the members opposite, because they don't seem to listen and modify their cunning questions and actually engage in debate on what has been referred to by me and other ministers in debate on the budget.

The member asked for a number of things on this and he, in fact, referred to differing requests from the childcare community and I'm not sure he even realized they were different requests. In investing in childcare, either an investment to the base funding of the direct operating grant is a priority or wages are a priority. I'm not saying investment can't be made in both areas, as we did last time, but the member can't stand up and say that wages are the priority and then say base funding for administration and overhead is the priority and expect it to be treated as credible by the Yukon public.

We listened to the work that was done and the reports from the stakeholders during the four-year plan last time, and they identified wages as being the largest funding issue for childcare workers. The direct operating grant increase included a significant increase to administrative and base-funding provisions in that 40-percent increase to the direct operating grant. Then the childcare community told us that it was not the most effective way to make the investment. We listened to that, which is why we will be providing funding directly and specifically for wages, with accountability in that funding arrangement to provide the accountability we must provide to the Yukon public as a whole.

The member needs to recognize that what we have here is the second-best funded system in the country, plus a commitment to invest a further \$1.2 million per year. That, in rough numbers, is about a 20-percent increase over the level. In fact, if the members take the level of childcare funding at the beginning of our first mandate and compare it to the \$6.5 million at which it will stand at the end of this mandate, they will find it's an increase of total funding to childcare of about 50 percent annually.

Did the members, when they had their chance at government, invest in childcare? No, they did not. They picked a fight with the childcare community. They did not invest. They talked a good talk. Federally, they talked a good talk for 13 years before they got around to delivering a plan at the last minute, when they knew they were on the verge of facing a non-confidence vote. But for 13 years sitting as a majority government they did absolutely nothing but promise the sky and deliver crumbs. Now, Mr. Chair, this government, in contrast to that, does what we say we'll do. We promise small and deliver big. That's what we did with childcare. That's what we'll continue to do.

Another issue that the member mentioned was the location of the emergency medical services and the possibility of EMS co-location with the city's fire hall at the top of Two Mile Hill. I have to point out to the member opposite that it was the City of Whitehorse that said they did not want to co-locate. We re-

main committed to working with them on that, but we can't force them to work with us. They said the option was off the table. They had no desire to pursue that, and they told us that very early in this mandate. We were disappointed by that indication, but they had no desire to continue, and so we are working with them to explore other options, such as the current fire hall location at the top of Two Mile Hill. When you're working with another government, when you're working with a partner in this area, if they choose to not proceed in this area, we can't force them to do so.

Similarly, there's another area very near and dear to my heart as an MLA: the funding the government offered to extend the rural well program into city limits in Whitehorse. Whitehorse has chosen not to accept that, despite YTG putting all the cash on the table. We can't force them to partner with us in that area. All we can do is attempt to convince them to do that. So that, with the issue of the EMS co-location with the city's fire hall, the city has taken that option off the table and has indicated they have no interest in discussing it. Should they reconsider, we would remain interested in discussing that. In the absence of that, we will look at other options, including the possibility of using space that they vacate in the fire hall. I'm hopeful those discussions will continue, and they certainly will continue from our end. Again, in working with a partner, the partner has their own free will and choice in this area.

The member mentioned the area of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society of Yukon and the security of funding. What the member did not recognize -- and I'm sure he must be aware of this -- is the funding arrangements. We provided bridge funding at one point. Last year we provided bridge funding in this area to cope with the loss of federal government funding, and we're currently working with them on providing that long-term security in that area.

I remind the member that it was the Liberal federal government that cut this funding and did absolutely nothing to address it. This is in the federal scheme of things. A \$200,000 annual investment is not very large out of the federal budget. Yet, for some strange reason, the Yukon's Member of Parliament did not go to work on this area, did not address it and did not deliver. He delivered platitudes and excuses but failed to deliver on his promises and actually provide secure funding for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society of Yukon. In the absence of the federal government's commitment -- the federal Liberal government -- we stepped forward to address the gap.

With regard to family and children's services, I must remind the member opposite that this is an area where we have continued the investment in this fiscal year. Should we ever get to the point of line-by-line debate -- which is at the member's discretion -- I'm sure we will engage in debate where we can provide the member detailed information but also point out that this year's investment in this area totals \$32.25 million -- a very significant investment in this area and an increased investment over last fiscal year. Once again, unlike the federal Liberal government and the Liberals, when they had the short time in office in the territory, we actually deliver on what we promise.

Mr. Mitchell: That was quite fascinating. In just one answer, the Minister of Health and Social Services managed to

take the time to criticize a former Prime Minister of the country and indicate that his shortcomings were why he served such a short time as Prime Minister. I would point out that he served many years as Finance minister. He served all Canadians quite well and it's quite ludicrous to listen to this young minister talk about a Prime Minister of Canada -- unbelievable.

I'm sure he was studying the Prime Minister of Canada when he was Finance minister and a Member of Parliament when he was still taking his school lessons, but nevertheless. Then he took shots at our current Liberal Member of Parliament who has been elected about three times, I believe, but I guess he is interested in debating a different campaign here right now. We'll see how that goes. I think our current Member of Parliament is well-respected all over this territory. Anywhere you go, people are calling him by his first name, and they are calling "Larry", not "Brad", so perhaps this Health and Social Services minister has other aspirations, but I don't think we have to worry too much about that.

The other day this minister, who is constantly suggesting that we on this side are criticizing officials, took the time to criticize a current official working elsewhere in government and indicated that she had perhaps, in discussing and in helping us develop a platform that included a trial, collaborative health care clinic, suggested that she had announced our platform using information that the government had shared in that process. That is quite remarkable. I have had discussions with that individual and have been assured that anything she brought forward were items that she and others had brought forward to government, not items that they learned from government. Collaborative health clinics occur across the country and around the world as an alternative method of providing increased services, not replacing the existing types of services that we have, so to make that suggestion is quite remarkable.

The minister didn't answer the question about dental services. I guess maybe raising four or five issues at once was too much for him, but I will point out that when we raise one, we are still going to get a long, long response about many. He also, in responding to the issue of the possible ambulance station at the top of Two Mile Hill, only made reference to the city -- according to him -- indicating they didn't want to co-locate. I believe what the city had said was that they couldn't wait any longer for the territorial government to make decisions, but he didn't answer the question I asked about whether it be co-located or stand-alone. I would ask him again.

Let's forget the debate over who pulled out of what consideration of co-locating and simply answer this question: is the government considering an additional or replacement ambulance station located perhaps more centrally to some of the ambulance runs they have to make and where there are a lot of people residing?

There are some references in the budget document and there were some references made in the briefing to early psychosis intervention. I did ask some questions of the officials when we had the briefing. Unfortunately it has been all too topical. Around the time we had the briefing, we were still feeling the recent events at Dawson College in Montreal, but more recently at Virginia Tech in the U.S. I'd like the minister to

provide us with some explanation of what sort of programming this is meant to be. Will it address the mental illness or mental health problems that have led to these tragic events?

The officials indicated that it would, but they didn't give any more detail than that. Will this help us to identify and treat young people sooner so that perhaps we can avoid these sorts of tragedies?

I will ask one more question because I do want the minister to answer at least a few of these questions. Perhaps, if we give him an option, he will answer at least one. The third party raised this and we hear it constantly from the public about the need for long-term alcohol and drug treatment programs. We have heard that the current program -- in particular, the residential options -- is insufficient and that these particular durations lead to relapses, and then we are treating the same people again and again. I think there was even an official who was working in one of these programs and made some public comment about the difficulties. Are there any plans for longer term residential treatment programs, and are there any plans for different sorts of residential options -- some that might be perhaps more culturally appropriate for First Nation people, for example?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: The member again asked a long list of questions, some of them going back on each other. First of all, I can't help but express some joy at the member's failure to do his research in the area of the federal government, as he lauded the former Prime Minister and former Finance minister, Mr. Martin, for his work as Finance minister and as Prime Minister.

I would point out that the facts are the facts. One of the issues that the Yukon and every province and territory is trying to cope with is the aftermath of the federal Liberal government under Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and then Finance minister Paul Martin slashing the health and social transfer payments to the provinces and the territories. The cuts to that were also compounded by, I believe, a five-percent cut to the entire territorial funding formula, which they did not put back in place. It was that this new federal government, the Conservatives, recognized the need to increase the TFF funding arrangement significantly, beyond the minor escalator amounts and the arguing over tiny portions of a small pot that had been proposed by the Liberals once they realized that even they had gone too far in balancing the budget on the backs of the provinces.

Again, many of the problems we're faced with today are as a result of the slashing and the cutting of that funding by the federal Liberal government in the 1990s, which significantly diminished the ability of every province and territory to meet their base needs in health and social services. Those are the facts. If the member wants to stand up and commend how wonderful that was and what a great job they did -- well, we know his position. We believe that it's important for the federal government to honour the responsibilities under equalization and to give the money to the provinces and the territories to address the needs of the citizens who paid the money into the taxation system in the first place, while providing national equity and a national standard in these programs, through the funding which is the basic structure of equalization and the territorial funding formula.

Mr. Chair, moving on to other areas affecting this year's current budget, the member raised the issue of EMS again, and I have to stress to the member, if he had listened to my previous reply rather than sticking to his script, he would have noticed that I replied to the question. We are currently still working with the city to look at options of possibly moving into the fire hall building once they vacate that, if indeed they do, since their new fire hall project has significantly ballooned in cost, which is causing them a significant degree of angst right now. Beyond that, should that not prove to be a workable option for us, we will look at other options for improving the timeliness of EMS through creation of facilities to house the ambulance at a more centralized location, enabling us to fall within the base response times as identified within the national standards and within the study that was done of the typical response times within the City of Whitehorse.

Also, the member touched on an interesting point with regard to collaborative practice. I would point out that the member is absolutely incorrect. This minister certainly did not criticize any employee of the government in this area. I know the member is very sensitive in this area and trying desperately to get as much credit as he can for this idea, but I have to remind him that the idea of collaborative practice has been put in place in other jurisdictions. That's what we're looking at. Work locally was done by what is referred to as the "group of seven" health professions -- and with the reluctance of the YMA recently, which we discussed previously in this House, sometimes referred to as "the group of seven minus one".

The way we will continue to work with them is in planning as well as pursuing the YMA's full engagement in the process and development of a collaborative practice clinic to ensure it reflects the input of all the health professionals and their expertise so we come up with a facility that is an enhancement to an area of the system and does not cause any problem or destabilization of other elements of the system, including the privately owned family practices. We think this is one of the concerns of the Yukon Medical Association but, again, they need to come to the table and fully bring their concerns forward before we can address them.

With regard to alcohol and drug services, we have discussed here on the floor in the past the investment and significant increases that have occurred, the creation of new positions in this fiscal year through the seven-percent increase in funding to alcohol and drug services -- an increase of \$244,000. This brings the total level to \$3.682 million and 41.95 FTE positions. This is a significant action.

If the member is wondering what we're going to do, he needs only refer to previous comments in this Legislature or the platform we were elected on in 2006, *Building Yukon's Future Together: A Clear Vision for a Bright Future*. If the member takes a look at it, he'll realize we committed to going further in the area of treatment through continuing the implementation of the alcohol and drug treatment programs that are offered through the Sarah Steele treatment centre and working with First Nation governments, NGOs and other stakeholders to develop more treatment centres and programs throughout the territory.

That is exactly what we're going to do, and we will be moving forward in this area. I look forward to making announcements when the discussions and work necessary to lead up to putting in place the appropriate programming is dealt with.

In reference to the issue of whether treatment or not is working and the perceptions of that, the member should talk to some of the experts in this area and understand that one of the problems with substance abuse is that it is typical for individuals to go through different types of treatment or the same type of treatment several times. It's usually not on the first time, the first treatment session, that the change and the cessation of the addictive behaviour ceases. The member need only look at perhaps more publicly displayed addictions, such as addiction to tobacco, which is evident. We all know of people who have tried to quit numerous times, and what is typical in that area as with other areas of intoxicating substances such as alcohol and drugs, the person requires more than one time through treatment to achieve whatever change within themselves that they need to actually break away from that addiction, whether it be tobacco, alcohol or drugs.

That is the reason why the member should not be so simplistic as to suggest that treatment, because it hasn't worked the first time, is somehow a bad treatment. There are many different types of treatment. The in-patient treatment is something that had been cancelled by the NDP government. They had cut the funding to Crossroads, and we established it internal to government within the Sarah Steele Building -- the 28-day program. In fact, we've increased the number of 28-day programs to nine in this fiscal year compared to six in the last fiscal year. This is yet another demonstration of this government's continued investment in this important area.

Mr. Mitchell: The minister has made a couple of comments in answering the questions that do concern me. Twice he has referred to -- this must be some little catch phrase that he likes -- the group of seven minus one and made reference to the Yukon Medical Association as being reluctant to take part in discussions on collaborative health care. I let it go the first time. He did it the other day and he has done it again. I just think that he is being disrespectful of the Yukon Medical Association and doctors if he refers to them as "the group of seven minus one". If it's a case of not liking to hear what one or another part of a consultation process has to say, at the end of the day the government can make its decisions, but I don't think that it's helpful to be dissing -- by the way he describes one of the partners in a consultation process. We've seen enough of that in other areas.

I have a couple more questions in terms of issues we have been talking about.

Under child protection services, we have mandatory reporting of suspected abuse for teachers, for educators. First of all I know it from the act; second, my wife is a teacher and has been in that position. If teachers have reason to suspect that there is physical abuse or sexual abuse of a child, they must report it and there are legal consequences if they don't. They exist under the *Education Act*. They have an obligation, but not others. I am wondering if, since we don't know when we will

see the new *Children's Act*, the minister can let us know whether or not any kind of mandatory reporting in other areas for workers who come into contact with children is something that would be included in that.

Again, he answered the alcohol and drug services question about long-term treatment programs. He has indicated where it is going. I didn't hear an answer or explanation about the early psychosis intervention and what that will hope to accomplish. If he refers to the officials, if he doesn't know off the top of his head, I think he can answer that question. I think he missed it when we asked how we are going to deal with the shortage of dentists who can go out into our rural areas to provide service and whether any progress has been made there.

Finally, I just want to refer to some of the statistics the minister has had in this budget. I refer back to May 18 of last year, during general debate, when this minister was early on in his time in the portfolio, and I indicated that we had an aging demographic, that there were consequences, and that we weren't going to be able to play catch-up if we didn't move forward.

Some of the statistics in here: Macaulay Lodge, average number of people on the waiting list year to year, up 30 percent; number of months on the waiting list, up 60 percent -- it's on page 11-26. On page 11-22, the Yukon population aged 55 and over is up seven percent; Copper Ridge Place -- page 11-27 -- number of people on the waiting list, up 100 percent; number of months' wait, up 300 percent; McDonald Lodge, both areas up 100 percent.

I know that the numbers of people may be small in some cases, so if you have to swing from three to six, that is 100 percent, and I recognize that, but these are the statistics that the minister has provided us. These are people -- every one of them doesn't want to be thought of as a statistic, even if it's only two or three or five or six. They are people who are waiting.

Beyond the Thomson Centre -- and we don't know when it will open and what it will accomplish -- we have an aging demographic; is there a long-term plan -- better than the long-term plan that the minister's colleague, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, had for planning new residential lot development for service lots within the City of Whitehorse -- because we have a three-year gap there? Is there a plan? We know that from the time we start to plan a building, be it a school or health facility, we are looking at least three years from planning to the building being completed and in service -- probably longer, based on the track record we have seen over the past four years.

So has the minister planned beyond the 12 beds in Copper Ridge Place and whatever portion of Thomson Centre, when its problems are finally resolved, to other options and intermediate options beyond that?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I thank the member for what I would refer to as a left-handed compliment. He referred to an issue with lots in the City of Whitehorse, which of course is something that I would urge him to take up in debate with the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. But I do appreciate his left-handed compliment, in that the member yet again is blaming this government for actions he knows full well are due to action and interaction with other governments and the re-

sponsibility in those areas, recognizing in that area the City of Whitehorse planning process and the official community plan. But it's just another good example, although not relevant to this department, that the member is having a hard time finding things to criticize about what this government is doing. So I appreciate that left-handed compliment.

With regard to the issue of the *Children's Act* and mandatory reporting, I have to remind the member opposite the *Children's Act* is under discussion right now. We will certainly make everything public before it is passed into legislation. That has gone through public consultation. Those types of things were brought forward in that process, but I'm not going to release draft reports as the members are so fond of asking for but, of course, would never have released themselves, although it appears from some of their behaviour that they would act on draft information.

The member mentioned the issue of early psychosis intervention, and I see that I may have indeed missed responding to that in the previous reply. Again, I have to point out to the member that, if he gave me a shorter list of questions, there is less chance in flipping back and forth between pieces of paper that I've written on that I would miss one of his questions.

So early psychosis intervention, as far as whether it would prevent issues such as the tragic shootings in the United States, is one of the hopes that it would deal with, but to actually predict whether any psychological intervention is going to be successful for youth or for adults, there is never a guarantee. It is something that clinical psychologists and others in this area would inform the member, if he sat down with them, that these things are always an attempt, but there are no guarantees in this area. When someone is being helped to address mental challenges, addiction challenges or other behavioural issues, there is a need for personal recognition, personal action, personal acceptance and personal understanding of what their problems are, and that is just a very simplistic overview of the issues. To actually get into a detailed discussion of what mental challenges people are afflicted with is something that would take a great amount of time. Although I have some understanding of that area, I certainly do not have the detailed expertise. If the member wishes to hear a very detailed explanation of clinical psychology, it would best come from a clinical psychologist.

I hope that has answered the member's question. I would again just emphasize, in summary, that, yes, early psychosis intervention focused on children and youth is aimed at preventing them from engaging in behavioural activities that are detrimental to themselves and to others.

Violence is the worst action as a result of a behavioural problem, and violence involving death would be the very worst result of that. That would be the type of thing we would hope to prevent through this. If the member is asking for guarantees, I don't think he'll find a psychologist or mental health clinician anywhere in the world who would be so presumptuous as to give him a guarantee of whether or not they'll be able to cure someone. It's a challenge and the professionals in those areas have to deal with it.

The member asked about continuing care and the Thomson Centre. I would point out to the member, as I've laid out previ-

ously, that one of the things this government will be doing is going beyond the issue of just continuing care facilities, which we have significantly invested in and will continue to invest in. Continuing care within this year's budget is an investment of \$23.7 million.

As we move forward, we'll not only enhance the facilities within Whitehorse and communities such as Watson Lake and Dawson City -- and, ultimately, a consideration of other areas where need may exist such as Teslin, at such time as that becomes necessary -- and the need for a seniors facility -- in Haines Junction -- which is another option, of course, in other communities. I should point out the seniors facility is more toward the central living complex and is through the good work of the Yukon Housing Corporation and their investment in that area. Through working in partnership within departments and dealing with corporations such as Yukon Housing Corporation, we'll continue to invest in this area and take the next step forward.

This investment I referred to in the budget has been added to, of course, by our recent investment in opening up the remaining wing of Copper Ridge Place. Because the announcement came partway through the fiscal year and is in the process of coming on stream in as timely a manner as possible, it will not require that full amount of money in this fiscal year, but the annual cost of operating will be \$1.47 million for the 12 new beds in operation at Copper Ridge. That is an area in which we will continue to invest.

We have discussed the Thomson Centre at significant length. I see from the member's indication that they perhaps wish to discuss it further. We will address the issues there once we receive the reports back and determine what needs to be done to be confident that when we open that facility for continuing care and a palliative care unit, everything is indeed addressed in that area. Once the work is complete and once the work is done to ensure that the facility is appropriate and operational and we can be confident problems will not develop in the future as we have had in the past, then that will be opened. We will announce that at that point.

I should also point out that members will open it at the time the facility is ready. We will open it in the stages that are justified by the need. We are not going to open 44 beds at once if there is only a need for a handful of them. We'll open as many beds as need be opened.

The member referred to my comments on the collaborative practice working group and suggested that I was somehow being disrespectful of the Yukon Medical Association by referring to the group of seven recently as the group of seven minus one. The member should be aware that the Yukon Medical Association members in recent months have pulled back from the table and it was expressed to me directly by the president that this is because they had some concerns with the clinic. I, of course, in response indicated that we respect their concerns. We aren't attempting to create a problem, nor do something that is going to cause a sea change within the system that will in any way, shape or form destabilize the other areas, including family physician private practices where care is being provided very well.

We intended it to be merely another option within the system such as it is in other areas where it has been successful. We want to do a "made in Yukon" version of the successful models that have been put in place in other jurisdictions.

As far as the member's reference to my somehow being insulting of YMA, as he suggested, there is certainly no insult or disrespect intended, and I'm sure that the Yukon Medical Association is well aware of that as the member himself should be. I was simply referring to the fact that they did pull back from the table, and I encouraged them to come forward to it. We will of course -- through the good work of department officials and working with these professions -- move toward a concept that is practical and workable and is an enhancement of the system and an effective component of Yukon's health care system. I think that's about all the member had asked.

Mr. Edzerza: That's quite a debate. I certainly hope my line of questioning for the minister is better and more direct. I heard many questions asked, and I have to say that I really didn't hear an awful lot of answers. I would like to start by first of all thanking the staff from Health and Social Services for all the countless hours they put into developing a budget, and I do understand the difficult task that this department has in dealing with all the social issues that are involved with the population within the Yukon Territory.

I do know there's a lot of stress involved, and one has to be aware of all these issues.

I'd like to start by asking a couple of constituent questions before I go into other areas within this budget. I do have approximately 14 pages of questions, so I think we'll be here for awhile. I don't intend to let the Official Opposition talk for two days and then stand up and sit down and have us say nothing and leave.

We will go through our line of questioning. To start, I have a constituent who had health care coverage cancelled. The constituent tried her best to settle it in-house but was told to take it to her MLA, so I will ask some questions on that today. It's only for clarification. I'd like to know if there is a process in place whereby a citizen's right to health care is protected -- much better than being cancelled at the stroke of a pen, without notification to the person until after the fact.

My constituent happened to be put under a lot of unnecessary stress because of a cancellation of the health care coverage. After many discussions with the department, my constituent was accused of living in Vancouver and collecting health care coverage in the Yukon. My constituent repeatedly said that was not the case and she had never moved out of the Yukon Territory.

Anyway, the coverage was cancelled without notifying my constituent. Upon her persistence continuously saying there had to be an error, the department looked into it a little better. They did more thorough work only to find that the constituent was 100-percent right and the department had identified two people with the same name but different birthdates.

I want to ask if the minister will look into wrongful cancellations of one's health care coverage and try to ensure that there isn't so much unnecessary stress put on an individual before such a drastic action has been taken?

Chair: Order please. Do members wish to take a brief recess before we continue?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

Chair: Order please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 6, *First Appropriation Act, 2007-08*, Department of Health and Social Services.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Before we took the break, the Member for McIntyre-Takhini asked a question about a constituent who had had a problem with health care coverage being cancelled due to an error because of their name being similar to somebody else's name. I don't have any direct knowledge of that specific incident, but I would point out that it is certainly an unfortunate incident and I express my sympathy in that area. The standard practice in this is that whenever we have problems, we take a look at them and ensure that we do what we can so that such errors don't occur in the future. Certainly the intent of the system -- I'm sure the member will recognize -- is to ensure that there aren't any people on the system who shouldn't be on it. The Yukon's health care coverage level often compares very well to many of the other jurisdictions. So there may be some desire by some to stay on it, particularly for certain programs, such as our chronic disease coverage, which are better than those in other jurisdictions. So there is a need, of course, to control who is on the list and ensure that we don't have people fraudulently on it, who are out-of-territory residents, non-residents of the territory, and perhaps even non-citizens of Canada.

I will agree with the member opposite on this issue. No one, whether myself as minister or officials in the department, wishes to see somebody cut off the health care coverage when in fact they are a resident. I will ensure that those concerns are passed on. As I say, I was not aware of this specific case but will ask that steps are always taken to ensure consideration of the same name, perhaps even the same middle name, and that all due diligence is exercised to ensure that somebody is not mistakenly cut off the list for any reason, including confusion with someone else's name. Again, I want to stress to the member opposite that no one is perfect. There is always a possibility of mistakes in any system, but certainly in areas as important as this, we want to minimize that chance to the greatest extent possible because no situation like this where someone is denied the coverage they should have is ever acceptable.

Mr. Edzerza: Just for the record, I would like to state that my constituent had given the department more than one option to review this case. It just so happens that the individual has a job here that requires travelling out of the territory and it really did cause havoc with the individual's schedule -- we all know how serious it would be to travel outside the territory with no health coverage.

I'm going to continue. I appreciate the minister being concerned about this issue and I'm sure things will be watched a

little more carefully in the future and that was the intent of raising the issue: so that, in the future, this will be watched a little closer.

The next question to do with constituency work is on the apprehension of children. I've been approached probably as many as four times in the last month or so about apprehensions and how they're conducted -- the requests of the individuals in question. One of the most repeated concerns I have is that First Nation children are being taken and there appears to be no effort whatsoever to ensure that these children are placed with others in the community, or else placed with other First Nation families.

I know for a fact that several years ago there was a recruitment process that took place within the McIntyre subdivision. From that recruitment process, I believe there were approximately 14 First Nation families who came forward to offer their services as foster homes. Lo and behold, I don't believe they were ever used. That would have to lead me to believe that there is no need for First Nation foster homes and that there is an abundance of them that are empty. I can confirm this statement very easily because one of my family members was one of those people who went to this orientation and was also accepted as a foster home. In the five years following that orientation, my family member was never contacted once to take a foster child.

We are all Kwanlin Dun First Nation members. We also know that there were a lot of our children in care. We had family members within the community actually lobby us and ask us if we would take their child or their grandchild because they were apprehended, but my family member was never, ever approached.

Upon my investigation, I realized that probably only three out of the 14 were ever used. Having said that, I hope the minister can now see the urgency in getting this revision done on the child welfare act. A lot of this could be put into legislation where the government has to make more of an effort to use First Nation families with regard to foster care.

So my question for the minister is quite simple: are there enough foster homes within the City of Whitehorse?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I know this area is of great importance to the member opposite and I understand that. It is an area the government also views as of great importance.

On the issue of child apprehension, it is a very difficult and unpleasant situation any time a child is apprehended and placed in the government's care, and typically, of course, whatever family the child has been apprehended from is likely to resent that decision and feel it was unfair. However, as I'm sure the member will realize, there are situations where parents are abusive. Whatever the cause of that -- there may be issues with mental challenges, substance abuse or with being previously abused themselves, and there may be a root cause the person has not properly dealt with and addressed -- and whatever the person's intention, if, when consuming alcohol or another substance or when they experience emotional challenges, someone is consistently acting in a way that endangers the safety of their family members, including their children, there are times when action needs to be taken.

That's always a very unfortunate thing. I think the other part that needs to be recognized and laid out in debate is recognizing that those who have children apprehended will likely always complain and, in some cases, very genuinely believe that there was no fault on their part, not having recognized the problems and the inappropriateness of violent actions and the damage that they cause to others.

That is one element of this very difficult and emotionally charged issue. Another aspect of it is the issue of placement with others in the community, in foster homes. The issue related to that is sometimes related to one of security. There is the need for somebody to be able to ensure a safe environment and sometimes that includes keeping the children safe from the parents they were apprehended from in the first place. That can sometimes mean that, regardless of the appropriateness of the potential foster home, it may not be a suitable fit for the child if it does not adequately ensure that security.

Another area the member referred to is that of informing the First Nation and we do it through policy -- inform First Nations of children who are apprehended from their citizens. One problem that sometimes occurs with that is if an individual refuses to identify which First Nation they are from, and it is not known, or if they identify a different First Nation -- because they don't want to face the embarrassment of having members of their First Nation know about the situation. That creates a potential problem where, in fact, the wrong First Nation might be informed through good intentions and every attempt by the staff of Health and Social Services in this area. It is simply a flaw that is in there and steps can be taken to try to prevent it from occurring.

There will be times in any situation where, if an individual deliberately provides inaccurate information, their First Nation may not be informed if we don't know that is the First Nation that needs to be informed.

The other issue related to foster homes and the numbers and individuals who apply, of course, is the need for screening of the individuals -- both the screening of the people themselves and, of course, the safety of the home environment they can provide. Those are decisions that officials make. The member will be aware that the consideration of how this is dealt with was one of the more significant policy elements in discussion between the Yukon government and the Council of Yukon First Nations and the *Children's Act* review -- and that issue related to foster homes, to apprehensions and to the whole process around that. It was one that was very important to many First Nations, and the government treats it with the utmost consideration and seriousness, recognizing the two sides of it -- the issue of ensuring that children to the greatest extent possible are kept with their families or their communities, when it is not endangering their safety, but recognizing at the other end that there may be times when, in the interest of protecting that child's safety and possibly their life, the government is required by law to take the action of apprehension. That is always an unfortunate situation, but in any child protection system, it will always be a very unpleasant reality that occurs in extreme situations.

Mr. Edzerza: Well, I don't believe I need too much coaching from the minister in this area, as I have been an advocate in this area for over 25 years. I've done a lot of volunteer work with families, trying to maintain some stability within the family.

I'm going to ask the minister this very simple question, and it should be easy to answer this one -- he didn't answer the last one. Does the department have the responsibility to work with the family when their children are apprehended?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Yes, the department does have a responsibility to work with the family. I would point out to the member that apprehension is the most severe step taken. There are a number of steps and attempts that will typically be taken in a child protection situation prior to apprehension, unless it is felt there is a new and imminent danger to the child, which may result in quick action.

In reference to the member's previous question, I thought I had addressed his question. If he could perhaps inform me of what I did not answer in that area, I would attempt to answer it. I believe I gave him a full answer to the questions he asked previously.

Mr. Edzerza: That's fair, Mr. Chair. I asked this question about the responsibility of the department to work with families, because it just so happens that one of my constituents was told by a worker that it wasn't incumbent upon them to continue working with the family any more because their child was in permanent care. I have a hard time accepting that kind of a statement, because then it would be saying to me that the department's main goal is to get permanent care and after that their work is done. I believe that if you have someone in permanent care -- it takes two years to do that -- your work is only beginning, because I would certainly hope the ultimate goal of the department would be to reunite the family at some point in time.

The question I asked the minister that I felt wasn't answered was this: is there an abundance of First Nation foster homes?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: In answer to the member's question about whether or not there is an abundance of foster homes, there's not an abundance at this time. I'm also advised that there's no real shortage in that area, but efforts to recruit and train foster home parents is an ongoing process and has increased through things including a program called PRIDE -- Parenting Resources for Information, Development and Education -- which provides some increased training to foster parents.

The other issue that the member referred to was permanent care in a specific case. Without knowing more details about it, which of course would not really be appropriate for us to discuss on the floor of the Legislature due to the fact that they would be confidential and related to the specific constituent to whom he refers -- the issue of the access to a child in permanent care is dependent on the situation. When there are child custody orders, you have involvement from the courts. There are issues related to what the judge's determination has been, what safety evaluations there have been, et cetera. The intent in permanent care is to provide access by the parents to the child in care, unless this is expected to create a safety risk to the

child. That determination, I'm sure the member will recognize, is a very important one. As far as whether or not that determination has always been the right decision, the member understands that in dealing with human behaviour there are judgement calls made. One of the things in the *Children's Act* review process was to discuss with First Nations their perspectives in this area because we want to ensure, to the very best extent possible, we are not denying parents with children in permanent care of the department access to their children and that attempts are made to ensure that the parents continue with the linkage to their children even if, at that time, they are not themselves able to provide a suitable and safe home environment.

But there will be times when there is a feeling or a determination that they would in some way jeopardize the child or it would create perhaps an emotional problem for the child on that. Of course, in those areas, we have clinicians and those with expertise in psychological areas that make those determinations.

The attempt of everyone involved is always to making those right determinations. Again, the member has hit one of the central issues in the *Children's Act* review. One of the most significant areas of discussion with the Council of Yukon First Nations and First Nations and with members of the public who are themselves First Nation citizens was related to issues regarding the whole issue of apprehension, access, informing the First Nation and where the child is placed. The government has worked through the official level and at times, when necessary, through the leadership level with me as the current minister and the Premier sitting down with the principals from Council of Yukon First Nations, being the Grand Chief and the chiefs health committee to discuss these issues, to have those issues discussed at that level if necessary.

Although, again, I have to emphasize that, for obvious reasons, the technical issues have been dealt with at the officials level almost exclusively. The work that has continued there and the discussion and the attempts to ensure that the policies currently in place, as well as changes that would be proposed in the revisions to the *Children's Act*, are being made to ensure that the balance is struck and that, if modifications are necessary to the basic operations and procedures and methods in place, those are done. That is a good part of the reason why the *Children's Act* review and the joint process was embarked upon -- recognizing the concerns that exist in this area and having the strong desire to ensure that together we determine what the best balance is for ensuring the protection of the child while respecting the interest of keeping families together or with some connection when it is not possible for them to be together, as well as the issues and concerns related to children who may be removed and lose connection to their culture and to their heritage.

I hope that has answered the member's question. It is certainly a matter that we take very seriously, but there are no simple answers in this area. Officials from both Health and Social Services and representatives of Council of Yukon First Nations have worked very diligently in this area to come up with an agreement on these important matters.

Mr. Edzerza: Well, the minister did not answer the question specifically, because I was specifically referring to First Nation foster homes, not the overall number of foster homes in the territory. I still would like an answer to that. Along with that question, I would like to know if the minister does know how many First Nation foster homes are presently approved in Whitehorse and the outlying areas.

I would also, at this point in time, like to make the minister aware that I would appreciate it if he doesn't refer to the Council of Yukon First Nations when I am discussing my own First Nation because we do not belong to Council of Yukon First Nations and Council of Yukon First Nations does not speak on behalf of any issues for Kwanlin Dun. When I talk about my specific First Nation, the Council of Yukon First Nations has nothing to do with this First Nation.

I would sort of like to get a direct answer with regard to the First Nation foster homes. Does the minister feel that it is important to address the First Nation foster home issue?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: As far as the issue of a breakdown of First Nation foster homes, I don't have those numbers. I can check into whether we actually have it broken down on that basis and endeavour to get back to the member opposite with any information we do have.

Anecdotally, I can tell the member, without the statistics at hand, from the department assessment and advice provided in this area, there is not really an abundance of any type of foster home, but not really a shortage in this area, either -- both on a specific basis of type of foster home and on the global issue of all our foster homes.

As far as the issue of Kwanlin Dun First Nation being involved in the *Children's Act* review, I would have to remind the member that they were in fact invited to participate in the joint process and discussion; they chose not to do so, as was their right to make that choice. Opportunity was provided through the whole process. The primary partnership was with the Council of Yukon First Nations, which represents most of the First Nations in the territory, to ensure those citizens of First Nations who are not encompassed in that -- as with, in fact, any member of the public, First Nation or non-First Nation -- was provided an opportunity to be involved in the discussions of the *Children's Act* review and all things from the *What We Heard* documents, which encompassed the reflections of people -- both First Nation and non-First Nation -- in all areas of the territory. Those viewpoints were heard and considered.

Certainly the citizens of the Member for McIntyre-Takhini's First Nation were not deprived of the opportunity to be involved in this review, nor were elders or any member of that First Nation deprived of the opportunity to participate. The Kwanlin Dun First Nation government was not involved, at their choice.

Mr. Edzerza: For the record, I want to state that I am not attempting to make anything difficult for the department or the minister. I am merely trying to seek some rationale as to why, when the department requested to have a recruitment process happen within the First Nation, they never used the homes that came forward. There must be a reason behind that,

something that Kwanlin Dun First Nation people can understand.

Why can't aunts and uncles be used as foster parents? Why is it so difficult for grandparents to be able to access their children? I would appreciate it if the minister would pay attention to this, because that is why we're not getting answers. You can't be talking to somebody else with your back turned to the opposition when this important line of questioning is happening. I still am not satisfied with the answers that the minister gave, because I'm trying to at least give the minister some understanding of how important this really is to the Kwanlin Dun First Nation, and rightfully so. The stats speak for themselves. The majority of the kids are from the Kwanlin Dun First Nation. That's why it is so important to be able to get a partnership deal working with the government.

I know that there have been many attempts, and I also know that we won't go anywhere with this questioning. Why? Because the department is negligent in recruiting First Nation foster homes and making them readily available. I would like to make a request to the minister today that he would look into this issue and to, again, hold another recruitment process within Kwanlin Dun First Nation. There are a lot of reasons why Kwanlin Dun First Nation chose not to be involved with the *Children's Act* review. Most of it boils down to a lack of trust, because many, many times the First Nation has made sincere efforts to try to develop some kind of a working relationship in this area and has failed. After awhile, it begins to almost be another form of abuse, where people are developing some kind of hope that things will get better, but they never do.

So we're still struggling a lot with this area. Will the minister comply with my request about trying to recruit more Kwanlin Dun First Nation foster homes?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: First of all, I have to take issue with the member's reference to the department being negligent in this area. I don't think that's a fair characterization nor is it fair to direct it toward the officials who do the work in this area. As far as the issue of recruitment of foster homes, I already committed to looking into the numbers for the member opposite in this area. This is something we can review.

The member made reference to a number of constituents he says had tried to provide foster homes and been declined. I'm not familiar with the individual issues, which are confidential in nature and should not be brought up on a case-by-case basis to my attention unless the people themselves consent to that -- it would be confidential in nature as to why they would have been screened out in the foster home screening process. I cannot comment on the details of why or whether there is any need for a reconsideration of that decision or modification, et cetera. That's something that is done on a case-by-case basis. I'm sure the officials acted with the best of intentions there and I'm sure there's a good explanation, but it may break down to a case-by-case or home-by-home situation, which I'm not privy to.

I don't know if the member himself is or is not privy to that, but I would caution him that if he is privy to individual details, prior to bringing any of them to my attention, either on the floor of this House or outside of it in letter form or other

manner, he should be certain that he has the consent of the individuals about whom he's relaying that information. It is protected and confidential information and it would not be fair to them to have that information relayed in error.

The other issue the member referred to was the Kwanlin Dun First Nation. He suggested that they did not come to the table on the *Children's Act* review because of lack of trust.

I would point out to the member a couple of things: first, we recognize that some First Nations and some members of the Yukon public have felt burnt or betrayed at different times by different governments and different politicians at the territorial level, federal level, municipal level and at the First Nation level. Depending on the individual, it is not uncommon to find citizens who have a lack of trust in their political representatives, those they elect, no matter what government level we are talking about.

Obviously I can't go back in time and address the mistakes that were made by others or the actions of previous territory governments, which I may in fact disagree with, and in some cases have referred to my disagreement. Something I hope the member will recognize is that in working with First Nations and any others, all we can do as a government is extend the offer for them to be involved in a public process. Should they choose not to do so, we can't force them to the table, nor can we hear their input if they refuse to provide it. If they refuse to provide it because their trust has been betrayed by others prior to us at some point in the past, that's truly unfortunate, but that of course is beyond our control and there is nothing we can do except to extend the offer genuinely for them to be involved and hope that they choose to get past their past experience and come forward and provide that input. If people choose not to do so, if they choose not to come forward to the table, if they choose not to provide that input, of course we have no way of knowing what their personal experience is or what they would recommend because they have chosen not to provide that.

I won't comment on some of the other elements the member included in his rhetoric around this issue. I recognize that it is an issue that the member cares very deeply about. I appreciate his commitment to that area, but I would urge him to be somewhat cautious and recognize that all the people in the area of child welfare have difficult jobs. By and large, their reason for entering the field is through dedication, commitment and true compassion. To suggest anything other than that, directly or indirectly, is not fair to the people who do the work in this area. I think we should always focus on policy and not on the issue of suggesting intent about someone's possible motives in coming up with the policy. The member did reflect on that to some extent.

I think it should be recognized that the intention of those involved in this field, both in the direct front-line activities and at the policy level, is based on what they genuinely believe and is to the best of their abilities in performing their jobs. If there is a need for revision, we should do so. We should do so in a fashion that fully considers the seriousness of it and all the policy implications on families and individuals, including, most importantly, the safety of the children, while respecting the actions of those who are involved in this area. We must recog-

nize that even if we disagree with the policies on which such actions are based, it is not the fault of the people who do those jobs. It is not the intent of the previous drafters of old policies to do something that is in any way abuse, as the member described it. Their intentions were actions toward assisting and resolving situations.

I would point out to the member that, in addition to the discussion we have had around the *Children's Act* review, one of the interim steps we have taken as part of our partnership with the Council of Yukon First Nations in moving forward in this process and discussion around the *Children's Act* has included child welfare policy discussions with Council of Yukon First Nations members and I believe also other First Nations that are not part of the Council of Yukon First Nations. We have listened to their concerns and discussed them in a very dynamic, collaborative and positive manner.

The First Nation child welfare policy, which is in the Yukon government child welfare manual, has been revised based on these discussions already to describe the collaborative working relationship between Yukon First Nations and the Yukon government when there are child welfare concerns regarding First Nation children. A child's First Nation is included in planning, where child welfare officials first received concerns with respect to a child in their family, as long as we are aware of what First Nation that is, as referred to in my earlier comments.

This revised policy goes significantly beyond the commitment that has been made by the Premier to the Grand Chief that First Nations would be notified prior to their children being taken into the care of the director of family and children's services. The policy reflects what was already in practice in many Yukon communities, but is an enhancement and strengthening of the process that we have in place without restricting or changing the authorities under the *Children's Act* to act in the best interest of the child.

Mr. Edzerza: A lot of what the minister went through I'm well aware of. I understand the complexity around work in this area. I also understand that one's permission is required before you can deal with certain issues. I don't intend to rewrite anything on the floor of the Legislature. I'm merely bringing things to the minister's attention that maybe he is not aware of and is maybe going to look into after my discussions here.

Talking about policy, I would like to know: is there a limit on the number of children who can be placed in a foster home at one time? One home -- how many children are allowed to be placed in that home at one particular time?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I don't have that information in front of me here; we don't have with us the policy related to that. I can, in general terms, inform the member that there is some variance, depending on the size of the home environment, the number of bedrooms and facilities for that. One of the other key considerations in this is the attempt to keep siblings together whenever possible. That is, of course, a very important and key priority.

I would mention to the member that this policy he referred to -- he may indeed be aware of it but he may be thinking of an earlier incarnation as some changes were made as recently as

March of this year, based on the discussions that we had with the First Nations. So, changes have been made.

I point out and I stress that we have already, in advance of the *Children's Act* legislation being amended, taken significant steps and taken a step toward further improving the relationship and the reporting relationship and involvement of First Nations where their citizens' children are affected by the actions of family and children's services.

I hope that has answered the member but, under the family and children's services branch, I hope he does recognize that these issues here are very challenging. They are very emotionally charged and it's very rare that there are simple answers or simple solutions to this. We've been working with First Nations to improve what is already a good system and to address areas where perhaps it can be made stronger and made to better reflect the desire to ensure that children don't lose their connection with their family, unless it's absolutely necessary to do so for their safety, and that all attempts are made to ensure that they don't lose the linkage to their culture and heritage.

Mr. Edzerza: The minister sort of confirmed why this question needs to be answered. The minister's comment was that some of these children are very challenging. That's why I am asking this question.

Does the minister feel it's appropriate for one foster home to maybe have 10 children in there at one time -- one family responsible for 10 children? Does the minister feel that is too high of a number? What I am trying to determine here is whether or not the government feels there should be a maximum of four children in a home at one time, or is the sky the limit? Is one foster parent allowed to have six, seven or eight children to look after at one time?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: That's a bit of a hypothetical question. I already committed to the member to look into this area and get back to him on what we have in place in this area. But I would point out in terms of total family size that there can be other factors that would need to potentially be considered.

I am not an expert in the area but the officials are. I will check into it and find out what the current policies are and discuss the issues related to that before I get back to the member opposite. As the member said, for me to make a hypothetical determination without discussions with officials and those with experience in this area, without looking into the maximum number of children per foster home that is currently in place here and what is in place in other jurisdictions and the experience with such issues -- the member is aware that there are many different family sizes. My grandmother, for example, was from a family of 10 children and I am not going to make any hypothetical determinations on this floor.

I will look into the member's concern and what our current policy is. If he wishes to make specific recommendations related to what he thinks we should do there, we will consider the member's comments, as we consider the comments from any MLA and, indeed, from any Yukoner, on the basis of their merits. If there are good suggestions, we will always be prepared to act on good suggestions.

Mr. Edzerza: I'd like to point out the difference between one's own family and those who are doing foster care.

It's all attached to money. There is a per diem for each foster child. Now, that could be an incentive to take on more than they can handle. That's what I am trying to get at and I do appreciate the minister saying he is going to look into this. I really encourage him to do so because I was advised that this could possibly be happening, and that is why I brought it to the attention of the minister. That's as far as I want to go with that because I'm going to give the minister the opportunity to look into this and hopefully he will get back to me by letter or such to satisfy my curiosity in this area with regard to maybe taking on too many kids at one time. That can also be very harmful and dangerous -- if you have too many. Most kids who are involved in this system need to be supervised very intensely, so if you have too many it is almost impossible to do that task effectively.

Another question I have for the minister is with regard to policy again. Is there a policy on children leaving the territory? I am aware of children who are in care who have been shipped south with the family because they moved. They are First Nation kids who are right from this territory -- right from Whitehorse -- and they have been in Edmonton; they've been over to Vancouver; and now I think they are back in Edmonton again -- moving all over with the foster family.

Something that has been brought to my attention is that the parents and grandparents of one child in particular -- there has been no communication or visiting in approximately 10 years now. The mother and father have not seen their son for, I believe, it must be between eight and 10 years now. If that is the case -- first of all, I'll let the minister answer that question about the policy on foster kids being taken out of the territory.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I think that, first of all, in reference to the member's concern about the number of children in foster homes and ensuring the appropriate level of supervision, I agree with him on part of that. There is obviously a point at which too many children create a potential issue, particularly if there are behavioural issues involved. That's one of the reasons why I am sure that there is no easy answer to that for the member. We will look into exactly what the policy says. It's not just an issue of every child being the same. Of course, every child is not the same. There are different issues interacting with behavioural issues and mental challenges in some cases. There are victims of abuse and difficulties in coping with that. All these things create complexities that have to be factored into decisions.

As far as the issue about whether or not foster families might be taking on too many children, with the driving force being financial gain, I would point out that it's not an area in which people are well paid. As the member is well aware, as he has had some involvement in this area and I commend him for that, it's not a particularly lucrative area. In fact, one of the commitments we made in the platform was to review the funding arrangements for foster families, because we want to ensure that the appropriate assistance is provided.

Ensuring that the appropriate determination is made in any foster home in terms of total number of children and there is adequate supervision is always an issue that will be treated seriously. As I indicated previously, I will have to undertake to

get back to the member on specific issues related to the policy as to number of children and other related factors.

As far as children under the care of foster parents being taken out of the territory, without knowing the specific case it is hard to comment. Of course, I am not urging the member to bring forward specifics of that case here because of the confidentiality, but that type of thing would not be common.

The other case the member cited was about not seeing the children in 10 years. I have to point out that that also relates to decisions that were made 10 or more years ago. Obviously in that situation, the policy has changed. The policy changed as recently as last month, as I pointed out in relation to First Nations and child welfare. The other factor that has to be recognized is that in some cases children are placed in permanent care, permanent custody or guardianship at the direction of the courts. So, court orders and the specifics of those are another factor that, of course, must be abided by and they can be a complicating factor, particularly for older cases, as the member referred to.

For those under previously existing policies -- the issue of adult children placed into care or adopted years ago -- then obviously a question that comes into play is also the wishes of the child, whether the individual is a child or an adult now. They may wish, in some cases, not to renew that contact with their birth parents. That is something that certainly must be very difficult for those who then lose that contact and for the parents in that situation. Of course, the free will of individuals and the wishes of children are factors that have to be considered in these cases.

I know that is a fairly general answer. I hope I've given the member enough information to understand what the current procedure is and what we will have to get back to the member on. I just want to emphasize that we do appreciate the member's concerns and his experience in this area and his understanding of this area. But there are no simple answers even to a question like that. It's not something that we can simply answer without getting into the details of it, beyond saying we certainly have sympathy for anyone who has been affected by this issue. For those who have moved past problems that caused them to lose their children, but may not have the contact, it certainly must be a very difficult situation.

One of the driving reasons behind the *Children's Act* review was ensuring that, at all times, efforts are made to recognize the importance of family connections whenever it is possible to do so without jeopardizing safety or, in the case of adult children who were taken away, their wishes must be taken into consideration. We are not going to force them to renew contact with relatives if, for whatever reason of their own choosing, they choose not to do so.

Mr. Edzerza: I could put on record that a lot of my knowledge in this area is probably a little bit too close to home, and I do have some pertinent information that I know to be factual. I'm not going to discuss the case on the floor, but at some point in time -- I would make myself available at any time to discuss this with the minister or anyone else in the department, on a positive note -- on a positive note -- because these things are happening, and what do you do?

The family basically had to write off their son. So, I think that's wrong. That's all I'm saying, and at some point in time I hope things will change and be different. That's why I asked if there was a policy with regard to this issue. I would certainly like to know of the changes that may have taken place in the department that I'm not aware of. I may even help the individual pursue a chance to see their son again after many, many years -- if that's possible.

With regard to the large numbers, the reason I brought that up to the minister -- a large number of children in one foster home -- is because, like the minister stated, it's not lucrative, but it could be. It could be. It depends on how many you want to take on. If you want to take on 15 children, it's obviously going to be quite financially beneficial to do so, if you can handle it.

But I'm going to leave that area now because I think we have enough on record that the minister has committed to looking into. And I do appreciate that because I ask these questions only to seek positive change if something is not right, or appears not to be right, so that it can be looked at and corrected, if it can be.

I also want to extend the invitation to the minister and his department that I, as the MLA for McIntyre-Takhini, would do whatever I can to assist the department or the government in recruiting Kwanlin Dun First Nation foster homes, for example. If there is anything I can do, I certainly will do it. I'll focus on everything toward a positive outcome.

I want to go more into the budget issues now, because those were the pressing constituency issues that I was asked to have some discussion around. I feel comfortable that there is a positive flow here and I think we can do some good things. I think communication is the answer to being able to develop some really positive things that could come in this area. I have no doubt in my mind that the department is capable of doing that.

With regard to the financial summary on 11-4, the recoveries and transfers from Canada are both down. Can the minister tell me why that is?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: In the interest of not keeping the member waiting, I can look into the issue of recoveries and flip to the right page and get back to the member opposite.

I just want to add, though, in addition to the debate he has raised and his concerns around child welfare and foster homes, I want to reiterate that it's always important to keep in perspective that what happened 10 or 20 years ago -- things have changed, the process has changed, so concerns that were relevant then -- the process may have already changed to address them.

The department and the staff are doing an excellent job in this area to do the very best that they can within the existing policy as well as the changes that have been made and will be made to the policy and legislation. Of course we will always do what we can to improve in this area.

Also, in reference to the member noting that he would like to know what has been done in this area and what we have changed, I would be happy to provide the member with a copy of the First Nation and child welfare policy changes that were

made back in March. I will get that to him. It may not be before the end of this legislative sitting, recognizing that we are late in this sitting, but we will provide him with a copy of that.

Mr. Edzerza: I thank the minister for that. I realize that things change over the years and I'm also aware of the fact that the social issues have changed over the last 50 years plus that I have been on this Earth. Things that an eight-year-old would face today are certainly not the same as when I was eight years old -- nowhere close. So I understand that, over time, social issues can escalate or they can stay the same, but we are aware of the fact that there are a lot of different contributing factors today as to why things end up the way they do.

I definitely want to highlight the fact that I appreciate the work the department does and I know that it is a very tough area to work in. I know there is no fault to be placed on the department, but if policies and legislation are not meeting their goals, then obviously they have to be looked at.

Policies are made to be changed when they need to be changed.

I am going to ask one more question under family and children's services. What is the number of social workers in the regions and where are they located? Is there a problem with recruitment and retention of social workers, particularly in rural Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: With regard to the question asked by the member about recoveries from Canada and transfers, the page number that I heard him say was not one I have listed here. Looking at the page where I think he's referring to in recoveries is the amount due to the ending of the primary health care transition funding, which was multi-year federal funding that expired. It then shows up in our revenues or recoveries. I believe that is the issue the member is referring to. It would be more helpful if the member could ask further questions in line-by-line debate when we get to the same page. I could then address that issue for him.

With regard to the member's question about social workers, I don't have the total number of social workers at my fingertips. That information is not managed through the minister's office. The operational issues are dealt with in operations. Unless they are issues regarding the need for funding for a new position, it doesn't typically come to my attention.

As far as his question relates to social workers in rural areas, including recruitment and retention, periodically there are problems in specific areas. We don't have an ongoing or chronic problem with social worker recruitment in rural areas, although we do have a few areas where there is commonly an increased problem in some of the rural communities -- there are more common occurrences.

I hope that has addressed the member's questions.

Mr. Edzerza: Maybe the minister has a point in going through those when we get to line-by-line, and that's acceptable.

I would like to know if the minister can explain the difference between family services and child protection cases. What is the difference between those two?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: To answer the member's question, family and children's services deals with things beyond the

issues of child protection, and though there are linkages between them -- and, of course, they are part of the same unit -- some of the other things that family and children's services branch deals with, just to give the member a few examples, are that they may assist families with things such as counselling, family support or special needs of disabled children who don't have anything directly related to protection issues. The protection area is one area within that but it's not the only area dealt with through the services and the work of this branch.

Mr. Edzerza: The median time spent on family service cases is 6.8 months. On child protection, it's about 2.5 months. What I would like to know is: are some cases open for years? Or are some repeatedly opened as child protection? I am wondering if the minister could maybe provide some stats on that in a legislative return or through some process that he's comfortable with.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I understand that the member is not attempting to do so in this situation, but he is, in fact, to some extent, mixing apples and oranges. The statistics aren't quite the same thing. The issue in family and children's services branch may be related to ongoing supports to a family but don't have anything to do with the issue of child protection. It could be something related to child protection, but not related to an ongoing and imminent safety issue.

The other issue, of course, is under child protection and the case length. They transfer, in some cases, into foster homes and then they fall under a different statistics line.

So, I hope that gave the member the answer he was looking for, but what I'm trying to point out is that to try to compare the number of months in here and project a trend or pattern is a bit difficult because we're mixing two different types of cases under the one area -- or, actually, more than two different types of cases. But child protection is child protection, and the family and children's services issues cover a broader spectrum.

Mr. Edzerza: Well, I do believe that there is a relevance here. That's why I'm asking these questions. Maybe I'll ask one more in this area: what percentage of family services and child protection cases become children in care, or does that happen? And what percentage of families have children returned? And how long does the case remain open after that? What is the policy on monitoring returned children?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I don't believe we have the statistics to answer the member's question. I can look into that and confirm whether we do indeed have that information tabulated. If we do, I'd be happy to provide it to the member.

But I would point out to the member that they are different issues. There is some connection, but the statistical data is not something that's tabulated for management purposes. It's perhaps more of an information item, rather than something that directly affects the management programming in that area, and the current systems don't address that.

I'd point out to the member that one of the things in these areas -- in social services and in health -- is that as we continue the enhancements and investments in the electronic systems, we do develop the ability to generate information that can perhaps be useful, but otherwise might be very costly and difficult

to compile, particularly once you start getting into privacy issues.

It's far easier to take databases and to extract specific excerpts from those databases for statistical purposes, as you further enhance the electronic managements systems, without getting into the issue of those who are compiling the information, looking at information that is confidential, and that isn't within their job to see it and to protect it confidentially.

As I say to the member, we will check into whether we do have those statistics already, but I don't want to make a commitment at this point that will generate them if we don't have them -- without looking into how complex it is to generate. I will have to take the member's question and request under advisement. As I say, if we do have it already, I will happily provide that statistic to the member. If we don't have it and it's not complex or time-consuming to generate, we will take that request under consideration, but if there is going to be a lot of time involved in doing that, or difficulty, I will reserve the ability in that case to inform the member that, because of complexity, it simply would have been too cumbersome for officials to generate. I do appreciate his desire for this information and we will take that under advisement.

Mr. Edzerza: I thank the minister for committing to look into this because the question is really focused on being able to have a citizen come to the department and get information as to what progress is being made.

If there are 70 children apprehended in one year, or over two years, I think it is very important information to know what percentage of the children were able to return home. To me, as a citizen of the territory, it would be one way to say: yes, there are positive things happening; there is progress being made, if out of 70 apprehensions 35 went home. That would be excellent.

All the information I was trying to seek out was if there was any kind of data to support -- maybe how many kids were apprehended over the last 10 years and how many were returned home to their family? It would be interesting to know that.

On page 11-9 of the budget book, it stated -- maybe I'll leave this one for line-by-line too, because it can be answered then.

I want to ask some questions around adoption services. How long does a child stay in care before he or she is put up for adoption? What are the criteria for putting children in care up for adoption?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: That is a difficult question to give a simple answer to. There's an assessment made based on a lot of factors in the situation. Ultimately, of course, it's based on the conclusion of evaluating those factors -- the belief by officials that there's the necessity to take the extra step and actually go to adoption and that that's the appropriate step for the child. I have to point out that the courts do become involved in some cases, so there's also then a judge's determination in that area. It is extremely variable, depending on the situation, so it's not really possible to give the member a simple answer to define it. It is based on a lot of variables.

Mr. Edzerza: I'd like to ask the minister a question on custom adoption. I can confirm for the minister that this is a very worthwhile endeavour to seek out, because, in my own particular case, I have used this area without going through the department. It's an area that is, I believe, in the face of society as a cultural clash, because First Nation people did have a process of custom adoption at one time. That was a way for First Nations to be able to ensure that their own siblings and their own extended family weren't shipped out of the territory or shipped somewhere else that would be foreign to the child.

I ask the minister this question: are there any plans to have a policy and eventually legislation on custom adoption that reflects First Nation culture?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: The issue of custom adoption is one of the things that was a point of discussion in the *Children's Act* review and, of course, the final determinations haven't been made through the process we've agreed to with the Council of Yukon First Nations. Ultimately there will be a requirement for a review by Cabinet before tabling any specific legislative detail. But I do anticipate that there are likely to be some changes within the new *Children's Act* related to the issue of custom adoption, recognizing the importance of it and also recognizing that it is not a cut and dried, simple issue. There are safety issues related to it sometimes and it needs to be dealt with carefully and with full consideration and the appropriate safeguards put in place. The appropriate recognition of the value of this also must be recognized.

Mr. Edzerza: I believe that, again, this is one area that is of high importance with regard to the *Children's Act* review. I believe that would be an acceptable process to be able to address that particular issue. Hopefully it will come around someday.

The only ones it is important to are the ones who are experiencing difficulties. People who are not involved in this area really don't feel the pressure as much as a parent or grandparent whose child may be in need of immediate support.

I'm going to talk a little bit about children in care. What is the definition of permanent wardship or care? Is there a difference between the benefit to the child in temporary or permanent care? I ask these questions again for a lot of citizens who listen or pick up *Hansard* to review things that are discussed here. A lot of people do not know the answers to the questions I am asking.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: In answer to the Member for McIntyre-Takhini, those are legal definitions. There is no difference in the benefits provided, but it is a legal definition related to whether it is a permanent or temporary act. The parental rights still exist while there is a temporary wardship in place and the children are in the care of the director. They are simply suspended at that point. In the case of permanent wardship, the parental rights have been extinguished by court determination.

Mr. Edzerza: I have one other question that has repeatedly come up in this area. Quite often -- and I am aware of several cases -- a child may be apprehended at a very young age. They may be in care for 15 years. One has to believe and appreciate and understand that it becomes a way of life for that child.

They get used to that structure, of being in care, and they get used to their foster family. But when they reach 18, some of them are not mature enough even to be able to go out on their own. I have been asked several times why the department doesn't try to support someone who turned 18 if they are attending school. I don't know if the department does. My question is: does the department have any policy in place, or does it contemplate allowing children to stay in care after they are 18?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: The question the member refers to as far as support after the age of 18, particularly in school -- once children reach the age of majority and if there is still a need for support for them, they would move from family and children's services and would be supported through social assistance. Of course, in some cases, they may be fully independent at that stage and not in that system.

There is also support through the advanced education branch in the Department of Education related to accessing programs for those who may themselves not have the financial means to do so. I don't have the details on that. If the member wishes more information, he should raise that with the Minister of Education. There is support there in certain areas.

I can inform the member that the issue related to the whole issue of training and the labour market and the support provided to people, particularly in the area of trades training, and, of course, the focus we put through Health and Social Services on the health human resources end of things -- these are things we are looking at right now. I can't give the member any predictions or pronouncements in this area. We are looking at the overall support levels and access issues as far as courses provided and support that is available.

It is a significant process to undertake, as some of the areas referred to involve Yukon College. Some of it applies to out-of-jurisdiction colleges or universities. Some of it may be areas that relate to programming within Health and Social Services. Some is related to programming within the Department of Education.

That being said, I hope I've illustrated to the member why this is a bit of a large undertaking. But it is one, as we committed to in the election platform, to look at, particularly the issue of trades training and those entering the labour market. That's an area of importance. This has a direct linkage to the review that we are currently doing in the area of social assistance, in that the issue with some of the clients on social assistance becomes one of those who may have moved on to social assistance directly from care. They may not themselves have the resources to access certain things and they may not have the training to access certain jobs, so this is an area under considerable review right now.

I am sure there will be a number of announcements from the Minister of Education and from me and from others we work with in this area over the period of this mandate. We recognize the importance of the whole issue of education and training and that certainly does include the issue of children in the care of the department.

There will also be a linkage to this area within the *Children's Act*. I should say, since this is at the draft stage, that I anticipate that there will be some steps taken relating to this

issue in the *Children's Act*, which is still in the development stage. I can't give any final pronouncements of what is in there until it has gone through the review process by the principals and has been approved by Cabinet for tabling in this Assembly. I am optimistic that the member will be pleased at that point that we've taken the steps to further improve in this area.

Mr. Edzerza: It is encouraging to hear that this area is up for consideration, because I believe one only has to go and explore the Individual Learning Centre, and you would find that there are youth who fall through the cracks right at this particular juncture. So, it's good to hear that there is at least some exploring going on in that particular area.

I'd like to go on to ask a couple of questions about child-care services. What amount has the minister received in trust from the federal government for early childhood education and childcare? And when does the minister expect to hear from the working group that is looking at how to spend this funding?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I thank the member for his question. Some of the information that he has included in his question is -- obviously, he has misunderstood some of the areas related to this. What we received from the federal government was \$1.3 million in one-time funding. Of course, that program is now no longer continued, and we received an indication that we will be receiving about \$250,000 annually, but we have yet to receive that money. We have yet to be informed, and neither have the provinces nor other territories been informed of the terms and conditions that will be attached to that money. So, that money will be spent in accordance with whatever requirements we have related to it, assuming that the deals and the arrangement provided are acceptable to us, but all federal money has to be spent in accordance with the accountability requirements related to that funding.

With regard to the issue of the \$1.3 million one-time funding, as I announced last May -- the member will find a press release on the government Web site -- it is related to investments that this government will be making into childcare over this mandate. The \$1.3 million received from the federal government in one-time funding will be used for one-time capital projects. O&M needs are dealt with separately in the commitment of the additional \$1.2 million annually from the Yukon government's general revenue.

Mr. Edzerza: I am going to ask a couple of questions on the healthy families program. What are the criteria for families to be involved in this healthy families program? Can the minister tell me how many families involved are low income and how many are single parented? Is that possible? I will understand if he does not have statistics on this one.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I don't have a breakdown as detailed as the member has requested. We don't have those statistics broken down. The member will, I am sure, recognize that the healthy families program is still a fairly new program. It is designed to assist families with newborns, prenatal situations or at birth, in partnership with public health nurses and support workers. The program provides in-home assistance and education through regular home visits to support families in being the best parents possible for their infants to ensure that they receive the care and stimulation so crucial to their long-term well-being

and healthy development. The support workers can remain involved in a family's life until the child reaches school age.

It's a short-term involvement and it's based on the assessment of what the risk is believed to be in this area. It's left with room for discretion of the professionals to provide the support where that need exists. It's an area, I would point out to the member, where we've seen some very positive results to date and we'll continue to look at this program and at how we may be able to continue to support it and consider enhancements to that program.

Mr. Edzerza: I thank the minister for that response and I do believe how critical and how important this program is. That's why I wanted to know a couple of things about it. One question I would like to ask is: the minister knows the number of families served is steadily increasing; is the number of staff increasing along with this growth? I believe I already heard the minister commit to maybe looking at putting more funds into this program.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: If the member will look at the statistics pages in his budget book, he will see that the numbers here under "Healthy Families" are actually fairly flat in terms of growth. The number for the 2005 actual was 171 families served. The number of families served last year -- which is of course a forecast, the finals haven't come in -- was 169, and it's forecast to be 175 for this year. This year is predicted to be higher than last year. It's not predicted to be that much higher than the year before, which was slightly higher than the 2006 fiscal year.

So, it is an area that is fairly consistent. It is within the Whitehorse area at this point and the numbers here are based on the assessment of families being at risk. The information I am provided is that it is not actually felt that we are having a challenge in Whitehorse in serving the demand, but that is something where, if the member has any suggestions regarding this, we are always happy to entertain them. It is an area that is working pretty well at this point. It has been, as I say, a fairly new program comparatively, and we are very pleased with the success that it has had to date.

As far as the expected growth in this area -- the number of births in 2006 versus what the estimated number is for the 2007 year -- we are projecting a slight increase in birth from 2006, but only a two-percent increase, so this is not an area we are expecting to see a lot of growth in the demand here.

Mr. Edzerza: The reason I raised this is because I think every party in the Legislature has at one time or another accused the federal government of starting programs and abruptly ending them. I just wanted to be comfortable that the government of the day hasn't adopted those bad practices of the federal government where you get people depending on a service and then you shut it down. I am aware of the increases in this area. That's why I asked if the staff has grown accordingly. If the government feels there is no reason for alarm there, I guess they should know.

I would like to ask a couple questions now with regard to children's assessment and treatment services, like the child abuse treatment services. How are services provided to the communities? I know there are 108 regionally and Whitehorse

has 148. That makes about two-thirds of the Whitehorse total. But outreach is only about 40 percent of the total services. I am curious as to how these services are being provided.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: The program is a Whitehorse-based program. Services provided in communities in terms of treatment and counselling are provided on a needs basis. The workers travel from Whitehorse for that.

I would point out to the member opposite that I am attempting to provide him with the information in the interest of answering his questions and facilitating debate. Some of this would be easier to deal with in line-by-line, simply to avoid keeping the member waiting while we flip pages here. Certainly I am attempting to provide the member with the information here in general debate, but it would be simpler to get into it in more detail in line-by-line. However, I hope I have addressed the member's question.

In reference to his previous comments about the healthy families program, certainly we regard this program as something that has been very successful to date. It is not a program that has been running for that long, so it is something that was established in Whitehorse to evaluate its success. We want to have a look at ways, as with any program, that we can address and improve it after it has been implemented. Theories are one thing, but seeing how they actually work is another.

The Yukon is, of course, different in many ways from other areas, even when we take programs based on other areas and jurisdictions. They are not always directly transferable. They aren't always the same thing. We need to address the needs of the Yukon. That is what we are doing in this area and in other areas, and it is something we certainly appreciate.

I would point out that with healthy families initiative is something to address the member's concern. We certainly have no intention of cutting off funding to this program, as he raised. We've been very critical of the former federal Liberal government and their practice of establishing "boutique programs" that looked good for the press announcement, but discontinuing that funding down the road -- not staying for the long term.

We certainly don't agree with that type of practice. We believe funding should be provided for appropriate programs and for appropriate services in an appropriate manner and be done on the basis of the needs and interests of the public and the population, not just for the press announcement. We're focused on providing the services that are needed, requested and desired by Yukoners long term.

The healthy families initiative, based on the assessment that has been done to date, we believe has been a very successful program and one that, in fact, may be a building block for building on that and looking at other areas of the Yukon at some point in time. This is an area that's working well.

I hope that has addressed the member's question regarding this successful area, and we intend to continue supporting the healthy families initiative.

Mr. Chair, seeing the time, I move that we report progress.

Chair: Mr. Cathers 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: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Mr. Nordick: 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. The time being 5:30 p.m., this House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. Monday.

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.