

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Monday, March 14, 2011 — 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 now proceed with the Order Paper. Tributes.
 Introduction of visitors.
 Returns or documents for tabling.

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Mr. Cardiff: I have for tabling a submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights respecting *An Act to Amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act*, Bill C-4, made on behalf of the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates.

Speaker: Are there any further documents or returns for tabling?

Are there reports of committees?

Are there petitions?

PETITIONS

Petition No. 15

Ms. Hanson: I have for presentation a petition regarding the Northern City Supportive Housing Coalition's proposal for a 20-unit supportive housing project in downtown Whitehorse.

The petition contains approximately 500 signatures, including those of a number of homeless people.

Speaker: Are there any further petitions for presentation?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motion?

NOTICES OF MOTION

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

THAT this House urges the Members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly to grant unanimous consent to deal with a proposed bill, entitled *Act to Amend the Workers' Compensation Act*, concerning firefighter presumptive legislation, during the current sitting of the First Session of the 32nd Legislative Assembly should the need arise.

Hon. Ms. Horne: I give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to consult with the residents of Ross River and the Ross River Dena Council concerning the replacement of the Ross River recreation centre that was recently destroyed by fire.

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

THAT this House urges the Official Opposition to call for debate some of their favourite motions of the more than 1,000 motions other than government motions, including motions for the production of papers, or admit that there was never any intention of actually calling them for debate.

Mr. McRobb: I give notice of the following motion for the production of papers:

THAT this House do issue an order for the return of the following information regarding the Yukon business nominee program:

(1) a list of all applicants to the program, including but not limited to, the eligibility criteria checklist, the date and authority by whom the application was approved or rejected, and degree of follow-up with each nominee with respect to their continued eligibility in the program; and

(2) copies of all minutes of the business review committee that reviews and approves or rejects applications submitted to the program since November 1, 2006.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to ensure that the Emergency Measures Organization has the resources available to it for coordinating the territory's preparedness for, response to, and recovery from, major emergencies and disasters, in light of the current tragedies occurring in Japan at this time.

Mr. Fairclough: Mr. Speaker, I give notice of the following motion for the production of papers:

THAT this House do issue an order for the return of all documents and minutes of meetings for the work done by the Public Service Commission to move forward on whistle-blower legislation.

Ms. Hanson: I give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to support the Japanese Canadian Association of Yukon in its endeavours to provide financial and other emergency assistance to Japan in response to the catastrophic disasters that have affected Japan and her citizens this past week.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Canada to accept the following recommendations of the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights respecting *An Act to Amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act*, Bill C-4, dated March 2011, namely:

THAT Parliament stay any further consideration of Bill C-4;

THAT the Government of Canada provide evidence that shows the amendments proposed in Bill C-4 will result in a

decrease in criminal activity among youth and increased public safety;

THAT the Government of Canada give full effect to the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* by adequately funding the non-custodial options provided for in the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, by channelling funds to provincial and territorial governments who are charged with the administration of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*;

THAT the Government of Canada facilitate a national multi-jurisdictional strategy, to be jointly developed by federal provincial and territorial authorities and their respective oversight agencies, that responds to the needs of young people with mental illness or severe behavioural and developmental disorders, thereby preventing them from becoming mired in a system that is ill-equipped to meet their needs;

THAT the protection of the public and rehabilitation of youth be reinforced as two interdependent objectives, both of which are equally relevant as principles guiding the decision-making process under the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*;

THAT the Government of Canada ensures that any future proposed changes to the Canadian youth criminal justice system comply with the provisions and spirit of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and;

THAT all parliamentarians work toward consensus in order to ensure that an independent children's commissioner for Canada be established that respects the distribution of legislative power.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to follow the lead of concerned community and business groups and work with the leadership and residents of Ross River to provide alternative facilities where residents, and especially youth, can pursue recreational and social activities until the community's recreation centre, destroyed by fire on March 10, 2011, is replaced.

Speaker: Any further notices of motion?

Is there a statement by a minister?

This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Ross River recreation centre fire

Mr. Elias: On behalf of the Official Opposition, we want to express our deepest sympathies to the residents of Ross River. The loss of their community recreation centre is a tragic and most unfortunate event. We expect that the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin has already travelled to the community of Ross River to reassure her constituents that the government will act quickly to minimize any collateral damage to the community. I understand she put a motion on the floor today.

We do not yet know what happened or why. We do know the community of Ross River has suffered a terrible loss. There has been over \$50,000 raised from donations from Yukoners already and that is truly wonderful. Will the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin provide the House an update on this issue? Is the gov-

ernment mobilizing a team to look into the options that may be available to the residents of Ross River?

Hon. Mr. Lang: We on this side of the House are concerned about the Ross River situation they found themselves in after the fire. I would also like to thank the mining communities and individuals who put the resources together so the community can continue with their hockey program.

There is a team of people on the ground in Ross River as we speak, working with the First Nation, the residents and the fire marshal's offices on the ground there to do the investigation on the fire itself. There is a team of people on the ground in Ross River doing the good work they do.

We are also very committed to make sure that community has a recreation complex.

Mr. Elias: I thank the minister for that update. Community centres and recreational opportunities in rural Yukon have a direct effect on Yukoners and our quality of life. Rec centres are the social heart and soul of any community and the loss of the recreation centre in Ross River is nothing short of a tragic event.

There has already been over \$50,000 of donations made toward the purchase of hockey equipment that was lost in the fire. We thank all of the individuals and organizations that have made donations for their generosity. We want to make sure that the residents of Ross River know that their needs are being addressed by this government. Has the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin engaged in any discussions with anyone about interim measures for the Ross River recreation centre while plans are being drawn up to replace the recreation facility?

Hon. Ms. Horne: I can assure the member opposite that the government is well-aware of what the community of Ross River needs. I have been speaking constantly with members of the community since Friday morning.

There are temporary measures that are being considered right now. I am pleased to say that the whole community — all of Yukon — has come together to support Ross River. Faro is being used, and they are coming forward to the community to also assist. It is at times like this that volunteers throughout the Yukon shine when they give of themselves to help the communities that need help and individuals who need help. We are well aware of the problem in Ross River, and there are already discussions of temporary facilities that will be used.

Mr. Elias: That's why we chose to bring this question to the floor of the House today because the whole territory is wondering what the government's plans are. This is not the first time that the issues of recreational facilities and quality of life have come before the Assembly. Unfortunately, there are still communities throughout rural Yukon that have already waited for many years for adequate facilities. This government has had a decade to deal with this, with successive, billion-dollar budgets, and there should be enough money to provide modern and safe recreational centres in Yukon communities. With the loss of the recreation centre in Ross River, the problem just became that much bigger. A Liberal government will deal with this. A Liberal government will fix this problem.

Will the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin commit her government to do the same?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Certainly, this Yukon Party government will do exactly that. We've expanded and built in Marsh Lake. There's the Mayo recreation complex. We're committed to going ahead with Dawson City, and certainly this incident that happened in Ross River has to be addressed. The Yukon government will do just that.

Question re: Social housing

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, a few moments ago, a petition was tabled in this House with over 500 signatures. Every signature on it belongs to someone who supports the goals of the Northern City Supportive Housing Coalition. The Liberal caucus also believes in the coalition, its objectives and its plans. We have raised their case in this House numerous times. The many Yukoners who lent their names to this petition want to see the coalition succeed, just as the Liberal caucus does, and as does the Third Party.

But to go forward, Northern City still needs Yukon government financial support. Will the Housing minister also lend his support to this plan?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: As I have said before, the Yukon Housing Corporation issued a call for submissions under the affordable housing initiative, and the Northern City Supportive Housing Coalition was one of three proposals submitted for a 20-unit apartment building in downtown Whitehorse.

The submission was put on hold by the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors, not the government, because of insufficient information with which to evaluate the submission, therefore making a decision impractical.

That review is now in the hands of the Department of Health and Social Services, which is working with other agencies within the government to do an evaluation and to make a decision for the best use of Yukoners' money and the best solution to the problem.

Mr. Mitchell: The Northern City Supportive Housing Coalition proposes to build 20 units of safe, supported, affordable housing in Whitehorse. This complex will also provide on-site outreach, counselling, education and referral services. Eight local social service providers and a core group of volunteers have worked hard to advance this vision.

The petition tabled today shows that many individual Yukoners also support their plans. For this project to go forward, the Yukon government must lend its support. The Health minister recently said the government is near a decision on the proposal. Will the Housing minister support the Northern City Supportive Housing Coalition's proposal to build much-needed supported housing in our community?

Hon. Ms. Horne: The Health and Social Services department has been actively engaged with the Northern City Supportive Housing Coalition and with Yukon Housing Corporation to assist the development of their project and in review and assistance with their business plans.

As the members opposite always bring up, the Auditor General just noted in her recent report that we require proper review and analysis. They are an obligation of any government to responsibly manage the resources of its citizens and that's exactly what we are doing.

Mr. Mitchell: The members of the Northern City Supportive Housing Coalition have invested a great deal of time, energy, expertise and vision in preparing this proposal. As a result, they were able to recently release an expanded business plan to address some of the issues previously raised by government. That plan details how collaboration with other social service organizations will make housing possible for the members of our community who are most in need. The Housing minister already has those plans and now there is a petition showing strong public support for the project. Again, will the minister and this government lend its support to this concrete solution to addressing homelessness within our community?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: The review of the potential operating and maintenance impacts has been with the Department of Health and Social Services in order to assess the impacts that are acceptable. It also looks at construction financing, mortgage financing, et cetera.

I would remind the member opposite that, having been on the floor of the House many times saying that we should do better at planning and deal with facts and figures and not just gut reactions, perhaps he should go back and read some of his favourite *Hansard* speeches. That's exactly what we're doing. The decision lies with the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors. It's not a political decision.

Now, of course, the Liberal Party has made it very clear that they would go in and if they were to form government, they would take over that and constantly stir the pot with the Board of Directors and other Crown Corporations. I leave it with the good, competent people within the Housing Corporation. The analysis is being done and decisions will be made with fact, not potential fiction.

Question re: Airport activity

Ms. Hanson: Last week I asked the Minister of Highways and Public Works a question about concerns residents of my riding have raised with me about helicopter training and recertification flights over their homes. Contrary to what the minister said in his reaction to the question, nobody is asking him to shut down or move the Erik Nielsen International Airport. What these residents are asking for is very straightforward. They consider these flights directly over their homes to be disruptive and even potentially dangerous. These residents of Whitehorse Centre want the minister to see if an alternative and safer location for these flights can be found. Will the minister commit to doing that?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I did contact the helicopter industry. The testing is done over the airport. It is not done over the community itself, so the facts aren't borne out by exactly what the industry has told me. Plus the airport group has said the same thing. The helicopters are checked over the airport itself.

Ms. Hanson: In fact, if the minister would walk around downtown when these flights are occurring, he would know that they do fly off the clay cliffs over the downtown area. In this day and age, public health and safety should be of paramount concern to any government. Allowing these low-altitude flights to occur over residential areas, coming out of the clay cliffs, is not a good idea. As I said last week, these flights run from April to June. They are not running right now.

They occur 12-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week. They can cause considerable noise and air pollution. They have a negative impact on the quality of life of the people of downtown Whitehorse who live near the clay cliffs directly under the flight path.

The residents want to know why this government allows these potentially dangerous and disruptive flights to occur directly over their homes. I understand what your minister is saying when he talks about talking to the industry.

Will he make a commitment to the residents to look at ways of having these flights occur elsewhere?

Hon. Mr. Lang: The alternative is to shut down the Erik Nielsen International Airport. I remind the member opposite, I live under a flight path that has five jets a day that blank out the sun when they go over my home and I understand the merits of living in an area — in fact, I built my house where I live now. I understand the need to have air transportation into our community. The helicopters are doing their work; the helicopters are following the rules; the helicopters are doing their work over the airport itself. Of course, there is noise involved with that and, if you were standing, you could look up and see a helicopter, certainly, because that's where our airport is in the community.

We have all sorts of traffic coming into that airport at all times of the day and night. I have jets over my home at midnight coming into this community. It is not safe, when you think of the Concord going down in Paris, or you think of the airplanes that have landed in New York. It's very unsafe for me to live where I do, when you think of the accidents that could happen. But I live there and the airport is where it is. It's part of our community and has been part of our community for many years. I'm sure the member opposite will understand that there is a safety factor around airports.

Ms. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, and repeatedly, nobody is asking the minister to shut down or move the airport. Five flights a day is not 12 hours a day, seven days a week. Nobody is asking him to stop the training and recertification flights for helicopter pilots. Nobody is asking him to do anything beyond his capacity as the minister responsible. All he is being asked to do is show some common sense and find another place where these flights can occur safely and with fewer disturbances to people.

The residents of Whitehorse Centre are concerned and they want an answer from this minister. Will he take their concerns seriously, not disparage them, and work to find some other place where these flights can occur?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Maybe Abbotsford. That would be a good alternative for our helicopter industry. Abbotsford has many helicopters flying in and out of that community in flight paths that are regulated — training or otherwise. That's where you get your endorsement.

What I'm saying to the member opposite is that the international airport is regulated. The industry is regulated. They do what they can to do the job they can, but it is an airport.

Question re: Criminal justice legislation

Mr. Cardiff: Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Justice advise the House what the implications are for the Department

of Justice with regard to Bill C-4, now before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights?

Hon. Ms. Horne: This is under the federal jurisdiction, not the Yukon Department of Justice.

Mr. Cardiff: But it has implications for the correctional system and the criminal justice system here in the Yukon, and the minister considers the changes that have been made in Yukon corrections under her watch to be humane and even progressive. The thrust of new Yukon legislation and the new corrections centre is one of rehabilitation and healing, rather than punishment. This government has brought forward a social inclusion policy that supports the integration of the marginalized in our society. Bill C-4 is a step backward that rejects some of these ideals. It takes away from the rehabilitative steps that are contained in the *Yukon Criminal Justice Act*. It hinders the positive reintegration of youth back into society. Those are the views of our own child and youth advocate. How will the minister ensure the present restorative justice programs continue if Bill C-4 passes?

Hon. Ms. Horne: In the Yukon, we do not sentence inmates to federal penitentiaries. This is an issue related to a federal bill, not a Yukon one. If the member opposite wants to, he can write a letter to the federal minister.

Mr. Cardiff: Well, so can the Minister of Justice. The territory has a positive reputation for its experience with restorative justice. Many of the new ideas in circle sentencing and diversion programs originated with First Nations here in the Yukon. The Community Wellness Court and other programs provide treatment and therapy. Research shows that the decrease in incarceration rates because of similar programs was not followed by an increase in youth crime. In fact, youth crime in the territory has gone down 45 percent since the implementation of restorative justice programs.

Bill C-4 is based on punishment, deterrence and denunciation. It neglects the needs of young people with mental illness and FASD. Bill C-4 is just the opposite of restorative justice. It reflects an overreaction of a federal government that is punitive and fearful. Will the minister tell her federal counterparts that this territory does not support Bill C-4?

Speaker: Thank you. You're done.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Let's bring some clarity to this question.

In the first instance, the Yukon government, in all its areas of jurisdiction, whether it be in youth criminal justice, with our young offenders facility, and all the programs we have available within both Health and Social Services and our justice system — they all apply. However, in the case of criminal charges and criminal sentencing being handed down by the courts, under whatever federal bill we may be dealing with at any given time, we do not have inmates who have been sentenced to federal time serving that time here in the Yukon. That's the important point here.

As far as Bill C-4 and the legislation as presented before the House, we value the input of such people as our youth advocate. This is important. This bill is up for debate. If you looked across this country, there are many who have experienced youth criminal activities, who are victims, who are

deeply concerned about this particular situation. It's in our best interest to direct our attention through the appropriate channels.

As far as Yukon, we do our job within our jurisdiction when it comes to youth criminal activity.

Question re: Motions for the production of papers

Mr. Mitchell: Last week this government's federal cousins had their hands caught in the cookie jar for refusing to honour the democratic process and releasing information that the opposition was requesting on behalf of Canadians. Over the past five years, this Yukon Party government has shown the same disregard for democracy, revealing only the information that it thinks Yukoners have a right to see and viewing democratic process as an inconvenience instead of a fundamental right.

Last week the Health minister said that, when looking at the development of a new hospital in Watson Lake, "We were looking at the needs of that hospital and what would be required." He went on to say that several studies and evaluations were done to determine what kind of a facility would be needed there. This is curious, since we have asked for the release of these studies numerous times and this government hasn't been able or willing to provide them.

Will this government produce these studies right here, right now?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: In the case of Watson Lake, I think it is pretty clear that the Watson Lake Cottage Hospital has been in service since about 1978-79. I'm sure there is a tremendous amount of information compiled over those many decades. The amount of people who were in the hospital at any given time who were receiving — whether it be acute care, maybe in some cases palliative care, in other cases detoxification, in other cases emergency services being provided.

The hospital also included community nursing. Community nursing was established there. The hospital also, from time to time, served as a facility for a travelling dentist to come to the community and do that work. So there has been a tremendous amount of history in regard to the Watson Lake Cottage Hospital. Furthermore, the members opposite also queried the witnesses before this House from the Yukon Hospital Corporation, and I'm sure they heard the Yukon Hospital Corporation reference the fact that they had done their due diligence on the matter and have proceeded.

Furthermore, we've tabled — and it's very public — an overall health care review that shows clearly within that review when you choose to pick a recommendation that this was in accordance with that review also, but at the end of the day here's the study. We'll meet the needs of Yukoners —

Mr. Mitchell: No one is asking whether or not there has been a hospital in Watson Lake and for how many years it has been there. We're asking this government to demonstrate that it did its due diligence before it announced what it was going to build.

Now, there are over 60 motions for the production of papers on the books that this government continues to ignore. This government claims to be open and accountable, but if it has nothing to hide, then why does it refuse to put its cards on the table for Yukoners to see?

Practising an open and accountable government was something that this Yukon Party government promised voters in the last election and something that Yukoners have a right to expect.

But here's a prime example: there have still been no studies tabled to indicate that a needs assessment for the Watson Lake hospital was even done before the decision was announced. Why hasn't this government released these studies? What does it have to hide?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: The Leader of the Official Opposition began his questioning with such comments as, "hands in the cookie jar" and now something "to hide". The difference between the Liberals and the Yukon Party government — when it comes to meeting the health care needs of Yukoners, whether they be in Whitehorse, Watson Lake, Dawson City and beyond, we are going to stand up and meet those needs. There is no reason in the world why the hospital in Watson Lake could not continue to function. The structural issues that the existing facility faces are quite obvious. The government had to make a decision, which we did. In the context — and here's the study — of meeting the health care needs of the residents of Watson Lake and surrounding area, we'll defend that decision any day, any time, anywhere.

Mr. Mitchell: The Premier just made it clear that there never was a study. That's the problem the Auditor General keeps finding with this government. Now, a request for the production of public documents shouldn't be difficult for an open and accountable government to satisfy. But when these requests go unanswered or when documents are released with so much black ink on them that they look more like a CSIS file than a public document, Yukoners start to raise the question: just what is this government up to behind closed doors?

This is the kind of governance that has been practised in this House over the past five years, and Yukoners are tired of it. We ask this government for information to ensure that it's staying on the right path, and when we do, it's like we're asking to see state secrets. These are public documents we're requesting.

Did this government actually initiate the needs-assessment studies for the Watson Lake hospital like it said it did, and if so, why is it not releasing the results?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Here are some results: there are people in hospital beds in the hospital at Watson Lake. That's a pretty good result, I think, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite has now referenced blacked-out documents. Does the Leader of the Official Opposition not understand what access to information and protection of privacy is all about? It looks to me like the Liberals would ignore the right to privacy for Yukoners, Mr. Speaker. The member references the so-called calls and motions for production of papers. Why then, don't the Liberals call those motions for debate?

Mr. Speaker, there is one thing about politics. There is either gamesmanship or there's real delivery on behalf of the public interest. There are three kinds of parties in this House: the make-it-happen party — the Yukon government — the Yukon Party government making decisions on behalf of Yukoners; the watch-it-happen party, which the NDP are now certainly clearly defined as with the Green Party's emergence; and

the wonder-what-happened party, which is the Liberals. They keep wondering instead of looking at what their plan would be for the future for this territory — so are Yukoners wondering what the Liberal plan is.

Question re: Motions for the production of papers

Mr. McRobb: This is all about open and accountable government. The public deserves no less than to see how their tax dollars are spent. Last week this government's federal colleagues were called on the red carpet by the Speaker of the House of Commons for failing to disclose information requested by Parliament. When the Premier led the secret charge to privatize Yukon's energy future, the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources was ordered to let \$275,000 in contracts to Outside consultants. The public deserves to see those contracts. We've been requesting these documents for 18 months. Will the Energy, Mines and Resources minister now release these documents?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: The Department of Energy, Mines and Resources has worked with a variety of different companies, different utilities and different consultants looking forward on Yukon's energy strategy. We look at a number of different initiatives, whether it is things like the Mayo B project or the Aishihik enhancements. The Government of Yukon is working very responsibly to ensure we're meeting the energy needs of Yukoners now and into the future. We're working with all affected. We have a number of different policies that are out for consultation now. Once again, I'll ask members opposite and the Yukon public at large to judge us based on the decisions we've made and the performance to date, not on the options identified by the Official Opposition.

Mr. McRobb: We began requesting these documents on a formal basis in the fall of 2009. A year later, we submitted a motion for the production of papers, again requesting the contract documents pertaining to the \$275,000 paid to Outside consultants on the secret attempt to privatize Yukon's energy future.

The Premier said last week, and I quote: "Frankly, all pertinent information for this Assembly, for the members opposite, for the public is made available..."

Our Assembly is guided by precedents in our Parliament. Last week's ruling from the Speaker of the House of Commons said that Parliament has an unconditional right to demand information from the Cabinet.

Again, will the Energy, Mines and Resources minister now provide these documents?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: I wonder if the Liberals actually have anything original. Anybody can watch the national news and come up with this kind of strategy. Furthermore, the Member for Kluane keeps referencing this so-called position that the Liberals have taken with regard to assets of the Energy Corporation. Let me remind the House and the Liberals and all Yukoners that it's the Liberals themselves that tabled all the pertinent documents and information. In those documents, it clearly shows Yukon was not selling energy assets whatsoever. It was all about a public utility. It was all about partnership. They even questioned the witnesses from the Energy Corporation and the Development Corporation who reaffirmed that. The

Liberals tabled the information themselves and now are asking for the same information. Do you think we should dedicate our public service to that? No. They're too busy working on behalf of Yukoners in the public interest.

Mr. McRobb: That's incorrect. We have not tabled those contracts. That's why we keep requesting them. Now, someone in this government handed out \$275,000 to Outside consultants on this privatization. The public deserves to know who it was — the Premier or the former Energy, Mines and Resources minister? Yukoners paid for those contracts and they deserve to see them. This government has denied this document request for the past one and a half years.

Where is the accountability, the openness, the transparency? What could be so wrong that it doesn't want anybody to see? The federal Conservatives were admonished, and this Yukon Party government deserves the same treatment for the same infraction. The issue of open and accountable government will be front and centre in the coming election campaign.

Will the Energy, Mines and Resources minister now act in an open and accountable way and release these documents? Yes or no?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Speaker: Order. Order please. Give me a chance to recognize you first.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: You know, there is such a thing as the contract registry — a very public mechanism for providing information to the Yukon public. Again, the Member for Kluane is referring to the Speaker of the House of Commons. As I said last week, take the matter to our Speaker. Present your evidence that the government side is not open and accountable. Present your evidence that in briefings you are not receiving information on the questions asked. Present your evidence that the government has not tabled all pertinent information as required in each and every sitting. Let's be open and accountable. Let's have the Liberals stand up and actually present some factual substance to their questions. The government will answer and provide material on all relevant information needs of substance, Mr. Speaker.

We will not be speculators. We're too busy building Yukon's future while the Liberals are trying to reconstruct history with misinformation.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Just a passing note, honourable members: one can only presume that when you ask a question you'd like to hear the answer. I just ask all honourable members to focus on that in the future.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Ms. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, 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

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair (Mr. Nordick): Order please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 24, *First Appropriation Act, 2011-12*. We will continue with the Department of Education, Vote 3.

Do members wish a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Recess

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

Bill No. 24: *First Appropriation Act, 2011-12* — continued

Chair: The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 24, *First Appropriation Act, 2011-12*. We will now continue with general debate in Vote 3.

Department of Education — continued

Hon. Mr. Rouble: It is my honour and pleasure today to rise to continue to debate the \$145,388,000 in the Department of Education's budget. We put forward this request for these sums in order to create a more responsive education system that will enable all of our learners to succeed, in order to enhance transitions between the different levels of education, training and the world of work, and to further develop and maintain meaningful relationships with all partners in education and training.

I'm very pleased to table the budget that certainly builds upon what we have laid out in the Department of Education's strategic plan. This was developed after extensive consultation with our partners in education, with parents, with teachers, with other orders of government, with non-governmental organizations and others that have a passion for learning in the territory. It outlines our vision, which is for all Yukoners to possess and desire an appreciation of lifelong learning, a strong commitment to their communities and the knowledge and skills needed to lead meaningful, productive and rewarding lives.

Indeed, it builds upon the micro level of education, helping an individual to grow up to become everything he or she wants to be, and on the macro level, working to educate people in our communities so that they are prepared to take on the responsibilities that we have here — whether it's through the world of work, through the world of volunteerism or through the world of participation and democracy.

It has been a privilege to work with both the Department of Education and the Energy, Mines and Resources portfolio. On one hand, with Energy, Mines and Resources, we look at preparing opportunities for Yukoners and, on the other hand, in Education we work to help prepare Yukoners for Yukon opportunities. This involves both the early childhood education, K to 12, post-secondary work — whether it's supporting students through the Yukon grant and the training allowance to attend colleges and universities here in the territory or Outside, or through Yukon College, with their degree and diploma programs, as well as their certificate programs, and also through the Department of Education's labour market initiatives.

We realize we have a multitude of programs designed to increase individuals' capacity and designed to be responsive to the demonstrated needs here in the territory. We've already had a bit of a day to go over many of the factors in today's education system. We've talked about the number of teachers, which has increased since we took office. We've seen the number of education assistants grow since we took office.

We've had quite a debate about that already. When I look at the statistics, I see that in 2002-03, we had 441 teachers and today we have 476. In 2002-03, we had 106 education assistants and today we have 159.15. We have had an opportunity to discuss some of the statistical indicators within the department. We have had an opportunity to go through many of the issues that the Liberal Party has brought forward and now we look forward to entering into debate with the New Democratic Party to respond to some of their concerns and their criticism and to provide them with more information about what is going on in Yukon's education system today.

On that note, I will just remind people of the next education summit, which will be held on April 11 to 13. This will be another opportunity for the Department of Education with all of our partners in education, whether they be First Nation orders of government, with members of the Yukon Association of School Councils, Boards and Committees, with parents, with students, with elders. It is an opportunity for all of these folks to get together and do an annual check-in with education to ensure that progress is being made on issues that have been brought up in the past and to look forward to addressing and resolving issues in the future.

Many of the issues that we've recently discussed have dealt with things like the staffing allocation process, the education reform initiative and the issue of transitions — transitions of going from kindergarten into grade 1, from grade 3 into grade 4, primary school into secondary school, secondary school into post-secondary, and then that transition into the world of work. The next focus on the upcoming April 11 to 13 conference will be on developing a rural strategy. Again, it's not just looking at issues specific to one community or to one perspective, but indeed delving into it in a much broader and greater level in order that we can come up with equitable transparent strategies that are applicable to students and to communities throughout the territory.

With that, I look forward to the debate ahead of us today and to questions pertaining to the Department of Education's budget.

Mr. Cardiff: It's with great pleasure that I rise today to enter into the debate on the education budget.

I would like to begin by thanking the officials for their attendance here today and for the briefing that was provided to members of the opposition and our staff. I realize the amount of work that goes into the preparation of a budget, as well as all the other initiatives that flowed through the Department of Education over the past number of years — the education reform project, responding to the review of the *Education Act* that began before the current government took office, as well as the annual reports and the strategic plan.

The minister tabled the strategic plan in the House last week. I've had an opportunity to go through it briefly — not in depth. But I do have some questions with regard to the report.

Toward the back of the report, on page 40, there is a paragraph dedicated to the implementation of the strategic plan. There are a number of goals, objectives, strategies and initiatives contained in the plan and it references, at the back, on page 40, an implementation plan that has been developed to track the annual progress of each initiative and ensure that they're working toward the goals and objectives. A key thing that is usually included in an implementation plan — when you kind of set a new direction for what it is that you're going to do and how you're going to work with your partners in education, part of an implementation plan — or, my understanding of an implementation plan, is that there would be timelines and associated costs with an implementation plan. Now we have the strategic plan, but we don't have the implementation plan in front of us. The report indicates that there is one.

If you're going to track the progress, I would assume there are some measurements of how the minister intends to track progress. You can call them whatever you want. You can call them key performance indicators — whatever the minister would like to call them — but they should have targets for achievement, and there should be costs associated with the implementation of new initiatives and the continuation of initiatives that are already underway.

On a very high level, the minister could either table or provide a copy of that implementation plan. If he doesn't have it today, I would be pleased to receive it by legislative return over the next day or so, if he can give us sort of a broad overview of what's contained in that implementation plan with regard to those indicators, the timelines that have been assigned for achieving the goals and objectives of the strategic plan, and what the cost implications are for the budget for the Department of Education.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I would like to thank the Department of Education, through the leadership of the deputy minister and her executive staff. They've done a tremendous amount of work on the strategic plan for the Department of Education.

As a politician, I've had my perspectives on education and objectives I've wanted to see and fully appreciate the benefit of getting all these ideas and concerns down on paper in a cogent and descriptive manner, planning for the future, identifying our priorities, and putting forward the goals and objectives for the department.

I was very proud to see the work that was done on this and how involved it was with Yukoners. As the member opposite suggested, yes, we started with a number of documents that were previously existing out there in the world of education.

We have built upon the *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* document and the Kwiya report from August 1987 and then followed up with the information gathered from the *Education Act* review, which was conducted from 2002 to 2004. I remember on that one, looking at it from the outside, we saw that there were literally thousands of concerns raised through that process, but that there were very few that actually dealt with the legislation. It was a case of recognizing that the

legislation that we have is already very enabling and that the legislation, for the most part, wasn't a barrier to enacting some of the issues that people wanted to see, but that we could do a lot of work addressing the concerns that had been brought forward.

The department also built upon that with the education reform project and the recommendations therein. I'll also note for members opposite that, in addition to the strategic plan being tabled, there was also another document tabled last week and that is a link between the education reform initiative, recommendations or points, and that of the Department of Education's strategic plan.

There are two documents there: one links the strategic plan to the reform document, and the other one links the reform document to the strategic plan, so that you can find out either way how your concern is being addressed or the purpose of the objective that is identified.

We also went out with the draft strategic plan some months ago — again, to members here, I believe copies of the draft strategic plan were shared with Members of the Legislative Assembly and with our other partners in education. Based on the information that we received back, we certainly made changes to this strategic plan. Some of the changes included enhancing lifelong learning initiatives, enhancing adult literacy objectives, and enhancing some of the other labour market initiatives. Members would also recognize that I recently tabled the labour market framework report which was another strong project done in the Department of Education, Advanced Education side of things. We are really linking together the needs in our community and the programs going on with the Department of Education.

It was raised in the Auditor General's report that we could not demonstrate the efficiency or effectiveness of some of the programs that we had in place. As the chair of PAC stated, that was a criticism on the record-keeping process rather than a criticism of the performance of the system. We put in place some additional tools since then — things like the Yukon student information system — in order to address the concerns brought forward by the Auditor General. The other concerns that were brought forward by the Auditor General — the progress on those can also be found in the annual report, where we have gone step by step through the recommendations from the Auditor General and then what the department is doing to respond to that. It's that point that I'd just like to spend a bit of a moment on.

We in the Department of Education — really, there are two separate and distinct functions. There is the role of the department and of the government in order to set the policy objectives, to set the overall strategy. Then, it is up to the department to implement or create an operational plan in order to effectively and efficiently implement the policy direction that has been given.

Often when we talk in here about the Auditor General's reports, it is recognizing that the Auditor General is not criticizing the policy set but is raising issues or concerns about the implementation of that policy.

Just a couple of pieces of background information here, because we're getting into the question now of what the political policy, political direction or capital P policy is that's being established. We have that in the department's strategic plan. Then when we get into the implementation of that plan, the operational side of things, we do dig quite a bit deeper.

The plan is set out with the typical hierarchy that one would expect from a strategic plan of looking at the mission and the vision of the organization, its overarching goals and then the specific objectives we want to accomplish there. That's the first part. Then we do have an implementation strategy the department is working on and is continuing to update. It also links back to the budget, because the budget is the tool to enable the plans to be carried out.

There are definite links between the objectives in the strategic plan and the decision around funding on an operational level in the budget. The member opposite has asked a question about the operational plan and, just for his information, that's over 75 pages long right now with different projects, with different outcomes and, as one would expect, with the specific measurable, achievable, realistic and timely characterizations about who will do what. Once we get into the department then too, this broader workplan becomes individuals' workplans, so they will identify what their key job responsibilities are. We're going into quite a level of detail in here. I can say for the member opposite that the Department of Education's budget is the request or the allocation that we require in order to fund the strategic plan. We intend to go forward with implementing the strategic plan, implementing it with the budget allocations that are before us here.

We have a budget a little bit greater than \$145 million that is split between Advanced Education and Public Schools in order to undertake our specific objectives to ensure we are creating additional opportunities for Yukon youth, raising them in a manner — or helping to raise them; I must make that key point. The Department of Education's role is to work in partnership with Yukon parents to help the students reach their potential or become everything that he or she can be.

The operational plan — the implementation plan — is being worked on right now. It has had a huge impact on the budget and the allocations of resources for different areas within the department. The department will be implementing the strategic plan within the constraints or allocations of our budget. That's how the process works.

Before we get into that level of detail, I want to ensure that members are satisfied that we have the appropriate mission, vision, goals and objectives for education.

Mr. Cardiff: Well, I thank the minister for his answer, but I guess what I'm asking him is whether or not he'd be willing to share — I'm not looking for workplans for individuals who are working within the Department of Education to see exactly what it is that each individual is doing. What I'm looking for is that high-level document — the implementation plan that has the performance indicators, the benchmarks, so to speak, and the timelines for the delivery of those specific initiatives. So if he could commit to provide that over the next day

or two, I'd be pleased to receive it. I'm sure the education critic for the Liberal Party would as well.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I will endeavour to provide the member opposite with a copy of the implementation plan once it has been completed.

Mr. Cardiff: There has been a lot of information provided over the last little while, in the annual report and with the strategic plan. We are still working with the education reform documents, the Auditor General's report, and several other documents that have been provided to us over the last few years. As the minister can well imagine, there is a lot of information provided in the Department of Education, and it takes a long time to go through it and on this side of the House. We are not just going through the Department of Education; we are going through information on numerous departments. I may jump around a little bit today with some of my questions, and we may go back and forth on a few of them.

An issue that has been raised several times in education here in the territory for many, many years — I think going back to back to even the 1970s — is the responsiveness of our education system to the needs of First Nation students.

When you look in the annual report at enrolment, you can see where there has been an increase or, at the very least, a steady level of First Nation students participating in our education system and a decline in non-First Nation students in many communities, I believe — I don't have the graph in front of me — and even within the boundaries of Whitehorse. There are more First Nation students, overall, participating in our education system, or trying to access our education system, here in the Yukon.

There have been numerous attempts, and I recognize that some of this is addressed in the strategic plan.

When you get further into the actual initiatives, there is discussion about the tripartite MOU. I'm trying to find the actual reference to it here, which is, according to the strategic plan: "Addressing the disparity in achievement between First Nation and non-First Nation learners in Yukon is a priority for all levels of government in the Yukon. A memorandum of understanding and a joint action plan between the Council of Yukon First Nations, individual First Nations, the Government of Yukon and the Government of Canada is being developed to define the roles and responsibilities of all parties in order to advance student achievement and success for First Nation learners."

I think that's a good goal; I think it's a good objective that we work toward that. But in the Auditor General's report and other reports, there have been concerns about the disparity between the graduation rates. My frustration lies in the fact that we're taking steps, but I think there's a frustration — and I certainly sense it when I'm going door to door and talking to people over the last little while; when I'm talking with leaders in the communities and in the education system — that our efforts, while they may be honourable and we are trying to achieve something, we're not hitting the mark.

I was looking in the annual report to actually see where — maybe the minister can help me with this. There was a section in the education reform document and a number of recommen-

dations around governance and the proposed governance structure. It talked about the Government of Yukon and Yukon First Nations governments establishing a working group with a mandate to explore mechanisms that will facilitate the establishment of a shared governance model for education. The minister has already spoken about the existing legislation and said that the legislation was very enabling. It said in the education reform document that the government should examine existing legislation and identify articles or clauses that are potential barriers to effective partnerships with First Nations. There were actually 11 recommendations under the governance section in the education reform document that begins on — basically it's 1.7 to 1.16. There are 16 pages basically of dialogue in the education reform document about governance and one of those pages contains 11 recommendations.

I don't see it necessarily in the annual report. As I said, there is a section in the strategic plan that talks about partnerships with First Nations, but I'd like the minister to highlight specifically — and I recognize the implementation document was tabled in the Legislature along with the strategic plan about implementing education reform project recommendations and "New Horizons" and the Department of Education's strategic plan, but again, it didn't have those timelines and costs associated with it, so I'm looking forward to it. I thank them for offering to provide that document.

I look forward to receiving it. But I'd like him to report to us on what work has been done specifically around the governance structure. I, too, believe that the legislation is very enabling. I have some further comments about that, but I'd like to listen to what the minister has to say in this regard.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I made quite a few notes during the member opposite's question and comments here. It was quite ranging. So I'm going to start off addressing First Nation student success; then I'll go into student tracking and evaluation; then I'll go into governance and education; then I'll go into some of the changes that we're putting in place to effect life-long learning initiatives for students of First Nation ancestry. I hope he can link all of the concerns that he has expressed together here.

Yes, the success of students of First Nation ancestry has been an issue, as we have reported in previous annual reports. The graduation rates for students of First Nation ancestry lag behind that of non-First Nation ancestry students. Also, we believe participation rates in post-secondary education have lagged behind, although we don't have all of the data with which to reach those conclusions.

It's a pretty heartfelt thought; however, we don't have the evidence, in a Yukon context, to back that up.

The member opposite and I have discussed this in the past about the challenges with the data regarding Yukon's education system. We have put in place a new method of calculating the graduation rate, one that is comparable with most jurisdictions in Canada. Members will recall the discussion we've had in the past about the graduation rate that had been used in the territory for years, which looked at the enrolment in grade 12 and then the graduation of grade 12. It was really looking at those people

in grade 12 who had the potential to graduate and then how many actually did graduate.

But potentially lost in that statistic was the number of people who would have dropped out of school prior to grade 12. Even though this is a statistical method that was used for years in the territory, many people felt it was misleading, so we changed that.

We are in the process of still finalizing that and ensuring that we have the strength of the data and the reliability and sturdiness of the data that we are dealing with in order to provide more information in the future. Part of that change was the implementation of the Yukon student information system, or YSIS, as a way of tracking students from kindergarten through to grade 12, and potentially beyond grade 12. This will also be using the same student ID number as is used in B.C., so we'll have a tool that we can use to measure and monitor student performance that has been much better than we have had in the past.

We have also put in place the student exit survey, and I have discussed that in previous budget debates because it was started a year or so ago. That is a longitudinal survey that the Department of Education is doing with the Bureau of Statistics to look and gather the data and make an informed analysis around participation rates in high school, participation rates in post-secondary graduation and how that relates then back to working in Yukon.

We really want to get a handle on whether or not Yukon is educating Alberta's workforce or if we are indeed preparing Yukoners for Yukon opportunities.

We have been looking at the issue of First Nation performance at a national and Yukon school and on an individual basis. On the national front, the Council of Ministers of Education has made it a priority to eliminate the gap in performance levels of students of First Nations ancestry and students of non-First Nation ancestry. There was a recommendation that was put forward by me. Yukon recommended that we change the term from "close the gap" to "eliminate the gap" because we felt that that was important to state that the existence of any gap, no matter how small or how large, was plain and simply unacceptable. We have made it a national priority to increase the educational outcomes of students of First Nation ancestry.

On that front, we have had numerous territorial and provincial meetings that have also engaged national aboriginal groups. In the past, the Grand Chief, for example, was invited to attend the large summit we held. We've been working on a national basis to address this. Also on a territorial issue, the Government of Yukon has been working very closely with the Council of Yukon First Nations in order to address this issue. Members will remember it was a joint commission that looked at the education reform project and that there were people there from the Council of Yukon First Nations, chairing it and co-chaired with a member from the Government of Yukon.

Following that, with both sides receiving copies of the education reform project, different First Nations took a look at some of their programming, the Council of Yukon First Nations and their education department looked at some of their

programming and the Government of Yukon looked at its programming policies and practice.

We saw some immediate changes and some changes that were going on in the department while the project was going on to address many of these concerns — whether it be something like increasing the Yukon Food for Learning allocation from the Department of Health and Social Services, which doubled the government's contribution to that program, or to things like the creation of the First Nations Programs and Partnerships unit within the Department of Education or the creation of the Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee. I should state also that, during that time, there was a dissolution of the Chiefs Committee on Education. The Chiefs Committee on Education was established with the Council of Yukon First Nations as a forum for chiefs to work on education issues, either with the Department of Education or with their own education people or with me as minister. The good news is, at a recent Council of Yukon First Nations meeting, they passed a resolution to enact the Education Commission, which will, again, create a vehicle for Yukon First Nation chiefs to address territorial issues regarding education and also a vehicle for me as minister to meet with First Nation chiefs in order to address issues of territorial importance.

On that front, we have the Yukon Forum as a mechanism for relationships between the Government of Yukon and Yukon First Nations, and we also have the option of mechanisms for me to meet with First Nation chiefs or for our respective staff to meet.

I'm going to try to drill down here a little bit. We've looked at this from a national perspective; we've looked at it from a broad territorial perspective; now if we can drill down a bit to look at it from an operational perspective, we have the creation of the Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee, which works very closely with the Yukon First Nations Programs and Partnerships unit, to address issues on a territorial basis. They look at broad issues in curriculum, in course design; they were a big impetus into the CHAOS 9 program and some of our other courses.

Then when we take it down another step to more of a geographic nature, there is the opportunity for me as minister to meet with First Nation chiefs to discuss specific initiatives going on in their specific communities. Examples of this could be the bicultural program in Haines Junction, the land-based experiential education program in Old Crow. There are a couple of other ones that I am sure will pop into my head here in a moment, but I just want to make the point that we try to deal on a broad territorial level and then on a broad departmental level. Then we will work on a school-specific level or community-specific — I haven't quite gotten to the school-specific initiatives, but that is the next point now where we are talking about specific initiatives going on within a specific school, and the tool that we have put into place to address that is the school-based growth plan. This is working with the school council, with the administration in the school, with parents, with the Department of Education and others who are interested in education.

A note on the school councils: many of our school councils have a guaranteed representation level which sets a minimum level of people with First Nation ancestry to be on the school council. That's done to ensure that there is participation by people of the local First Nation on the school council, but that by no means is a ceiling to the people of First Nation ancestry participating on their school councils.

Now we get into the next level here of governance. That's looking at the specific school issue that is addressed through the school growth plans, which do identify key priorities and target areas for their specific schools and then work with the administration in that school in order to find effective ways of implementing and achieving those goals.

Then we drill down to that next level. We have the other very important triangle — that being the student, the parent and the teacher — and ensuring that we're working with the teacher, with the appropriate training, with the appropriate awareness of the community and the culture, with the appropriate subject matter expertise to deliver the programs, working with the student to ensure that we have an engaging curriculum to ensure that they are interested in coming into the school, as well as engaging with the parent to be involved in the process. As I mentioned in my opening comments today, the involvement of the parent is key to the success of students in our system.

What we have here on the issue of involvement in governance is a multi-layered approach throughout the whole education system in Canada, whether it be at the national level with the Council of Ministers of Education, at the Yukon level between me and soon-to-be-renewed education consortium, or whether it's me at Council of Yukon First Nations meetings, from an operational level across the territory with FNEAC and the FNPP. The governance level then goes down to the community level with specific initiatives that we work on, whether it's on a government-to-government basis or on an MOU on education. The next level down is into the school, with the involvement in the school council, with guaranteed representations there, which is a floor-to-representation and not a ceiling-to-representation, the broader community involvement in education to ensure that the whole community has an opportunity to be involved in the school growth plans.

Then it's down to increasing the opportunities for involvement on the individual student level — whether it's on an IEP or whether it's just regular meetings between the parent, the student and the teacher to discuss progress. All of these are important areas to ensure that we are creating opportunities for success for our students.

Also, we have to remember that this is all taking place in the whole continuum of education — whether it's for children in our kindergarten schools, very young learners in the early primary school grades, whether it's children making the transition into the secondary school system or whether it's going into the post-secondary education and then some of the labour market programs. We have a variety of different programs there to engage learners of different academic levels or backgrounds. We're trying to provide appropriate training or appropriate learning at each of the different levels in order that we can de-

velop students who have the necessary literacy, numeracy, 21st-century skills in order to participate fully in Yukon today.

I have gone over a lot of ground here, and I hope I have addressed the member opposite's question. He wanted to know about governance and how people can be involved in the decision-making regarding programming for either their child or Yukon students in general. I have laid out a variety of different mechanisms for that. The one that I forgot was, of course, the creation of the strategic plan, which was quite a thorough review, working with all our partners in education to ensure that we have a strategic plan that is meeting their expectations, so that we can implement this, so that we can achieve the common goals that we have.

As well, we recognize that there will be ongoing issues or concerns with education, and that is why we have established the education meetings, the education summits that are held — well, we are on our third one now, where we are able to check in with the partners in education to report progress, to identify ongoing concerns or new concerns.

In the past, we have discussed issues about First Nation curriculum or incorporating culture in the school, or incorporating more experiential education. We've also discussed transitions in the past. At this upcoming summit, we will be looking at rural strategies of ensuring that we are putting in place programming that is meeting the needs of students in our primary, secondary and post-secondary opportunities. Indeed, the education summit that is coming up on April 11 to 13 is done in partnership with the Council of Yukon First Nations and also, I believe, Yukon College, because it's important to bring all of these entities together so that we can ensure that we're on a common path.

Mr. Cardiff: I thank the minister for all that information. I believe he has stated much of it in this House before. I'm going to stay with this subject for a little while with regard to governance because the minister and I aren't exactly on the same page. The minister talked about the legislation being very enabling, and I agree.

Part 7 of the *Education Act* talks about school committees, school councils and school boards. At each level, those organizations, whether they be a committee or a council — I don't know that there are any committees any more; I believe there are school councils and one school board. The legislation is very enabling, and it's very clear about the roles and responsibilities, the powers, what councils shall do and what they may do, what boards shall do and what they may do. I'm not going to get into that today, because that's a whole other discussion. It might be more appropriate to have another sitting after this one to discuss those types of things because our time here is limited.

The minister says the legislation is very enabling, and he has these tools at his disposal.

I'm going to quote a former president of Yukon College. I recall having discussions about how the college board's responsibilities were very broad. We were trying to keep it at a fairly broad level and the minister drilled right down to the relationship among the student, the parent and the teacher. I'm talking on a broad level here, where the college had a responsi-

bility to report to the minister and they had the relationship with the minister. They also had a relationship with community campus committees and communities. I'm going to paraphrase the quote, because I don't have the quote verbatim. It was about shared governance and sharing power and when you give up power to make decisions to have community campus committees make decisions about things that really affect their community and their local college campus, how that is empowering them.

It empowered the board because the board could take comfort in the knowledge that they were doing something to address real needs in their community. The minister talked about the school councils, but the powers and the sharing of power and the decision-making — this would make the minister more powerful, if he really wants to think about it — devolving some of those decisions down to a level of the school board, where they're granted more autonomy to respond, where they're granted more budgetary responsibility.

The minister talked about the legislation being very enabling. That's one section of the act that is very enabling and is available to the minister and is more responsive to the needs of the community, to allow them that power, that decision-making authority, as it's laid out in part 7 of the *Education Act*. Has the minister given any thought to that? Has he had any discussions about that with the Council of Yukon First Nations or with individual First Nations who are seeking more autonomy in how education is delivered in their communities?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I appreciate the member opposite's question and I'm just trying to find the best way or a way to respond to this. What we have before us today is the budget for the Department of Education and we in the department are seeking the MLAs' support on granting these expenditures so that we can undertake the activities that are outlined in the budget document. This is a large step in the public accountability of our public school system.

It is an important step, standing here and discussing the budget and what we plan to use the people's purse for, and what we want to achieve with that. I've gone through a number of different initiatives now, where we have discussed how the Department of Education — which has the statutory requirement under Yukon's *Education Act* to provide an education system for all. As to how we go about doing this, we've talked about identifying different needs in our community, whether they are needs that people of First Nation ancestry have, or the needs of people whose first language is French, or whether it's people who practise the Catholic faith. Yukon's education system has a responsibility to work with all people in all of these areas and then to support the programming and instruction that is delivered for all Yukon students. We have done a considerable amount of work in recent years, working with others, getting others' perspectives and points of view, and using that information to shape what our schools look like, the curriculum that is being taught, and the reporting that is going back to parents and Yukoners to create and receive their involvement in setting specific goals and objectives for their schools. I think we've done an excellent job of that.

As I have mentioned previously to the member opposite, we have worked on incorporating a variety of perspectives on a national level, on a territorial level, on a school level and on an individual level. We have worked quite a bit with our school committee, which did recently transform into a school council. We've done a tremendous amount of work with our school councils. I know our administrators and superintendent and the assistant deputy minister and the other Education support folks have done a tremendous amount of work, working with communities and working specifically with schools.

We have done a lot of work with the Yukon Association of School Councils, Boards and Committees and we'll continue to do that. I would encourage members to take a look at the school growth plans that have been implemented in Yukon schools and to take a look at the areas they provide detail about. We have just gone through a process of evaluation, too, where a school growth plan advisory committee has gone through and taken a look at the growth plans for each of the schools and worked with the schools to provide them with a bit of a report card on that. Also, on the school council basis, I have been approached, as the minister, about supporting specific initiatives or testing out pilot projects in specific schools.

We've done a few of those and then we really took that information to heart and then created the innovation fund, which is supported in this budget to provide a financial mechanism so that schools could go from the idea stage to "it's a good idea" to "let's test it" type of thing. We have put a lot of effort into engaging the community and to systematically involving their thoughts into the plan for the school. We've done work with them to provide additional resources so that they would be empowered to look at new initiatives or to take a look at new programming opportunities. We see that going on, and also we've seen a lot of work going back into the reporting, whether it's investing in the infrastructure necessary such as the Yukon student information system to provide the data that's required, to making changes to the annual report, to the tremendous steps we've taken with the strategic plan. It is interesting that with greater autonomy comes greater accountability.

We have been working to increase our accountability to the Yukon taxpayer and to Yukon parents and to Yukoners who are interested in education, through our Education annual report. Clearly there is no doubt about the tremendous growth and development we've seen in that area in recent years. I also have to add the labour market framework, going through with a strategic and systematic approach to looking at what our needs are in the world of recruitment, retention, of immigration and of a comprehensive skills and training strategy. Additionally, we're looking forward to increasing the data we have available on labour market information so we can make better decisions.

There are situations where I appreciate the whole business of the difference between "consent" and "consensus". There are instances where I will get an initiative from a school, requesting to do something in particular and, while I might personally have a concern about that, I also recognize that they have the authority to make that decision, so we have made a change even in how we respond to some of the letters requesting flexibility with school council resource allocations. In the

past, it was standard that it would be a letter from the minister that says I am pleased to provide my support for your initiative. Instead, we changed that to be more reflective, "We recognize your authority to make decisions over this and, as such, your request is approved."

There are those types of things that are happening. We are doing a lot of work with the school councils. We are doing a lot of work with the Yukon First Nations. The member opposite has talked about transferring power, but I would just seek a bit more clarity or detail on this as to how we would reconcile that with all of our statutory requirements and our budgetary requirements and just maybe get a better handle on some of the areas that he might be thinking about.

Once I have that, maybe we can talk about ways we can accommodate those types of things within our existing processes. We have been working with Yukon First Nations through the Council of Yukon First Nations with the federal government on applying for a fund that the federal government has established. The federal government has recognized that the outcomes for students of aboriginal ancestry aren't as high as the outcomes for other students. The federal government identified a pot of money and they've identified resources that people or entities can apply for. Our first step in this process is to jointly agree on a memo that will commit the orders of government to working together on this. We'll certainly respect each other's jurisdiction, but jointly, we all recognize that it is a priority to increase the outcomes for students of First Nation ancestry.

I expect that in the very near future, there will be a more formal signing off of this MOU and then we will be able to proceed to the next step of actually putting forward project proposals to access the resources that the federal government is providing in this area so that we can all work together to implement these projects and measure and monitor the results of these projects to see if indeed they are worth continuing and worth either up-scaling or making part of the operational plan of the Department of Education. The Department of Education is certainly open to hearing good ideas. We're open to ideas of how to implement transformative change. We're certainly interested in hearing what people's expectations for education are. That was the big process that we've gone through with our strategic plan and we'll certainly continue to work with all Yukoners on how we can go about implementing efficient, effective, relevant, lifelong learning programs for all Yukoners.

Mr. Cardiff: I'm not so sure about that particular response. The minister started out talking about the reason why we're here. What he said is that we're here to discuss the budget and seek legislative approval for the expenditures that are made. I believe \$145 million was the figure he quoted for Public schools and Advanced Education. Also rolled into some of that are those labour market initiatives and whatnot.

If the minister wants to get into that whole thing about whether we vote for or against the budget, this is where I personally am making my judgment of support for the minister and the budget. There are a lot of things in this budget that I support, but when the minister stands up and gives me an answer like that, it's hard for me to support his vision. He totally

dismissed what the question was about, which was whether or not he supports using the enabling legislation in part 7 about the creation of school boards.

I don't want to stand here and read out the list of what school boards "shall" do, and what they "may" do, in section 116 of the *Education Act*. The minister should be familiar with that. That's what the sharing of responsibility and power is about that I am talking about. I understand what the minister is trying to communicate and that we are drilling down into that detail about what the public's participation is in the education system. What I am talking about is, at the visioning level and at the actual decision-making level, allowing some of that authority to go from the department to a school board.

I recognize there are cost implications to this, but I am asking the minister whether or not he has even looked at it, or if he has just dismissed it out of hand because there may be additional costs.

There may be efficiencies that can be created somewhere else as well. But when I asked him the question, it was specifically about part 7 of the *Education Act*, the creation of school boards. There is one school board, albeit it's struggling for a variety of reasons. I asked the minister a lot of these questions last time. Partners in education — school councils and school boards are partners in education. What I'm asking the minister is whether or not he supports the creation of school boards. There have been other attempts within the territory to try and go that way, but they haven't been met by the current minister or previous ministers with a lot of enthusiasm. I'm asking for his opinion on this. This is some of the stuff that guides my support for the minister and his budget.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I remember from some of the courses I've taken that there is a distinction between working to address an interest or working from a position basis. I always want to take steps to work in the best interests of Yukon school kids. That's the whole objective of what we're talking about here. That's the whole point. If the member knows of any school council that wants to become or explore becoming a school board, by all means, have them contact me, have them contact their school principal or have them contact their school superintendent, and we can start a process to engage with the school council to take a look at this. The act is set up for this. The act enables this, and of course we would be willing to sit down with a community or a council that wants to explore this further.

Mr. Cardiff: I'm not suggesting that it would be just one school council asking to be a board, but it might be a geographical area, if it has an interest in providing more culturally appropriate education for its citizens.

This is coming from discussions I've had on the doorstep and in offices talking with people.

There are different models, I guess, and there's the model of education that we're delivering. We're trying to change how we deliver education here to meet the needs of First Nation students. I think if you were to listen to some of what First Nations are saying — that prior to western culture's arrival here in the territory — and there are examples of this recently in Teslin around justice. The First Nations had systems of justice. They

had systems of education for their people. There are those traditional ways of teaching. We're going to come around to a little more detail here in a little bit, but that's what I'm talking about when I'm talking about sharing power and granting powers and authorities to communities. It may not be one individual community. It could be a group of communities.

The minister mentioned incorporating culture. One of the things that is important for the survival of culture is language. Language is linked inextricably with culture because it is the way that you communicate in your community those stories, those lessons in that education system. I believe that there is a desire in a number of communities. I can applaud what is being attempted — things like the experiential program in Old Crow and the bicultural program in Haines Junction. There are other initiatives, I know, but we are trying to do it through a western delivery model, to a large degree. We are changing, but maybe we are not changing fast enough.

If we were to grant some of that authority and give some autonomy to communities through either the full granting of what it says in the *Education Act* for school councils, or moving toward a school-board model where there is more responsibility and more decision-making power, we could see some of these goals achieved faster. That's what I'm talking about; that's why I'm asking the minister his views about school boards and using that as a vehicle.

He said he's open to that and it sounds like he's open to working with communities, but would he support those initiatives if they were brought to him? Does he believe there is an opportunity for delivering education in a more culturally appropriate model by granting those powers and authorities to those communities?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Let me just start off by saying that the Government of Yukon, the Department of Education, fully appreciates that people were educated here in the territory before there was a Department of Education within the Government of Yukon; that since time immemorial, people have been learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together here in the territory; that the Department of Education does not have a monopoly on these types of things. In fact, this is part of the fabric of all of our societies and all of our cultures.

We appreciate that the Department of Education has a vital role in educating Yukon's young people and providing opportunities for our not-so-young people and, in the five and a half hours a day that we have children in the education system, we have a variety of different issues that we need to work on to give them the skills and abilities that we have collectively agreed are important in our territory to have people with the literacy skills and the numeracy skills necessary to participate fully in society, to have the other broad range of 21st century skills that we are working on in order to ensure that people can seize new opportunities as they emerge in this new millennium.

We're educating children today in Yukon schools who are six, eight, 10, 15 years old, who will then continue to participate in Yukon society for the next 50, 60, 70, 80 years. So we're working to ensure that they have significant skills, ability and knowledge when they leave Yukon's school system — or

when they take a break from the school system because, as we've discussed numerous times, it's a lifelong learning process and we need to make sure we're open to new learning opportunities at any stage in our life.

It's a challenge in having a hypothetical discussion with the member opposite right now. He has been talking about making some changes in a specific geographic area. I would suggest we've heard that before, that there are different issues or concerns coming from the school in Carcross, as opposed to the school in Carmacks and that, in addition to the multiple pathways for input I discussed earlier, whether it's on the territorial level or on the broad Yukon level, that we do have — and I want the member opposite to give full credit to the new initiative with the school growth plan, which is a specific plan specific to that school in that specific geographic area — usually with just one First Nation, although there are instances of overlap but, in many cases, it's working with the local First Nation to create that plan for that specific school. That's the whole point with a school growth plan, to include the opportunity for locally based curriculum, to include the school council in making decisions and choices for the school, to include them in the selecting of our administrators to staff the school, and include them in things like decisions about when March break would happen or setting the dates for the school.

We have many of these powers or authorities or responsibilities and the member discussed some of these — the “shalls” and the “mays” — and we are continuing to work with our school councils on a specific school-by-school basis in order to ensure that they are being involved in the decisions that are pertinent to them. It is a challenge to deal with a hypothetical, but I can tell the member opposite that I believe it's all of the programs or all of the issues that we have seen come forward for specific programming changes — I could stand to be corrected on this — but I believe that all have been in some way implemented into the school. That is the whole point of having a school-based planning process.

It is a mechanism to identify the need for locally developed curriculum. We can't just say we want to have locally developed curriculum and we should have locally developed curriculum in all the grades and it should happen next week. That's just not practicable in our system. But what we can do is work — whether it's with the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations to implement a strategy to put into place a bicultural program; we can work with the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation to access some northern strategy resources to implement the land-based experiential program; we are working with the Carcross-Tagish First Nation on the plan with the Ghùch Tlâ Community School and some of the programming that they are desirous to see in that area.

When the member is thinking about supporting the budget or not, I hope he does take a look at the track record that the department has in recent years of working with the local community to be more responsive to the issues being brought forward by the community.

We have put in place mechanisms to deal with issues on a territorial basis, on a government-to-government basis, on an individual school basis and then, as I mentioned earlier, that

very important point — the student, the teacher and the parent — to ensure that the parent is involved in the child's education process and is apprised very closely of their progress on their educational journey.

I just want remind the member opposite that within the budget are those allocations of resources to continue to build upon this; to continue to staff our schools with administrators who are receptive to these issues; to create opportunities for professional development so our administrators, our teachers and others are learning these skills; to see the allocations in the budget to support experiential learning habits.

Also in the budget we're seeking support for things like the education summit that brings together our partners in this so that different members from different schools can discuss initiatives that they've had going in their own jurisdiction or in their own school and how those can be incorporated in other areas, how we can learn best practices.

As I've said before, we're very open to good ideas that are coming out. We put in place the innovation fund in order to finance some of those ideas so that we can find out if they go from the idea stage to being a good idea to being a best practice — we're supporting those. In the work that we're doing with our school growth plans, we're working very closely with the local community to empower them to help guide the direction that the school is going in and to work with them and the school council to help make many of the decisions regarding the whole process within our school. So, many of the ideas that the member opposite is bringing forward, we're doing.

If there are other ideas that are beyond the hypothetical stage — if people are actually coming to him with these ideas, then I have to ask that he steer them to someone in the department, whether it is me or the administrator or the superintendent or the deputy or the ADM. Then we can start to take a look at what their idea is and how to go about best implementing it in their school or indeed in the school system.

Mr. Cardiff: Well, I thank the minister for the answer. I recognize that he is viewing these things as hypothetical, but the reality in Yukon society is that communities aren't going to put a lot of effort into coming forward and doing some of these things if they don't feel that they are going to get a positive response. That is why I am trying to get the minister on record — give him the opportunity to give that positive response so that there is some hope out there for communities. They are not going to come forward if they feel that the minister is not going to respond in a positive way.

That is some of what is out there. Resources are finite, and I really don't think that they want to put a lot of their time and effort into it if the government is not going to respond in a positive way.

I'm going to leave that area, but I still would like to ask some questions about First Nation programming, specifically First Nation language programming. I know the minister is going to stand up and tell me this anyhow — he's going to stand up and tell me what language programming is available, I'm sure. But what work is the department doing or are school councils doing — are they working in partnership with communities to expand First Nation language programming? Are

they looking at expanding the language programming in schools?

Have they looked into the possibility of some sort of a kindergarten through grade 3 or a kindergarten through grade 6 First Nation language immersion program? I see the minister has all kinds of notes to read. That's the thrust of the question.

I'm going to ask one more because it will probably be 20 minutes getting the answer. I'd like to ask: in the Auditor General's report of January 2009 — two years have passed — on page 6 there was a reference in a section about First Nation education in Yukon. There was a reference that in 2006 the department established the First Nations Programs and Partnerships unit and there were some courses being pilot tested but it was too early to evaluate their success.

That was two years ago. I'm asking the minister whether or not the framework to do those evaluations has been established and whether any evaluations have been completed, as well as the language programming question.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I can't think of a more optimistic topic to discuss other than education. I certainly don't share the member opposite's cynicism about talking to Yukoners about education. He has asked: what's the point? I would suggest that we have a pretty strong track record of going to work, based on the input of Yukoners.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Chair: The Member for Mount Lorne, on a point of order.

Mr. Cardiff: Under Standing Order 19(g), it says a member shall be called to order by the Speaker if that member imputes false or unavowed motives. The minister suggested that I was cynical about talking to Yukoners, when what I have been saying is I have been out talking to Yukoners.

Chair's statement

Chair: I think with regard to this point of order, the Chair will review the Blues and I will get back to you in the very near future on that.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: If it would help matters, may I suggest that the Member for Mount Lorne has put forward a very cynical perspective, shared a cynical point of view. He is responsible for what he puts on the floor of the Assembly. He has asked the question: what is the point of being involved?

Well, we have a pretty strong track record of involving Yukoners with decisions around education. When my previous Deputy Minister of Education retired, we went to work with Yukoners. We went to work with a representative from the Council of Yukon First Nations, a representative of the Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees and a member of the Yukon College Board of Governors and incorporated Yukoners in the search for the new Deputy Minister for Education. Whether it was creating the ad, writing the interview questions or doing the interviews, we all did that collaboratively.

There have been issues that I have asked for the association's perspective on. Whether it was things like the exam pol-

icy — as one example — we have gone out to Yukoners, listened to their perspective and incorporated it into the actions within government. I don't think you could find a more responsive department throughout government anywhere. The amount of community engagement that the Department of Education has done over the last couple of years has just been tremendous. When we look at how we've engaged with Yukoners, whether it has been through one committee or another, we have certainly gone to work to hear the voice of Yukon.

We have built upon the *Education Act* review that a previous government had done. We went to work with the education reform initiative. Also, we have extensive stakeholder committees that provide input and direction to the department at the operational level. Let's just take a look at a couple of these. We have the Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee, which includes representatives from 14 First Nations throughout the territory. We have the school growth planning committee, the secondary school advisory committee, the building advisory committee for the F.H. Collins school replacement, the leadership advisory committee, the special education advisory committee, the French second language review advisory committee and four different working groups there, the staffing allocation advisory committee — that was another very contentious issue. We went to work with Yukoners. We went to work with principals, with teachers, with school counsellors, people throughout the community and said, "We want your help with providing a way to create an equitable, transparent, principle-based allocation process."

We've incorporated what they said into how we go about doing business — the urban to rural transitions advisory committee; the technology and Yukon student information system advisory committee, which also included some representation from administrators, teachers, secretaries and department staff; the report card committee; the common client committee; the complex needs committee, which also works with Health and Social Services; the transportation advisory committee, and ultimately our policy advisory committee.

Members opposite know about the whole process we go through with a new policy initiative. So I don't share the perspective that was shared by the Member for Mount Lorne.

The Department of Education has demonstrated its responsiveness, its willingness to listen, and its desire to seek out and incorporate the advice of others. We have made changes in the department. We have instituted the education summit as a forum to provide information. We have changed the annual report as a way to provide more pertinent information back to Yukoners, and we have gone through an extensive process with our strategic plan.

The NDP might think — well, what's the point? What's the point of asking Yukoners how they feel? But we certainly don't and that is demonstrated in the actions of the department. We take a look at the policies, which do reflect the initiatives and the advice that we have been given, and will continue to do so. The member opposite can make a vague innuendo, but we've got to rise above that now. If there are specific concerns, let's hear about them. If he has got a specific group that wants to talk about becoming a school board rather than a school

council, well, let's call a meeting of that school council and send Department of Education officials and we can open up that whole dialogue — that whole process. There are some criticisms I will accept regarding the Department of Education, but not listening to Yukoners is certainly not one of them.

With the work that the department's staff has put into this in the last number of years, it has certainly been tremendous. We have certainly turned a corner in this area. It was a large priority of mine, wanting the Department of Education to become more responsive to the needs of the community. We have put in place policy, we have put in place practice changes, we've changed budgetary allocations — all in an effort to do this. That is indeed what is happening.

When we take a look at the allocations in the budgets, we can see that these are responding to the concerns of Yukoners. We are building on the advice that we have received. Does it involve incorporating a multitude of different perspectives? Yes, and coming up with a direction that is a synthesis of all the input; yes, that is what we are seeing here. Are we seeing a growth in expenditures? Yes, let's just go back to the budget here and look at the increases, look at the increase in the number of teachers in our system or look at the number of increases in education assistants or the increase of the whole First Nations Programs and Partnerships unit.

That wasn't there a few years ago, Mr. Chair. The First Nations Programs and Partnerships unit didn't exist but it was created because this government was responsive to the concerns that we heard during the *Education Act* review and through the education reform project. We put the money where the voice was. We've come forward with this and we've addressed it.

I hope that this addresses many of the concerns the member opposite has brought forth. If he has specific other initiatives, let's try to find a way to steer those people with concerns to become part of the solution. We have recently gone through one initiative with the staffing advisory committee and we had one school council that wasn't as involved as they should have been; in the work that we have been doing on that this year, they were much more involved. I have to say, from the feedback I've heard about this, the process has been much better and the outcomes will be much better because of the involvement.

We can either choose to be a continued part of the problem or we can choose to be part of the solution and start working on these initiatives constructively so we can increase the outcomes and opportunities for Yukon students.

Mr. Cardiff: I don't believe I heard answers to all the questions I asked. I asked about the First Nations Programs and Partnerships unit and whether or not there had been an evaluation framework established and whether or not an evaluation had been completed.

Two years ago, it said that it was too early to evaluate the success of the courses that were being piloted. It was asking him whether that framework had been established and whether or not the evaluations had been completed. I asked specifically about language programs and immersion programs and whether or not the department or the minister had been looking into

maybe trying to establish — as we build our curriculum in this regard — even on a pilot basis, an immersion program for First Nation languages where the curriculum and the material exists.

The reason I raise it is because, as I said earlier, the minister talked about integrating culture. I believe that culture is inextricably linked with language because, as I said, those are the stories, those are the ways of learning, traditionally. I agree with the minister that we do need to prepare all our students, to meet the students' needs, to participate in society as it is today. Part of being able to do that, in my mind, is encouraging them to stay in the school system and encouraging their families to encourage them to stay in the school system — it's about relevance.

From what I'm hearing, what people are telling me, is that this is something they would like to see. These are people who aren't necessarily involved at a school council level. Everybody has busy lives. I understand the school growth plan process. It's going to take awhile for it to catch on.

I attended one of the meetings at Golden Horn school that they held — actually it was in the Mount Lorne Community Centre — and I found it beneficial. But it is going to take time to bring communities along to understand that is where they are engaged. Not everybody is there yet, and what I am trying to do is communicate what I am hearing, what people are telling me when I knock on their door or go to their office.

Education is a priority for First Nations and for First Nation families. The survival of their cultural is inextricably linked to their language. The other part of that question was: has the department explored either a kindergarten through grade 3 or a kindergarten through grade 6 immersion model that exists elsewhere? Are we working on trying to get the materials and the teachers? Because there are already some teachers out there who are doing it.

Just recently there was a workshop here in Whitehorse that brought language teachers together from all over the Yukon. So there is work being done in that area. I think the more work we can do in that area, the stronger the culture will be, the stronger the languages will be, and the more successful our students will be.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I jotted down some notes here. The member opposite would like me to talk about assessment of the First Nations Programs and Partnerships unit, the First Nation language programs — a bit about what we are doing in that area and what is going on — and then wrapping it up with what we are doing to engage students overall in our education system.

Am I missing —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Okay, we'll focus on the language issue. The First Nations Programs and Partnerships unit was created a short number of years ago.

It has grown to include a variety of different people in there. We have the great pleasure of working with some tremendously knowledgeable and tremendously skilled people, including individuals who have had the long-standing history of being involved with First Nation issues or perspectives, if you will, including one gentleman I'm sure we are all thinking

of, with a tremendous background in this area. We are continuing to do informal assessment work through our assistant deputy minister, through the director, and then through the superintendents, and then the work with our educators on the programming that is coming through FNPP. As well, we are looking at the assessment results that we are getting back from the work done with students in the classroom. Members will remember that we recently put in place the Yukon student information system, which will help us to have access to data to take a look at progress made by students as they take different courses available through the public school system or through the high school system, as they continue their academic career.

We have 20 Yukon First Nation language programs offered in 20 Yukon schools. Seven of the eight Yukon First Nation language groups are represented in this work. Just to shorten things up, one of the eight that is not taught is Tagish. That is because of a lack of available language speakers. This continues to be a challenge for the Department of Education — to find an individual that has the language skills and also the pedagogical or the teaching skills. So we have been doing quite a bit of work with the Yukon Native Language Centre to either teach the language skills to those people with the teaching skills or the teaching skills to those with the language skills necessary to be effective instructors and teachers in our classrooms.

The Department of Education provides approximately \$2.9 million to the Yukon First Nation second language program. That's a curriculum-development and teacher-training program that is done with an agreement with Council of Yukon First Nations. That also includes the salaries for seven Yukon Native Language Centre staff members as well as a direct contribution. That also includes the salaries for 28 Yukon First Nation language teachers, including on-the-job training for six First Nation language teacher trainees. We recognize there is a need to increase the number of First Nation language speakers and we're putting money and effort into those teacher trainees.

There are a number of different programs underway at the Yukon Native Language Centre. They include a program in cooperation with Simon Fraser University. This is a certificate in First Nation language proficiency. There is a master apprentice program that offers one-on-one immersion. There is the second language acquisition theory and models advanced level courses program. There is the First Voices Yukon font and keyboard usage and application. There has been a development of teacher-friendly lessons, units and resource materials.

The member opposite talked about an immersion program. Well, one along those lines that is being piloted is done in cooperation with the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. I believe this is funded in part by the Northern Forum. No, I stand corrected. This is not supported by the Northern Forum; this is an investment by the Government of Yukon and by the Government of Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. This is a bilingual and bicultural program. It certainly fits with many of the ideas that the member opposite was discussing about putting it into more of an immersion type of scenario. It is a pilot project that is currently underway and is currently being offered at the St. Elias Community School.

We are doing work in Yukon schools to provide language training and language education. We are continuing to work on diversifying the courses so that there is a continuum of learning that goes on so there is a change from the grade 3, to the grade 4, to the grade 5, to the grade 6 — a different course, so that it's not doing a repetitive nature. We're working on the course execution to ensure that it is engaging with the students, that we are working with the community on this.

In many cases, the Elders in the School program also augments or enhances these types of initiatives and, indeed, we are putting in additional efforts for the First Nation language teacher and trainee program — I mentioned those earlier — and we are also taking steps throughout the whole continuum of education, from kindergarten to grade 12, to make the system more engaging, more culturally relevant, and more responsive to needs in the particular communities, reflective of the community that we're in and the language that is spoken in that area.

We have done work on the primary side of things on a number of different readers. Members will recall the North-Wind readers that I have shared a number of times that provide culturally engaging and community-engaging materials to help early readers. This is a great series of books that include Yukoners in a Yukon context to engage them in reading. We are being responsive and trying to create more relevance to the school system. It's not using books like *Fun with Dick and Jane*, but instead looking at things like *Making Tea at Grandma's*. We've had this discussion here before where we have to ensure that we're teaching in a culturally appropriate context. I remember one question where the math question was Pat, Kim and Terry each have two apples. How many apples do the girls have? Depending on your cultural context, you could come up with a number of different answers there. I have to tell you, Mr. Chair, if the minister knows that example, you can rest assured that department staff know that example and the necessity of being responsive in the classroom to ensure we are being responsive to the identified needs of each of the students there. Yes, that brings into question some of the issues about people doing English as a second language in our school system. We have some other issues in our budget that I can get into in detail once we get into line-by-line on that, in order to address them.

Also, members will remember the secondary school review and the recognition in there of multiple pathways. We have seen what happened when people were educated with only one expectation. I go back to my days in high school, where it was identified that everyone would grow up and go to university, and anyone who didn't was a failure. That was extremely unfortunate, and we certainly recognize that we have multiple pathways to success now and that we need to reflect that in the programming that is available for kids in the high school stream.

We have to do a lot of work on literacy and numeracy — build in the "21st century skills". On that I will just add that there has been some discussion about using the term 21st century skills. Some people don't like it, but you know, frankly, I

don't care what we call that combination of skills, just as long as they are incorporated into our learning environments.

We have put additional resources in recent years into vocational training. We have put additional resources in recent years into things like Yukon Women in Trades and Technology or Skills Canada Yukon to make kids aware of the different opportunities that are out there, to encourage them to explore different avenues that they think are pertinent to where they want to grow up — what they want to grow up to be in the future.

I remember when I used to ask my mother why I had to go to school, and she would say, "So that you can grow up and lead a meaningful life." And I would say, "Well, what does that mean?" And she'd say, "Well, that's your job to figure that out."

That's what we're doing in today's education system, in concert with parents, with other community organizations — making them aware of the different opportunities that are out there so that our kids can become engaged in learning, excited and optimistic about the future, engaged in what they're doing in the school system, and seeing the relevance of that — seeing how it relates to their future. If we ever needed a poster child for the topic of relevance in education, I would have been it in grade 11. I was the one who constantly challenged the teachers about what the relevance of doing quadratic equations is to me because I'm going to go into marketing and sales, or why I needed to know about this history thing or why I needed to know that Sir John A. Macdonald had a drinking problem. I was the one who was constantly questioning the relevance of education or some of the facts that we were learning.

As I'm sure my deputy will attest to, I will constantly be going on about the relevance of this education in the lives of students — how can we make it more meaningful? How can students see the relevance of what they're learning? I've gone into math classrooms and talked about the importance of doing quadratic equations and explaining that it isn't just about figuring out that $ax^2 + bx + c = 0$. I hope *Hansard* puts down the appropriate quadratic formula for me because I think I've just missed it.

What is relevant there is identifying what the unknown is, looking at the model for solving the problem, doing the hard work to figure it out, and then solving the problem. That's just part of what we're teaching in math. When we want to talk about relevance in education — yes, I agree. When we want to talk about using different tools in order to engage different learners — yes, I'm all there for that. That's part of the reason for the innovators program. If teachers want to use a radio or a broadcasting system in order to engage their learners — hey, I can get all over that. If they want to use teaching people how to do fashion design and fashion merchandising as an experiential way of engaging students — yes, we're going to see support for that as we go through the budgeting process.

If it's engaging students with hairdressing, I can support that. If it's engaging students with how to build a solar car — we have examples of doing that in our public education system so that we can be engaging, so that students can see the relevance, so that students can be involved, and so that the students will continue to come to school.

When we take a look at our annual report and look at some of the issues in education, we'll notice that one of the big challenges that we have is attendance rates. When we take a look at some students, on average, missing 35 days a year, that scares the heck out of me, because that means that after five years, they've missed 150 or so school days. That's pretty much a year's worth of education, which is a huge challenge.

So we do have to ensure that we are teaching in an engaging manner, in a culturally appropriate manner, in a manner that's teaching the skills and abilities we want Yukon students to have, and one that keeps their parents involved — one that keeps people from having a cynical, what's-the-point attitude.

That is why we have been making the investments into education that we have been making. That is why we have been going down this strategic path. That is why we have been involving Yukoners in Yukon's education system.

Chair: Order, please. The 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. 24, *First Appropriation Act, 2011-12*. We will now continue with general debate in Vote 3, Department of Education.

Mr. Cardiff: I'd like to thank the minister for his answers and I'd like to move on to something that is in the annual report. It's around recommendation 8 from the Auditor General: that the Department of Education should develop and implement a comprehensive human resources plan that clearly defines its current and future human resource needs and integrates them with its strategic plan and develops an action plan or strategy to deal with existing differences between current resources and short- and long-term staffing needs.

The progress update in the 2009-10 annual report says that plan is underway, on track and expected to be completed this spring, 2011, and it will assist the department in the progress toward a more equitable alignment between needs and resources. Some of the rationale that was given in the Auditor General's report was that the department couldn't link staffing decisions, including the overall staffing numbers and allocation decisions, to a comprehensive plan. I'm glad that we are working on that.

In section 88 of the plan, it showed as well that between 2003 and 2007, there were four percent more teachers and 14 percent more educational assistants and remedial tutors compared with 8 percent fewer students in Yukon. So, I guess, in the analysis, it's about providing some sort of a plan to how you — I know a process has now been worked on with Council of Yukon First Nations around teacher allocations.

But, as the minister pointed out, there are different needs in different schools. Consequently, we have in some schools — even though it says in the report that the Yukon has the lowest five-year average ratio of 11.7: — we have classes where there are five or six students per teacher, but in other schools we have classes where there are 30 students per teacher.

This is important because this is not just about the money that's being spent; it's about whether we're getting the best for the money that is being spent and are meeting the needs. So that's the evaluation piece of it and trying to look forward. We want to know whether or not the decline in student enrolments is projected to continue and whether or not we're going to be reallocating — maybe there will be fewer teachers, but maybe there will be more teachers or remedial assistants to assist students on a one-on-one basis, where they need assistance with their individual education plans or to meet the special needs of individual students within the education system. So if the minister could provide a brief update on that recommendation and where exactly we are with the human resource plan and how soon we expect to see that.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: When we received the Auditor General's report, we recognized that her role there is not to look at policy, not to make comments about policy decisions, but rather to look at the implementation of the policy and to evaluate whether, operationally, the policy was carried out in an efficient and effective manner. It was quite the discussion we had with the Auditor General about the issue of staffing, because I believe she thought we had too many teachers in our system — that we had created an inefficient system. We had quite a discussion, then, on the Yukon Party's decision to increase the number of teachers.

As the Member for Mount Lorne just commented, the number of teachers did grow; the number of EAs grew; the number of students went down. That was an important decision the Yukon Party made. We did not want to see a reduction in the number of teachers in our system.

We recognize the value of having the tremendous teachers that we do have, the impact that they have on Yukon communities, the importance of them. That is why we saw the number of teachers increase from 444 in 2002, to over 476 today. That's why we have seen the number of educational assistants increase from 106 to over 159. That's also why we have seen the teacher compensation increase since we have been in power. We value the contribution that Yukon teachers make to Yukon's education system and the impact that they have on the lives of our students. We also recognize that we had a responsibility to ensure equity in education, to ensure that there is equity in resource allocation throughout the territory. We really went to work on the Auditor General's recommendations. This certainly involves working with the Public Service Commission to ensure that we're using appropriate frameworks to go through this exercise. I expect that this exercise will be concluded in this fiscal year.

Also on this, we've built on the staffing allocation. Here's another issue where we responded to an issue brought forward or a concern brought forward by the Auditor General of Canada and then went to work with Yukoners to come up with a principle-based process. The staffing allocation formula advisory committee included Yukon Teachers Association members and Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees members who represented both rural and urban, elementary and secondary, and Catholic and non-Catholic areas, area superintendents, and representation from the francophone

school board was invited. We sat down and said we need to have a principle-based process to this. What we want you to consider is equity, data driven, transparency, predictability, timeliness, responsiveness, sustainability and viability, and then ultimately, accountability.

We're still working through this as we do each year. The superintendents are working with their schools. We're looking at enrolment levels. We're looking at enrolment levels per grade. We're looking at special needs. We're looking at some of the other characteristics that differentiate the different schools that we have, to go through and ensure that we are providing the appropriate resources and the appropriate staffing decisions where possible.

We've seen an increase in the number of teachers in our system. I don't think that's in question. We have more teachers, we have fewer students and now we have to ensure that we are providing equitable allocations of resources and, at the same time, also recognizing that some individual students have additional needs that need to be addressed and that, where we have a lot of those types of students, again, it creates greater pressures. We also recognize that some of our schools are more vulnerable than others, so we need to ensure we can respond to their needs.

We have taken to heart the criticisms levied by the Auditor General. We have put forward how we're dealing with that in our annual report. I believe we're probably about the only department that provides annual updates on where we're at with these types of things. We are continuing to work through this interdepartmentally with the Public Service Commission and, as well, we have incorporated the input from our partners in education to the policy decisions regarding the operational level of staffing.

I think it has been a pretty good process. We are still working through it. I know the staffing advisory committee is still working on some tweaks, as we said we would. When it was first introduced to me when I sat down with the committee some time ago, I was encouraged quite sharply not to monkey around with it. I was encouraged quite sharply not to monkey around with it, to implement it, to give them some time to evaluate it, to ensure there was ongoing evaluation.

Since then, we've brought another school into the process to ensure their perspective is part of this process. It's making for better outcomes that I believe will lead to a fairer education system that will ultimately see increased performance for all Yukon students and help to prepare all our students for Yukon opportunities.

Mr. Cardiff: What I was looking for was whether or not the process was on track. It's supposed to be completed by spring 2011. Spring is fast approaching and that's why I was asking that question.

I'd also like to ask the minister a very similar question with regard to teaching and staff evaluation.

In the report, the auditor found that the department wasn't carrying out regular performance evaluations and that, in fact, 26 percent had a current evaluation, 54 percent didn't have a current evaluation, and 20 percent were employed for less than a year and thus were not required to have an evaluation. The

response from the department to the auditor's suggestion that teaching staff be evaluated on a timely basis, as required by the *Education Act* and its policies, was that appropriate steps would be taken to ensure that teachers are evaluated by June 2011.

In the annual report it says, in the progress update, that administrators have been advised of those teachers who are not current in the three-year evaluation cycle, and steps are underway to ensure that they are fully evaluated.

Can the minister tell the House how many teachers have been evaluated and are in that three-year cycle, and how many are not?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I appreciate that the member opposite is asking about the implementation of the Auditor General's recommendations again. We're now veering from the policy side of things to the operational side of things in the department. All administrators have been advised of those teachers who are not current in their evaluation cycle. Steps are underway to ensure that all teachers are fully evaluated on a three-year cycle and that they are participating in the professional growth plans. The administrators have been made aware of this, and they also do a considerable amount of work with those teachers who are new to the system and might still be on a probationary period. I can share with members opposite that the Auditor General's report and the criticisms on some of the operational areas have been shared with Department of Education staff, including our administrators. We do expect that they will carry out their appropriate activities, including their participation in staff evaluations.

We are continuing to work on the human resource plan. I don't have a specific date to give the member opposite, other than we are continuing to work through that in the Department of Education, both in the staffing advisory committee process and internally in the department with the Public Service Commission. We are also working with the Public Service Commission on establishing frameworks for this. I do expect this process will be concluded this coming fiscal year. We have met the desire of the Auditor General to review this — to put in place appropriate human resource plans. At the same time, we're looking at emerging issues in education and where we need to allocate resources.

We have seen this with — whether it's increasing the number of teachers or increasing the number of EAs or increasing professional development, we are constantly working to ensure that we have the appropriate policy in place to address students' needs. With that, we'll work very closely with departmental officials, with the deputy minister, with the assistant deputy minister and with the director of Finance to ensure that the operational plans and operational processes are put in place to ensure that we can maximize the benefit of our investment in education.

Mr. Cardiff: It's too bad the minister doesn't have some firmer dates in this regard. I'd like to ask him, as well, about another item that appears in the annual report and the Auditor General's report: recommendation 9, the long-term facility plan. The recommendation was that the department should work with the Property Management division to develop

a long-term facility plan that takes into account the age capacity and location of facilities and student enrolment trends.

The progress update says that the department is making progress in the development and implementation of a facility plan that will form the ongoing maintenance and eventual replacement of facilities. The plan will be completed on schedule in the spring of 2011.

I would like the minister to inform us of how close we are on the facilities plan. I know that there are a number of projects. I would like to thank the department for getting back to us with some of that information, to do more capital work on things like roof replacements on some of the schools in the territory. It is important that we look after the investment in the infrastructure, but that we also plan for maintenance that is needed and replacement of facilities that are coming to the end of their useful life. If the minister could — it says spring 2011 — how close are we and when can we expect to receive a copy of that facilities plan?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: The Department of Education takes its responsibility to ensure that we're maximizing the use of our capital assets very seriously. We have been working very closely with Highways and Public Works. Members will recall the shift in resources that happened a couple of years ago with regard to Highways and Public Works. The plan is currently in draft form and is scheduled for our review with the departments during the spring of 2011, so that's exactly where it's at right now. Pending the review interdepartmentally, we'll see where it goes from there. We have been working very closely with Highways and Public Works. Our facilities people have been doing ongoing work in these areas while the long-term facility plan is being established.

I don't want to create the impression that there was an absence of long-term facility planning going on before that. People should not construe that. Our facilities people and our finance people have been working very diligently in years gone by to assess the condition of Yukon schools to identify priorities, to identify areas of needed maintenance and proactive maintenance. I think we've gone through this before about some of our hierarchy of doing maintenance. If it's putting people in a safety situation, that's obviously a greater priority than if it's something that's being done for an aesthetic purpose. Our capital folks and our finance folks have been doing a tremendous job on that. When we get into line by line, we'll be able to go through some of the specific expenditures — whether it be for school-based renovations or some of our roof repairs or some of the other building maintenance issues. We can go into those in much greater detail. Of course, the big capital project that is currently underway is the F.H. Collins school replacement. We've concluded the Carmacks project, save and except some playground-related issues there.

Obviously, the Dawson and Pelly campuses for Yukon College have also been acted upon. It was a priority of Yukon College to replace Pelly and Dawson. We had worked closely with them and with our Highways and Public Works folks. Then when an opportunity arose through the federal government's establishment of an education infrastructure fund, we were able to identify the resources the Yukon College had re-

quested. The federal government contributed half; the Government of Yukon contributed the other half. Those campuses are just about complete and should be finished in the very near future.

We have facilities that are under construction; we have the F.H. Collins school project coming along; we have ongoing replacement to extend the useful life of our facilities; we have a draft of the long-term facilities plans being worked on with Highways and Public Works that should come forward in the fairly immediate future.

Mr. Cardiff: I thank the minister for that answer and look forward to receiving those documents when they become available. One thing the minister has been reasonably good at, in my mind, is providing information when it does become available. The department tries to see to it that information requests are responded to in a timely manner, so I look forward to receiving that information.

I have some other specific questions. I would like to ask the minister a question about how many YNTEP grads are currently working in Yukon schools.

The other piece of that that I'd like to know is whether or not they're working — and the minister may not have this information, but whether or not some of these YNTEP graduates have returned to their community of origin. One of the concepts or one of the ideas behind the program was to provide positive role models for First Nation students. One of the hopes was that graduates would return to their community and be those role models in the school system.

The other question related to that: what are the retention rates of YNTEP grads within the education system? Are they staying in the Yukon education system or are they moving on to other jurisdictions, or moving on to further studies or other career opportunities?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I don't have all the information the member opposite is requesting. Some of it we don't gather. I believe we probably have other folks rifling through some of the files right now, trying to find the information. If I can just put out another request for my staff, who are likely listening to this right now — if they have access to one of the recent updates from the YNTEP program, it would probably be beneficial to enter into our debate right now.

The short answer to this is this: there aren't as many people involved in YNTEP as I would like to see. I don't have the average enrolment now, but I do know we have empty seats in there. This is something I've raised numerous times, in talking at Council of Yukon First Nations meetings or even at school council meetings, that this is a great program; it provides a recognized degree. Again, I can't think of a better way to prepare Yukoners for Yukon opportunity, other than to teach teachers here in the territory. They have the opportunity to earn the appropriate degree that is transferable to other areas, which is just the nature of ongoing education.

We can't make it mandatory that people spend their whole career here in the territory. That's just the nature of being Canadian and the whole issue of SUFA mobility and going into other jurisdictions for whatever reason individuals might have. So we do work very closely with Yukon College, which is the

service provider for this program. There is a significant annual contribution in the budget to fund it. Each year there are a number of different positions that come up within the Department of Education's teaching staff. That's just due to the normal retirement, attrition or moving on of some of our employees. There is, then, a desire by some people to go back to their community or, indeed, others that go on to choose to go to other communities. Again, there is the personal choice that has to be respected in this area. Often, it can be confusing to some.

I once had a discussion with one individual who was frustrated that a local person was not hired for the job of a local teacher, when, indeed, the local person had never even applied for the local position. So there are some challenges with that and also with doing the YNTEP certificate and degree.

It is one of those degrees that is often a benefit to people in other positions other than just being — I've got to rephrase that — other than being a teacher. We have seen YNTEP grads become Education managers. We've seen YNTEP grads working with the Council of Yukon First Nations. We've also seen YNTEP grads working with other First Nation governments. This just in, Mr. Chair: we've had 109 students who graduated from YNTEP, 55 percent or so are working with Yukon government, 44 percent as educators. Each year we recruit about 35 to 45 teachers annually. That is the normal attrition, or retirement, that I mentioned.

Out of the 109 graduates, it looks like there are 28 teaching in Whitehorse, 20 who are teaching in rural areas — I don't have the breakdown as to whether they are in their home community or not — 12 employed with YTG, three employed with Yukon College, eight employed with a First Nation, and 20 out of territory, and another portion in the "other" column. I think it's a great program. I'd love to see it filled every year, and I would encourage anyone who knows anyone who is interested in pursuing a teaching career — I'll make this pointed comment to one of our pages — that she now has a responsibility to go back to her school and to tell all the kids there who might be interested in becoming a teacher about this great opportunity. She knows about it; she's going to tell all of her friends, and we're going to get this program filled up because I'd love to see more Yukoners becoming teachers in Yukon's education system.

Mr. Cardiff: I thank the minister and the minister's staff for getting that information so quickly. It is helpful. I agree with the minister that the program is beneficial to Yukoners and that it's something that has proven its worth.

This goes back — I'm probably dating myself now, but there was an evaluation done many years ago of the program. I'm wondering if, in order to keep current with the needs here in the Yukon and with new programming — this is a partnership among the Government of Yukon, Yukon College and the University of Regina — in order to keep current and the needs that are identified are being met, is there any plan to do an evaluation of the program and how it's delivered, and that the outcomes in the school system — what's being delivered on the ground in the public school system is what was desired to be the outcome when the program was created and fits with the current thinking of the department and of the Yukon public?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Again, the Government of Yukon, the Yukon Party government, feels very strongly about the positive investments in education in the territory. One of the best investments that I can think of is in one's own education, and from a government perspective, one of the best investments I see is in investing in the education of educators. We have YNTEP, which has been running for some time at Yukon College. I'm always encouraged to see the graduates coming out of that program and then going to work in Yukon's education system. We've also made an investment with Yukon College on the Master of Education and leadership program. That one was done in conjunction with the University of Northern British Columbia. They are the accrediting body there.

We are in regular discussions with Yukon College. I'm sure the member opposite appreciates, having been on the board of governors, that Yukon College is a separate institution with its own responsibilities. We have certainly seen the investments that this government has been making in Yukon College with increasing the base operating grant from some \$11 million to greater than \$17 million, and increasing some of our project-specific financing. We've also made changes in the Yukon College's empowering legislation, the *Yukon College Act*. Members will recall that we unanimously agreed to amendments to recognize the audit committee, the school council and another committee within the Yukon College Board of Governors. We also empowered them to have much greater control over their fee structure.

We also gave them the authority to become a degree-granting institution. Those amendments which passed in the House unanimously have certainly been a benefit to Yukon College. As they are growing in autonomy, so is their growing need for accountability. We are continuing to work with Yukon College on some of the assessments of their programs, as well as ongoing performance reporting about the whole nature of Yukon College.

We have some statistics regarding enrolment levels and participation levels and I expect that as we are growing into an era of greater accountability, other Yukoners will have ongoing expectations of Yukon College to provide more information about their programming and the benefits of it. They have done some recent surveys to look at attitudes of students and some of the participation rates in employment following graduation.

We will continue to work with Yukon College on their program assessments and their accountability methods. At the same time, we recognize that they are a specific institution, with a board of directors that sets the priorities and expectations of the college, and that there are those structures in place.

Mr. Cardiff: I thank the minister for the answer. I recognize the autonomy of the college, but that ultimately it's the Yukon taxpayers, through the Minister of Education, who provide the funding to the college to deliver post-secondary education programs and continuing education programs to Yukoners. So the minister still has an oversight responsibility that he needs to take seriously.

There were recommendations in the Auditor General's report around the college's accountability and need for reporting to the minister and the public. The minister can request, I be-

lieve, that program evaluations be done, if he or the department feel there is a need for them, or the public has indicated there may be a need for them.

So it's not 100 percent out of his control or outside of his mandate to do such things. Ultimately, he's responsible for that \$17 million in base funding and other funding that flows to the college. I'm going to take that opportunity, actually — I recognize that we here in the Legislature granted more autonomy to the college when it comes to degree-granting status. I support that.

I think that more opportunities for post-secondary education in the Yukon for Yukoners and to attract others to the Yukon to participate in the post-secondary system is a good thing and that there are areas of particular expertise here in the Yukon and a need for knowledge in certain areas that could be addressed, even areas of specialization. I don't want to get into a debate about what those areas might be. It could be anything.

When reviewing Yukon College's financial statements — I'm going by memory here and don't have them in front of me — my recollection is that the figures for tuition were somewhere between \$900,000 and \$1 million. That was actually one of the goals of Yukon College at one time — making it more accessible to Yukoners. That's one of the goals of the minister as well — having education that is accessible to Yukoners. I'm wondering whether or not the minister or the department has looked into the idea. If we're looking at about \$1 million a year in tuition, that's for a variety of programs. Some of them are certificate programs. Some of them are two-year diplomas. Some of them are degree programs that take four years. I'm not sure whether or not the continuing education portion of tuition is included in that figure. If it is, it would lend itself to my argument that it wouldn't be unreasonable to look into the idea of making Yukon College — for starters, we could start it looking at the first two years of any studies at Yukon College that are either certificate programs, diploma programs or studies toward a degree — and upgrading programs, in my mind, as well. You would have to look at the criteria for student financial assistance, because it's targeted at graduates of the Yukon public school system, tuition-free.

It seems as if it would be a relatively modest investment, given the size of the budget for Yukon College. I'm going from the \$900,000 to \$1 million in tuition, which is what they show on the books in their financial statements. It would make the first two years of college education, at the very least, more accessible. It would remove some of those financial barriers that are there for people because there's a cost. It could be being away from your community, being away from your family. You've got the cost of textbooks; you've got the cost of providing food and accommodation for yourself and possibly your family. Has the minister or the department looked into the possibility of that or would they be willing to?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I appreciate the question coming from the member opposite because when we do look at Yukon College finances, one does recognize the importance of the government funding to this institution. I believe that tuition costs only covered between about two and four percent of the overall operating budget of the institution, which means that

the contributions from the Government of Yukon and other agencies is very important.

I will just go back to some of the comments the member opposite made at the beginning of his question. I'm sure he appreciates the challenge now of reconciling his comments earlier with his comments now about empowering others. Indeed, that is a challenge to empower others and give them more responsibility. Then I'm also reminded that the buck stops here and that, by empowering others, sometimes it means having to live with decisions that one doesn't necessarily like. That's part of granting additional responsibilities or helping another institution to become more empowered. It's always a challenge sometimes to remember when you're empowering someone, but when you're responsible for it, I guess it's two heads of the same coin. The Yukon Party government has taken great strides to increase the accessibility of education here in the territory. We certainly recognize that there are tremendous benefits to the territory as a whole, from investing in Yukoners.

We also recognize that there are significant benefits to the students. Students who attend Yukon College and receive a certificate, diploma, degree, or some kind of accreditation usually have greater employment opportunities, and in many cases, have the opportunity to increase their employment income.

Personally speaking, I can see no better investment than to invest in one's own education. The monies that I have invested in education have been paid back a number of times. I didn't have the opportunity of a grant system. I went through school on a loan program, on the federal student loan program, and then in more recent years, borrowed money from an RRSP. Indeed those investments that I have made in my own education have paid back significantly.

Government of Yukon has increased the student grant and indexed that to inflation. We have also increased the training allowance that's available to Yukon students. We've also put in place a number of programs here in the territory to increase the opportunities for post-secondary education here in Yukon, so students don't have to incur tremendous costs for going Outside. Some of those include doing the first two years of an arts or science degree at Yukon College and having that recognized at an Outside institution. Other examples include doing the bachelor of science and environmental studies — I believe that's accredited through the University of Calgary — in addition to YNTEP or the social work programs, which are accredited through the University of Regina.

Additionally, we've supported the college with the licensed practical nurse program and a couple of other initiatives on the programming side. To increase the accessibility to education, the Yukon Party government decided not to expense monies to be spent on short-term rentals for accommodation for the Canada Winter Games, but instead, chose to invest that in a legacy project, that being the student residence at Yukon College, which also include several rooms with multiple bedrooms in order to increase the opportunities for people with families to have student accommodation.

So we've increased the grant to students, we've increased the training allowance, we've increased programming opportunities, we've increased residency opportunities, and also with

the campuses being built in Dawson and Pelly, we've increased community infrastructure so that students do not have to leave their home community in order to access some of these post-secondary opportunities.

We've worked with the college and with other institutions to work on other distance education opportunities. Members are probably aware of some of the programs offered either through the Open Learning Agency, through Athabasca, through Royal Roads or other institutions that offer distance-based learning, and those opportunities are becoming more and more prevalent so that Yukoners can continue their education without having to leave the jurisdiction.

The Yukon College Board of Governors also recognizes the importance of students participating toward the cost of their education. They recognize that the taxpayer, as the member opposite commented, pays for a considerable amount of this, and also recognize that the student does receive a significant benefit from the investment in education.

We are continuing to explore other areas with post-secondary education. We just have to take a look at the labour market framework on this to look at the diversity of programming that's going on — whether that's for increasing access to apprenticeship programs, degree programs, certificate programs or some of the other labour market initiative programs that we have in place. Yukon College is a great delivery tool in the territory. We'll continue to work with them on a number of different issues.

Seeing the time, I move that we now report progress.

Chair: It has been moved by Mr. Rouble that Committee of the Whole report progress.

Motion agreed to

Hon. Ms. Taylor: I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Chair: It has been moved by Ms. Taylor 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: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 24, *First Appropriation Act, 2011-12*, 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. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.