



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 132

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Tuesday, April 25, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Spring Sitting

SPEAKER — Hon. Jeremy Harper, MLA, Mayo-Tatchun
DEPUTY SPEAKER and CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Annie Blake, MLA, Vuntut Gwitchin
DEPUTY CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Lane Tredger, MLA, Whitehorse Centre

CABINET MINISTERS

NAME	CONSTITUENCY	PORTFOLIO
Hon. Ranj Pillai	Porter Creek South	Premier Minister of the Executive Council Office; Economic Development; Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation
Hon. Jeanie McLean	Mountainview	Deputy Premier Minister of Education; Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate
Hon. Nils Clarke	Riverdale North	Minister of Environment; Highways and Public Works
Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee	Riverdale South	Minister of Health and Social Services; Justice
Hon. Richard Mostyn	Whitehorse West	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board
Hon. John Streicker	Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes	Government House Leader Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources; Tourism and Culture; Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation; French Language Services Directorate
Hon. Sandy Silver	Klondike	Minister of Finance; Public Service Commission; Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

Currie Dixon	Leader of the Official Opposition Copperbelt North	Scott Kent	Official Opposition House Leader Copperbelt South
Brad Cathers	Lake Laberge	Patti McLeod	Watson Lake
Yvonne Clarke	Porter Creek Centre	Geraldine Van Bibber	Porter Creek North
Wade Istchenko	Kluane	Stacey Hassard	Pelly-Nisutlin

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

Kate White	Leader of the Third Party Takhini-Kopper King
Lane Tredger	Third Party House Leader Whitehorse Centre
Annie Blake	Vuntut Gwitchin

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Dan Cable
Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Tuesday, April 25, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Are there any visitors to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Ms. McLean: I would ask my colleagues to help me welcome some folks from Skills Canada who are here today for a tribute. First, I will start with a couple of competitors who are here: Cadence Hartland for hairstyling and Taylor Daniels for esthetics. We also have the president of Skills Canada Yukon, Gerry Quarton, and the president of Skills Compétences Canada, Dr. Patrick Rouble — welcome. We have the executive director for Skills Canada Yukon, Samantha Hand, and program coordinator for Skills Canada Yukon, Abbey Gartner — welcome.

We have from the Apprenticeship Yukon offices, Kirsti de Vries, Jaydee Carrothers, Taylor Barr, and Jeff Van Zandvoort. We also have Paolo Gallina, proud parent of Oriana Gallina, competitor in fashion technology — welcome.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Streicker: On behalf of myself and the Member for Copperbelt South, we would like to welcome to the Assembly today Ms. Jenny Darling's grades 5/6 class from Golden Horn Elementary. Joining in this is Kirk — I am sorry but I don't have Kirk's surname — but we have with us today Aaron, Ava, Bella, Brae, Cash, Cyri, Emma, Lily, Sadie, Spencer, Aidan, Ashley, Ellie, Fraser, Kendra, Layla, Liam, Phoenix, Sierra and Martha, who also had a movie entered into the Dawson City International Short Film Festival just recently, and I was very excited to get to vote for her movie in the youth category — if we could welcome them all, please.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Yukon Skills Canada competition

Hon. Ms. McLean: I rise today on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to the Yukon Skills Canada competition which took place last week in Whitehorse. I had the opportunity to join students and apprentices last week to witness their passion and drive in the competition and to attend the awards ceremony as well.

A total of 75 students and apprentices competed in over 20 competition areas, including: baking, carpentry, cooking, electrical installation, graphic design, hairstyling, heavy

vehicle technology, mechanical engineering, mobile robotics, outdoor power and recreation equipment, photography, plumbing, welding, 2D animation, landscape gardening, esthetics, fashion technology, web technologies, car painting, automobile technology, and refrigeration and air conditioning.

I am incredibly proud of all of the competitors and their participation. It is inspiring to see them demonstrate their exceptional skills, creativity, and innovation.

It is with great pleasure that I congratulate the successful competitors who will be representing Yukon on the national stage in Winnipeg next month. Your hard work, dedication, and commitment have paid off, and you should be proud of what you have achieved.

I would like to thank Yukon employers and businesses, the apprenticeship advisory board, and other tradespeople for your work to help us develop local apprenticeships.

I would also like to recognize Employment and Social Development Canada, which along with the Government of Yukon, provides ongoing funding for trades and technology training. I want to thank the Department of Education staff who work hard to support apprentices throughout their journey, whether it is registering apprentices for their technical training or providing support to help pass their exams. These staff are integral in the success of our apprenticeship program.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the teachers, mentors, and volunteers who have contributed their time to supporting our students. Your inspiration and guidance have been invaluable to our students' success and to this fantastic competition, which could not have taken place without you.

Thank you, as well, to the Yukon University and to the schools throughout the territory for offering trades and technology training and mentorship. Finally, I would like to thank Skills Canada Yukon for organizing and hosting this competition and for inspiring Yukoners to pursue trades and technology.

Once again, congratulations to all the competitors, and I wish you the best of luck in your national competition. You have already made us so proud, and we look forward to seeing your continued success in the future.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: Salamat. I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize the 2023 Territorial Skills Competition held on April 20 of this year. This one-day competition allows participants to test their personal skills in their trades against their peers and serves as a selection process for individuals to represent the Yukon at the national competition.

The Discovery Zone trade show, held in conjunction with the competition, was open to the public and gave visitors a look at the different trades and technology opportunities available to pursue. Competitions are held in different areas of technology: culinary arts, fixing, making, creating, and more.

The awards were held on the evening of Friday, April 21. I was delighted to attend this wonderful event. As I walked up on the third floor of the MacBride Museum, I saw many young boys and girls with their families and excited teachers and

mentors. One very shy family from Vietnam was at the back of the crowd, standing next to me with their son, who took part in the competition for carpentry. When his name was announced as the first-place winner — going to the nationals to compete, he was shocked, as he did not expect to win. He even looked at his parents — if he heard correctly — his name. It was magnificent to see the reaction on the parents' faces. The student is enrolled at Vanier, and six months ago, his shop teacher encouraged him to build something in the carpentry class. He asked his teachers what the others may have done wrong, as he was not the first one to finish the competition. It was his accuracy that did it. He was calm, collected, and accurate.

It brought a lot of memories for me. As an Asian-Canadian mother, I instill the values of education and discipline in my children to learn a skill or two so that they will become independent and be able to compete in the bigger world out there. A healthy dose of competition is just that — very healthy.

Starting a career in the trades can be valuable to anyone — the sky is the limit with respect to all trades, and you can make an incredible career from the things you love to do. Students, if you are listening, I encourage you to consider pursuing your education in skills and trades. 2023 marks the 25th year that the competitions have been held here in the territory.

Congratulations and thanks to all participants, partners, and organizers and, of course, a special recognition to Skills Canada for their promotion and support of the trades.

Applause

Ms. White: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate the 25th annual Territorial Skills Competition. Last week's competition was an opportunity for budding tradespeople in 24 different fields to test out their skills in a public forum. From baking to plumbing, graphic design to welding, and with 20 others trades in between, there was literally something for everyone. Competitors from both the secondary and post-secondary streams were able to test their knowledge in a fast-paced, stress-fuelled environment. So, why does this matter? Because it is easy to perform when there isn't any pressure and everything is going right; it is much harder to do when your nerves are on edge.

I was part of the judging team for the secondary baking competition. So, let me set the scene. Imagine two young bakers — 14 and 16 years old — with six hours on the clock to produce four fully finished baked items. There's the constant sound of exhaust fans and convection ovens. Now sprinkle all of that with the sound of mixers and metal bowls clanking. It was intense. So, days like these are filled with highs and lows, even as a judge. You want to be able to prevent catastrophes and offer advice, but you can't, so you watch and sometimes, if you really can't bear it, you ask leading questions.

The moment from this year's baking competition that I took away with me and that I'll keep with me is the epic resilience of one of the young bakers. After burning an item that they had spent all sorts of effort and time on, they calmly put it in the bin and started again.

I have worked in kitchens all over the world and seen professionals crumble over less with far more lenient time frames. So, seeing this young person face that adversity with so much grace was really something, because it's not how we deal with our successes in trades that set us apart — because we can all be great. What sets us apart is how we deal with mistakes or failures. Skills competitions like the ones hosted last week show competitors what they're made of, and I can tell you that they are always stronger and more ingenious than they realize. They can face unexpected situations and problem-solve their way through it. Having that knowledge of what they are capable of will benefit them no matter what path they choose.

Thank you to all of those who put in the hundreds of hours to organize, to mentor, and to show competitors their worth. You never know the impact that you have had but I know from personal experience that it's our cheerleaders that get us across the finish line.

Congratulations to each of the competitors. Whether you won or not isn't the point; it's that you were brave enough to try that matters. And good luck to those who will be competing at the national event in Winnipeg at the end of May. Do your best, be safe and, most importantly, have fun.

Applause

In recognition of Cancer Awareness Month

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to acknowledge Cancer Awareness Month, also known as "Daffodil Month". Daffodils mark the return of spring and new life. They are used around the world as a symbol of hope for all people affected by cancer.

Cancer doesn't discriminate; it doesn't care who you are, how old you are, or where you come from. We all have family members, friends, or know community members who have been affected by cancer and faced a battle with cancer head-on. The goal of Cancer Awareness Month and Daffodil Month is to inspire us, to raise awareness, and to keep up support for the fight against cancer.

Cancer is the leading cause of death in Canada and is responsible for almost 30 percent of all deaths nationally. Nearly two in five Canadians will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime and one in four Canadians will die from cancer. In the Yukon, the most common diagnoses of cancer are breast cancer, colorectal cancer, prostate cancer, and lung cancer.

But our vigilance is beginning to show promise. The trend of new cancer diagnoses each year between 2009 and 2019 is going down. Early detection and prevention are critical to improving cancer outcomes. Our government and community are working to reduce cancer rates and mortality in the Yukon. This includes education and support for participation in recommended screening programs, such as ColonCheck, and reducing risk factors like smoking and alcohol consumption. Smoking tobacco can cause cancer almost anywhere in the body and is responsible for about 20 percent of all cancer cases. The most common type of cancer is lung cancer, with nearly nine out of 10 lung cancer deaths caused by smoking cigarettes or by second-hand smoke. QuitPath provides evidence-based information, strategies, and tools to help Yukoners quit or

reduce tobacco use. It has supported more than 3,000 Yukoners since 2012.

The second leading cause of lung cancer in the Yukon is exposure to radon. Health and Social Services works in collaboration with the Yukon Lung Association and the Yukon Housing Corporation to get more buildings and homes tested each year to reduce radon exposure. We are also working with health system partners and Yukon First Nations to support the Yukon First Nation cancer care project to ensure that together we build accessible cancer care services.

Thank you to the BC and Yukon Cancer Society, to community associations, to our community health nurses, physicians, hospitals, home care providers, family, and friends, and to the cancer centres outside of the Yukon where we are all very well cared for. All of your dedication and hard work support us and provide the best care to Yukoners.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to national Daffodil Month. Every April, the Canadian Cancer Society daffodil campaign raises funds to save lives and improve the quality of life for those affected by cancer. The daffodil was chosen in the 1950s as it is one of the first flowers to bloom in the spring and represents birth and new beginnings. It's a flower of hope. Not many families or groups are immune from being touched by a variety of cancers. The need for hope and positive vibes is real and all-encompassing when one is immersed in fighting a battle with this disease.

The theme is "Help hope bloom". I will play on these words. We can all do a small bit to help: make a donation; become a monthly donor; help or organize a fundraiser; or leave a legacy through a will bequeath. Each and every one of us has the ability to help.

Many years ago as I went door to door campaigning for cancer, there were many who didn't donate, but the ones I remember the best were those who would find a toonie and say, "It's not much, but here." That, to me, was special as they wanted to help and the gesture said it all.

Hope — each day is a day to hope that this disease can be stopped in its tracks. By having a dose of optimism, a healthy share of dreams and plans along with a goal of health and cure, let's continue to support and keep health and hope alive.

Bloom — we think of spring flowers that we will soon see flourish, displaying their brilliance along the roads and on the hillsides. After a long, dark winter, it happens quickly. The Yukon wildflowers come suddenly as we transition between a mucky spring to green leaves and the said flowers. It never fails to amaze.

Remember, one can help those Yukoners directly by donating to the Yukoners cancer care fund, which assists families who have expenses and changes in their lives due to cancer. Visit the webpage of the Yukon Hospital Foundation to "help hope bloom" with a local donation.

A line on the daffodil donation page reads that a donation can create more tomorrows for the nearly half of Canadians expected to be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime.

Whatever you decide — and I know we all have our charities of choice — remember that even a toonie adds hope.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to Cancer Awareness Month.

I don't imagine that there is a single person in this room who has not been touched by cancer, whether it be a friend, a family member, co-worker, a neighbour, or through personal experience.

For people being treated for cancer, there are many health care providers who come together to provide care, and I want to thank all the doctors, nurses, pharmacists, hospital staff, and more who do this work everyday. I want to thank the community members who come together to provide support and care. I think of all the groups who raise funds for the Yukoners cancer care fund and Karen's Room.

Nationally, the Canadian Cancer Society is running their annual daffodil campaign and every donation that comes in by April 30 will be matched to go twice as far.

Cancer changes your life. For the survivors of cancer, our community care can't end when they are discharged. Thank you to everyone who provides ongoing support to their neighbours, families, and friends.

Finally, I want to honour the Yukoners we have lost to cancer. They are missed, they are mourned, and they are celebrated.

Applause

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Speaker: Under returns and documents for tabling, the Chair has for tabling the *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer to the Legislative Assembly 2022 Annual Report on Political Party Revenues January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022*.

Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

Mr. Kent: I have for tabling today a letter from Christ the King Elementary School Council dated April 24, 2023, addressed to the Premier, regarding Christ the King Elementary School's seismic retrofit and capital infrastructure investments.

I quoted from this letter yesterday during Question Period.

Mr. Cathers: I have for tabling today a letter from Dr. Westberg and Dr. McIntyre of the Yukon Surgical Clinic, addressed to patients.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I have for tabling the *Yukon Workers' Advocate Office Annual Report 2022*.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to broaden access to experiential learning programs such as the Great Outdoor Experiential School, or GOES, which is currently offered at Golden Horn Elementary School.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to establish a trades centre of excellence program for secondary students looking to pursue a career in trades.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to begin issuing regular public reports on health care wait times.

Ms. White: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to support the expansion of cellular phone coverage for Yukoners living in rural areas along the Alaska Highway.

MLA Tredger: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to provide the funds requested by the City of Whitehorse to provide free transit.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Paid sick leave

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am pleased to rise today to provide an update on the advancement of a paid sick leave in Yukon. I am happy to announce that our government has launched a new paid sick leave rebate program to support our territory's workers, employers, and the self-employed. We are the first jurisdiction in Canada to provide a government-funded paid sick leave. This rebate, which will be paid to employers and self-employed individuals, covers up to 40 hours of sick leave for eligible workers and the eligible self-employed who are making \$33.94 or less per hour.

As many Yukoners know, the COVID-19 paid sick leave rebate program expired last month on March 31, but we know that the access to paid sick leave remains an important issue. Support for employers and their employees is still needed outside of the pandemic response.

With that in mind, we are introducing coverage to ensure that support is available for those who are most vulnerable. Workers who earn less than or equal to the average private sector wage are more vulnerable to financial hardship than those making above the average wage and they stand to benefit the most from continued assistance. Additionally, lower waged workers tend to include sectors that interact directly with the public. This sometimes further increases the risk of contracting and spreading illness.

Our program balances responsible fiscal management while offering support for both employers and their employees. This program will help to provide a degree of stability to those who are unable to attend work due to illness or injury. It aligns with our government's goals to keep Yukoners healthy and encourage workers to stay home if they are sick. Unlike the COVID-19 paid sick leave rebate program, which provided 10 days of paid sick leave to address self-isolation periods, the new program will cover up to 40 hours for each worker for a 12-month period.

We gained valuable insight from the COVID-19 pandemic and the new rebate program will reflect this knowledge. Of course, we will be sure to consult with stakeholders regarding how to best continue offering this support moving forward.

I must also emphasize that this rebate is for our private sector. That includes businesses and non-government organizations.

Those employed by the Government of Yukon and its corporations, Government of Canada and its corporations, Yukon First Nation governments, municipalities, federally regulated industries, and those that already have an established paid sick leave program of 40 hours or longer will not be eligible.

Employers who don't already offer 40 hours of paid sick leave can apply for the rebate after providing their existing paid sick leave to their staff. Again, I would also like to note that we have expanded the program eligibility to all illnesses as COVID-19 is now being managed alongside other respiratory viruses. By introducing this program, this government is signalling its firm commitment to a healthy future for its residents, its businesses and NGO communities, and the economy as a whole.

Ms. Van Bibber: I am pleased to respond to this ministerial statement. This announcement seems to be largely consistent with what the Premier announced at his budget speech to the Yukon Chamber of Commerce the day after the budget was tabled.

It's also consistent with what the Premier told the Legislature in Committee debate for Economic Development; however, it does seem to be different from what was recommended in the Making Work Safe Panel. For instance, recommendation 1 in part 3 of that report indicates that 10 paid sick days per employment year be implemented for eligible workers. Recommendation 2 of that part also included part-time workers and the case where the same employee works at different jobs.

So, I would like to ask if the Premier can tell us if this is consistent with what the panel recommended.

I also note that the previous paid sick leave program provided 10 paid sick days. It seems that the new program only offers 40 hours which of course is five sick days. So, can the Premier confirm that this new program will reduce the number from 10 to five?

Finally, the Premier has said that he would consult with businesses and labour groups about this new program. When completed, can the Premier please provide the feedback or the

“what we heard” document if there is one available? We will be monitoring the impact of this program on the labour market and watching how this program affects the department’s budget.

MLA Tredger: Over a year ago, the make work safe committee delivered their final report on how paid sick leave should be implemented in the Yukon. The committee included business owners, workers, and members of this Legislature. The report called for 10 days of paid sick leave for all employees in the Yukon along with a number of recommendations about implementation.

It has been over a year since that report was tabled so we had very much hoped for an exciting announcement today. We hear all the time from workers who are struggling with what to do when they or their children are sick. They are making impossible choices between paying their bills and following the public health advice to stay home when sick.

One story that always sticks with me is the story a woman shared during the consultations about how every time she was sick and had to stay home without pay, she had to choose which of her belongings to sell so that she could still pay her bills. That’s why we have kept up the pressure for a permanent paid sick leave program, and that’s why it’s so disappointing to be presented today with such an inadequate, poorly chosen program.

There are a lot of flaws. I’m not sure I’m going to be able to cover them all but I’ll see what I can get through.

The first and most glaring problem is that this only applies to organizations that don’t already have a sick leave program. So, businesses or organizations that have already taken it on themselves to do the right thing and added to their business costs in order to give their employees sick leave, they get nothing from the government. Meanwhile, their competitors will be subsidized as a reward for not providing sick leave. Essentially, businesses that do provide sick leave will be penalized and their competitors who do not will be rewarded. This is completely unfair.

If I were an organization that already pays for sick leave and will be getting nothing through this program while my competitors are subsidized, I would be outraged.

Next problem — this only applies to workers who make less than \$33.94 per hour. So, imagine that you and your friend work at a business doing the same job. Your friend makes just under the cut-off and is eligible for the sick leave program. Meanwhile, you have worked there a few years longer and so you make a dollar or so more an hour. That puts you over the cut-off and you will not get any paid sick leave. It seems pretty bizarre to have people working side-by-side but only some of them get sick leave. It’s creating a two-tier workplace.

The next problem — it’s not mandatory. Employers have to opt in. That means that if an employer doesn’t want their employees to take sick leave, they don’t have to. Workers have no way of making sure they get paid for their sick leave; it is completely dependent upon the employer wanting to do it every time they take a sick day. This is a problem that we have raised

many times and it’s disappointing to see it carried forward in every new version of this program.

Next problem — First Nation governments and municipalities are excluded as if their employees don’t also get sick.

Next problem — I went online to look at the details of the program and it says that workers aren’t eligible until they have been working for 90 days. That means seasonal workers will be essentially ineligible for the first year of work. Non-Yukon residents are also excluded. One of the key purposes of paid sick leave is to prevent the spread of illness, and excluding the majority of a sector that is directly involved in service provision undoes this completely.

There are also unanswered questions. What about on-call workers? For example, will the on-call workers who work at the emergency shelter be eligible? Given that they work with extremely vulnerable people, I would hope that the answer would be yes. I haven’t even touched on the choice to go with 40 hours, which is just half of what was recommended by experts or provided for federally regulated workers.

I mentioned before the Making Work Safe Panel. That panel poured hours into reviewing research and best practices to come up with the recommendations. Those recommendations are almost entirely ignored by this program. Will their other recommendations be ignored too? Will parents be able to use the program to care for sick children? Will doctor’s notes be required by employers?

The Premier has said that this is the first government-funded paid sick leave in the country. I think that there’s a reason why no other jurisdiction has gone with this model. It’s disappointing to see this government take so long to bring this forward and still bring forward an unfair program full of loopholes and exceptions.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I know that we hope that ideas come from all sides. We thought that this was a strong policy position and hoped to have one of the parties support it, but I didn’t hear the word “support” from either party.

I will start with answering questions for the Third Party. I think what is important is that the Making Work Safe Panel, as the member opposite was briefed on this morning — so, it’s odd that the comments coming after the briefing — there might have been a misunderstanding this morning, but I think that officials shared that we would still consult on the Making Work Safe Panel recommendations. So, that work that the member opposite was part of, which talked about a 10-day sick leave, with the potential of that being put on the private sector’s backs with a number of items that have been touched on — that conversation is still going to happen with the public. Those are the next steps. There has been a delay with the conversation but that conversation will happen. As I understand it, that was clearly stated today, and there are a number of items that came from those recommendations so that work will go to the public, and we will get feedback.

In the interim, we built a program. Before the make work safe plan was in place, we built a program in March of 2020, and it was coming to an end. We felt it was important to look

at another program. I think that the member opposite can stand there and say, “you missed this”, or “it should be more here”, or “this worker is at \$33.94 and somebody is at \$40”, but in government and leadership, you have to make decisions. You can’t just spend and spend and spend. You have to make tough decisions. You have to have parameters, and you have to build it out and build budgets. The reality is that you have to make tough decisions and you have to be able to structure programs. There are cut-offs. You try to take the data you have to make the best decisions.

We think this is a nation-leading program. That is what we are hearing already from the business sector today. People think it is very innovative. We will continue to do the work on the other side.

Again, going to the questions from the Yukon Party, to touch on it — yes, similar questions. The Making Work Safe Panel did have 10 days. We will go back out with those recommendations and get feedback. We can, again — I think it was this other piece — yes, I guess, the lunch — I said that we were looking at a Chamber lunch that was focused on — yes, you know what? This is another one where we made a plan, stuck to it, delivered — like many, many things that we have done over the last seven years as a team together. This is another one, and again, nation-leading, just like childcare that was put in place before the federal government — just like a number of different items.

The work with the Third Party on programs — yes, leading the nation on a number of these, and I think that will be the feedback on this. We are happy to step up to back the private sector — understand labour challenges with a hot economy and the lowest unemployment in the country. It makes it hard to retain folks; it is very competitive. We hope this will support folks at a family level, a grassroots level, a business level, and an NGO level.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Public transit funding

Ms. McLeod: Well, we know that the decision to have the Government of Yukon provide funding to make public transit in the City of Whitehorse free was not a decision that was made in consultation with the city. In fact, when it was announced, the Mayor of Whitehorse said — quote: “So this is a surprise... It was sort of a unilateral decision without the City of Whitehorse being involved.” Now, however, the city is faced with implementing this decision.

How much money is in the current budget to allow the City of Whitehorse to act on this commitment that the Liberals have made in their confidence and supply agreement with the NDP?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am glad to address this matter on the floor of the House this afternoon. I have to disagree a little bit with the preamble from the member opposite. There is a confidence and supply agreement, and there is a commitment in there to work with the City of Whitehorse to get free transit, but as I have always said publicly, and have said in my meetings with the mayor and with council, the municipality is

responsible for transit and responsible for the provision of transit in the City of Whitehorse, and I will work with it — it’s their — that is their jurisdiction, and I will work with the City of Whitehorse to make good on the confidence and supply agreement commitments — but it is still the City of Whitehorse that has to make that decision.

We have a commitment that has been struck — I am one person on a three-person committee — and we are working through the issues with the City of Whitehorse. We will continue to do that to try to bring this to the citizens of Whitehorse.

Ms. McLeod: Last night, the City of Whitehorse passed a motion calling on the Liberal government to make good on their promise. When we asked about this issue on March 30, the Minister of Community Services said that it was a city responsibility, and I would like to give the exact quote here: “Transit is a City of Whitehorse responsibility. I have said many times that the City of Whitehorse will take responsibility for things within its municipal boundaries. Transit is one of those things.”

However, Mr. Speaker, it is clear from last night’s debate at city council that the city is looking to the government now. According to the numbers discussed last night, the city will need about \$5.3 million over the next three years in order to deliver on the Liberal government’s promise.

Can the minister tell us when that money will be made available to the city?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Again, I have to disagree with the preamble from the member opposite about the actual values. The confidence and supply agreement commitment is for \$1.5 million to defer the cost of riding transit. So, the people — those are the fares currently raised by the City of Whitehorse — or was at the time of the agreement being signed. So, the commitment to the City of Whitehorse is \$1.5 million. That is the amount that the Yukon government is committing to under this program, if they want to take it.

We have a three-person committee that is looking at the issues surrounding transit within the City of Whitehorse. I am one person on that committee; there are two other members. That committee is working through the implementation of the free transit. There are a lot of things to consider. I am respecting the committee work, and the work of that committee is ongoing. We have had some discussions, so it is a \$1.5-million commitment from the City of Whitehorse to cover the cost of the fares that citizens of Whitehorse currently pay for transit. That is what is on the table. The City of Whitehorse and the New Democrat caucus are on the committee, and we are working through the issues surrounding the implementation of this, but it is the city’s — thank you, Mr. Speaker — it is the city’s responsibility, and it will be their decision.

Ms. McLeod: The commitment that the Liberals made in the CASA includes providing funding for free transit through to the 2025-26 budget. We know that the minister has discussed this issue as one that is the responsibility of the city, but the fact is that it was his government that made the commitment.

Fulfilling this commitment is now a Liberal government responsibility. In order to fulfill that commitment, the Liberals

need to provide funding to the City of Whitehorse. The funding that will be required is over \$5 million over the next three years.

Will the Minister of Community Services be committing multi-year funding to the tune of over \$5 million to the City of Whitehorse, or will this be another broken promise?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Again, I think the track record of this government, keeping its promises, is written large, and we have certainly backed up our words.

I will say to the House this afternoon that there is a committee looking at this to implement this. We are working with the City of Whitehorse. It will be their decision. The commitment is \$1.5 million per year until the 2025 fiscal year. That's the cap.

We know that the cost of transit is much more than that. We knew that going into this agreement. It will be up to the City of Whitehorse whether they accept the \$1.5 million a year to defray the cost of the fares that the citizens of Whitehorse currently pay to ride the bus. Whether they do or do not, that is in the city's decision. The city is responsible for transit. They will look at what they need to run transit, and they will make a decision and let me know. If they decide to take the money, the money will flow. If they decide not to, then that's the City of Whitehorse's decision.

Question re: Consultation on school replacement

Mr. Dixon: The Yukon Liberal government's decision to build a replacement for Whitehorse's biggest elementary school on the ball diamonds in the Takhini subdivision has spurred serious concerns from the sport community.

We have obtained a letter from the sport community to the Liberal Cabinet that outlines these concerns. Here is one — quote: "Softball Yukon cannot continue to deliver its programming at the same level without those fields, and finding suitable space for new fields is neither a simple nor a quick alternative."

Further, Mr. Speaker, both "Sport Yukon and Softball Yukon object to the consultation process surrounding the proposed building of a new elementary school at Takhini."

Why is the Liberal government charging ahead with this decision despite the serious concerns raised by the sport community?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am happy to stand and talk about the investments we are making in our school infrastructure. It's an important investment — one that is long, long overdue. The École Whitehorse Elementary School has been identified for replacement with a new, modern facility that will meet the needs of the community for years to come. I think that this is a school that was in need of replacement even when the Yukon Party sat in this exact position leading government. They chose not to make those investments. We are choosing to make those investments.

I am very mindful of all of the folks who need to be consulted with. We are now at the stage where we have put out a tender for a person who will be doing the planning. Softball Yukon and many other partners will be part of that consultation along with the project advisory committee, which is leading the

work around this planning for the new elementary school — an important project.

I am aware of the letter that Softball Yukon has sent. Our deputy minister has replied; we have invited them to be part of consultation; they will be part of the planning going forward —

Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Dixon: The decision has already been made by this government.

The simple fact is that the Liberals are trying to pit the school community against the sport community. When we debated this issue back in March, here is what the Minister of Community Services said — quote: "... if I was looking at committing to a school or committing to some ball diamonds — as much as I like Softball Yukon — I will take the school over the diamonds any time."

Mr. Speaker, that statement from the Minister of Community Services is a perfect testament to the Liberals' flawed mindset on this issue. This decision does not have to be one or the other. The Liberals chose this location with zero consultation. If they were simply willing to step back and actually conduct meaningful consultation and be willing to consider other locations, we wouldn't be in this situation.

So, will the Liberals agree to consult Yukoners about the location of the replacement for École Whitehorse Elementary School?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The Takhini education land reserve is an educational land reserve, so this parcel of land has always been an education land reserve. We're going to be working, of course, alongside Softball Yukon to mitigate any potential impact to the ball diamonds. As I mentioned just a moment ago, we will be working with a consulting team. The exact location of the school on this large land reserve has not been determined yet. This will be part of the consultant's work to complete an assessment of the land, test different areas within the reserve for a potential location of the school, summarize their findings, and provide a recommendation on optimal feasible locations on the educational land reserve at Takhini.

This is one of two locations that would have been available to us. I'm not sure if the member opposite thinks that potentially we should be selecting the Grey Mountain education reserve. This one is the optimal location.

Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Dixon: Well, the fact remains that the location of the new school has already been decided and there was zero consultation. Now that the decision has been made, the Liberals are trying to pit Yukoners against each other. Here is another statement from the Minister of Community Services just a few weeks ago — quote: "Frankly, I believe the education of our children should take precedence over the fate of a ball diamond that can far more easily be moved to a new location. If the choice is between softball fields and preparing young people for a lifetime of success, I will pick young people every time."

Yet again, Mr. Speaker, statements like this perfectly highlight the flawed approach from the Liberals. This issue would not nearly be as divisive if the Liberals had simply consulted on the decision before they made it.

Will the Liberals agree to stop trying to pit Yukoners against each other and put the location of the new school back on the table and actually consult with Yukoners about its location?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, this is a large education reserve. The exact location of where the school will be situated on this land reserve has not been determined yet. I have been very, very clear about this. We are committed to the education of our most precious resource in our territory, which is our young people, and I'm really happy to have so many young folks in the gallery with us today. This is a piece of infrastructure that's over 70 years old. We are working to invest in infrastructure in education.

I think that some of the preamble that the Leader of the Yukon Party has chosen to use today is exactly pitting Yukoners against each other. We have committed to working with all of our partners and those who are impacted. Of course, Mr. Speaker, we will be doing that.

I think that the Yukon Party opposition has a lot to learn through this. The education of our young people is absolutely paramount here and this is what I would think NIMBYism is at its finest — not in my backyard. That is what the Yukon Party is putting out there —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Support for substance use emergency

Ms. White: In this year's budget, the Liberal government earmarked some money for the substance use health emergency. While folks are hopeful that this money will save lives, one number worried everyone. This government, for what they are calling a substance use health emergency, has decided to give an extra \$217,000 to the RCMP for — quote — “substance use emergency response”. From harm-reduction workers to health professionals and people who use substances, Yukoners are rightfully concerned about what those words actually mean.

Can the minister tell Yukoners what this — quote — “substance use emergency response” money for the RCMP will mean on the ground?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the opportunity to speak about this government's response to the substance use health emergency, which has been extensive. The call to action made in January 2022 was exactly that — to every Yukon person, to every Yukon community, and to every Yukon government and individual across the territory — to rally together to do whatever individuals, organizations, and governments could do to address this incredibly tragic situation here in the territory.

We have, through the cooperation with partners, addressed the substance use health emergency — and just begun to do so. In response to increased knowledge and services that have been provided, there has been a significant increase in those across the territory. This is a territory-wide challenge that cannot be solved alone.

One piece of the services that are provided by the Yukon RCMP is what is being noted here in the question. The territory-wide challenge continues to bring concerns to all of us and our

partners are working together to coordinate our response successfully.

Ms. White: I am still unclear what the \$217,000 is for.

The substance use crisis is a health emergency, not a criminal emergency. Even the Yukon's RCMP agree that the drug-poisoning crisis isn't a policing issue. Evidence shows that when someone is overdosing, the people around them are less likely to call for help if they know that the police might be the ones responding. People who use substances, especially those at risk of overdose, will not benefit from more resources being given to the police. Instead, this government could have invested this money in harm-reduction measures that are proven to work, like funding more harm-reduction workers in communities or giving the funding that Blood Ties has publicly asked for to expand the supervised consumption site to be open seven days a week.

So, why is the minister ignoring what users and experts have told her, and why is she asking the RCMP to respond to more substance use emergencies?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: If the member opposite thinks that the RCMP has absolutely no role to play whatsoever in responding to the substance use health emergency, then they are not recognizing the important partner that the RCMP is here in our territory.

In response to the substance use health emergency in the past year, we have developed Car 867. Car 867 responds to a number of situations, including those related to the substance use health emergency, with a trained RCMP officer and a psychiatric nurse who respond to individual situations in the territory to resolve them in a way in which law enforcement does not have to become further involved. That, of course, takes some RCMP resources.

There is an overdose outreach team. There are increased opioid treatment services and access to safer supply. There are expanded methods of consumption available at the supervised consumption site. We have held two mental wellness summits and we have increased access to resources such as Naloxone kits, and over the past year, we have developed partnerships and taken many steps to address the substance use health emergency.

However, we do, of course, recognize that toxic, illicit drugs still circulate in our communities. The RCMP is an important partner in this process.

Ms. White: So, it is not just the recent money to the RCMP for substance use. So much of the way that this government handles the substance use emergency shows that they are still treating it like a criminal justice issue, not a health one. Twelve years ago, health experts in the Beaton and Allen report told the government to create a sobering unit and close the arrest processing unit at the Correctional Centre because it was criminalizing people who were intoxicated.

But in those 12 years, including seven years under our Liberal government, the arrest processing unit is still open and it has seen thousands of overnight stays. That is thousands of times where this government allowed intoxicated people to be picked up by the RCMP and put in a jail cell to sober up. I will remind the minister that the health experts who wrote the

Beaton and Allen report told the government to create a sobering unit downtown, staffed by a nurse or paramedic with no RCMP presence.

So, when will this government open a sobering space, staffed by health care workers, and stop criminalizing people who use substances?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am very concerned about the unfortunate approach here because it is clear that a message is not getting across about the focus on harm reduction. We chose extremely carefully the “substance use health emergency” title because, in fact, the approach and the requirement recognized at the time that the harm-reduction approach has to be the lead in how we approach this and the title needed to be able to speak to the issues around alcohol use and abuse, drug use and abuse, as well as suicides throughout the territory because they are related to the difficulties around the substance use health emergency.

I am concerned that, for whatever reason, the question that is coming today is about how we have ignored that approach and it’s simply not the case. I have mentioned many of the partnerships. The RCMP is just one of them. We appreciate the work of all of the partners who have come together to address the toxic and illicit drug supply here in the territory.

We have an opportunity to speak in front of a young class here, and I urge them to heed the warnings that have come with respect to drug use in our territory. Blood Ties Four Directions, the Yukon Hospital Corporation and Yukon First Nations have all been very serious partners.

Question re: Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport runway project

Ms. Van Bibber: On April 11, the Minister of Tourism and Culture made a surprising statement about the future of the tourism industry. When asked about the impact of the work at the airport on Condor, the minister revealed that Condor could be pulling out of the Yukon entirely. Here is what he said — quote: “The issue isn’t just the work on the airport, because Condor itself is moving to different airplanes and those planes are not going to be accommodated in the future here in the Yukon.”

Can the minister indicate if that is in fact accurate, and can he confirm that Condor will be changing planes and that those planes will no longer be able to land at the Whitehorse airport?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thanks for the question. First of all, the planes that Condor is thinking about switching to are planes that have never been able to land here in Whitehorse. This airport is quite a ways away from being capable of supporting the types of planes that Condor is moving to.

But that’s Condor’s choice, and I said to the House that I would make sure to update once I heard that Condor had made their decision. I have not heard that yet. What I can say is that we are not waiting on that. Our basic partnership is with Air North. Air North has an interline agreement with Condor. Condor flies, in the Yukon summers, once a week, I think, but they have many flights to Vancouver and Edmonton, and Air North interlines to make sure that folks who want to get to the Yukon during the week can.

I just saw correspondence from Air North a couple of days ago where they let me know that the Yukon is the number one interline destination for Condor.

So, hats off to Air North and the partnership that they are doing, the hard work that they’re doing. I just reached out to them a couple of days ago. We have an e-mail exchange and we’re going to sit down and work through this together, but the main point here is that we’re finding good solutions for the Yukon with Yukon business partnerships.

Question re: Education assistants

Mr. Kent: One commitment in the recent Liberal-NDP confidence and supply agreement is to — quote — “... increase the allocation of Educational Assistants and Learning Assistance Teachers starting in the fall of 2023.” Can the Minister of Education tell us how many new EAs and LATs will start this fall and what schools they will be working in?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The New Democratic Party and our government absolutely have a lot of alignment in terms of our support for education in the Yukon. Yes, there are a number of — which reflects in the agreement that is very much in line with the work that we already had underway in terms of investments and important investments in our education system really responding always to the Auditor General’s report of 2019. That is such a main focus of our work. So, all of the work that we’re doing within the confidence and supply agreement and reimagining inclusive and special education, which is very much where this lives in the work that we’re doing within that particular part of our focus in education. We already had a group that was working — a community of inquiry, which is also another word for a “working group” — on the advancement and rethinking of how EAs and LATs are —

Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Kent: With all due respect to the minister, she didn’t answer the question that I asked. Again I will repeat. One commitment in the recent Liberal and NDP confidence and supply agreement is — I quote: “... increase the allocation of Educational Assistants and Learning Assistance Teachers starting in the fall of 2023.” There’s only a month and a half left in the current school year.

Can the minister tell us how many new EAs and LATs will start this fall and what schools they will be working in?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I think I did, in the last question, talk about some process that we are going through in terms of reimagining inclusive and special education. I am happy to take the questions because to me — I am talking to Yukoners. I am talking to Yukoners about the work that we are doing. Sometimes I have a really hard time speaking to the opposition party about some of this. I know that they represent Yukoners but they had 14 years and an Auditor General report, much the same as the one that I am responding to. The difference is that we are responding. We are doing the really hard work, and part of it is connected, of course, with the CASA. This is an important agreement for Yukoners. It is an important investment that we are making.

There are a number of communities of inquiry that are working diligently to get this right because — again, the Yukon

Party will know very well that, in 2015, they just simply doubled EAs. They really had no rhyme or reason to do it, other than it was the eve of an election, and that is how we ended up with the number of EAs. We are really working toward focusing on putting children at the centre and meeting their needs and not simply basing it on a formula that doesn't work for Yukoners. So, I am looking forward to the work of our community of inquiry.

Question re: Capital plan for schools

Mr. Istchenko: Recently the minister launched consultations on the replacement or renovations of Whitehorse area schools. We agree that some of the schools in Whitehorse are aging and require significant upgrades or replacement. However, no schools in rural Yukon are being considered as part of this work.

So, when will a consultation process take place to come up with a renovation or replacement study for schools in rural Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am actually a little surprised at the question today about capital planning. Yes, absolutely, Mr. Speaker, we have launched an incredible process to look at long-term capital planning. Again, we inherited a deficit in terms of attention to education infrastructure overall. I am surprised that the Member for Kluane is asking about rural investment. We are building Kêts'ádañ Kù. This is a long, long-standing request of the Kluane First Nation to build a new school in their community, so this is a huge investment. It is in our five-year capital plan.

I actually just met with the Kluane First Nation a couple of days ago along with the Minister of Highways and Public Works. We are committed to this project, and we are committed to working with the First Nation School Board, which now will have the operation and maintenance and governance of nine rural schools out of the 11 that they're taking on.

So, we will work really closely with the First Nation School Board, and all of the other schools that are not part of the First Nation School Board, to continue to meet the needs of our rural communities.

Mr. Istchenko: So, in 2017, the former Minister of Education confirmed that her government was considering either renovating or replacing seven schools. At the time, the seven schools she referred to seemed to align almost perfectly with the Department of Education's seismic report, except for one school. The Nelnah Bessie John School in Beaver Creek was the only school that was identified as part of a seismic report but wasn't listed by the minister as a priority for her capital plan.

So, given that it appeared on the seismic list as a risk, when will the minister consider replacing Nelnah Bessie John School?

Hon. Ms. McLean: We're working very closely with all of our partners. The First Nation School Board is now overseeing that particular school that's being discussed. It's hard to know where to go with the seismic upgrades. We've done a lot of them to date. We've addressed several structural issues — for example, repairs to roofs, floors, walls, and many

non-structural issues, such as duct work, furniture upgrades, and shelving. All of these things were identified in a report that said these are the things that needed to happen to shore up our schools.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we have inherited — Yukon Party, they did not spend the time that we needed on the school infrastructure in the Yukon overall. Given their record, we are very skeptical about taking advice from the Yukon Party about how to build schools. Again, they do not have a strong record. I will stand by our record all day long.

We are investing in the youngest people in our territory by investing in schools.

Mr. Istchenko: I will remind the minister that she has been in government since 2016.

So, the Ross River School has been the subject of much discussion in this House also. It was actually evacuated at one point. They have had an issue with bats. The building is sinking. Since 2019-20, and including this year, estimates are that almost \$11 million has been spent on remediation.

Can the minister tell us if there are any plans to consider replacing the Ross River School?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The health and safety of students across the territory is a top priority for the Yukon government. The school in Ross River is built on changing permafrost, as is much of the community. Changing permafrost has contributed to the need for structural assessments and repairs over the years, but we continue to ensure that the school is kept safe by mitigating structural movement through upgrades like the releveling system and by performing repairs to lessen the effects of building movement.

The Ross River School is inspected quarterly by a multidisciplinary team that includes an architect, a structural engineer, a geotechnical engineer, and a surveyor. The latest building condition inspection report, received on February 22, 2023, confirmed that the school remains safe for occupancy. The next inspection report is expected to be received in May 2023.

As indicated, we are currently building a releveling system at the school that will mitigate the effects of further permafrost deterioration. We are also building a new modular mechanical room to replace the existing mechanical plant. The heat emitted from the mechanical plant was contributing to the deterioration of the permafrost under the school. Work for both of these projects is currently underway. The new modular mechanical room was completed during spring break. The releveling system is scheduled to be completed this summer. We are getting it done.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Notice of opposition private members' business

MLA Tredger: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the items standing in the name of the Third Party to be called on Wednesday, April 26, 2023. They are Motion No. 720, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre, and Motion No. 271, standing in the name of the Member for Takhini-Kopper King.

Mr. Kent: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the item standing in the name of the Official Opposition to be called on Wednesday, April 26, 2023. It is Motion for the Production of Papers No. 8, standing in the name of the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin.

Speaker: We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 22: Act to amend the Yukon Advisory Council on Women's Issues Act (2023) — Third Reading

Clerk: Third reading, Bill No. 22, standing in the name of the Hon. Ms. McLean.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I move that Bill No. 22, entitled *Act to amend the Yukon Advisory Council on Women's Issues Act (2023)*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate that Bill No. 22, entitled *Act to amend the Yukon Advisory Council on Women's Issues Act (2023)*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Hon. Ms. McLean: We covered extensive ground during our debate on this bill just yesterday. I would like to thank my colleagues for their questions in the House and in Committee of the Whole. It is integral to the legislative process that the bills we bring forward receive the kind of scrutiny and review that we received with this bill. I am truly grateful for the issues that my colleagues have raised and the opportunity that I have had to address them.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Women and Gender Equity Directorate staff and our legislative drafters at Justice for all of their hard work on the development of this bill. I would also like to thank the many Yukoners who contributed, both through engagement on our territory's LGBTQ2S+ action plan and through the council's revisioning process that targeted stakeholders.

The process that led to this legislation has been extensive and thorough. The release of the LGBTQ2S+ action plan in 2021 clearly identified restructuring the Yukon Advisory Council on Women's Issues to include matters related to gender diversity and sexual orientation. As my colleagues know, this action plan identified more than 100 items that will help our government to reduce barriers, increase inclusivity, and form more equitable government programs and services for 2SLGBTQIA+ Yukoners.

Engagement with key stakeholders and the public was very important in the development of this plan. The revisioning process for the council, carried out with targeted stakeholders, also contributed significantly to the development of this bill. Again, I am very grateful for all of these contributions. Mr. Speaker, I am confident that this bill is the best way forward for the council. The Yukon Advisory Council on Women's Issues has been a valued advisory body to the Government of Yukon for more than 30 years.

Our government remains strongly committed to achieving equity for all women living in the Yukon. We are proud that the legislation we have brought forward will ensure that the council will play an important advisory role on women's issues into the future. We are also excited that the council's expanded mandate will allow the minister's Advisory Council on Women and Gender Equity to provide advice to any minister.

At the same time, our government is steadfastly dedicated to making its services, programs, policy, and legislation more inclusive for 2SLGBTQIA+ Yukoners. We also remain committed to completing the initiatives identified in the LGBTQ2S+ *Inclusion Action Plan*. This legislation supports our achieving these commitments through expanding the council's mandate to include advising on issues related to equity for the gender diverse, as well as those who may face discrimination based on sexual orientation.

It will also remove gendered language from the act, remove the council's membership criteria from the act, and create a regulation-making power so that, going forward, we can use this regulation to allow Yukoners with diverse and representative backgrounds to become council members. These changes are very integral to creating a more inclusive Yukon for everyone.

Ms. Clarke: Salamat. As I noted in my second reading speech, we had some concerns about the bill as originally presented. The Yukon Party felt it would be more appropriate to have two committees, so we were happy to see that the minister brought forward amendments to the bill during Committee of the Whole to make this happen. With those concerns addressed, the Yukon Party will be voting for the bill at third reading.

MLA Tredger: When this bill was first tabled, I went out and started talking to the women's groups in the territory and the LGBTQ2S+ groups in the territory because I wanted to know what they thought about it. There was a variety of feedback that I got but the biggest concern that came up was around how this bill was originally structured to have one council that combined the issues of 2SLGBTQ+ Yukoners and women's issues.

So, I'm really pleased that, in response to these concerns, the bill was amended. I think the current structure that it has in this bill with two subcommittees — one to address each side of issues — is a good one, and I'm really hopeful that it will address those concerns. We believe the amendments have addressed our concerns, and we will be supporting this bill.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to my colleagues for participation in this important debate. Again, these are not amendments that I take lightly. I so respect that this committee was originally brought forward by then Margaret Joe, now known as Margaret Commodore, an

Indigenous — the first Indigenous Minister of Justice in Canada and a legacy, I think, in our territory. She was — at the time, in the late 1980s, when this important council was formed, was at a time when we were without that type of council and one that has been legislated ever since.

So, bringing forward the amendments to this council were not taken lightly. Really, Mr. Speaker, to be inclusive of our entire community is important. I have spoken extensively about that, but what is really important to me today is that we future-proof this legislation to ensure that our entire community is represented and that folks from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community are part of the future-proofing of this legislation and that ministers, going forward, will have the opportunity to be advised on women's issues and those from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and that this will continue into the future.

Thank you very much for the debate, and I look forward to the vote.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 17 yea, nil nay.

Speaker: I think the yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for third reading of Bill No. 22 agreed to

Speaker: I declare that Bill No. 22 has passed this House.

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 711

Clerk: Motion No. 711, standing in the name of the Hon. John Streicker.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT this House supports the creation of a Yukon citizens' assembly on electoral reform by establishing a Special Committee on the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform;

THAT the Third Party appoint the first member to the committee;

THAT the membership of the committee also be comprised of one member from the Official Opposition caucus selected by the Leader of the Official Opposition and one member from the Government caucus selected by the Premier;

THAT the Premier, the Leader of the Official Opposition, and the Leader of the Third Party inform the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of the names of the selected members from their respective caucuses in writing no later than seven calendar days after the adoption of this motion by the Assembly;

THAT the committee convene no later than 30 calendar days after the adoption of this motion by the Assembly;

THAT the chair of the committee have a deliberative vote on all matters before the committee;

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

THAT the committee report to the Legislative Assembly its recommendations on terms of reference for the electoral reform citizens' assembly no later than October 31, 2023;

THAT if the House is not sitting at such time as the committee is prepared to present its report, the chair of the committee shall transmit the committee's report to the Speaker, who shall transmit the report to all Members of the Legislative Assembly and then not more than one day later release the report to the public; and

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

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the Assembly, the Select Committee on Electoral Reform tabled its report. Colleagues may have noticed that it was more than an inch thick. As the Committee met for the last time yesterday to sign off on that report, we were joking that the Chair of the Committee should drop it — just sort of let it thud down to the desk — because we thought that it would give an indication of how much is in that report.

The select committee has met over 30 times. I am not the chair nor the co-chair — those positions belong to the Member for Takhini-Kopper King, who is the chair, and the Member for Lake Laberge, who is the co-chair or vice-chair. I am just one of the members, but we have met more than 30 times over the past couple of years and done a lot of work. So, that work really was to try to look at our electoral system.

If you think about our democracy and what is fundamental to our democracy, the two things that I think of most are how we work in this Assembly and how people are chosen to represent them to come to this Assembly — how our voting system is comprised. As you look at electoral systems, you

understand very quickly that, even though most Canadians are just used to this one system, it is not the only system. In fact, I think that jurisdictions like Canada, the United States, and England are the last jurisdictions where first-past-the-post is the main system. That doesn't make it right or wrong; it's just one of the ways in which you can set up your electoral system.

Why do we care about it? Because the whole point of the voting system is to reflect the will of the voters. I think that was shared by all of us, as members of the committee — that we all care about the will of Yukoners.

We met, and we hired an adviser, someone who is very well-informed about electoral systems. They provided a report to us outlining all of the various types of electoral systems and what you could have. We then had a series of expert witnesses — more than a dozen — where we had hearings with them. We then had a tour of communities. We went to seven of our communities to talk to Yukoners and hear directly from Yukoners. We opened it up to written submissions. We had more than 50 written submissions given to us, and there was a lot of feedback.

We also did a survey. That survey that we had, it turns out that there were questions about how we should set up that survey, and at first, there was concern about using the Yukon Bureau of Statistics as the group to do the survey. I sort of pulled away a little bit, because I'm part of the government, but my colleagues had some questions of the Yukon Bureau of Statistics — especially when we all were informed that the Bureau of Statistics has a role to supply surveys for more than the government. It can be for the Yukon. That was good; and they did a very good job at designing a survey for us.

When you think of Yukon surveys, I remember when we went out and talked about cannabis — when we were legalizing cannabis. That was the biggest response that we had ever gotten. After that, when we dealt with time changes here in the Yukon, suddenly we broke the record again. Then this survey that I am talking about — the one on electoral reform, the first large survey that we conducted of Yukoners — broke the record again. That survey was sent to every eligible Yukoner. We went from the age of 16 and up, so all voters, and even those who aren't quite yet voters, the survey went to. There were just about 36,000 Yukoners at the time. It went to all those Yukoners, and we got a response rate of just over 17 percent. Over 6,000 Yukoners responded.

We also had a unique ID, so we would make sure that there were no duplications. It was all very purposeful. We were quite excited as a select committee. We got the biggest response that we have ever seen. We worked through that and, of course, our in-person conversations with Yukoners and the written submissions to try to come up with where three — one member from each political party — three representatives on the committee, who have very different partisan perspectives but I think share an interest in hearing from Yukoners.

We worked through that survey. We had already had one extension here in this House. Thank you to all members for giving us that extra time. Our job was to get back to this House last fall, but when we were working through what our recommendations were, we had consensus on most of the —

we had agreement among the three of us on all things except one and that was whether or not we should have a citizens' assembly.

A citizens' assembly is kind of like a jury. It's a group of Yukoners, in this case, who don't have a partisan perspective, aren't elected to represent, but they are selected randomly but with a distribution across the territory, so that it represents the Yukon and our demographics and our communities, and then brings their perspectives and allows them to work through this question of: Is first-past-the-post the best system for Yukoners, and if not, then what is?

Through the first survey, we had heard clearly from Yukoners that there were concerns with our electoral system, but no consensus around what might be a better system. There was a lot of diversity of views around what a better system might look like.

We learned about citizens' assemblies through the process. We had presentations about it; we heard from other jurisdictions that had used citizens' assemblies — outside of Canada, within Canada — and we started thinking about that. The survey that we got back — the one that had the most respondents ever for a survey in the Yukon — had said to us, "not sure about a citizens' assembly", but the public — or, in our talk with Yukoners, it said, yes, they were interested in a citizens' assembly.

As a group, we sat down, and we said, okay, we don't agree whether or not we should recommend a citizens' assembly, but there was a request by the Yukon Party to, please, if we went back and ran a second survey of Yukoners, where we gave them a little bit more information on a citizens' assembly, asked some very direct questions about whether — yes or no on a citizens' assembly — and if we heard back from Yukoners that a citizens' assembly was a good thing, we could then seek to find consensus among us as a select committee. We did that work — on behalf of the Yukon Party, we did that work.

We went back out and put out a second survey, and do you know what happened with that second survey, Mr. Speaker? It broke the record again for the number of responses. We had more Yukoners now — we had increased the population by 450 or so between the first survey and the second survey — a big jump — but still, this time we got 17.5 percent of every eligible person who could respond, did respond.

Again, there were unique codes for IDs, and we got the response. It was very clear: 63 percent of the respondents said they support a citizens' assembly, and close to 8.5 percent said they don't. There were a bunch who were not sure, but if we look at it, it was 63 percent in favour, 8.5 percent not in favour.

So, we said, okay, we are there; we are now going to reach consensus. We showed up, and I will say that this committee — I want to praise everyone involved in the committee. The work was very well done, and there was a lot of effort put into it, but I was pretty shocked when I heard back from our colleague, the Member for Lake Laberge, who stated that his —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: Member for Lake Laberge, on a point of order.

Mr. Cathers: The Government House Leader has been delving a lot into conversations that occurred at the committee, which were held in-camera. I would ask you to rule on whether he is in order or stepping outside the bounds of that process with the comments he has made about his own personal views about what was said or wasn't said by members during those meetings.

Speaker: Government House Leader, on the point of order.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I look forward to your ruling, Mr. Speaker. Sorry, the committee had made the decision that we were going to share all things, so we made that. I apologize if I have been delving too far, and I just look for your advice, or your ruling. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Now, on the point of order, I'm going to have to get back to members, but I also wanted to mention that anything that is held in-camera is private, but anything that's publicly put in a report, you can talk about.

Government House Leader, please continue.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will make sure to just reference the public-facing parts of all of this.

I'll use the Yukon Party's press release, okay? That's what I'll use — because they put out a press release yesterday, talking about the fact that they don't support a citizens' assembly.

In the press release, they referred to the input of Yukoners as we went around — and the turnout, I think they called it "abysmal." That is the adjective that they used to talk about Yukoners and how they were responding to things. This was — if I can just say again — the survey that had the most responses we have ever seen — of Yukoners — the highest response rate ever and that is not enough for the Yukon Party.

I don't know where to go with that. I won't talk about the other things that were said; I will wait to hear what the member for the Yukon Party says in response to this motion, but they have indicated, through their press release, that they don't feel that is enough of a response.

I will just draw a couple of comparisons. They are saying — what they have done, is they have taken the number of people who responded and multiplied it against the number of people who said yes, and they are saying that it is only 11 percent of Yukoners, but actually, 100 percent of eligible Yukoners were welcomed to provide a response. Some chose to and some didn't. That is the nature of how our voting system typically works anyway. I went and looked at the leadership of the Yukon Party — to look at their own vote of how they selected their leader to see what kind of response they got. Here is what I found — that the Leader of the Yukon Party got 752 votes, and that was in the second round. By the way, political parties — including the Yukon Party — doesn't use a first-past-the-post system in choosing their leader, but if you ask yourself the question: 752 out of how many? Well, in the

election the following year, they got 7,500 votes, so that is 10 percent of the votes, but that is enough — that is enough for me to believe that the Member for Copperbelt North is the Leader of the Yukon Party, and I respect that; I believe in it; I trust it.

In this case, we asked all Yukoners to let us know what they thought, and they — not everybody responded, that is correct, but it is the highest response that we have ever seen — but it is not enough for the Yukon Party. According to their press release, they think that there are other things that are more important.

Today, we heard questions on free transit, sport fields, international flights, educational assistants, rural school infrastructure — all important topics but that doesn't mean that we can't also care about our electoral system. The thing about it is — and my impression of Yukoners, as we went around and talked with them, is that they care about a lot of things, including our electoral system. It's pretty important. I think that it's fundamental to our system. I think that here is an opportunity for us, as a House, to ask for Yukoners not tied to one party or another to think through about what kind of a system they would recommend.

In fact, what we are doing today in this motion is putting forward a suggestion to create another select committee of members of this House to report back this coming Fall Sitting with a terms of reference for a citizens' assembly. I am sure we are going to hear from some Yukoners who are very keen on the subject that they think that this is too long and far out, but that's the process that we're trying to put in place to make sure that we respect this Legislative Assembly, that we respect this territory, and that we respect its citizens.

I will give one more example. When I was first elected to office, it was as a city councillor. It was in 2012, so a little over a decade ago. I look back at the results of that election to try to see what kind of voter turnout there was. It's difficult, because again, with how councillors are elected — and the Premier will know this, as well — you can vote for up to six people, so it's not a purely first-past-the-post system, but the votes for our mayors are a first-past-the-post system. I looked at that election, and I saw that the mayor was elected with 2,375 votes. I looked back to see what the population of Whitehorse was at that time, and it was roughly 24,000. In other words, the mayor got 10 percent of Whitehorse citizens to elect him to the role of mayor. Do I think that this is fair and valid? I absolutely do. That mayor went on to be a three-term mayor, the first three-term Mayor of Whitehorse. I respect our municipal elections. It's not about the voter turnout; it's whether Yukoners have the opportunity to respond.

What I get from the press release is that the Yukon Party is not interested in a citizens' assembly. They are not interested in hearing from Yukoners, but they just heard from Yukoners — we all did. This is why it's amazing to me. Not only is it a principle of democracy, but it's also a principle of listening to Yukoners. I think that this is incredibly important.

I won't talk about my response at the committee level. What I will say is that when I saw this press release, my jaw hit the floor. I think that this is not respectful of Yukoners and what

they have asked us to do. I encourage all of us to go forward now with this vote. I hope that we can fulfill the will of Yukoners, as we have heard it, and call for a citizens' assembly.

Mr. Cathers: To begin with, I want to thank all Yukoners who shared their views regarding the topic of electoral reform. I also want to thank the Legislative Assembly staff for their many hours spent in support of the committee's work, especially the Clerk of Committees.

I will be speaking to this as the Yukon Party's democratic institutions critic as well as our representative on the committee, which just wrapped up upon the tabling of the final report yesterday.

That committee was born from the confidence and supply agreement made between the NDP and Liberals in April of 2021. We voted against its creation but accepted the decision made by a majority of MLAs, and participated in that process to hear from the public.

Our democracy belongs to all Yukoners. The committee was formed almost two years ago and had been working since with multiple press releases throughout, advertising, and public meetings. Despite that, throughout that time period, my colleagues and I heard from Yukoners more frequently about many other issues. While we appreciate that electoral reform is a priority for some people, we believe that there is a long list of other issues that are much higher on the priority list for most Yukoners.

Those issues include lack of access to a family doctor, nursing shortages in communities, health care wait times, gaps in emergency medical services coverage, the growing affordability crisis, strained police resources to respond to organized crime and the illegal drug trade, lack of addictions treatment, problems in the education system, the cost and availability of firewood, and the problems caused by the failure of the Liberal energy policies and their short-sighted decision to rely on portable diesel generators for the foreseeable future.

Over 82 percent of Yukoners did not participate in the most recent survey done by the Yukon Bureau of Statistics on the topic of a citizens' assembly. After two years of work spent on this process, public participation compares poorly to participation in territorial elections, where voter turnout of 70 percent to 80 percent is common.

The results of the survey indicate that 11 percent of Yukoners over the age of 16 support creating a citizens' assembly. There was a long time period for people to respond to the survey and multiple reminders. I believe it's fair to say that virtually everyone who supports forming a citizens' assembly had ample time to say so.

I would also mention that while I won't spend much time responding to the Government House Leader's comments, particularly since, as I indicated to you, Mr. Speaker — and respecting that you have reserved your ruling on it — in my view, a number of his comments were procedurally out of order relating to matters that the committee discussed in camera, and therefore I cannot respond to them without, in my view, crossing that line myself.

So, I will simply encourage the Government House Leader, when he refers to "record-high response", to actually review some of the information that the committee was provided by the Yukon Bureau of Statistics in response to questions about high participation rate and other surveys because his comments are largely written by himself in his talking points and not necessarily reflective of reality.

Mr. Speaker, again, we do respect that for the 11 percent of Yukoners who indicated they support creating a citizens' assembly — we respect their viewpoint.

I want to remind this House of what the Yukon Bureau of Statistics said in their report on that most recent survey — quote: "... the results may not be representative of the eligible population, as those with a particular interest in the survey topic may have been more likely than others to participate in the survey."

Of note during the committee's two years of work in travelling around the territory to gather input was the very low turnout at most public meetings and even for online presentations. Mr. Speaker, I would note that the Government House Leader mischaracterized our remark in the press release, suggesting that we were commenting on people's views when, in fact, the reference was that it was an abysmally low turnout for public meetings.

Mr. Speaker, as noted in the committee's final report, only 53 people chose to say something to the committee during the community hearings. Only a handful of people attended most of the public meetings with the attendance dwarfed by other public meetings held during the same time period and zero attendees at one public meeting.

I will give some specific examples of that. In Mayo, more people turned out for a presentation by the Commissioner regarding the Queen's Jubilee than to a committee public hearing. In Dawson, the day after a poorly attended electoral reform public meeting that had less than 10 attendees and only four people who presented to the committee, the Klondike Placer Miners' Association hosted a meeting attended by over 50 people, including the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and me. In Watson Lake, no residents of the community or the surrounding area attended the public meeting.

The Yukon Party Official Opposition does not think the issue of electoral reform is top of mind for most Yukoners right now. While we respect the fact that 11 percent of Yukoners support forming a citizens' assembly, we believe similar surveys on topics such as access to a family doctor would have a higher response. According to the government's own numbers, over 20 percent of Yukoners do not have a family doctor, thousands of people are on the waiting list for a family doctor, and many more have given up on trying.

The Yukon Party Official Opposition believes that a proposal to establish a citizens' assembly would be voted down by Yukoners if it were put to a referendum. Mr. Speaker, random selection on any body, including a citizens' assembly, does not guarantee representation of citizens any more than a lottery does.

Mr. Speaker, in contrast to colleagues in the Liberals and the NDP, we do believe in our democratic process, including that Yukoners have the right to pick their elected representatives, and we have been clear that for those who are proposing a citizens' assembly, if that were put to a referendum and was successful, we would respect that result. But again, I want to reiterate that we believe a proposal to establish a citizens' assembly would be voted down by Yukoners if put to a referendum.

We believe that the Yukon government and MLAs should be focused on issues of more importance to Yukoners, including increasing the number of family doctors in the territory, proper funding for Yukon hospitals, health care wait times, the substance use health emergency, inflation relief for families and others who are struggling, supporting the private sector, as well as many other priorities that we hear from Yukon citizens.

So, Mr. Speaker, it should come as no surprise that the Yukon Party Official Opposition will be voting against this motion.

Ms. White: I have so many different things to say, I think, in so many different capacities. I want to start off by saying that each of us have our own biases when we deal with situations. We have biases about different things, and I have to tell you that, as the only member in this House who has been in the opposition party to two separate majority governments that did not have the majority of the votes in the territory — they had the full majority without the full majority of Yukoners standing behind them — I have a lot of biases when it comes to electoral reform. I do. I have so many biases when it comes to electoral reform that it was in our 2011 NDP election campaign, in our 2016, and again in 2021. I have so many biases about our current system that I did make it one of the issues in the confidence and supply agreement. I said that I would like to have a select committee. I would like to have a conversation with Yukoners about electoral reform. I did. Those are my biases. I am the one person standing here who can say that I have been through multiple governments with false majorities. I have been through it. I come to this issue with a lot of baggage.

I also can say that, had you asked me about my feelings on citizens' assemblies before this process even started, I would have said no. I would have said no. I would have said that this was not the way that I thought we should go. So, I am here standing in the Assembly today to say that, after almost two years of going over this issue — and I thank the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes because we did have 31 meetings internally with three members of this House. There were 14 presentations from expert witnesses. There were two public meetings in Whitehorse. There was one in Haines Junction, Teslin, Watson Lake, Dawson City, Mayo, and Carmacks. There were people who sent written submissions. There were people who presented and there were letters, and there was a lot of learning.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that, going into this, I might have had an idea of how I thought that things should go, and I can tell you that it is different now. I can tell you now that I

have the utmost faith in Yukon citizens. I believe that, for example, Dr. Kenneth Carty, who was the support person behind the Citizens' Assembly of British Columbia — he actually presented twice because the first presentation wasn't specifically about citizens' assemblies and his advice on it. We actually asked him to come back again because we recognized that he had a lot of valuable information that maybe we should learn. I have to say that the citizens' assembly that was created in British Columbia has become the gold standard in the world. It has been mirrored in other places and other jurisdictions — for example, in Scotland and Ireland where they have randomly selected citizens who sit on citizens' assemblies and make really hard decisions and make really hard recommendations for their parliaments — to make decisions, to give direction to their politicians.

I have to say that I went through this entire process thinking that my answer was going to be no, and I can tell you now that the answer is yes. I have to say that there was a lot of conversation in the meeting rooms and there has been a lot of conversation in the communities. We got to hear people present for and against electoral reform. The really interesting thing, I would say, is that through that entire process, the committee worked really hard at consensus. I am standing here not as the chair of the committee. I am standing here as a member of this Legislative Assembly who is really in support of the creation of a citizens' assembly. I have to say that the committee that I just sat on — the Select Committee on Electoral Reform — it wasn't always easy but it was very respectful. We worked very hard to be respectful of each other — including with differing opinions. I think that it is really important to note that in the recommendations of our report, it highlights that two decisions were made by consensus — and I am actually going to mention them because I think that they are really important. Two decisions were made by consensus and one was made by majority. The reason why I think that it is important to say this is because we agreed on more than what we disagreed on.

Recommendation 1 was that the Special Committee on Electoral Reform recommends that Yukoners be given the opportunity to vote on a proposed change to Yukon's voting system both before any such change is implemented and again after a trial period with a new voting system. So, that is talking about two referendum votes — one before, if we decide that, based on a recommendation that we are going to make a change — should we make a change? — that is the answer to the question — and, again after we have had an opportunity to try that system. Why did we make that recommendation? It is because we heard from a witness from New Zealand who talked about the referendum process and electoral reform in New Zealand. Really, what I can say that I felt after those presentations is that electoral reform is a really big deal and it really should be decided on by people. So, that should be a referendum vote — not whether or not we investigate it further. The recommendation was for two referendum votes.

Recommendation 2 says that the Special Committee on Electoral Reform recommends that any decision on voting systems reflects the importance of a balance for rural and urban representation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you are from a riding that encompasses three communities, three First Nations, and a great stretch of highway. I am from a riding that is urban in nature.

If we went, just based on numbers, Whitehorse would always be able to dominate rural Yukon and that is something the committee thought we really needed to take into account, because we all recognize the importance of rural representation.

Finally, the third recommendation says, “The Special Committee on Electoral Reform supports the creation of a Yukon Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform.”

As you will remember, what I said is that the first two were by consensus and the final one was agreed to by a majority. I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I don’t spend a lot of time reading the other parties’ press releases, so I wasn’t sure what my colleagues had said about electoral reform, but I can say that I heard from people — I did. I listen to folks. I think that it’s really important to say that the surveys that were put out, including the second one that was specifically on a citizens’ assembly, we have really conscientiously made sure that people couldn’t respond multiple times from the same IP address. We made sure that they had a unique number with which they had to register and log on so that it was capturing individuals.

I think, when we look at the results of that survey, it’s really clear: 63.2 percent of the people who responded said yes to creating a citizens’ assembly, which really got us to Recommendation No. 3.

I am standing here as a person whose mind was changed over this process. I have to tell you, as well, that I really believe that Yukoners — given the opportunity and the resources to study an issue like electoral systems around the world — will be able to come up with a recommendation.

Mr. Speaker, this is really important for me to say as well: if that citizens’ assembly comes back and they say that our current system is the right system, that’s it for me, because I will respect what that recommendation is. I will respect the recommendation. It will be hard, but I will respect that recommendation.

I appreciate the work that was done by the committee. I believe that the motion — also, it’s important to note — I’m not actually sure I can say this. The motion that we are debating right now was decided on by the committee. It is the committee’s motion that was put forward — generously tabled by a minister, because otherwise we would have to use an opposition Wednesday or get full consent of the House to be able to debate it today. So, I appreciate that working together.

One thing I would tell my colleagues is, what do we have to be afraid of? If we task Yukoners with this big question, and we give them all the resources that they need to do the work, what are we afraid of?

I look forward to seeing this process. I can tell you that, as the Leader of the NDP, who will be naming a person to the committee — I don’t think I will spoil anything by saying that I will be naming myself; I am passionate about the issue; I am passionate to see it through. So, I really appreciate the work that was done. I appreciate the integrity of the three members — or the other two members who were on that committee with me — and I really appreciate where we got to.

I urge members of this House to vote in favour of the motion — to not be afraid of what Yukoners will come back with as a recommendation. Again, I will respect what that recommendation is.

Speaker’s statement

Speaker: A moment, please. I just want to remind members to please not use the Speaker in debate, please.

Thank you.

If the member now speaks, he will close debate.

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will make a few concluding remarks, and I will look forward to our vote on this motion.

The Member for Lake Laberge talked about whether or not I was talking about reality. All I was doing in my opening remarks — and I will apologize again for referring to in-camera conversations, but what I referred to was numbers from votes. Those are the numbers that I am talking about. Then, the member went on to talk about a referendum on a citizens’ assembly, and then said that he or his party believes that it would be voted down by Yukoners.

Well, we haven’t had a referendum on citizens’ assemblies so how does he know what that would be? I don’t get it. In fact, we just surveyed Yukoners, and we asked them, “What do you think?” We heard back from them, and — the member opposite often talks about bias in these processes, yet the Yukon Party recently just put forward two petitions from Yukoners to say, “Hey, we should do a survey of Yukoners so make sure to have this unique ID.” But that is what we just did on the citizens’ assembly.

That’s what we did, and it was done in order to hear from Yukoners. That was the purpose of it, and we did hear back from Yukoners. The results are there. I know that the Yukon Party is going to say it was 11 percent of Yukoners. I understand their math, but how normal people would look at this, they would say, “Hey, of the people who responded, what did we get? 66 percent said yes; eight percent said no; and the rest were not sure.”

Having been around a lot of science in my life, I get frustrated when I hear math like that, because it’s not — I don’t believe that it is being respectful to the views of Yukoners. Forget what I want; forget what the Liberal government wants; forget what the Yukon Party opposition wants. What Yukoners want is a citizens’ assembly. That doesn’t mean that there aren’t other issues that we should work on and address.

That is not the — we didn’t go out and say to Yukoners: “Hey, we’ll stop working on everything else if you ask us to do this”, because we won’t. We will keep working for Yukoners on all of our fronts, and so will the opposition for that matter. Their job is to criticize. That is important work, but we heard from Yukoners, and what I’m worried about is that this position of the Yukon Party just basically, blatantly disregards that view of Yukoners.

I have done much outreach around — long before I became a minister, but certainly as minister. We just went recently on the launch of the new mineral legislation. I went on the first

visit to one of our communities. We got four people out, and I counted that as a win. It was a small community we were in, and we wanted to hear from them. Those four Yukoners, they said important stuff, and I think that's worth it. I think it was worth us travelling to hear from those Yukoners. I disagree with the members opposite when they refer to that turnout of Yukoners as being "abysmally low."

I think we heard valid perspectives, and I think it's our job now to try to follow up on what we heard. There was a range of views — that is true — but on the question of citizens' assembly, we heard clearly from Yukoners that they were in favour of us moving forward with a citizens' assembly. So, I urge all of us to please listen to Yukoners on this.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Dixon: Disagree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Ms. Clarke: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Ms. White: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are nine yea, seven nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it.
I declare the motion carried.

Motion 711 agreed to

Hon. Mr. Streicker: 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

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Deputy Chair (MLA Tredger): Order, please. I will now call Committee of the Whole to order.

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 2, Executive Council Office, in Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

Deputy Chair: I will now call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill No. 208: *First Appropriation Act 2023-24* — continued

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 2, Executive Council Office, in Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any general debate?

Executive Council Office

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am pleased to introduce the 2023-24 budget for the Executive Council Office. I would like to welcome officials from the Executive Council Office. Our deputy minister, Michael Hale, is with us today as well as Exilda Driscoll, who is our director of finance, and Christine Cleghorn, our ADM who is with us in the gallery today.

With that, I will start with some prepared remarks and then we will go directly to the opposition for questions.

The Executive Council Office operates as a central agency providing leadership and guidance throughout the Government of Yukon while also directly supporting the Cabinet Office with high quality advice and support. We share expertise and information, help build capacity, and ensure coordination across the organization in the support of effective public governance.

The Executive Council Office serves Yukoners in many ways. The department helps represent the Yukon's interests beyond our borders and maintains continuity through elections and changes in government. In its regulatory role, the department supports the coordination of assessment and regulatory reviews for major development projects. The department supports implementation of the final and self-government agreements and leads the negotiation of other agreements. Our commitment to reconciliation is undertaken through a number of initiatives, including the expansion of how we incorporate Indigenous knowledge, values, and perspectives throughout our work.

As we look to the future that we are creating for all Yukoners, we consider our youth and support their engagement, development, and well-being through initiatives across the territory.

I will now provide some details with the Executive Council Office budget. Operation and maintenance budget overview — the 2023-24 Executive Council Office operation and maintenance budget is \$25.6 million. This is an increase of \$46,000 over last year, and now, Deputy Chair, I will provide a

brief overview of each of the Executive Council Office's three divisions and some budget highlights for the upcoming year.

Strategic Corporate Services provides leadership and coordination to support the management and functioning of the government as well as operational support for the department, Cabinet, and ministers. The division's activities are supported by a budget of \$4.1 million. Strategic Corporate Services aids the Cabinet decision-making process by providing comprehensive and balanced information, analysis, and advice. Staff work across all departments to coordinate the department's approach on strategic initiatives, its legislative agenda, and priorities from public engagement to the recent pandemic response. The division coordinates communication activities from within the department and across government, helping to inform and involve the public about government programs, services, and priorities.

Aboriginal Relations focuses, of course, on reconciliation and that is one of the fundamental priorities of our government. We work closely with First Nations and Indigenous groups to address the impacts of historical inequality and discrimination. Aboriginal Relations provides leadership and support to guide the government's approach to reconciliation and collaboration with Indigenous governments, communities, and organizations. The division leads and supports negotiations with Indigenous governments and advises departments on how to strengthen relationships, fulfill consultation obligations, and implement agreements. The operation and maintenance budget for Aboriginal Relations this fiscal year is estimated at \$9.6 million. About half of this amount, \$4.5 million, is transfer payments to support land claims implementation boards and councils.

This year, the budget also includes \$525,000 to support the ongoing work of the First Nation governments' burial site investigation committee. This committee guides the research and investigation of potential burial sites around former residential schools in the Yukon. As a government, we are committed to supporting this important and difficult work. It's vital that we learn from the past to build a stronger, healthier future for all Yukoners.

We will now move on to the Intergovernmental Relations and Corporate Programs. This division encompasses several branches, including the Office of the Science Advisor, Major Projects Yukon, Intergovernmental Relations, the Youth Directorate, and the Yukon Water Board. The operation and maintenance budget for this division is estimated at \$7.5 million. We will go through those branches.

The Office of the Science Advisor — the science advisor supports the respectful use of traditional knowledge in government actions and decisions. The office ensures that the Yukon benefits from research conducted in the territory and that the public service is supported in making evidence-based decisions. This year, the Office of the Science Advisor has a budget of \$500,000. Notably, the office contributes up to \$100,000 annually to the Arctic Inspiration Prize, which is awarded each year to projects designed by northerners for northerners, demonstrating a real-world application of northern

knowledge and experience for the benefit of the Canadian north and its people.

The Office of the Science Advisor also contributes \$200,000 to the Two-Eyed Seeing research and training knowledge mobilization program. The program was developed to advance research training and knowledge, mobilizing activities in Yukon through a two-eyed seeing approach. Two-eyed seeing is about seeing with one eye using the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing and seeing with another eye using the strengths of western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together for the benefit of all.

Major Projects Yukon is the branch that ensures that the government fulfills its responsibilities under the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-Economic Assessment Act*. They provide leadership and guidance to departments and coordinate the assessment and regulatory reviews of major development projects in the territory and support consultation with the affected First Nation governments. This year, Major Projects Yukon has a budget of \$880,000 to support their initiatives. This government-to-government work supports our commitment to advancing responsible development projects while ensuring a sustainable environment.

Similarly, the Intergovernmental Relations branch also works at the government-to-government level. Intergovernmental Relations helps the government present itself on the national and international stage to ensure that the Yukon's priorities and perspectives are heard. The branch helps to elevate the Yukon's voice on the national stage and advances the territory's interests and activities through intergovernmental negotiations at multilateral meetings such as the Council of the Federation. In 2023-24, the Intergovernmental Relations budget is \$1.1 million.

Now I'll move on to the Youth Directorate. We know that the empowerment of youth is vital to our future. The Youth Directorate funds organizations that provide valuable support, services and resources to the territory's youth. This includes more than \$1.5 million annually to groups like the Heart of Riverdale, BYTE — Empowering Youth Society, the Youth of Today Society, and the Boys and Girls Club of Yukon.

This division is also responsible for the youth investment fund, which supports community-driven initiatives aimed at addressing the needs of youth. The fund is \$102,000 annually. In 2023-24, there is an additional \$750,000 earmarked within the Youth Directorate budget to help advance mental health and substance use projects and programs that have a youth focus. Again, we're proud to help contribute to the well-being of Yukon youth.

Finally, we have the Water Board Secretariat. While the Yukon Water Board is independent and arm's length from government, the staff of the Yukon Water Board Secretariat are all public servants employed by the Executive Council Office. The secretariat provides advice, analysis and technical support to the Water Board to help effectively regulate the use of water in the Yukon. The budget for 2023-24 is \$2.3 million. This includes operating costs for the Water Board and operating and support costs for public hearings.

Beyond the three divisions of the Executive Council Office that I just touched on, there are a few more critical functions that I will speak to. While the Commissioner's Office is independent of the Government of Yukon, its staff and operating costs are funded through the Executive Council Office. The Commissioner of Yukon is the Yukon's head of state. Her role includes ensuring the continuity of government leadership and maintaining democratic freedoms, delivering the Speech from the Throne, assenting to bills, and signing orders-in-council. The 2023-24 budget for the Office of the Commissioner is \$374,000. This covers annual events hosted by the Commissioner such as the Commissioner's Award and new year's levee as well as administration and communication support.

The budget also includes \$100,000 set aside to host the viceregal conference, which will be hosted by the Yukon in June 2023. This conference will bring together Canada's Lieutenant Governors and Commissioners to discuss matters of mutual interest and how they can better serve all Canadians.

Finally, the Cabinet Office is also included in the Executive Council Office's budget. The budget in 2023-24 is \$3.4 million to support staffing for the Cabinet Office as well as travel and communication expenses for ministers and support staff.

Finally, the government internal audit services branch falls under the Executive Council Office. Its total budget for 2023-24 is \$596,000. This will help us to provide objective, risk-based assurance and advisory services supporting the government's commitment to openness in accountability and strengthening our performance.

I hope this has provided some valuable insights into the work and upcoming priorities of the Executive Council Office. I look forward to supporting the strategic work of the department for this upcoming year so that we can continue to support good governance and build strong relationships within a fair and prosperous Yukon.

Deputy Chair, I would be happy to answer any questions from my colleagues about the 2023-24 budget for the Executive Council Office.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to this budget item today in Committee. I thank the officials for joining us as well. I will jump right into questions because I know we have a fairly limited amount of time before we carry on to other business.

I will start with the staking bans in the Kaska traditional territory. Can the Premier give us an update on the most recent meetings that he has had with the Kaska on this file? Has there been any progress, and what is the current plan with regard to the possibility of lifting those staking bans in the Kaska traditional territory?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We have had a few separate meetings. I have been on the job for about 100 days and we had meetings in January at Roundup. Those were our first initial meetings — conversation about staking bans, the moratoriums. The Kaska, of course, have publicly stated their interest in what I would describe, to some extent, as a different approach on land

planning and protection, which they have publicly stated they are looking for.

We talked about priorities for the community. One of the things that I have requested — at least in meeting with folks from Ross River and for the government and the chief there — is to just get a better sense of where the community's priorities are when it comes to identifying where they want to see development in their community. It was brought up today during Question Period. We talked about the challenges with the school in Ross River and the approach that has been taken.

We know there have been housing needs and requests from Ross River, but there have also been discussions that I have been party to since 2017, which talk about where the community sees it moving to. Is it going to be where the community of Ross River is now? Is there going to be redevelopment there? There was interest, at one point, to rebuild some infrastructure on the other side of the Pelly River. That's another discussion. Then, of course, there are other areas near what could be targeted as potential geothermal opportunities.

I think it's really important what we propose to the nation, or to the government of the First Nation, is that we need to get a clear understanding of what direction you want to go, when it comes to the redevelopment of your community, then we can approach that accordingly.

We know, going back to the heart of that question, yes, I am trying to get some clarity around the current moratorium. There was some significant detailed conversation that I will hold off for now, looking at different approaches that have been deployed over the last 10 years with conversations.

I just received an e-mail from the chief, either Friday or yesterday — I will go back to my e-mail — just confirming that we will be meeting with Ross River leadership later in May. We have another number of communities. I committed to spending time with Chief Loblaw to get a real sense of priorities of the community, have a conversation around where things are on the moratorium on staking, where the priorities are on advancement of diversification of the economy, what are some of the things that we believe, in the short run, we can look at. I want to get a better understanding. We have talked about it here in the House — the information that Ross River has put out about protected areas. I want to understand exactly that impact.

I think we have a good process in the Yukon when it comes to land planning. It's challenging, but it's a good process, where everybody is there at the table. I want to understand what has been communicated publicly from Ross River.

That is sort of a snapshot. When it comes to the Liard First Nation, my hope is that, during the Association of Yukon Communities weekend, we can reach out to have our next set of conversations with Chief Charlie and council. We have also had invites to meet with some other Kaska leaders from Daylu Dena later this year on some of the infrastructure they have built, and they want to share an understanding of some of the work they are doing.

When it comes to the Liard First Nation, we are thinking mid-May is our next set of meetings. In my previous roles, I had some significant meetings with Chief Charlie, but I am

really looking to engage — and, of course, there are a number of conversations that will be there, you know, how they see the economy moving forward in that region, everything from mining to forestry. We think that there are some real opportunities to sit at the table and come to some agreement and common ground in a number of areas.

Of course, they are doing some significant work on housing. We are going to go back and see how — they have bought a housing manufacturing business. We partnered with the municipality, through Community Services, around lot development on Frances Avenue. Those will be some things that we will be focusing on — continuing to support other housing initiatives. Taking a look, again, at where we can partner — not just on your standard areas of the economy, but also what the thoughts are, moving forward, when it comes to tourism, but what the thoughts are when it comes to energy too.

Yes, to the conversation around discussing a moratorium, but I think, as the member opposite would know, it would be more of a fulsome conversation on a number of things — not just that item — but that would be one of the items that would be on the table in both discussions.

Mr. Dixon: The question that I asked was about the status of the moratorium on staking. So, can the Premier just tell us what is the status of the moratorium on staking? How long was that moratorium in place, and when will it expire?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, as stated, the mineral staking prohibition in the Ross River area — and that was put in place in 2013 — and is in place until April 30, 2024. The southern portion of the Kaska territory was first put in place on February 1, 2017, and is in place until April 30, 2024.

Mr. Dixon: Does the Yukon government recognize the Pelly Banks government?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: My understanding is that the Government of Yukon has not entered into any formal conversations with the Pelly Banks First Nation, meaning that they have not been at the table as a distinct nation with the Yukon government.

Mr. Dixon: So, the Yukon government does not recognize the Pelly Banks government. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: At this point, I think there has never been a process that has been put in place where we have identified the Pelly Banks First Nation as its own distinct First Nation. I want to make sure that I can go back to officials to take a look at transboundary conversations or anything like that but, no, we have not ever entered into a dialogue or negotiation, as far as I know — again, 100 days in the department. I want to go back and make sure that, in the last number of years, I haven't missed anything, but my sense is that, in that particular traditional territory, we are talking about 11 self-governing nations, and when it comes to Kaska, we are meeting with Ross River and Liard First Nation.

Mr. Dixon: I will move on to the collaborative framework with regard to YESAA. A letter has previously gone from the government — and was jointly signed, I believe, with the Council of Yukon First Nations — to Minister Vandal regarding the reopening of YESAA, and I would like to ask for an update on the work to do that.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Absolutely. There has been a letter signed off by Council of Yukon First Nations. There has been a dialogue that has been shared with the Yukon Chamber of Mines on the language. There has been work done by the Yukon government. It has gone to the federal government. This is the work that was committed to being done. In dialogue with Minister Vandal, with Minister Leblanc, and Minister Wilkinson — all identifying to them that it is extremely important that these amendments move forward. That was the commitment that was made.

We have done the work on this side. Yukoners have come together, and it's important now that we see those amendments. We believe that, as soon as possible, these amendments should be made. It goes to a process of drafting. We know there is a commitment from the federal government to do this work but we want to get an accurate timeline from them on when it's going to occur.

I will be meeting with Minister Wilkinson next week — and Minister Vandal and Minister Leblanc — and I will have an opportunity at that point to get a better indication of exactly the timeline from the federal government on when this work will be completed.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the Premier's update. I would like to ask further, though — while I appreciate that there's work going on at the government-to-government level, I'm wondering when we might see some sort of public consultation, either open to the public or with members of the public including affected stakeholders like the Yukon Chamber of Mines, the Yukon Prospectors Association, and others.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: My understanding from conversations with officials is that there has been dialogue with the Yukon Chamber of Mines and officials. I want to make sure, if there is a broader group — our sense is that we are trying to get this work done and that industry names that were there — the folks who were named — are supportive of getting the work completed. I can imagine that there could be a need for further dialogue.

But let me get back — because my sense was that there was a bit of back and forth from industry, just ensuring that the amendments were still going to be workable and that they were appropriate. But if I am wrong — let me get back. I will make a commitment in one of two ways to the member opposite — if I have that information before the end of the week, I can come back with a legislative return, or, if not, I will provide that to both caucuses by e-mail.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the Premier's commitment to get back to us on that issue. I would like to move on to the Water Board. As I am sure the Premier is aware, there was a court case last year that involved a mining company — I believe it was Victoria Gold. In the decision, the judge — last year, in October, I believe — made some fairly strong comments that were picked up by local media about the conduct of the Water Board.

The judge said that the board was “overly adversarial”. The judge also went on to say the following: “It sought to take on the role it believed Yukon or Na-Cho Nyäk Dun should have played. In doing so, it overstepped its mark and became too

partisan... The Water Board must be careful: it is not an adversarial party and should not act like one.”

Has the Yukon government considered any policy, regulatory or legislative changes to address the concerns raised by the judge with the Water Board?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, I appreciate the member opposite touching on that particular topic and what was said through the courts. I have had one opportunity since taking on this responsibility — Executive Council Office — to meet with the chair and vice-chair of the Water Board to have a bit of dialogue around how they see their role — and, in my role, identifying what we believe the Executive Council’s role is — and to make sure that we are clear on our responsibilities and that the process that’s in front of us — that institution or that entity — works in an accountable way in its delivery of governance and, of course, our commitment to also work in the same way.

There’s going to be further dialogue around policy and policy development and defining those roles. I think that has been ongoing for a number of years. I just received an invite to go and meet with the entire Water Board when we conclude our work here. It’s in the first week of June, I think. I just saw the invite today. So, we have some work in our communities with municipalities, meetings with First Nations — pretty steady when the work is completed here this week — and then we’ll have an opportunity to define — so, yes, it’s an area where I believe it’s extremely important that it receives significant focus and understanding on how the Water Board will carry forward its activities while contemplating the comments that were made post-court case concerning their work on the Victoria Gold file.

Mr. Dixon: So, the Premier just said that there’s policy work underway to define or redefine the role of the Water Board. Can he expand on that? What work is being done to define or redefine the role of the Water Board?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Sorry — what I said was that we would be working alongside the Water Board. I have had one meeting. I want to get a sense of the work that they would be undertaking, so I’m sorry if I misspoke. I have had one dialogue with them and we’ve talked about roles and responsibilities. Again, they have invited me to go and have a longer discussion. I want to see how they are contemplating the work over the last year and to understand how the particular legal process that occurred and other activities that have occurred that the Water Board has been involved in — how they feel that will define their role going forward. Then, of course, I see the role of Executive Council being to ensure that the policies and the role and the governance structure of the Water Board — first of all, paramount is that it’s serving Yukoners and that there is no scope creep in the work and that it is following the legislation that has enacted that entity.

Mr. Dixon: If I understand the Premier correctly, the government is currently not contemplating any policy, regulatory or legislative changes in regard to the Water Board. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: There is none underway that I have defined at this point.

Mr. Dixon: It’s a little bit surprising, just given the strength of the language used by the judge last year, that the response from the government wouldn’t be to at least contemplate some sort of policy change that would improve the governance structure or address some of the issues that were raised by Judge Wenckebach in their judgment last year. Using terms like the Water Board being “too partisan” and taking on an “adversarial” role — those are fairly strong terms from the court to be used in reference to the Water Board.

I am just a bit surprised to hear that the Premier isn’t contemplating any change at all — that there’s no policy, regulatory or legislative changes that are even being contemplated at this point.

So, maybe I’ll just give the Premier a chance to respond to that and see if that is indeed the case.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think the original question was around — are you contemplating — and then, is there work underway? What I said is that there is not work underway. I didn’t say I wasn’t contemplating it. At this point, I think we have a legal process still going. I have had one meeting with the Water Board. I contemplate a number of things in this role for every area. I work with public service to provide insight and advice on what they believe should be in place. So, at this point, am I going to lay out a number of policy thoughts during the budget of Executive Council Office? No, not now. I’m going to watch a legal process conclude and I’m also going to be sitting with the Water Board. I want to hear not just from the chair and the vice-chair of the Water Board; I want to hear from the Water Board in totality and then we’ll have a sense.

I think that, as the member opposite stated, there were some significant comments made. We always, as government, have to contemplate the advice of Yukoners and our justice institutions, and we have to understand how to make improvements when we can.

The member opposite would understand that, at this point in time, I’m not going to lay out a number of policy points that are contemplated. I haven’t had a thorough conversation with the Water Board. I want to see what they are doing. I have had one meeting in the time in this role. We will be meeting with them shortly and we will have an understanding about how they are digesting those comments. We will see a legal process conclude and then we will move forward.

I think that we are always contemplating opportunities to improve our branches and our processes. That is certainly something we would want to undertake but I want to understand what is being done with the work plan at the Water Board and, at the conclusion of some of the public comments, I want to see a thorough understanding of the legal process completed to a final piece, and then I will have an understanding of how we can help improve processes at the Water Board.

Mr. Dixon: I am glad to hear that the Premier is indeed so contemplative.

I will move on to the Commissioner’s Office. When the Commissioner was here earlier this week, she made a comment to us all that this was the last time she would be appearing in the Legislature. Can the Premier give us an indication of the

status of the current Commissioner and whether or not there is a process underway for the replacement of the Commissioner?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I have to get back to the House. My understanding just from talking to officials is that there might have been an extension. That's all we know at this point. We did hear the comments that were made by the Commissioner last week — saying that it would be the last visit. We haven't had any information yet as to whether there has been another extension. It seems as though the federal government, which makes this decision, hasn't made their final decision yet so I will have to come back and find out if there is any new information on the extension and the time of the extension for our current Commissioner.

Mr. Dixon: So, the Commissioner has been fairly open that her term was extended to May 31 and, because she wouldn't be in the territory this week, her appearance last week was the last time she would appear in the Legislature as Commissioner.

Somebody, at least, from the Yukon government has informed her that she won't be extended beyond May 31, so I would like to ask what the process is for the replacement, and obviously, the Commissioner is appointed by the federal government on the advice of the current Premier. So, I would like to ask that he provide some information about that.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We were told here by the Commissioner — my understanding is that, between now and that point of extension — sorry, if there might have been a bit of confusion — May 31 as an extension, as she stated — the member opposite is correct, and that we are waiting to hear who would be appointed in the Commissioner's place, if she is only here until the 31st. We know that there is an extension, and we haven't had any more clarity on that to date.

Mr. Dixon: Am I incorrect in assuming that the federal government appoints the Commissioner on the advice of the Premier of Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, I think that the final decisions are made by the Prime Minister of Canada — the PM's Office — and we have not been informed yet on that decision.

Mr. Dixon: Has the Premier provided advice to the federal government about a replacement for the Commissioner?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I believe that there has been advice provided from the previous Premier, as well as conversations from me.

Mr. Dixon: The Premier has just said that he has had conversations with the federal government about this. Can he tell us what those conversations were?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: That we are looking forward to the Commissioner being appointed in the spring of 2023.

Mr. Dixon: So, the Premier has indicated that he is looking forward to a new Commissioner being appointed in the Spring of 2023, but as he has said, so far, he has not provided advice to the federal government about who that new Commissioner will be?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We are waiting for the federal government to make a decision. That is what I am comfortable providing today. We haven't heard anything. They will make a

decision based on their process, and we will hopefully see soon what that decision is.

Mr. Dixon: So, the process for the federal government is to seek the advice of the Yukon Premier in the naming of the next Commissioner. So, if the Premier has not provided the name of a replacement to the federal government, they are going to have a hard time making a decision, because their process is to seek his advice: that's how this process works.

So, again, I'll ask: Has the Premier given advice to the federal government about the appointment of a new Commissioner?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: As I stated here in the House today, I have provided advice. I am waiting to hear on a decision from the federal government on their decision. Ultimately, my understanding — unless misinterpretation by me — is that the final decision on this process lies with the federal government. Unless that has changed, that's my understanding. We can provide advice, and we have provided advice, and we're waiting to see what that final decision is.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the Premier clarifying that. He started the day indicating that the previous Premier had provided advice and that he hadn't, and now we've reached the point where he has admitted that he has provided advice, which is appreciated.

I'll move on to the Cabinet Office budget. The Premier indicated that the budget for the Cabinet Office is \$3.4 million in this budget. Can he provide a breakdown on the number of staff in the Cabinet Office currently?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I know that we're budgeted for 24 FTEs. It's the same as I believe the previous government — our government — but we're not fully staffed. I think right now — I can go back and check, but I believe, at this point, we're at about 19 or 20 staff, so we're about four or five staff short from what the total count is for staff in the Cabinet Office.

Again, I can go back and take a look and see what those numbers are, but yes, right now, we're not fully staffed in the office.

Mr. Dixon: Earlier this Sitting, when we were debating the supplementary, I asked the Premier for the supplementary budget for the CASA, for the additional staffing for the NDP office. He provided me the staffing for last year's budget. So, I would like to ask for this budget now: What is the budget for the additional staffing for the NDP office that falls under ECO?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: There are three positions. They are funded through the Executive Council Office. The total cost is \$275,000. They are not new FTEs; they are allotted FTEs that have been in the Executive Council Office budget moving into the 2020-21 CASA.

Mr. Dixon: I'll move on to the negotiations with the TRTFN. We had a few questions about this in the Legislature, and there has been some media coverage so I would like to give the Premier an opportunity to update us on a few issues related to the TRTFN. I understand that there are three concurrent matters that are being discussed: one is a land transfer — that is the sale of an approximately 1,100-hectare plot of land to the TRTFN as fee simple for a dollar — and there is the discussion about a government-to-government agreement, and then, of

course, there is the ongoing discussion about the Atlin hydro project.

I would like to understand how those three projects intersect and, in particular, the budget for ECO in regard to the negotiation of each of those three things. I'll start there and then we can get into some of the details about these various items as we go, but I'll start there.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I'm just going to get one quick point of clarification. I know there are the negotiations going on, post-legal case. There was the Atlin hydro. There was another item that the member opposite was inferring was all interconnected, which it's not, but I want to hear that second item.

Mr. Dixon: The three items that I talked about were the Atlin hydro expansion project, a proposal for a land transfer agreement — that's the sale of fee simple land — and the other item that's referenced in the Taku River Tlingit's public documents related to their membership is the negotiation of a g-to-g agreement, by which they mean a government-to-government agreement, which is apparently under negotiation.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Not interconnected. I think the public document — because the Member for Lake Laberge had talked about it. It's a newsletter, I think, that the First Nation had put out.

I will start with Atlin hydro. The conversations on Atlin hydro were probably well touched upon by the Minister responsible for the Yukon Energy Corporation and the Yukon Development Corporation. Those are the entities that have had the dialogue with Atlin on that project. That has been the key lead.

The land transfer was the second item. The Yukon government is committed to advancing reconciliation with all First Nations, including the Taku River Tlingit. We are advancing discussions with the Taku River Tlingit on a number of matters, including consultation and their land interests in the Yukon. Two governments sitting down — so the first question and the second question really encompass that government to government — and then talking specifically about this land item that has been brought to the floor.

We are actively discussing how to resolve issues raised in the previous court actions. The member opposite knows this well. They tried to build the campground. They sued the Government of Yukon. Now there is a fallout from that. We are sitting down, government to government, and we are trying to get to a place of common ground. We want to alleviate what has happened at that point. There is a dialogue that is happening and has been happening for a number of years. I am getting the information from our officials.

The transfer of the Taku River Tlingit to a government-to-government agreement — that would address matters of mutual interest and advance the relationship.

The potential land transfer relates to 11.5-square-kilometre area known as Áashú lands. It's located 120 kilometres from Whitehorse, off the Atlin road, with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation. It is shared traditional territory with the Carcross/Tagish First Nation. The land would be transferred in fee simple and would not be equivalent to Yukon First Nation settlement lands.

Where it is right now is that there is a conversation happening with the Carcross/Tagish First Nation. As I committed to in the House and shared with the members opposite, we also have an obligation to those who have land interests in the area. I know that had to do with easements and access to the properties. I think there is a non-profit or a religious organization that has substantial land there and I think there are some private landowners, and so we are having that dialogue.

The land we are considering transferring would surround, but not include, land held by private landowners. The private lots would remain with their existing owners. We talked about that. There are no changes on that.

I just want to clarify something on the quantum as well, which is 11 and a half square kilometres, because I know that the Member for Lake Laberge had a much different quantum that he was discussing. If asked, my Atlin transmission line information, which is part of the work that's going on with Carcross too — I can bring that to the House. The Yukon Energy Corporation and the Taku River Tlingit are proposing, again, to build a transmission line, which is part of the Atlin project infrastructure, so there is a dialogue happening with Carcross/Tagish, as well as with Taku River Tlingit. That's where we are now.

The member opposite is probably well aware of some of the previous work. There was a statement of claim. 2014 was when the TRT filed their statement of claim, and that was really around consultation on mining. Again, that was coming from the team — two mineral declarations — goes back to the conversation we had at the start of today around Ross River and Liard First Nation, even if there was a 2017 moratorium put in place. Then there was a dialogue that happened in 2017, and that was the start of a positive conversation with Taku River Tlingit after the 2014 statement of claim. We are really just trying to get to the table. There has been no execution of land transfer. There is consultation that is ongoing. As I stated before, I am happy to bring further information back to the House as the consultation concludes and next steps are identified.

If there is any change in that land quantum, I want to make sure I'm bringing accurate information to the House.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the Premier's recognition of the land amount. In various documents, we have seen both 1,100 hectares, and we have also seen 1,150 hectares, so I've seen both numbers cited in public documents from the TRTFN, so I would appreciate understanding from the Yukon government's perspective what is the quantum of land under discussion.

I will focus specifically on this aspect of it — the land transfer agreement. The Premier has previously — and today as well — linked this to the 2016 court case, which of course is the 2016 TRTFN versus Yukon.

Is it the government's position that this decision compels them in some way to sell this land to the TRTFN?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, I think there is an ongoing relationship that — there have been challenges in the relationship between Taku River Tlingit — as the member opposite has spoken to, there is the 2016 case. I just referenced

the 2014 process. There is a longstanding piece that has been in place, and really, what I want to have an opportunity to do is — there has been a government-to-government dialogue. I want to sit down with our officials to get a full understanding of how they have gotten to the decision on a land transfer: What is the catalyst and mechanisms for that, and how is that being contemplated, based on what has happened?

That is my understanding, which is what I shared with the member opposite. Part of what I want to be able to do is get a sense from the negotiation team and the legal team — a full briefing on how that decision has been made and how they are moving that forward. I can say to the House today that I don't have a fulsome answer on that at this point. Part of what I want to do is, over the next while, have an opportunity to sit down — I haven't had the time to sit down with the full senior team and the negotiation team and the legal advisors to get a full sense of this. What I do know is that, coming into this role, there has been a direction on these lands. The consultation is underway, and I am going to get a more accurate understanding of what all the steps are that led us to here. Once I have had that opportunity to get a full understanding, I will be able to better answer that question.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the minister conceding that he is not fully aware of some of the details of this arrangement and that he needs to be briefed and get up to speed on some of the facts. I appreciate that; there is a lot to take in here; but what concerns me a little bit is just that it appears that TRTFN views this as being much further advanced than that. TRTFN — it was in their public documents — are contemplating that this is at a penultimate, or almost complete, stage. In fact, they say in their public documents that the remaining step includes final approval by both Yukon Cabinet and by a clan meeting that will happen very soon.

I think we just want to understand how we have gotten so far down this road without the Premier even being aware of some of the details.

He has referenced a few times the 2016 court case, and of course the 2014 statement of claim that he referenced leads into the 2016 decision. So, those are not different processes; that is the same process, but when one reads the TRTFN versus Yukon decision from 2016, it is difficult to see how that five-page decision can lead us to what would possibly be the largest land transfer in Yukon's history — in a fee simple sense at least.

I would just like to ask again if the Premier has received any legal opinion that suggests that the TRTFN versus Yukon decision, in some way, compels Yukon government to enter into negotiations for the sale of north-of-1,000 hectares of Yukon Crown land for one dollar.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I want to confirm that it is 11.5 kilometres square — total — that is what it is. I would have to go back — it would be interesting, anyway — I would have to go back to take a look at the land transfer, if it is the largest. Maybe it has already been clarified by Land Titles, I am not sure — maybe it is. We will take a look anyway.

The process has been ongoing. You can imagine that I am coming into the role. The government has been undertaking activities in a number of departments. My comments were that

there is a process underway for 11.5 kilometres of land. There is a consultation that is underway. There are many things that are ongoing. I am not trying to say that there are a number of files that — over the last 100 days — I haven't gotten every detail on. I want to be able to get a complete understanding.

The member opposite can identify it as that I am not up to speed on all of the details. Yes, there are a few things that I want to be able to understand about this particular file, and when I have that opportunity to get that briefing, I would be happy to have a conversation on the floor of the Assembly on the decisions.

Right now, we know that there is a consultation underway. We know that there have been some real legal challenges that have happened — some directly connected to the member asking the questions.

I want to understand what the correlation is. I'm not prepared today to go further because I need to gain more information. I've been briefed up, and I'm going to do that. There might be a difference of opinion, but I made a commitment to bring that back, and when I have an opportunity to sit down with our officials and negotiation team and legal, I will be looking forward to that dialogue here in the House.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the minister's willingness to come back to us once he has had a chance to get up to speed.

One of the other questions I have, and perhaps based on what he has just said, he may not know the answer to this, but one of the other assertions that was made in their public membership bulletin — the TRTFN's public membership bulletin — was that this agreement would require subsequent amendments to both the *Lands Act* and the *Territorial Lands (Yukon) Act*. Is the Premier aware that there will be legislative amendments as a result, or that will be necessary, to facilitate this land transfer?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I'm going to go back again and find out. Again, one thing is that we keep hearing — and maybe it was tabled; I'll go back and see the newsletter that was tabled by the Member for Lake Laberge. I think, without looking exactly at the mechanisms for a transfer — first of all, hypothetical at this point, because the consultation is not concluded, and there's still work to be done. So, I will look to see what those specific changes may look like.

I know that, at this point, when it comes to our lands legislation, there is a process ongoing for modernization. That was something that was, of course, long overdue — a commitment post-devolution and agreements that are in place. It was one of the top items on the list of conversations between First Nation leaders and the Yukon government but never really touched. Of course, that has driven a lot of challenges, when it comes to trapping, outfitting — so many industries that have been really left in limbo because of the lack of focus on that.

We are doing that work. I'll sit down with our officials to see if this has any direct connection to some of the mechanisms that are required if that decision then is finalized, but again, for clarity for the House today, I'm happy to come back and have a dialogue. I think that the work that has been undertaken by Executive Council Office and Aboriginal Relations is good solid work.

I will have an understanding of how those decisions were made, what were the challenges that have led to it, what are the activities, and what are the decisions that led to some of the conflictual challenges, and then, of course, the work that's ongoing now. We will have a sense of what the implications are to the private land owners and what that consultation has led to.

There are a number of things that we will come back with and be able to share with the House as to, kind of, how we got here, what are the implications of the previous actions, and where we are now. I am certainly happy to; this is a file I want to dig deeper into. I don't have as much detail at this point as I would want to have. I think that, by the time we are coming back in the fall, I will be more than happy to have a discussion, but this is one thing that I feel I would like to dig deeper into and understand exactly how we got here.

Mr. Dixon: I agree that this is an issue that the Premier should, indeed, dig into and learn more about.

My last question about this particular file is whether or not Canada has been at the table for this, or has this strictly been a bilateral negotiation between Yukon government and the TRTFN?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The discussions on this particular matter have been bilateral between the Yukon government and the Taku River Tlingit First Nation.

Mr. Dixon: Did the negotiations in any way affect the BC treaty process, or did the BC treaty process influence this discussion at all?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: This has been a g-to-g dialogue, as identified in the preamble to the questions. Of course, there are still BC treaty negotiations and Canada and the Yukon at tables on areas of other priorities and interests.

Ms. White: Welcome to the officials. It is a delight to have you here today. I thank my colleague for his questions so far. It has been interesting.

One of the subgroups, or subcategories, underneath the Executive Council Office, of course, is the Youth Directorate. I am curious as to how many projects, groups, or organizations were funded last year and what that expectation is for this year.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I can get back with an entire list of projects from last year. What I can share with the House is that there has been a very active dialogue with youth organizations. At the time, Premier Silver had done some direct commitments to youth organizations — I think it was back in February of 2022. We are just going through an internal process for allocations of funding for some special priorities. Those special priorities, of course, include things such as the youth strategy, which all members have been made aware of, as we have gone through our processes — or gone and attended the youth summit. We have also had youth organizations come and meet directly with government around just some of their aspirations and priorities as well.

We are almost concluding the internal processes to fund multi-year agreements, and we also see the importance of the youth summit and trying to make sure that there is some stability in funding there, and also the work around the youth strategy, which we think will probably come out in June of this year. I do have some more detailed information I will share.

\$272,000 in funding will be shared between the Boys and Girls Club Yukon, BYTE, the Empowering Youth Society, the Heart of Riverdale Community Centre, and the Youth of Today Society. That was the distribution. Then \$128,000 in funding was to be distributed among nine organizations for smaller projects valued between \$10,000 and \$20,000: Big Brothers and Sisters Yukon's Connect Across Generations project; Industrial Arts & Technology Society's after-school woodworking program; the Kluane First Nation's Wellness Wednesdays; the Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon ADHD support program; the Lorne Mountain Community Association's outdoor recreation family activities, storytelling, and arts; Marsh Lake Community Society's winter arts activities; the Town of Faro's drum-making, carving, beading, and woodwork; the Village of Teslin, the spring bison hunt; Yukon Theatre for Young People weekly workshops on positive acceptance, and self-expression and teamwork. That was through last year's work.

I am just looking to have the budget concluded, and we have an internal process to go through to make sure we have authority to support some of those projects. I will say for the Assembly is that we have been in good, active dialogue with leaders from the collective who supported the summit this weekend. We are hearing very clearly what the priorities are from a number of organizations. We feel that these organizations are going to be extremely important partners, especially within the challenges that we are in right now, when it comes to the substance emergency. We need these folks to have the tools that they require to make sure that they are reaching out to our youth and providing good, healthy opportunities for youth, and that they are supported by individuals who really know where those youth priorities are and have the communication abilities that are required to be able to connect with those youth and to support them in the best possible way as we go through some of the challenging times that we have seen — not just in Whitehorse, but in our communities.

Deputy Chair's statement

Deputy Chair: I would like to remind members to use members' titles and not their names.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. One of the reasons why I was asking specifically about last year's projects was just to get a sense of, for example, what projects might go through this year.

Then, of course, I am flipping between the budget of Health and Social Services and the Executive Council Office, trying to figure out who funds what.

As an example, one of the organizations that was one of the hosts of the Youth Summit is the Boys and Girls Club. At this point in time, they are able to offer services five days a week, but they have asked for a core funding increase to be able to up those services to seven days a week.

I am unsure if I would find the funding under Executive Council Office and the Youth Directorate. I can't find the line item in Health and Social Services, so where, for example, does

core funding come from for an organization like the Boys and Girls Club in Whitehorse?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The funding for the Boys and Girls Club is really part of the money that we allocate through the Youth Directorate. In my opening statement, you would have heard that we increased by \$750,000 this year the allotment to the Youth Directorate. What I have to do is wait until we go through our internal processes. As folks know, we go through Management Board; we go through Cabinet processes.

I have sat down with the team from the Boys and Girls Club. Our officials at the senior levels in Executive Council Office have. A shout-out to Gord at the Youth Directorate, who, as well, has sat down. We have seen the submission. The Minister of Education also met with Boys and Girls. We know that they have a core, and then there is a bigger ask, which I think they must have shared with the member opposite. On top of that, they would like to do some delivery for after-school.

I will just say this: every youth organization has asked for increases. They all want to do more. So, that is the balance, and we are in the midst of making those final decisions — looking, of course, to have our budget supported and pass on Thursday, and then again, being in a position to allocate funds toward those organizations. We are looking very keenly at all these opportunities to work with organizations to better help youth in the Yukon.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that response from the minister.

I guess that the challenge is that, if I look at the Executive Council Office budget, and I look at other budgets, other budgets will have a section in the back where it has transfers, for example. If I go through the Executive Council Office, there is no section where I can find out, for example, the money that is going to be transferred to organizations. I can look at the fantastic budget briefing that I got, and on the first page, it says: “Highlights and Main Drivers,” and it does talk about the increase of \$750,000 for youth mental health and substance use priorities.

So, understanding that these youth organizations, when they are asking to put on more programs and they are asking to be able to run more things, it is in all direct response to that. They are trying to capture kids, as they are vulnerable, before they can go on to become more vulnerable.

So, the challenge becomes — is that, in the budget document — and the same — Youth Directorate is under Corporate Programs and Intergovernmental Relations, and I’m not sure that the other ones under — you know, whether we talk about Program Management, Intergovernmental Relations, Science Advisor, Yukon Water Board Secretariat, and then we have the Youth Directorate, and Major Projects Yukon. It is my understanding that the Youth Directorate is the one that transfers out the money, whereas the others are using it for internal work, so maybe I can just ask the minister to clarify that for me.

Am I correct in understanding that the Youth Directorate — the \$2.544 million — is predominantly transferred out to other organizations, whereas, for example, under those that I listed just now, they use the money internally to run programs.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, the Youth Directorate, really, there’s an oversight. They work with youth organizations, and the majority of the funds that they are receiving are transferred out to other organizations.

I take the points from the member opposite, just on clarity, within our budget structure, first of all, one thing that I think it is important to note is that we did add a substantial number of dollars this year because we have been working to support the work of all those organizations for a number of years, but also because we needed to have further dialogue. We wanted to have the resources in place, and we knew there had to be a further dialogue coming from the final work on the strategy.

It’s important, when we look at the strategy — some of the work — the final strategy, we will see it in June. We needed to have the resources, so we are still waiting to get an understanding of how those resources can be used, and we also have conversations that have happened with organizations that are preparing to support the work of the strategy. So, those organizations are coming directly to the Youth Directorate and having dialogue as well.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. Again, I just want to point out the difference, for example. Within the Executive Council Office, there isn’t a page that shows me what money is being transferred out, but if I was to look at Economic Development, where there’s money that gets transferred, those organizations are listed. When I go to Health and Social Services, the organizations where money is transferred to are listed. I know that, for example, the Heart of Riverdale is getting an additional \$20,000, because it was in the notes that I was given, but it means that, for the \$2.5 million, I am not sure where it goes, which is why I’m asking the question.

I appreciate that there is the increase of \$750,000. I will note that 500,000 of those dollars is one of the CASA commitments for youth mental health.

I appreciate that the notes I was given has information, but I’m just highlighting that, within this department, there is a substantial amount of money that isn’t itemized in the way that other budgets within the government’s budgets are. So, it is very complicated.

Maybe I’ll ask the minister what youth organizations are funded through the Youth Directorate? So, when we’re talking about core ones — maybe I’ll start with that: What youth organizations are funded with the money through the Youth Directorate?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I was validating the comments for the member opposite in the sense that the member opposite, I believe, was saying more clarity in the presentation of the budget at Executive Council, as it pertains to transfer agreements. So, I was agreeing and hearing that advice but. At this time, I have the budget as it has been presented.

Yes, we have debated, of course, those other budgets for lots of years, like Economic Development, and we’ve gone into minute detail. I’ll go back and take a look at how we’re presenting. What I can share is out of — I’ll give a breakdown. The member opposite is correct. There is the \$500,000 that was

in place. We have the \$250,000, as well, that we're really trying to make sure is there for programming.

We have the youth developmental asset program, which receives funds. We have BYTE — Empowering Youth Society; Heart of Riverdale community centre; Boys and Girls Club of Yukon; Youth of Today Society; the youth investment fund, which we talked about — that \$102,000; and the Association franco-yukonnaise. So, that's all the different areas.

Again, some of those transfer agreements are still under a process of getting to a final number, and hopefully that gives a little more clarity. I take the comments from the member opposite about just how we present the agreements that are coming from the Youth Directorate in the future.

Ms. White: I appreciate the validation from the minister, but it doesn't — I understand that some of those agreements aren't solidified yet, but within every other department, they're listed already, right? So, I appreciate that there is work that has been done to be caught up, and maybe I'm asking or hopeful for the future that there will be that transfer sheet where we can look at, because when an organization reaches out and says they have questions about their funding, I can find it somewhere, as opposed to just asking questions about their funding.

One of the other things — I have to say that I was a bit surprised when my colleague asked the question about the Pelly Banks, only because — well, I guess I was surprised; there might be lots of reasons why I was surprised — but there was a fantastic article by APTN that talked about kind of the nature, or the history, of the Pelly Banks band. One of the things they say within the article, and what the membership is saying, is that, you know, it is up to the federal government to go back and right that wrong.

So, I guess, just to follow up on what my colleague had asked about is: If the minister hasn't had conversations at this point yet with the membership of the Pelly Banks, is there a willingness to have those conversations to assist them to have the conversation with the federal government?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I have received communication, as Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, from the Pelly Banks leadership — have had professional interaction with the individuals who have worked in a leadership role there, again, and have had discussions with people — the individuals who I have given some of the Pelly Banks leadership — if I can use that proper term — technical support and advice.

But, again, we as a government are — at this point, the position of the Yukon government is that we are waiting to see if Canada defines things in a different way; at this point, they have not. At this point, we continue to work with all of our First Nations in the Yukon, as currently identified and defined, and with transboundary nations.

So, I have not undertaken — as the question today: Have I undertaken any work to support the work of Pelly Banks as it relates to their conversation with the federal government — I have not. Is that an area of priority right now for me in this role? I haven't prioritized it, to be upfront. We have so much work happening with a number of nations that have been identified as governments that we have a role to play g-to-g with. That is where my focus has been.

When it comes to that particular traditional territory that is being spoken about or has been focused on by Pelly Banks, I have to actually sit down with Aboriginal Relations to understand where the assertion is and what the background is, but what I can say at this time is that, when it comes to the southern Yukon, my focus is working directly with Ross River Dena Council and with Liard First Nation on their priorities. That is where my focus is at this time, Deputy Chair.

Ms. White: I may have to check Hansard but I thought I asked if the minister would be willing to work with them — to have that conversation — but I will leave that behind.

In the budget document, it says that there is a decrease of \$500,000 for COVID research recovery funding. I was just online looking — so, there was up to \$75,000 per project available. What I wanted to know is: Is the research that was done through that funding publicly available research? Is it collected in a place, for example, on the Yukon government website where people can see what was funded? I am just curious what happened with those research projects.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The majority of that work is just concluding now. It is not publicly available, but as that work is completed, I can come back to the House and report. I will see if I have some further detail.

There are 12 programs — 12 research projects that were funded that focus on areas of social, economic, health, and cultural impacts of the pandemic. This is just an opportunity for us, Deputy Chair, to identify some information gaps and some emerging issues. The research recovery programs focus on Indigenous-led research, Indigenous methods, Indigenous knowledge, values, and perspective supports to advance reconciliation. It is a commitment to evidence-informed decision-making in complementing other government-led information gathering efforts, which included surveys of Yukon businesses and individuals.

Just to clarify, there are 11 active projects right now that are underway. That work is concluding and we will be able to report on that. I believe, in the next number of months, that it is going to be in conclusion so we will be able to come back in the fall and share with the House.

I have just been informed that the work will be completed by June and then they will be setting up a platform for a presentation on those research projects.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. I am looking forward to reading more in June, I guess, about those projects.

Another header underneath of the Executive Council Office is "Major Projects Yukon". In the blurb on the website, it says: "We are the government's main point of contact on matters relating to the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act* (YESAA)."

Can the minister walk me through what Major Projects Yukon does — whether it's a go-between between proponents and YESAA or what exactly Major Projects Yukon does?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I'll just give you a definition of core services of the branch. So, Major Projects Yukon provides corporate leadership and facilitation to Yukon government departments in administration of the development assessment regime, provides policy advice to Yukon government

departments on how to fulfill their responsibilities under the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act*, and represents Yukon government on matters relating to YESAA. The branch response to assessment recommendations of the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board for major projects submitted to the executive committee. The branch facilitates the implementation of the major projects management framework for the transition of projects from assessment to regulatory review and in complex regulatory situations that are of a controversial nature to provide a corporate perspective to management of the project.

Again, we have a number of departments that provide advice on the YESAA process and into the YESAA process, as the member opposite would be aware of — whether that's Department of Environment, Women and Gender Equity Directorate, Energy, Mines and Resources, Economic Development. So, really, that Major Projects is a hub that's bringing all of that information together and interfacing on those processes when we have a project that has been of a magnitude that would be going to executive committee — again, working with our team on issues relating to YESAA. So, hopefully, that gives a bit of a better understanding — internal with data and information gathering, and external as it relates to the work with YESAA as an entity.

Ms. White: I appreciate the answer from the minister. I guess the one — not that anyone is asking me for my advice or my opinion on anything — helpful thing — the blurb that the minister read has a lot more information than the paragraph that's available on the website that talks about what the \$881,000 does for government. Sharing information about the important work that folks do helps us all understand what work is being done. I am going to sound a bit like a record when I say the next one, which is, “the Office of the Science Advisor”. I think it is such an interesting heading. It says: “We work with other governments and organizations to identify and address knowledge gaps of importance to Yukoners. We make sure the government helps develop and implement scientific solutions that improve Yukoners' quality of life.” That sounds great, although I think it's up to a lot of interpretation, so can the minister walk me through a bit more detail regarding what the Office of the Science Advisor does?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I do appreciate the comments and opportunities for us to clarify some of the information that we are sharing with the public so they can better understand. I will do my best on this one, and maybe it's work that we can add — or some of the language that's here that we can add — into our budget processes but also online for the public.

The branch leads with the development of a government-wide policy to support the respectful use of traditional knowledge in government actions and decisions. Remember that this is something we talked a lot about in 2016 in the election. You would have heard Minister Silver talk about that important work and that is some of the work that is being overseen here.

This work will be advanced through a collaborative policy development process with First Nations and includes a closely related project on how we track and manage traditional and

Indigenous knowledge with which we are entrusted. The branch also leads work under the Government of Yukon's science strategy, which, among other activities, endeavours to increase the benefit to Yukon from research conducted in the territory and support public service in reporting on and generating reliable evidence in support of evidence-based, balanced decisions.

The branch will also endeavour to increase the benefits to Yukon from research conducted in the territory and support public service in reporting on generating reliable evidence in support of evidence-based and balanced decisions. This work will be advanced by the corporate science strategy action plan and the associated corporate Yukon research plan. The development of both of these plans is being led by the branch. So, that is some of the key work that the branch does.

Deputy Chair's statement

Deputy Chair: I remind members to use other members' titles.

Ms. White: I do thank the minister for that. I think there is a bit of a theme right now. Despite the fact that I am standing in the Assembly, I only have access to the public website. So, I can go on yukon.ca and I can Google “Executive Council Office” and this is what comes up. So, I appreciate that the minister has just kind of expanded on what, for example, the Office of the Science Advisor does because, in the two lines of the description on the website, it doesn't once say “traditional knowledge”. It doesn't say “the keeper” and it doesn't say that this office is taking traditional knowledge and making sure that it is incorporated in decisions. So, I think that there is a real opportunity — again, if I were a member of the public, I would have access to the same website that I am on right now, and I think that there is a real opportunity to explain and to give more details.

The point that the minister just made — he actually said that there are two policies that are being developed under the Office of the Science Advisor so I would like to know more about those policies and what the timeline for them to be delivered is.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am sorry — now I understand where I have been mistaken. I am going to get back with a legislative return on some more details on the policy work out by the science advisor. We will have the branch give us a detailed legislative return — and fully understand that we have identified, potentially, some areas for improvement on our outward-facing communication today that could give individuals a better understanding. I am in agreement. For many, many years, the Executive Council Office — what does it do, what happens there, what role do they play?

Now I have an opportunity to be in a situation to learn about the different work that they do but also take the points today that maybe there are some ways for us to share with the public the important work that they are doing, what certain branches are focused on, what their priorities are at this time and some key undertakings that they are involved in, and what

the timelines are, what the outputs from that work look like, and how that work is going to be shared.

I hear that loud and clear today and I think that our officials are hearing that, and we will have an opportunity to see where we can improve our ability to interface with Yukoners as we serve them.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. I would be delighted to come back in the fall and talk about how great the website is and how it describes the cool jobs that all 110 FTEs do within the Executive Council Office.

The reason why I wanted to highlight those points that we have discussed — and just talking and asking the minister to expand on the work that is being done in those departments — is because it is really important, but when there are very few lines and very little written about them, the general public won't understand what that work is, how important that work is, and how that informs other work that is being done by the Yukon government. That is my point. There are really interesting things being done by people in support of efforts of Yukon government and, I would say, efforts of us all toward reconciliation and toward knowledge-sharing and understanding. I think that there are lots of reasons to celebrate that if I could read more about them, so I look forward to that.

I thank the minister today for the conversation and, if there is a supplementary, I look forward to the fall. If not, then we come back in the spring. I thank the officials for attending today.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I just want to thank the officials for their preparation today and for their patience with me in taking on this role and still going through a learning process. I want to thank Exilda Driscoll for her work in preparation and support through this, as well as Deputy Minister Michael Hale, and those who are listening in from Executive Council Office. Thank you again for your patience as I take on this role. Thank you for your preparation and budget work for this year. Thank you for the questions from the opposition today and the dialogue.

Deputy Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 2, Executive Council Office?

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

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 2, Executive Council Office, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 2, Executive Council Office, cleared or carried

Deputy Chair: The Member for Takhini-Kopper King has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 2, Executive Council Office, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$25,593,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$15,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$25,608,000 agreed to

Executive Council Office agreed to

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education in Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 10 minutes.

Recess

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

The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any further general debate?

Department of Education — continued

Hon. Ms. McLean: I just want to invite back our officials, the Deputy Minister of Education, Mary Cameron, and our senior advisor, Megan Foreman, to assist in the debate today.

Mr. Kent: I, too, would join the minister in welcoming back to the officials here today.

The first question that I wanted to ask was a follow-up on Question Period earlier today. In the CASA signed between the Liberals and the NDP, under “Education”, section 2(b), is: “increase the allocation of Educational Assistants and Learning Assistance Teachers starting in the fall of 2023.”

I just wanted to hopefully get a number of how many additional EAs and LATs will be hired for the fall, which schools they will be assigned to, and what the budget amount will be for those positions for the fall of this year.

Hon. Ms. McLean: The work that we are doing around this particular commitment within the confidence and supply agreement around the increase and allocation of educational assistants and learning assistance teachers is that we are working with each school community, and then there is a process that we must go through to make formal decisions around allocation — FTEs and financial decisions — and that is within the Cabinet process.

Mr. Kent: So, I am curious, given that, you know, we are almost at the end of April — there is about six weeks, give or take a few days, left in the school year. Staffing allocations — I guess that is the question that I would have for the minister: When would she anticipate staffing allocations to be set for the 2023-24 school year? So, when — the process that she talks about — I guess my question is: When will that process be complete around additional EAs and LATs for the upcoming school year?

Hon. Ms. McLean: We have certainly begun our posting for rural schools, and of course, French immersion for the 2023-24 school year. We are moving quicker into that part of our recruitment process. We posted positions earlier to be more competitive with other jurisdictions. We participated in online career fairs, so there is a fair bit of work that is underway right now with recruitment. We are in the process of setting — and working with each school community. That process is well underway in determining what their staffing needs are, and then determining what the additional needs will be. So, that is a bit of an ongoing process with the school communities — very connected, as I said today, with the reimagining inclusive and special education.

There certainly is a fair amount of work that has been put into looking at staffing allocations for educational assistants and learning assistant teachers through RISE. There's actually a working group that's working on that through the community of inquiry process. Again, there is additional allocation of staff and any FTE that is required to meet this commitment based on the needs of the schools will have to go through a Cabinet process, which is something I have already stated here today.

So, it is a bit of an ongoing process. We're certainly working with each school community around what the needs are.

Mr. Kent: I guess we'll have to revisit that, perhaps in the fall, because the commitment is pretty straightforward. It says to increase the allocation of EAs and LATs starting in the fall of 2023. Obviously, time is running short on this school year, and recruiting and posting and other HR processes have to be done. The minister said that there's still a Cabinet process for it to go through as well. So, I guess we'll circle back in the fall and check in with the minister on how many additional positions have been hired.

I wanted to go to the Liberals' election platform from 2021. One of the things that is promised is to work with communities and stakeholders to develop and implement school safety transportation plans, covering safe drop-off and pick-up areas, snow removal, safe crosswalks, speed control, and proper lighting. So, I'm just curious: How much money is in the current budget to do this? Which schools is it targeted at? If the minister has the information, if she can tell me which schools already have those school safety transportation plans in place and which ones are in the near term for getting that work done?

Hon. Ms. McLean: This certainly was an area that we're very committed to. We understand the importance of infrastructure and orientation plans, and ensuring students and school community members can navigate campus safely. In 2018, we worked with the City of Whitehorse to review infrastructure surrounding Whitehorse schools and identify projects that could enhance safety.

Many of the on-campus recommendations from the 2018 school mobility review, as well as additional projects identified, have been implemented. These include: new parking lots and parent drop-off areas for Christ the King, Golden Horn, Holy Family, and Hidden Valley schools; bus loop and parent drop-offs at the north side of Selkirk Elementary; enhanced

crosswalks at 12th Avenue; and additional signage on Pine and Fir Streets.

The development of active safety transportation plans has been identified as a key government priority. Currently, we are working with the road safety branch of Highways and Public Works to develop a safety activity booklet for students and develop a school-specific parent handbook that will include information of how to navigate the campus safely. These materials will be distributed by the start of the 2023-24 school year. The government continues to invest in infrastructure to enhance safety, including new parking lots, additional signage, and better lighting.

I think that is where I will stop for now.

Mr. Kent: Deputy Chair, I thank the minister for that, and seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Copperbelt South that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

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

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes 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 Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole?

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 208, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report progress.

Speaker: You have heard the report from the Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole.

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

The following sessional paper was filed April 25, 2023:

35-1-98

Report of the Chief Electoral Officer to the Legislative Assembly 2022 Annual Report on Political Party Revenues January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022 (Speaker Harper)

The following documents were filed April 25, 2023:

35-1-151

Christ the King Elementary School Seismic Retrofit and Capital Infrastructure Investments, letter re (dated April 24, 2023) from Christ the King Elementary School Council to Hon. Ranj Pillai, Premier (Kent)

35-1-152

Yukon Workers' Advocate Office Annual Report 2022 (McPhee)