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HANSARD

Wednesday, April 26, 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

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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
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Speaker: I will now call the House to order.
 We will proceed at this time with prayers.

Prayers

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: Yesterday, the Member for Lake Laberge rose on a point of order during debate on Motion No. 711, and I committed to reviewing Hansard and getting back to the Assembly.

Upon review, it is clear that the Government House Leader referred to an in-camera discussion that occurred during a meeting of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

As I noted yesterday, in-camera discussions are to be held in confidence by committee members unless the committee has agreed that discussions can be shared. Reports of a committee that have been made public and a decision of a committee that appeared in public meeting minutes can be discussed in the House.

I would ask the Government House Leader to take care in his remarks so as not to reveal the details of an in-camera discussion.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We have two sets of guests in the Assembly today for our tributes — all lovely folks.

For the Tourism Week tribute, we have from the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon: Neil Hartling, chair, and Dylan Soo, executive director. From the Yukon Convention Bureau, we have Alida Munro. From Northern Vision Development, we have Rich Thompson, chair and CEO, and Blake Buckle, VP of development and corporate services. Did I mention that Alida Munro is the managing director — pardon me. From the Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon, we have Sandy Legge, the executive director. From the Tourism branch, we have Akriti, Robin Anderson, Avery Bramadat, Alex Bouchard, Denise McCann, Eduardo Lafforgue, and Jonathan Parker. Could we please welcome them all?

Applause

Hon. Mr. Silver: I would ask my colleagues to help me in welcoming, for today's tribute to administrative assistants, our administrative assistants for the Yukon Liberal caucus in the Legislative Assembly today. Starting with the administrative assistant to the Premier, we have Sylvia Anderson. We also have Carla Gostick, administrative assistant to two ministers; we have Sabrina-Jean Fred, also

administrative assistant to two of our ministers; Starlene Elias, administrative assistant to me and another minister; we also have the backup administrative assistant extraordinaire, Megan Roche, with us as well; and at our front counter as receptionist, we have Ana Labindao. Thank you everybody for being here.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of National Tourism Week

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to acknowledge that this week marks National Tourism Week in Canada, an initiative that celebrates and recognizes the impact that Canada's tourism sector has on every community from coast to coast to coast.

Today, I want to talk about the power of tourism in the Yukon and how it contributes to our economy, culture, and overall well-being. Tourism is a major driver of economic growth and plays a crucial role in supporting small and large businesses in our communities. Every year, thousands of visitors come to the Yukon to experience our beautiful wilderness, rich history, and unique culture. These visitors fly with our airlines, explore our communities and special places, stay in our hotels, eat at our restaurants, attend our festivals and events, and avail themselves of goods and services from our local businesses.

Tourism is one of the largest industries in the Yukon, with close to 400 businesses and organizations providing jobs and opportunities for almost 10 percent of our residents. Beyond its economic impact, tourism also plays a vital role in upholding and promoting our history and heritage. Many of the visitors who come to the Yukon are interested in learning about Yukon First Nation culture, tasting our local food, and celebrating with us through our vibrant arts and music scene. By sharing our Yukon stories and traditions, we preserve our heritage and create opportunities for cultural exchange and broadening our perspectives. Tourism fosters a sense of pride in this place that we all call home. Tourism allows us to showcase our natural beauty, reminding us of the importance of our land, water, and wild spaces.

As we celebrate National Tourism Week, let us take a moment to appreciate the incredible beauty of the Yukon and the role that tourism plays in sharing and promoting it. Let us also recognize the hard work and dedication of the people who work in the tourism industry and who make it possible for visitors from around the world, and Yukoners alike, to experience the wonders of the north by northwest. The ingenuity and enthusiasm of our tourism folks are as much a part of what draws visitors as our incredible wilderness, vibrant culture, and captivating heritage.

Let us continue to welcome visitors with open arms, share our stories and traditions, walk respectfully on the land, and work together to ensure that our communities remain vibrant destinations for years to come.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to National Tourism Week, April 24 to 30. Yukoners are very familiar with tourists. Tourists come here by a variety of transport means: by car, RV, bus, cruise industry, or air travel. They come alone, with an inclusive package tour, part of a land tour from a cruise ship, air-hotel package, and many other initiatives that show the growth of the industry.

As a destination, the draw for a Yukon visitor could be the northern lights, the Dempster Highway, Dawson City and the stampede lore, the Yukon River, and all points in between. We know that many of our American visitors are just passing through to get to their gold, Alaska. But we do reap a bit of economic benefit as they have need of food, drink, and fuel replenishment.

We showcase our beautiful Canada and our extraordinary Yukon each year during Tourism Week, and this year, the theme is “Powered by Tourism”. By encouraging Canada as a place to visit, the Tourism Industry Association of Canada works diligently to encourage our share of the world’s market to come our way through awareness campaigns. Our TIA Yukon works along with their members, partners, and businesses to ensure that we get the required message across, along with the Department of Tourism, that the Yukon is a must-visit.

There are also conventions that happen and I am sure that event planners encourage their attendees to take a few extra days to explore. There is sport tourism, such as the Yukon River Quest, that we know has a huge impact on our economy. Winter tourism is growing as travellers become more adventurous. They want to experience the cold, the snow, and the northern lights. So, thank heaven, not everyone wants sun tans and hot sand.

Culinary tourism, cultural tourism, music festivals, and the list goes on. The Yukon has it all to offer and we hope that this season we do it justice. For those looking for work, don’t be afraid to start in a tourism business. You get to meet the most amazing people, and you can learn so many skills that transfer to other work. We need to step up and make sure that we offer the best travel experience.

So, a special thank you to all the industry players, tourism organizations, and tourism businesses and staff who make it all happen. We need to give those who have the urge to travel and leave their everyday lives a wonderful experience when they come to explore our Yukon.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP caucus to add our voices in tribute to National Tourism Week. I was delighted to read that the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon’s theme for Tourism Week this year is on sustainability. Their website shares stories of how operators take action to operate sustainably, with everything from using solar power for off-grid electricity needs to limiting the number of trips in sensitive areas to buying food from local producers. I want to thank all these businesses and the Tourism Industry

Association of the Yukon for their hard work on building such a vibrant and sustainable industry.

We all appreciate this beautiful place we live in, and I know Yukoners are proud to show it off to visiting friends and family. National Tourism Week encourages us to remember to support our local businesses by eating at a local restaurant, booking an adventure at a local resort, visiting local museums and cultural centres, and maybe even renting a canoe or kayak for a river adventure.

Congratulations to the tourism industry — you play such an important role in the Yukon.

Applause

In recognition of Administrative Professionals Day

Hon. Mr. Silver: I rise today on behalf of Yukon Liberal government in honour of Administrative Professionals Day. Mr. Speaker, I love this tribute. It’s extremely important. I remember three decades ago, in the very first weeks of my burgeoning educational career, the importance of administrative assistants not only in the work that they do to prepare, plan, and assist every single aspect of students’ and teachers’ lives, but also, they hold the pen on the substitute teacher list — and getting to know those administrators is extremely important.

There is somebody here today in the gallery whose mom was one of those administrative assistants way back in the day, but I won’t embarrass her.

With this tribute, though, I do want to celebrate and acknowledge the entire team of administrative professionals across the whole Government of Yukon and also across the territory as a whole. As someone who has worked in the public service for a number of years, I’ve seen and experienced how critical administrative professionals are to ensuring the smooth running of our work days.

They have the finger on the pulse of the organizations and they know the importance of the big things and the little things. It is often the attention to detail that is critical to any organization to run efficiently, effectively, and successfully.

It is this group of staff who are often Yukon’s first point of contact in government offices, the first person you speak to at the counter, or the person at the other end of a call or e-mail. Administrative professionals keep everything well-organized and moving behind the scenes, all the while being the point person or the face of the organization. This is surely a balancing act for any individual. A lot of times, folks might be frustrated with the politician, but they are talking with the actual administrative assistants.

Throughout my time working with Cabinet and in the school system as well, I have had the pleasure of working with many administrative professionals across Yukon government. I can’t say enough about each and every one of them. Without their professionalism, their diligence, and their responsiveness, our jobs are so much harder. I encourage everyone to take the opportunity today and every day of the year to recognize the administrative professionals in your office, at your school, or at your place of business and thank them deeply for the jobs that

they do to keep the wheels on and for helping us stay organized in our jobs and throughout our daily lives.

Applause

Ms. White: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP and the Yukon Party to celebrate those who make offices across the Yukon the vibrant, functional spaces they are. The work of an administrative professional reaches as far as the imagination allows you to reach. From technology to finance, customer service to vendors, the law, health care, human resources, and taxes — all of this can happen in one single day. Administrative professionals are those special people who can organize a million things at one time without ever missing a beat. Anyone who has worked in an office environment for any length of time knows that it is these multi-tasking wonders who are the ones to make offices so successful.

This week, we recognize the administrative professionals in our workplaces for the work that they do each day, for their support and encouragement, for their patience and insight, for their friendship and their contributions that they make to the success of each of our organizations. Today and every day, we recognize and celebrate the contributions of the administrative professionals across the territory. Thank you for the valuable work that you do.

Applause

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Speaker: Under returns or documents for tabling, the Chair has for tabling the report *Subsistence Travel & Accommodations of Members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly 2022-23*, dated April 20, 2023. This report is compliant, pursuant to an order of the Members' Services Board.

Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I have for tabling today the 2022-2023 annual report for the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Pursuant to section 5(h) of the *Education Act*, I have for tabling the annual report on the state of education in the Yukon, including a Yukon school board report.

Mr. Dixon: I have for tabling today a letter addressed to five Cabinet ministers from Sport Yukon and Softball Yukon dated March 29, 2023. I quoted from this letter yesterday in Question Period.

Ms. White: I have for tabling today the Yukon Hospital Corporation employee survey 2023.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees' Petitions.

PETITIONS

Petition No. 20 — response

Hon. Ms. McPhee: In response to Petition No. 20, tabled in the House on April 12, 2023, I would like to thank the supporters of this petition for their continued advocacy on behalf of Yukoners experiencing infertility.

Hearing perspectives brought forth by Yukon citizens is of great importance to our government and, I know, to all members in this Legislative Assembly. We acknowledge the significant impact that infertility can have on mental wellness and we recognize that the costs of receiving fertility treatments may place a financial burden on many Yukoners, which is why, in 2021 in our election platform, the Yukon Liberals promised to expand the support available to Yukoners undergoing fertility treatments. We were also very pleased to build on these commitments in the 2023 confidence and supply agreement.

The work that is currently underway is to explore how to deliver this support to Yukon families seeking treatment for infertility. We are dedicated to doing all we can to support each Yukoner's unique reproductive health journey.

The Department of Health and Social Services is currently conducting the work required to expand the medical travel program to include fertility treatments and working with the Department of Finance and the Department of Justice to design the other necessary supports.

Implementing initiatives of this magnitude requires significant background work and involves regulatory and legislative assessments and likely amendments. These initiatives will help to make fertility treatments more affordable for Yukoners. I understand that many Yukoners are waiting to access these new initiatives and I would like to thank them for their patience during this time.

In the 2022-23 fiscal year, approximately 101 Yukoners requested an initial consultation for fertility treatment. It is important for Yukoners to know that the Department of Health and Social Services does currently offer medical travel coverage to support Yukoners in accessing an initial fertility testing consultation, which may include certain follow-up tests such as ultrasounds, examinations, and some types of pregnancy tests. Additionally, intrauterine insemination can be billed directly to the Yukon health care insurance plan, with some remaining costs being covered by the patient.

These important supports align with our ongoing work to transform Yukon's health care system and, in this case, expand the entire continuum of sexual reproductive care services that are available to Yukoners.

We continue to support the Sexual Health Clinic and the Yukon Women's MidLife Health Clinic and their work to meet the sexual and reproductive care needs of Yukoners. We are committed to supporting the eight existing Canada prenatal nutrition programs operating in the territory by matching federal funding to ensure that they can continue to support families and assist in setting the foundation for strong, healthy families and communities.

The Community Nursing branch also offers pre- and postnatal programs such as prenatal classes offered at the Whitehorse Health Centre and postpartum follow-up provided

by community health nurses in the community as well as the health centre.

The Yukon is leading the country in advancing gender-affirming care access by providing health insurance coverage to Yukoners for gender-affirming surgical and non-surgical procedures and services.

We have expanded access to feminine hygiene products for Yukoners by partnering with the Council of Yukon First Nations to equip all Yukon schools with period products and distributing products to non-governmental organizations, and this program will continue to expand.

We are committed and look forward to undertaking the work to advance initiatives like these that make fertility treatments more affordable for Yukoners.

We continue to take action to transform Yukon's health care system to a more modern, integrated, and person-centred system to better serve all Yukoners.

Speaker: Are there any petitions to be presented?
Are there any bills to be introduced?
Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to ensure that the City of Whitehorse does not need to increase taxes or cut services in order to pay for commitments made in the 2023 confidence and supply agreement between the Liberal and NDP caucuses.

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

THAT this House urges the Premier to take action to defend the rights of Yukon firearms owners by writing a letter to the Prime Minister urging the Government of Canada to:

- (1) repeal its May 1, 2020 regulation that reclassified rifles and other unrestricted firearms as prohibited weapons; and
- (2) not proceed further with Bill C-21, *An Act to amend certain Acts and to make certain consequential amendments (firearms)*.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to develop a Yukon forestry strategy in consultation with First Nation governments, industry, and other stakeholders that will:

- (1) support value-added products for Yukon timber such as biomass energy production;
- (2) identify long-term fuelwood harvest areas that are close to communities;
- (3) complete the timber supply analysis for the Whitehorse and Southern Lakes Forest Resources Management Plan to identify opportunities for fuelwood and timber to support local milling operations; and
- (4) revitalize the forestry industry in southeast Yukon.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Housing initiatives fund

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, we all recognize that our territory faces a shortage of affordable housing and that solutions require strong partnerships. I rise today to acknowledge the successful applicants to the housing initiatives fund and the impact that these collaborative projects will have on housing affordability and availability in coming years.

For those of you less familiar with the housing initiatives fund, let me provide a few details on how it works. Administered by the Yukon Housing Corporation, the housing initiatives fund provides capital grants to First Nation partners, private sector housing developers, and contractors as well as non-profit organizations to support new housing developments. Funding is available through three competitive application-based streams and can be used for both new rental and home-ownership options.

The housing initiatives fund requires that units are energy efficient and that 20 percent of units in a multi-unit building are accessible. Each project must include a minimum of four affordable units in Whitehorse or one in our communities, and those units that are designated "affordable" must remain so for 20 years.

I would like to take moment to acknowledge the tremendous impact that this fund has had since it was first established in 2018. Overall, the program has awarded over \$28 million in funding while leveraging millions more in the private sector for new housing developments; 56 shovel-ready construction projects have been awarded, funding over six intake rounds; 24 of these projects have been completed and 32 are currently under construction or will begin construction shortly. In total, the fund is supporting the anticipated construction of 799 new homes in Yukon communities, and 645 of these new homes meet our affordability criteria.

Some of the larger projects that previously received funding under this program and are now complete include the newly opened 87-unit Boreal Commons rental facility, the 53-unit mixed-income Cornerstone building, and the 84-unit Normandy Living. Last fall, I announced the sixth intake of the housing initiatives fund and I would now like to share information on the results of this intake round.

In total, 11 shovel-ready projects were awarded funding. Several projects are set to break ground later this spring and summer. Collectively, it is anticipated that they will create 159 new housing units, all of them affordable. The projects are spread across the territory, including in the communities of Teslin, Dawson City, Haines Junction, Pelly Crossing, Old Crow, Mendenhall, and Whitehorse. In addition to shovel-ready projects, we are also supporting two fresh project concepts that we hope will bring to life new projects this next year — the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture in Dawson City and the Son of Mendel, also in Dawson City.

Notable shovel-ready projects that we are also excited to see initiated this year in communities include the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun's 16-unit project, Teslin Tlingit Council's elders complex nine-unit project, Selkirk Development Corporation's four-unit project, Champagne and

Aishihik First Nations' 10-unit project, and Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation's nine-unit project. In Whitehorse, shovel-ready projects include Habitat for Humanity's four-unit project, the Council of Yukon First Nations' 15-unit project, and Grey Mountain Housing Society's 89-unit project. The success of the latest intake round speaks to the growing popularity of the housing initiatives fund and how it is helping to meet the housing needs of Yukoners. Again, I am proud to say that, together with community housing partners, we continue to help to make more affordable units available.

Ms. Clarke: Yukoners know that housing is important as the territory continues to grow. We congratulate the successful applicants to the housing initiatives fund and we look forward to the completion of these projects. This will certainly go toward filling the housing gap that exists in the Yukon.

I did have a few questions for the Premier. Did all applicants to the fund receive funding for their projects this year? If not, how many applicants were denied funding? Could the Premier indicate if any of the projects are accessing other public funding to cover their costs? In regard to the projects in Whitehorse, I was hoping that the Premier could be a bit more specific. Could he tell us where in the city those projects are being built?

We know that more housing is needed. We hope that the Liberal government will get more land to market soon so contractors can build the housing that so many Yukoners need.

MLA Tredger: We are happy to hear about the projects being funded through this program and we are particularly excited about the partnerships with First Nation governments and non-profits. A comment on the eligibility criteria: We suggest that when the government funds the construction of units, all of those units should be affordable. We are pleased to hear that this is the case this year and we hope that the government will change the program criteria for future years to make sure that all units funded with public money are affordable.

One great and widely used definition of "housing affordability" is one that ensures that the cost of housing is no more than 30 percent of an individual's income, and I hope that the government will consider using this definition in future years.

I would like to talk about how this government ensures that projects meet the requirements of the fund. I want to share a story that I have been told by a senior who has limited mobility and is renting an accessible unit in one of the buildings previously funded through the housing initiatives fund. Despite the "accessible" designation of her unit, she has struggled on her own with many accessibility issues. She had to pay out of pocket to have a grab bar installed in her bathtub and shower so that she could use them safely. Another issue was that the parking spot outside her door was assigned to someone else and she was told that, due to the way the building was wired, she could only use a parking spot on the far corner of her large apartment building. That meant that to start her car to warm it

up in the winter, she had to walk the full length and width of the building, sometimes in icy and snowy conditions, start her car, walk all the way back to her unit to wait in a heated space, and then walk all the way back again to get into her car. For someone with mobility issues who needs an accessible unit, this is a really big barrier.

So, I would like to ask the Premier how he ensures that the buildings funded through the housing initiatives fund meet the requirements of the program, including accessibility and affordability.

I will finish by saying congratulations to all of the recipients of the fund. We are grateful for the work you are doing to support Yukoners with affordable housing.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Our Liberal government continues to make historic investments in increasing housing options. This includes our work in the implementation of the Housing First philosophy. Applicants in the housing initiatives fund are increasing the availability of affordable homes across the territory. This is good news for all Yukoners and for the upcoming generation.

The projects that I highlighted previously, which are being supported through the housing initiatives fund, are a critical component of our collective efforts to meet the three goals of the housing action plan for Yukon: to help people gain and maintain housing with services; increase access to adequate and affordable rental housing; and increase and diversify home-ownership options.

I have said it many times and I will say it again: Government cannot solve the pressures on the territory's housing situation alone. It takes all partners — NGOs, the private sector, community organizations, and those with lived experience — sitting at the table together, listening to new innovations and diverse insights.

Thank you to all the groups who are working together to find solutions. Our government sees you and we are committed to continuing to support this collaborative approach. It is projects like those successful applicants to the housing initiatives fund that help reduce the Yukon's housing gaps through pioneering new partnerships and innovative ideas.

Things are happening across the territory. Walls are going up, roofs are going on, and building permits continue to increase. On a year-to-date basis, which is January through to February 2023, the preliminary total value of building permits issued in Yukon was \$28 million. This represents an increase of \$8.1 million, or just over 40 percent, compared to the same period in 2022. Residential permits were up \$11.9 million, or 99.6 percent.

I look forward to following the 11 shovel-ready projects from the sixth intake of the housing initiatives fund that is scheduled to see 159 new affordable housing units come online. I also look forward to the two project concepts from the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture and Son of Mendel.

Concerning the questions from the opposition, I will bring back a note to the Assembly just on applicants who have applied — if there are any who have not received funds, which was one of the questions — and locations in Whitehorse. The

notes that I have don't go neighbourhood by neighbourhood, but I can share that, since we started this, there have been 23 projects in Whitehorse; 12 are fully completed and 11 more are in progress. I will bring that information back.

I think there were a number of questions from the Third Party. I'll look to see if I received an e-mail from the member opposite concerning that particular situation, or please feel free to reach out and I will follow up. It sounds potentially like some of the challenges may be with Property Management, but let me dig into that a bit with our team.

I take the comments on the methodology that you have tabled on affordability. Part of the challenge is that, when you are trying to de-risk and bring the private sector in, sometimes you have a diverse number of units. Some are affordable and you are investing in a project to make sure that there is an affordable option, but sometimes you need market in order to have it bankable.

We can have a further discussion later today in our debates about that, but congratulations to all of these entrepreneurs and organizations for helping us to solve this problem — 799 units. That is a lot of units.

Speaker: This then brings us to the Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Whistle Bend development

Ms. Clarke: Last year, the Yukon government did not complete construction work on green streets in Whistle Bend because it was determined that an error had been made and that the Yukon government had breached the terms of the agreements for sale with homeowners on those streets.

Since then, the Minister of Community Services has been trying to blame the City of Whitehorse. Over the course of the past few weeks, several of my constituents on green streets in Whistle Bend have been facing issues related to poor drainage and flooding. I have received letters from some constituents and I have seen pictures from several homeowners that show the flooding that they are currently experiencing. These residents have asked what the long-term solution for this issue will be and who is liable for this flooding.

Can the Minister of Community Services tell us what is being done to help these residents address this issue?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The Yukon government is responsible for the design and construction of the city's green street plan. Construction of the green street is not yet complete, as work was halted last fall to allow the City of Whitehorse to hear from residents about green street options. We are aware of the concern with spring melt causing excessive runoff. I am told that the City of Whitehorse is currently removing snow and ponded water to alleviate the current issue. Utility companies are monitoring the situation. I actually had a conversation with the mayor about it this morning. She and the city administrator told me they were working on this issue. It is a municipal responsibility.

Ms. Clarke: When the Yukon government's contract on the site was cancelled last year, it meant that the Yukon government contractor did not complete the necessary surface

grading or landscaping. It is clear to affected residents that this has directly contributed to the surface water flooding that they are currently experiencing.

The City of Whitehorse has not yet issued a construction completion certificate for the work, so the responsibility for this clearly rests solely with the Government of Yukon.

What is the Government of Yukon doing to address this issue?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We will be constructing the chosen option early this season. The final design is being reviewed, and we will include additional drainage controls in this area, if needed. We will keep residents informed about construction and landscaping activities and timelines for construction start-up through to completion of the landscaping.

Ms. Clarke: This is just the latest in a string of mishaps that have affected the streets in my riding. Residents who bought lots on these streets were hoping for nice, modern lots that open up onto green, landscaped streets that included a walking path. Unfortunately, for many of these residents, this has not been the case, and they have been looking at dirt landscaping for years. We have seen the agreements for sale between them and the Government of Yukon breached. We have seen Yukon government construction contracts halted, and now we are seeing that all of that has resulted in surface water flooding due to underdevelopment. Residents want to know who is going to be held liable for this.

So, can the Minister of Community Services tell us who is liable for damage done to homes by flooding on these green streets?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Green streets are an innovative concept in Whistle Bend for neighbours to gather, play, and connect to a multi-use trail system free from vehicle traffic. Last year, construction on the green streets was paused to hear from residents who were concerned about widening them from three metres to six metres to allow for emergency vehicle access. We have worked with our partners at the City of Whitehorse. The city has made a decision about the final design option to meet the need for emergency vehicle winter access, address their policies, and adhere to the original design concept. The Land Development branch will implement the design work through an existing contract and tender the landscaping work to begin early this year. This work is going to happen this year.

As I have said, we are aware of the concern with the spring melt caused by the excessive runoff. I am told that the City of Whitehorse is currently removing snow and ponded water to alleviate the current issue.

Question re: Cost of living

Mr. Istchenko: So, last week, I pointed out that the recent data from the Yukon Bureau of Statistics shows that measures that the Liberals brought in to address the rising cost of living are not enough. The most recent information from the YBS shows that, for March 2022 to March of this year, our CPI grew by 5.5 percent. That is the highest growth in cost of living in the country.

Is the Premier now willing to look at the facts, change course, and actually take some measures that will reduce the cost of living for Yukoners?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We are consistently looking at the data that is coming in, and we had an exchange — I think about a week ago — and the latest numbers that I saw, unless something came out today, were showing that, from last month to this month, we have seen our numbers trending in a way that is about mid to the lower part of what we are seeing in the rest of the country since going into February/March.

We know that our interim electrical rebate is one measure that is being used in this quarter. We know that we have another one set to go for the third quarter. We know that the Member for Kluane deeply cares about our inflationary measures and will support the budget tomorrow and support Yukoners, as he stands today to talk about more measures. I look forward to question number 2, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Istchenko: So, unfortunately, the measures that the Liberals have brought in don't seem to be working. The data from the Yukon Bureau of Statistics shows that we are leading the country in cost-of-living increases. What is worse is that it appears that the government has run out of new ideas. The only new policies that this government has brought forward all come from the CASA, and we think it is time for the government to try something new.

So, will the government take steps that have actually been shown to help people with the cost of living and suspend the territorial fuel tax?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: So, the inflation rate in Whitehorse was 5.5 percent in March, and that was down from seven percent in February, but is 1.2 percentage points higher than the national inflation rate of 4.3 percent. So, Whitehorse's inflation rate has been high, but what we are seeing is a downward trend — so, comparable to the other regions.

We have put our programs in place; we are looking to see support for the budget. When we talk about some of the things that we need out there to support folks — of course, we have a number of programs that will be in place. Probably the biggest one — when you think about the fact that the Official Opposition didn't support us on childcare — you know, when I think about what things were like in 2016, if you had two children in childcare — I know, when I was paying for two children in childcare — \$1,400 — that is now in the pockets of Yukoners. I think it is about \$43 million this year — \$43 million.

So, I hope the budget will be supported. That money can go in the pockets of folks, and when they are sitting at the kitchen table and they are making plans about how to handle their family budget, they will know that all of us in this House supported them.

Mr. Istchenko: I can tell the Premier right now that I will not be voting for a government with the worst record on cost of living in the country.

When I asked about this last week, the Premier said one thing that I certainly agree with. He said — quote: "It doesn't look good — the picture that is being painted for the Yukon Liberals."

Now that the Premier has admitted that his record doesn't look good, will he actually change course and try some measures that have actually been shown to reduce the cost of living? Or will he continue with the measures that have resulted in the highest growth of cost of living in the country?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: For the Member for Kluane, I appreciate doubling down on the argument with me. The first time we chatted about what had happened year to year, the conversation is: Do current policies look like they are making an impact? My perspective is, because we were at 0.3 percent from February to March, I looked at what the national average is; I looked at the provinces. I know the member opposite and the Official Opposition many times look toward Alberta and Saskatchewan as the policy leaders in the country. I appreciate that, but the growth in Alberta was one percent, and Saskatchewan was 0.8 percent, and we were 0.3 percent.

I thought, if you look at western Canada and the north, from where things are in Q1 of this year, we were in a good spot. I would then think that the policies we were putting in place are doing good work.

If you want to go back to data from 11 months ago and add it in, fair enough, but right now, based on what's happening in the Yukon from last month to this month, we are in a good trend, and our programs are working. That was my part of the argument.

Question re: Hospital employee satisfaction

Ms. White: There are a number of systemic problems in our health care system, and many of them are highlighted in the 2023 Yukon Hospital Corporation's employee satisfaction survey.

According to the survey, only 32 percent of their workers reported looking forward to going to work, and more damning, just 29 percent of the hospital workers found that the hospital "... is a psychologically and emotionally healthy place to work." This is deeply concerning.

So, what is the minister doing to immediately address the lack of satisfaction of the majority of hospital workers regarding their working conditions?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think that quoting the survey is interesting. I think that what we really need to talk about is the health and human resources issues that exist in the Yukon, in Canada, and across the world with respect to making sure that individuals are supported through their work and that we have enough people to come to work. I don't think there's a sector anywhere where this is not an important issue.

We heard in recent media about tourism sectors, but what we must remember is that perhaps the most important and most stressful sector is exactly health and human resources. We have been through a three-year world pandemic that has left no one unaffected with respect to these issues. Front-line workers, hospital workers, health care workers in Yukon hospitals and hospitals around the world have been taking the brunt of that concern.

I think that we must be compassionate, and we must address the issues that are brought forward in this survey. They are an important lesson for us all.

Ms. White: In this survey, one of the categories with the lowest score is training and development. Only 33 percent of hospital workers reported having opportunities to develop their careers. Health is an ever-changing field, and professionals often take courses and training to update their skills.

A few years ago, the hospital ended a program that allowed their employees to take up to 20 hours of paid continuing education. This helped medical staff keep up to date with medical practices or learn new skills. Opportunities for paid training and professional development are one important way to make sure employees feel valued in their place of work and want to stay in the long term. We know, thanks to the employee survey, that this is far from the case at Yukon hospitals. With a shortage of health care professionals, this government should be doing more to retain medical staff, not less.

Will the minister work with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to ensure that 20 hours of paid education time is restored for all hospital workers?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the laser focus on one particular issue. I think that the focus of the work that we are currently doing with the Yukon Hospital Corporation is to make sure that all staff and all professionals working through the hospital and providing services to Yukoners are supported in a way that gives them positive job satisfaction and positive work experiences. Absolutely, training and continuing education is an important part of the benefits and the supports that can be provided to Yukon health care workers — in particular, in this question, Yukon workers and health care workers who spend time and are employed by the Yukon Hospital Corporation.

We work regularly with the Hospital Corporation. I met this week with the Hospital Corporation's board chair and the CEO of the Hospital Corporation. These are the kinds of issues that come up for us regularly, and we are working together to address them to improve satisfaction for our employees, and that, in turn, improves health care for Yukoners.

Ms. White: So, it's clear from the results of this survey that hospital employees aren't feeling supported. People can apply for continuing education, but the feeling on the ground is that nobody is getting approved. We are fortunate that the medical professionals working at the hospital are dedicated to keeping up their certifications, but this burden shouldn't fall solely on them.

Most hospitals in Canada require their emergency room nurses to have advanced cardiac life-support training. In the maternity ward, nurses usually need the fetal health surveillance course, and the pediatric advanced life support is also a course that most critical care nurses want to take, but here in the Yukon, nurses and other hospital workers have to take all of these important courses on their own time; it is not considered part of their jobs.

So, can the minister explain why this critical training, required to provide high-quality health care, is not offered on paid time to hospital employees?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Again, a very specific part of this question, which I think is an important one — worth investigating. I don't have any information about the particular

details of the employment situation in relation to the courses that are noted in the question, but I certainly will follow up.

The Yukon Hospital Corporation recently had an employee survey, as has been noted in the question. Prior to the last survey, which was conducted in August and September back in 2020 — clearly, the gaps in 2021 and 2022 were due to COVID — it is an important way in which we can obtain information about people's work experience.

The survey does provide overarching feelings from employees that are then able to be used to improve that experience. We are working with the Hospital Corporation to engage staff about improvements. The Hospital Corporation has traditionally not put these surveys necessarily out to the public. I think that will be an improvement that we can also make — to make sure that kind of information is available, and we will use these surveys to respond to the needs of the individuals at the hospital.

Question re: Physician recruitment and retention

Mr. Cathers: Over the course of this Sitting, we've learned more about the Liberal government's failures in meeting the health care needs of Yukoners and the challenging environment that they have created for health care professionals. We have heard about red tape that the minister imposes on doctors, which forces them to spend too much time on paperwork and not enough time seeing patients. They are late in paying doctors for health care services, with thousands of billings outstanding beyond 90 days.

We've heard from doctors who have unpaid bills from the government going back even more than a year, and all of this is at a time when there's a shortage of doctors and thousands of Yukoners don't have a family doctor.

Will the government admit that they have not been creating a welcoming environment for physicians and that the government's actions and inaction are hurting efforts at recruitment and retention of doctors?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: No, I won't agree with that. I don't think that will surprise anyone. I certainly won't agree with that information that is incorrect for much of the preamble of that particular question. Unfortunately, that is the method by which some of the questions come from the member opposite.

It is important for Yukoners to know that the health and human resources impact of COVID-19 is being felt across the country — across the nation. We, here in the Yukon, have a unique opportunity to address the concerns that we have here in the territory for the purposes of providing better service to Yukoners. We have a road map to go forward in *Putting People First*. We have a committed Yukon Medical Association, a committed Yukon Hospital Corporation, a committed Department of Health and Social Services — that all come to the table on a regular basis with other partners to deal with the health and human resources issues and to deal with the ultimate goal, which is to provide better people-centred service for Yukoners.

This is not work that was done prior to our government coming into office; it is not work that has been done by the

previous government; it is work that we have taken on and are doing.

Mr. Cathers: Unfortunately for the minister, denying a problem exists doesn't fix it. We continue to hear from local doctors that morale in the physician community has never been lower. This is hurting efforts in the recruitment of new doctors, causing doctors we already have to consider leaving, and it's making it harder to attract locums.

The unfortunate reality is that so much of this is directly due to government policies and practices, and so much of it is preventable. One of the promises that this minister made to the Yukon Medical Association was to hire a territorial medical director. On April 7 last year, she said that work was well underway to recruit and hire a territorial medical director.

Can the minister tell us if that position has been created and hired, and if not, when will she live up to her promise?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak about the importance of physicians to the Yukon health care road map to go forward through *Putting People First* and the focus of making sure that our health care services are people-centred and are responding to the needs of Yukoners. One part of that process, of course, is a strong relationship with Yukon physicians, with the Yukon Medical Association, and with other partners in the medical health care services.

We have worked extremely hard to build a strong relationship with those partners. As the member opposite might remember, last year we signed a three-year agreement with the Yukon Medical Association to increase service for Yukoners, to increase support for Yukon medical practitioners, and we will continue to work with them to resolve any issues that might arise to make sure that at the centre of all of our decisions is what is best for Yukoners and their health care.

Mr. Cathers: This Liberal government is all talk and no action when it comes to fixing problems in the health care system and in living up to their promises to Yukon doctors, including a promise to pay doctors within a reasonable amount of time.

In 2021, the Yukon Medical Association passed a resolution calling for the creation of a territorial medical director. The minister told this House last year that the work to create a new position of territorial medical director had begun and was well underway. On April 7, 2022, she told the Legislature that the position would be created and filled very soon.

So, I will ask again since she didn't answer previously: When will that position be created and staffed?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: We have, as I noted, focused on access to primary health care services being a challenge in this jurisdiction and globally. We have been committed to a strong and healthy community of primary health care providers. We believe it is critical to ensuring that Yukoners have access to excellent primary health care.

I won't speak about specific positions here. I can answer the member opposite in future correspondence. I don't have details, and I don't want to provide details that aren't specific.

We have negotiated a new memorandum of understanding with the Yukon Medical Association last year. That will help to increase Yukoners' timely same-day and unscheduled access to primary health care services — the details of which are still being worked on by the organization and with the Yukon government.

We are working to foster a strong, healthy community of physicians, something that did not exist, Mr. Speaker, when the member opposite was briefly the Minister of Health and Social Services.

What I can indicate is that relationships are incredibly important in providing the service that we need and in coming to the table to resolve any issues that might arise. That is the approach our government takes. It hasn't been one in the past.

Question re: Capital project commitments

Mr. Hassard: Over the course of the past few weeks, Yukoners have developed a strong sense of the inability of the Liberal government to manage our major capital projects. The Nisutlin Bay bridge project was billed as the largest capital project in Yukon history and it's almost certainly going to be way overbudget. The massive Whitehorse airport project that this government has planned will, by all accounts, come in way over the initial budget. The Dawson City recreation centre is overbudget. The gymnastics facility is overbudget, and the list goes on and on.

My question for the Minister of Highways and Public Works is very simple: Is there a single major capital project that is currently underway that the minister thinks will be on time and on budget?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The Nisutlin Bay bridge is a critical link along the Alaska Highway and is an important landmark for Teslin. The project will provide a significant positive economic outcome for the territory, local businesses, and the community of Teslin, as the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin is likely witnessing with his own eyes, as this construction is proceeding in his community.

The \$160-million contract was awarded on May 3, 2022 to Graham Infrastructure LP and there are approximately 28 contracted staff on-site working on this project each day. On average, there are two Yukon government project personnel staying overnight in the community and overseeing the project. Piling operations on the temporary bridge, called a "trestle bridge", have now begun, and a shout-out to the communications team at Highways and Public Works for the progress that we're seeing on social media. There's great work being done already.

As of April 5, there are now two complete spans on the south side of the bridge, which means that there are now a total of four piles in the water. So, there's a lot of work being done there and there's more to report.

Mr. Hassard: I will take that as a no.

The unfortunate reality for this government is that the money allocated for any of these major projects in the five-year capital concept is not going to be enough and we are going to be faced with significant shortfalls. That means that other projects that are important to Yukoners are falling on the

wayside. They continue to ignore the north Alaska Highway and they ignore the Dempster, and they continue to stall on the vast majority of the Resource Gateway roads projects that were promised years ago. In fact, so far this year, the government has only released one single road construction project. When I asked the minister over and over about when we can expect more, he simply could not answer.

So, will the minister now admit that his failure to award contracts this year is a direct result of the Liberals' inability to manage major capital projects?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Let's take a short trip down memory lane to 2015-16 — the final year of the Yukon Party government when they got approximately \$185 million of capital spending out the door. For fiscal year 2022-23, the numbers are still coming in, but we will be getting approximately \$500 million out the door. Quick math — but that is 2.5-plus times what got out the door.

So, taking lessons from the members opposite — I don't think so.

We have the parallel runway; we will have the main runway; we have got the national trade corridors funding on the north Klondike Highway; we have the Nisutlin Bay bridge; and we have just finished the Carmacks Recreation Centre. There is the Pelly pool; there are the two grader stations at Klondike and Ogilvie going in, offsetting hundreds of thousands of litres of fuel and greenhouse gas emissions every year; and there is biomass at Elijah Smith. There are various projects, so I am not sure what is not getting out the door.

Mr. Hassard: That will be cold comfort to the contractors. The Liberals are quick to make big promises about big spending, but when it comes to delivering, they keep coming up short. We continue to hear from businesses in the construction sector that they are worried about the lack of action from this government. Small- and medium-sized projects continue to get cancelled or deferred and the Liberals' commitment of tendering seasonally dependent contracts by the end of March has become a bad joke among contractors.

In their 2016 platform, the Liberals promised to tender all seasonally dependent projects no later than March of each year. So, can the minister tell Yukoners whether or not they have in fact kept that promise — yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Yes is the answer. The Yukon government plans and issues tenders as early as possible to help vendors plan for upcoming work. This includes forecasting and tendering projects earlier so that businesses can take full advantage of the short building season.

It also includes staggering closing dates to make it easier for contractors to bid on several tenders and to encourage price stability. When planning and tendering projects, we are giving contractors the best opportunities to perform the work at the right time. We aim to tender well in advance of the time when physical work needs to start.

Mr. Speaker, this timing allows contractors to plan their season, place orders, and hire staff. Some examples include: the Whitehorse gymnastics climbing facility was tendered in November 2022 for work to start in the summer of 2023; the Mountain View Golf Course irrigation upgrades were tendered

in November 2022 for work to start in the summer of 2023; the Watson Lake Housing First project had a tender forecast issued in January 2022 and was tendered in February 2023 for work to start in the summer of 2023; and a wildland fire air-tanker services project was tendered in August of 2022 for service in 2024 to 2029 fire seasons — a two-year lead time, early indeed.

This all adds up to 57 projects totalling \$104.4 million before March 31, 2023.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

OPPOSITION PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 720

Clerk: Motion No. 720, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Whitehorse Centre:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to make housing more accessible to seniors by:

(1) pausing the removal of the exemption to seniors relative to the \$100,000 asset limit policy in order to be eligible for Yukon Housing Corporation programs until consultations on how this decision will impact seniors in Whitehorse and in rural communities have been completed;

(2) reviewing the decision to remove the exemption based on results from the consultation; and

(3) ensuring that Yukon seniors who were already on the Yukon Housing Corporation wait-list when the exemption ended can remain on the wait-list and continue to be exempted.

MLA Tredger: I rise today to speak to Motion No. 720, which is about supporting Yukon seniors who have been waiting for years on the Yukon Housing Corporation's wait-list. We're bring forward this motion in response to concerns we've heard from seniors, from stories we have read in the news — I think we have all read those stories — and from advocacy groups who have brought this to us, because this is an example of this government making a change — I think with good intention — to our social safety net without really considering the effect it will have on people.

I'm going to start by telling a story, and I'm going to tell the story of Tor Forsberg and Paul Tubb, who brought this issue to the public. Some of the members have probably read about their story back in March. This is a couple who is living in Watson Lake. Three years ago, as they started to face health challenges — Paul is getting well into his 70s — they realized that they are not going to be able to stay in their home forever and that they are not going to be able to do the upkeep of a home and manage the accessibility issues of a home forever. So, they made a plan. They got themselves on the wait-list for seniors housing in Watson Lake.

For the next three years, this couple kept working to stay in their home. They dealt with the upkeep that's required and they dealt with the stairs. Every year, their health was declining. Every year, it was getting a little more difficult, but they knew they had a plan.

Then this year in January, they received a letter from the Housing Corporation. I can imagine that getting that envelope in the mail was pretty exciting. They had waited a long time for this and I imagine they were thinking: Wow, this is our chance; we're going to get into accessible housing for seniors that we can afford.

Only that's not what the letter said. It was not an acceptance letter; it was actually a letter telling them that they had been disqualified from the Yukon Housing Corporation housing and were being taken off the wait-list. Why? Well, after years of waiting, there had been a sudden policy change and their assets now disqualify them. Those assets were a mobile home that was almost 40 years old. Their assets were a truck that was 12 years old and a camper that was almost 30 years old. So, based on those assets, they were no longer going to be allowed to apply to Yukon Housing.

That left them in a really tight spot without very many options. I'm going to talk a little bit more about that later, but I want to dive into what that policy change is, because that's really at the core of this motion.

Until just a few months ago, when seniors were applying to Yukon Housing, they could have assets that were over \$100,000 and still be eligible to apply for a Yukon Housing unit.

This is an exemption compared to people who are not seniors, and it's because seniors have a fairly unique economic situation. They have limited earning ability. Most of them are not going to be able to work full time, if at all, and probably shouldn't have to work full time, if at all. That's not something that I think we expect from our seniors. There was this understanding that they would need a different asset cap than everyone else.

A few months ago, that exception was removed, so now any seniors with even a tiny amount over \$100,000 in assets would no longer be eligible. We are told that this change happened because Yukon Housing units should go to the people who most need them. I absolutely agree that the units should go to people who most need them, but I want to talk through the process of making a government policy for a minute. There are always going to be clear-cut examples. I think that we can all agree that someone who has no assets and is currently homeless should be eligible for Yukon Housing. Great, that's easy.

I think we can also agree that someone who owns a million-dollar home that's paid off does not need to get into Yukon Housing. I think we can all agree on that, but there are always going to be all these cases in the middle that are a lot less clear-cut. We need, in any policy, to be able to address those middle situations in a way that's caring, empathetic, and responsive to reality.

Unfortunately, what we have is a policy that has a very arbitrary and rigid cut-off with no flexibility. It says that this is the line. It doesn't matter how close to that line you fall or what

your extenuating circumstances are. It doesn't matter how this works for you in real life. That's it. That's the line, and if people fall through the cracks, it's too bad. That's not a policy that we want. We want a policy that responds to the realities of what Yukoners need. We need policies that have flexibility and don't ignore the people who are falling through the cracks.

We have heard that this change was in response to the Auditor General's report on housing. It's true that the Auditor General's report actually brought this issue up, so I want to actually read what they said. I am quoting from their report. They wrote, under "Ongoing barriers to affordability" — quote: "We found that the eligibility criteria for the corporation's social housing program were not the same for seniors and non-seniors. Seniors could have over \$100,000 of assets and still be eligible, while non-seniors with over \$100,000 of assets were not eligible." Later in that paragraph, it says: "... it was noted that applying different eligibility criteria for seniors meant that the corporation was providing subsidized housing to seniors who may have been able to afford other types of housing."

I want to break that down a little bit in terms of what they said. They did not say that everyone who has over \$100,000 in assets can afford other housing. They did not say that everyone who has over \$100,000 of assets should be disqualified. They said that some of those seniors "... may have been able to afford other types of housing." So, then what do they suggest we do with that? So, here is their recommendation — sorry, just let me find my spot in the papers.

So, here is the recommendation — and I quote: "The Yukon Housing Corporation should conduct a review of rent assessment for those on social assistance, housing eligibility requirements, and its prioritization system to ensure that there is access for those in most need of housing and benefits."

You know, I had to go back and read that recommendation, because with all of the discussion that we have had in the House, it was sounding to me like the Auditor General's report had said to get rid of that asset cap — or, sorry — implement a \$100,000 asset cap, but that is actually pretty different from what is written here. It talks about reviewing to ensure that there is access for the people who need it most. They are not saying — they are not prescribing changing the asset cap to \$100,000 and sticking with it come what may; they are asking for a review of a system that has been broken for a long time. They are asking to fix a system that has been broken for a long time.

To me, a review would involve talking to people. It would involve looking at people's real-life situations. It would be evaluating who needs this most, how we are going to deliver it to them, and how we are going to support the people who are the exceptions to this rule — but that is not what happened.

Instead, we saw this government simply end the exemption without thinking it through, without assessing the effects it would have on seniors. They went for a quick fix, and unfortunately, that leaves a lot of people behind. So, let's talk about what some of those issues are that are affecting people — some of the changes.

So, here is one loophole that was actually pointed out by Keith Halliday in the paper quite recently. He talked about pensions. Pensions aren't recognized as an asset. So, imagine

that you have a government pension that pays you \$50,000 a year. That is worth a lot more than \$100,000 in assets, because that is going to secure revenue for the rest of your life. That doesn't count toward the \$100,000 limit, and to be really clear, I'm not suggesting that we disqualify people based on pensions, but I am trying to illustrate some of the inequities in this policy.

So, meanwhile, someone who has a registered retirement savings plan, an RRSP — which is what a lot of people have instead of pensions, mostly people who have worked for non-profits, people who have not had access to pensions and have saved themselves — those are counted as an asset, and those can be used to disqualify people. Those are two tools that people use for the exact same reasons, but basically, depending on what your job was, it means that you will either have access to Yukon Housing or not. That seems really unfair.

I also want to talk about \$100,000. That seems like a lot of money, but when you are planning for retirement, you are planning for 10, 20, 30 years of not working or maybe working part time, if you're not lucky enough to be able to fully retire. So, if you are talking about money for 10, 20, 30 years, \$100,000 is not a lot of money. Imagine, for example, that you were going to say: Okay, well, I have this asset, and I am going to move into a private place. Maybe you want to move into Normandy Living, which is the only assisted-living senior option that is not part of Yukon Housing. Well, \$100,000 would last you less than three years in Normandy Living — definitely not 10, 20, 30 years.

There are a lot of other inconsistencies. There are assets that don't count toward the \$100,000 limit, like jewellery or art. And again, I am not suggesting that we start penalizing people based on their jewellery or art, but it seems a little strange that one person sitting with \$1,000 in cash gets counted one way and then if they walk down to the store and buy it in gold, suddenly it gets counted in a different way.

I would also like to talk a little bit about how this affects people in rural communities, because you know, the housing market is tight everywhere, but I would say that there are a lot more rental options in Whitehorse than in other places. There are a lot of people living in rural Yukon who don't have a lot of options for downsizing. They might not be able to find an affordable rental unit. Even if they do sell all their assets and start renting until they can qualify for this Yukon Housing under the new exceptions, where are they going to move to? Are there accessible, affordable rental units in all the communities in the Yukon? I don't think so.

So, we are forcing people to upend, to leave their support networks, leave their families, leave their communities, and move to Whitehorse in hopes of someday qualifying for Yukon Housing. That is the choice that we are asking people to make under this policy.

I want to go back to talk a little bit more about Tor and Paul, because I think that real-life examples are really important. It is one thing to write a policy on paper and say that it is going to apply to X number of people and it is going to apply this way, and it is really another thing to work through the complexity and nuances of real life. That is whom we are supporting; we are supporting real Yukoners with these

policies. We need to make sure that it works for real Yukoners — not just a theoretical person on a page.

I am going to give the example of Tor and Paul because they are comfortable with me sharing this story publicly and they have shared their story publicly. I have talked to many other people affected by this asset cap. This is not an isolated situation. So, what are they supposed to do? They are sitting there with their — what is it? — 37-year-old trailer, their 12-unit-old truck, and their 27-year-old camper, and they are out of options. They have been told that they can't get into Yukon Housing as is, and they can't stay in their home. So, what are they supposed to do?

I guess maybe they should sell their assets, sell their secure housing, sell their means of transportation, and sell their form of recreation and then take that money and move into rental housing, except there isn't any, so they'll have to move to Whitehorse. So, they leave their community behind, move to Whitehorse, and wait for that money to run out, at which point then they can apply to Yukon Housing and start the many-year process of getting through the wait-list. That can't be the answer. That can't be what we're asking Yukon seniors to do.

What should we do now? We are in this situation as a Legislature. The government is in this situation where they have this policy that is clearly not working for people. We have a suggestion to make, which is this motion. We think that the government needs to pause this policy, start looking at the consequences it has had, and figure out what to do next through reviewing it. They made a quick change without ensuring that other options are available. We know that seniors have very limited options when it comes to downsizing and preparing for the days when they are less mobile, and the government just ended one of those options. They need to take a step back, talk to seniors, talk to advocacy groups, think about how this is going to work for people in real-life situations, and figure out a new policy that has flexibility, that works for people and can accommodate these situations that fall through the cracks, making sure that we have housing for people.

They have a choice to make. They can stick with this rigid and bureaucratic policy — and I support the intention; I support getting the people who most need it into housing — but now they have heard from people about how it's not working for them. The Premier himself said during Question Period that these are good points. So, it's time to take a step back, review the policy, listen to people, incorporate their feedback, and find a way forward that works for everyone. That's the choice that they have today, and I really hope that every member of this Legislature will support this motion.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am rising in the House today to respond to Motion No. 720, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre. This motion reads that the House urges the Government of Yukon to make housing more accessible to seniors by, one, pausing the removal of the exemption to seniors relative to the \$100,000 asset limit policy in order to be eligible for Yukon Housing Corporation until consultations on how this decision will impact seniors in Whitehorse and in rural communities have been completed; and

reviewing the decision to remove the exemption based on results from the consultation; and ensuring that Yukon seniors who were already on the Yukon Housing Corporation wait-list when the exemption ended can remain on the wait-list and continue to be exempted.

The Yukon Housing Corporation provides a vital service in our community, helping to address urgent housing needs across Yukon's housing continuum. Access to affordable and suitable housing — especially for vulnerable persons — is a universal challenge and something we are aiming to address in the Yukon through coordinated action across government. Through our work with our different partners, there has been significant feedback to address the needs of our citizens who are the most vulnerable.

We have heard this through communications with our constituents — Yukon First Nation partners, NGOs like Safe at Home and the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition, and the City of Whitehorse, just to mention a few — that government housing programs should be made available to help assist our most vulnerable and those who are facing challenges with affordability across the spectrum.

We have heard through the community and from the results from the Office of the Auditor General's report that the needs of marginalized Yukoners should be prioritized for access to our subsidized housing. The work of the Yukon Housing Corporation is ever-evolving and adapting to fit the needs of Yukon's maturing and progressive social fabric, leveraging the strengths of community and private sector partners to deliver innovative and diverse solutions where they are needed and aiming to address Yukon's broad housing needs.

The collective efforts target support for seniors, low-income families and individuals, those with high medical and mobility needs, victims of violence, and those experiencing vulnerabilities related to homelessness. As previously mentioned on the floor of the House, this is an endeavour that will need community input and effort to address and is a high priority for this government. This past December, at the direction of the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors and on the recommendations of the Office of the Auditor General of Canada, the Yukon Housing Corporation has diligently looked at their programming to take appropriate action to address the Auditor General's report recommendations.

Some of the findings in the OAG report pointed to the outdated social housing delivery model, the longer wait-list for housing, and ongoing barriers to affordability.

One of the points from the OAG report identifies the following "Ongoing barriers to affordability" in section 28 of the report: "We found that the eligibility criteria for the corporation's social housing program were not the same for seniors and non-seniors. Seniors could have over \$100,000 of assets and still be eligible, while non-seniors with over \$100,000 of assets were not eligible. As of September 2021, seniors made up 42% of all residents in social housing units. In the Social Housing Transformation Implementation Plan, it was noted that applying different eligibility criteria for seniors meant that the corporation was providing subsidized housing to

seniors who may have been able to afford other types of housing."

Section 31, which was the recommendation, states: "Yukon Housing Corporation should conduct a review of rent assessment for those on social assistance, housing eligibility requirements, and its prioritization system to ensure that there is access for those in most need of housing and benefits."

Yukon Housing Corporation has agreed to the recommendations from the findings in this report and is doing the hard work of looking at and making changes to the housing programs and policies to address the findings. I am sure you will recall that the Office of the Auditor General found that the corporation was providing subsidized housing to some seniors who may have been able to afford alternative housing.

Since 2019, the Yukon Housing Corporation has been working to transform its approach to housing from the outdated social housing model to a community housing model which treats all subsidized housing as a shared community asset. One important progression related to this new approach is the implementation of the community housing asset cap policy.

This past December, at the direction of Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors and on the recommendations of the Office of the Auditor General, the corporation implemented the requirement that all wait-listed applicants must have assets under \$100,000 to be eligible. This week is the four-month mark since the adoption of the new policy, which has been designed to ensure access to the rent-geared-to-income program for those in greatest need and some of our most vulnerable citizens.

While the policy has affected the eligibility criteria for seniors on the wait-list for community housing, the move to implement a consistent asset cap is all about restoring fairness and equality to the management of the territory's limited community housing stock. It is also about better serving the most vulnerable in society and aligning ourselves with that intention, similar to other jurisdictions across Canada, through a means-tested program.

Yukon's decision in implementing a consistent asset cap is aligned with the approach taken by many other Canadian jurisdictions. Really, the changes introduced in the Yukon earlier this year are standard practice elsewhere across the country.

When we look at data from across the country, there are jurisdictions with far more stringent thresholds in place. For instance, in Alberta, seniors with assets above \$25,000 are not eligible for government and social housing. In Prince Edward Island, a couple with assets above \$50,000 receives no points toward their housing application. In the Yukon, we chose to align ourselves with British Columbia, which has also adopted the higher, more generous \$100,000 threshold.

From census data collected, Yukon seniors have among the highest median incomes in the country. The recommendation from the Auditor General, from the audit, was to ensure that the corporation provides access for those in most need of housing and benefits. We agreed with that recommendation.

Now, I have been hearing from many of my colleagues, the members opposite, and their constituents about their concerns

related to the new policy and specifically the impact on Yukon seniors. As previously mentioned, the auditor's report noted that 42 percent of the corporation's units were assigned to seniors. Those seniors who are currently housed through the Yukon Housing Corporation's rent-geared-to-income program were exempt from this asset cap and may have been able to afford housing elsewhere. They are not being asked to move out of their units, and we are not looking to evict these tenants because they are over the asset cap requirement that has now been put in place.

With no asset cap in place, it wasn't too long ago that approximately 73 percent of all Yukon seniors were eligible for the corporation's subsidized housing. Let me say that again — 73 percent of all Yukon seniors were eligible for the corporation's subsidized housing. So, let us drill down on this concept for the most, or highest, need. We agreed with the auditor's recommendation because the corporation takes seriously its duty to ensure that limited public housing resources are allocated to where they are most needed and will have the biggest impact. The use of asset caps to guide community housing decisions in this respect is nothing new.

When it comes to objectively assessing severity of housing need, that determination must not be predicated on one's age. This is discriminatory. A consistent asset cap for all applicants aligns with the Housing Corporation and with the requirements of the Yukon *Human Rights Act*, as the use of age to differentiate program requirements would be discriminatory.

What this community housing asset cap policy has done for the Yukon is to ensure that all rent-geared-to-income housing units are allocated to those with clearly defined high housing needs, including those with low income and few assets.

By implementing this asset cap of \$100,000, the Yukon Housing Corporation is also managing the expectations of those who are on the housing wait-list. When a senior is on the wait-list for a number of years due to having higher assets, there is an expectation that, at some point, they will be housed within our public housing stock, which may not be the reality. Some of these seniors may be waiting for years on a wait-list and never be called on to fill a unit due to others having higher housing needs, and their application moves further down the wait-list. This expectation can have unintended consequences on that senior. For example, as a result of being on the wait-list, they may choose not to access other housing options or funding to upgrade or renovate their current housing asset. This may result in seniors with an expectation that housing is imminent while their asset deteriorates around them.

I have heard calls to pause the implementation of the asset cap or eliminate it. We have been here before. In 2011, the corporation eliminated the asset cap, and the number of eligible seniors on the wait-list increased significantly, crowding out the corporation's ability to fairly and effectively provide housing access to those with high housing needs. If assets are not worked into the equation equitably for housing, we could potentially be opening the doors for seniors occupying Yukon Housing Corporation housing who leave their units for months at a time to vacation outside of the territory. This could see a unit empty for a long period of time which could otherwise

house someone who is vulnerable and in high need of housing — someone without the resources to travel to find alternative housing left without a home.

What the implementation of the community housing model seeks to accomplish is a fair and transparent approach to providing suitable accommodation to tenants who have high needs. When we dug into the data of the 37 seniors affected by this policy change, we gained valuable insights to help support this difficult but necessary decision. The average asset value reported by this group of seniors was just over \$267,000. More than 12 seniors in that affected group reported assets worth more than \$300,000 and some over half a million dollars.

The public service is obligated to administer critical social services ethically. These were tough decisions and ones we stand by. It is hard to justify ignoring the needs of someone who is experiencing extreme vulnerabilities and instead offering a unit to someone else on the wait-list with half or a quarter of a million dollars' worth of assets. With the new policy, combined with the pressures of inflation and the high cost of housing and a lack of supply, I recognize that some seniors are facing considerable challenges in terms of aging in place comfortably in the Yukon.

We are committed to tackling these challenges. Simultaneously focusing on more lot development, more affordable housing projects, programs, and partnerships in ensuring our response to these very real housing challenges rises to the level of urgency we hear time and time again from the public.

Subsidized community housing is just one piece of this complex puzzle. There are many other means and incentives to allow Yukoners to age well in ways that are healthy, connected, independent, and respected.

I have heard the concerns about the well-being of Yukon seniors coming from the communities, and I share them. This is why, as a government, we are continuing to support all seniors and elders through the coordinated *Aging in Place Action Plan*, which is committed to the goals of positive aging.

If you are a Yukon senior who no longer qualifies for the rent-geared-to-income program because you have assets over \$100,000, there are other avenues of supports available. The Yukon seniors income supplement and the pioneer utility grant home heating subsidy are available to provide financial assistance to low-income seniors, and senior homeowners with mobility challenges who meet the conditions of the accessibility grant program may apply for up to \$30,000 to retrofit their home.

We are also continuing to invest in and build many new affordable housing projects that are all made available to seniors, and we are funding partners through the housing initiatives fund, which I spoke about today, Mr. Speaker, to invest in housing for seniors, including support for Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, Teslin Tlingit Council, and I believe we touched on a project in Haines Junction as well today.

Affordable housing is vital to all Yukoners, especially seniors. The increasing cost of housing demands that we work hard to address the issue. As the asset policy is applied and implemented across the program, I am open to looking at the

challenges of what counts toward the asset cap, realizing that people have invested for retirement through alternative means — and the concern that those who invested in RRSPs or RIFs from their work in the private sector would be impacted differently from those who have defined benefits through a government pension.

In the spirit of making our government housing, through the Yukon Housing Corporation, more equitable, we should be looking at some of these unintended impacts and what can be done or tailored within the program and through policy to apply fair and equitable housing.

I just want to touch on the comments from the Third Party. As you can see, we are committed to going and looking at the defined pension, and I have asked the team to do that. I asked the team to do it before we even talked about it in the House, and that was the same article that was mentioned today, but I have to say that the motion coming forward from the Member for Whitehorse Centre — there are a couple of notes I made.

When talking about the asset cap — and one of the comments that I heard was: “We know that this is fair and that you’re trying to do the right thing” and then quoted this particular article and talked about a defined benefit pension. In that same article, if I remember correctly, it gives an asset value to that pension, and I believe that it was over a million dollars.

So, the start of the conversation today was that the member who brought this forward said: I don’t think that people who have assets over \$1 million should be eligible — and then builds another argument later on that completely conflicts with the opening statement that was made today and then comes back and says: Well, but maybe look at this one. I am not saying that people who have pensions should be removed. I don’t know where the member stands on it, but I do know that making policy is not easy. You have to make difficult decisions.

Saying to us that we have to go back and review policy and you have to get somewhere in the middle — I don’t know what the middle is; I know what is going on across the country. I can’t quantify “middle”, but what I can do is go back and look across the country at what is happening and make a tough decision based on the data that we have.

I also can respect the independence of a Crown corporation’s board — the Yukon Housing Corporation — as they sat down and contemplated the Auditor General’s comments. It didn’t say “\$100,000”. No, it didn’t. It said “fair and equitable”.

We took into consideration Yukon human rights. We took into consideration inequitable policy. We took into consideration policy creation that is not discriminatory. That’s how we understand and develop policy — not “put it in the middle” — through this process, identified on surveys across the country — different jurisdictions. We didn’t think \$25,000 would be appropriate. We didn’t think \$50,000 would be appropriate, even if some of those jurisdictions are right next door to us.

We looked at British Columbia. I know the members opposite, in many cases, refer to the policies of the Government of British Columbia. We have aligned on this cap in that way, and if you think that 73 percent of seniors —

The other thing is, when you are probably preparing to provide us with this motion today, I am sure the Member for Whitehorse West, like many of us, has gone through Yukon statistics. I’m sure you took into consideration where our demographic trends are going. I am sure you went and looked at five, 10, 15, and 20 years out. I’m sure you then contemplated the capital expenditures that would be required in order to take that percentage of population and then house them in social housing, as was identified today — if we remove that asset cap.

So, you have contemplated all of that. Then I have to wonder — even today, when we debated it, you said, “I don’t think the government should put money into anything that is not going to have only affordability.” What I am hearing is that all of those folks who are at that cap should be provided with government-funded housing, which would include 73 percent of the population of seniors. I am sure that there were some calculations done based on what we are seeing in square-footage buildouts — \$275,000 per square foot in Whistle Bend, up to \$500 or \$600 per square foot in some of our communities, and now we are seeing over 12. It would be a great calculation — which I am sure was done — to take into consideration what is that demographic — 73 percent — all social housing required or eligible for and then rolling it out.

Likely, you felt that was good policy development and then said, “I will bring this motion forward today.” So, different views of policy development; different views of due diligence; different views of managing public money.

Nobody wants to get up today and reduce benefits to anybody. Nobody wants to do that, but it can’t always be more, more, more, and more. That does not work. We are not there. It is about having to make some tough decisions. It’s about working with other partners. It’s about building affordable projects with the private sector, which I still stand by and which we have been doing and we will do, and that will provide other opportunities for seniors.

I am going to meet with the seniors in Watson Lake. They have been back and forth. I think that there are opportunities in Watson Lake to do other projects. There are lots of entrepreneurs. I spoke with the Member for Watson Lake last summer, who made me aware of some interested partners in the community. I think that there are different things to do. I know that, through Health and Social Services, there is some extension — and I’m going to meet with the Liard First Nation as well. But I think that there are other ways to get there besides just the Yukon Housing Corporation.

So, in the spirit of making our government housing through Yukon Housing Corporation more equitable, we should be looking at some of those unintended impacts, so we will. It doesn’t mean that we have to pause a policy. We will go back and look. If we have to ensure that our list is brought up to speed, we can go back to when the policy was brought into place. We can take a look at if that makes any changes to the policy and we can take a look at that. As was pointed out by the member opposite — and we will see if the Official Opposition speaks to this — how do we take a look at a pension? You’re right. If you are an individual who doesn’t have a defined pension and you have contributed as an entrepreneur, as a

business owner, into an RRSP that is then flipped into a RRIF and it's defined in that way, but we're looking at it differently, we have to take a second look. We can adjust.

I know what the wait-list looks like in Watson Lake, Dawson, and Whitehorse. I know that we can look at this while still having this policy in place. Suspending it does not make a difference. I hope that, with the information that I have shared with you today, you will think about the argument you have put forward, think about the elements of the argument you have put forward today, and then contemplate if that has changed anything in your perspective.

I want to close by touching on an important and related issue about our broad support for seniors housing across Yukon. I have been hearing additional feedback from the Yukon Housing Corporation community housing strategy with regard to the mixed model and concerns over impacts to seniors. I understand that some seniors are apprehensive of a mixed-use approach and believe it to be the start of rolling back designated seniors housing facilities. Let me state for the record that the community housing mixed-use model will in no way impact Yukon seniors' ability to secure housing now or in the future.

In fact, the new policy, in some instances, could actually offer benefits to Yukon seniors by providing access to all of the corporation's rent-geared-to-income units for those within the asset cap threshold.

So, I have asked members of the opposition — I know that they have stood by some of the seniors who have come out against this model. I want to share again: Please provide this information to those individuals. The new policy, in some instances, could actually offer benefits to Yukon seniors by providing access to all of the corporation's rent-geared-to-income units for those within the asset cap threshold. This would be in addition to opportunities to accept tenancy offers in buildings designated for seniors only.

The corporation's community housing application form now asks seniors and prospective tenants whether they are interested in viewing units within a mixed-use building or whether they prefer to consider options within a designated building only. There is data from across the world where they have implemented a mixed-use housing model and there is significant benefit to seniors who live in these types of settings. Building strong community ties and relationships with families and others from different age demographics and access to community can improve and increase social interaction, helping those who do not have close family or relations feel less isolated.

These models are shown to improve inclusivity for the residents with positive social impacts, and some of our youngest and oldest members of society are the loneliest as well. Bringing generations together in a community mixed-use housing model can offer further ways to connect with those around us in a meaningful way, helping to create a vibrant community.

In this way, we are working hard to ensure that seniors and other clients have a variety of choices available as they consider important decisions around housing location and suitability.

I think it is also important to just touch on the comments that were made in the preamble about Normandy, and there has been some dialogue in the House about Normandy Living and the work that we have been doing with Health and Social Services and how we are supporting seniors. So, again, I wanted to just touch on what other opportunities exist.

We did, as a government, pre-purchase 10 units at Normandy. Again, those are units that we are making available to seniors who are on our seniors wait-list. We then had discussions on another 16 units at Normandy. So, the member opposite talked about — the math that was used was that if you have \$100,000 in assets and then you take the monthly fee at the market rate for Normandy, you would then only be able to live there for three years and you wouldn't have any more money left. So, it is a big assumption. What is not taken into consideration is the fact that the tenants we are working with are receiving other revenue — federal pension, old-age pension, CPP. We are then taking into consideration what they have coming in on a monthly basis and, in many cases, we are augmenting that on a monthly basis. We are providing by funding in a grant so that they can be able to live in those units. It is one of the approaches that we have taken, and there are 16 other units that are in place. So, there are options.

I do agree on one point that was made, and it was concerning seniors and housing in communities when it comes to reallocation or seniors having to make a decision to move to Whitehorse. I agree. I look at the two communities that have the most need on our wait-list and they are the communities of Watson Lake and Dawson. I know the Member for Kluane has talked about Haines Junction and the second part of that work. I know that there is some work being done in Haines Junction by Champagne and Aishihik, but I think there are still other advocates asking us to provide other building opportunities — I think in both of the communities of Dawson and Watson Lake. I know I will be — Watson Lake as a priority going into the spring — sitting down and looking at working with the Minister of Health and Social Services on different ways to meet the needs of those in the community.

That's work that we're committed to doing, looking to see how partnerships in the community, whether with NGOs, the First Nation, or the private sector, can get us there.

When I was there last year, one of the local entrepreneurs — I think one of their parents — needed supportive living and had gone on social media saying that they would vend in their time and effort. That was sort of a topic that came at me a bit while I was there. It was just a fresh sort of conversation in the community. It could be a very interesting undertaking working with local entrepreneurs in the community and trying to figure out solutions with some supportive living.

It was also talked about in the House last week that when we talk about seniors and an asset cap, how do we look at opportunities like Vimy? I think I clarified it in the media. The Vimy project and the Normandy project are two very different things. One project was primarily built and funded through a mortgage. Vimy is looking for a mix of financial tools from grants and mortgage and revenue from potential clients and tenants. They are trying to ensure that people who are in a

certain financial range who want a level of independence and a level of service could acquire a unit in that building.

Again, I want to state for the record that they have come back to us and they are short about \$5.5 million on their model. Just to clear, that is not that they need \$5.5 million; it is that all the other funding that we've been asked to provide plus \$5.5 million — and they are going back to refine their numbers on what their building costs will look like. The numbers that we're seeing coming in right now are very high across the board on square-footage building, as I stated earlier. So, we're going to see what Vimy's numbers look like. We have been committed to Vimy the entire time we have been in government. We have shown that through continuous support, dialogue, and financial support as we've looked to see how we can get them to meet their goals on their project. Again, it is another opportunity.

I think it's also important to put on the record that when we talked about how our policies would roll out back in 2016, we came together as a group. Our leader, who was soon to become the Premier, was adamant about the fact that we had to make sure that seniors had an opportunity to age in place and in their communities. That was because — Whistle Bend is a beautiful facility and we commend the folks who work at Whistle Bend and do the incredible work they do. But the vision of Whistle Bend being not 150 but 300 beds, without the investment into our surrounding communities, was going to do just what the Member for Whitehorse West said. The strategy was to bring everybody into Whitehorse because that is where the spending would be. In turn, what we have decided is not to build that extra 150 beds onto Whistle Bend. The decision has been to support folks to age in place and also to make investments with different groups — not just putting a facility together for 300 seniors but to make sure that the folks in Haines Junction or the folks in Watson Lake or Dawson City continue to be part of their community — the community that they helped build. It is a bit of a different approach there.

When it comes to the decisions that we are going to have to make, I think it's becoming very clear in the Assembly — the positions that all three political parties are taking. In our case, we are not going to shy away from tough decisions when it comes to the financial well-being of the territory and the well-being of the most vulnerable, but we will still be respectful of those who are in a different financial position, and we will work with them to figure out how we can still support all Yukoners, but there will be times to make tough decisions. It is a great debate on a Wednesday afternoon to come in and table a motion saying that the government and the Housing Corporation are bad and that you are not respecting those folks and you should be making sure that you house everybody.

Those are all very good arguments, and inevitably, you will probably see maybe both parties vote against this today — vote against this motion today — or vote for this motion today.

We, on the other hand, have to ensure that our financial decisions are made in a prudent way. We know that, in the long run, there are going to be more difficult decisions that have to be made. So, we know that the Third Party is saying build. We heard it in the statement; I can extract it from Hansard today.

There is a bit of back-and-forth on the argument about what assets should be included and what should not. Maybe I am reading into it a bit, but I do remember that article, and I do see that the thesis statement, as presented by the member opposite, states some key points, and if you go into that — before you conclude that work that came out today across the way, you would be able to see that there are some definite impacts to things such as pensions.

The Official Opposition, on the other hand — all I know is the record. The record would show that there would be some challenges with affordable housing. There was investment, to be fair — there was investment that was made into seniors housing — I have been — especially along the waterfront in Whitehorse. I have spent time going to those units. There is one that is — what we would say, for those who would be checking Hansard, listening — behind Boston Pizza. There would be another facility that was built — I will use “restaurants” — behind Domino's. Those are — I visited with the individuals who live in those buildings, and they love those buildings — most folks. Some folks are saying that yes, there are challenges with them, but I did speak with many folks who said — the last gentleman I think about speaking with — it was the building behind Boston Pizza — and he said “incredible quality of life”. He feels lucky every day to get up and leave that building.

I believe that there was spending done by the Official Opposition — not on the big affordable money that we got — that could have made a real impact, I think, overall for the housing continuum, but there was some support for seniors. But also, the removal in 2011 of that cap shows that those tough decisions that have to be made when it comes to the public purse, financial leadership, and financial accountability — folks shied away from those decisions, and I understand.

They are not easy decisions, and you have to be able to stand up and justify those decisions, and you have to be able to break down your strategy, going forward, and why you are doing it. And you know, it is probably easier to not make the decisions and leave those decisions for somebody else at a more difficult time when the situation has gotten to be under more pressure and to be dire. We will — that is not our approach.

We will continue to do this, I assume. We will come out of the process today, and it will primarily be: Those folks didn't pause the program; they're not being supportive of seniors — whatever the spin will be. We understand that, coming into a Wednesday debate, but what we do know? And I think that everybody in the Assembly knows — good political fodder, but likely the right decision because of all of the information I have just shared with you about this and based on where the housing stock is and where the population trends are going — maybe not.

But, you know, I would say — maybe not from your perspective, but I would debate with anybody here over a coffee on how you, in government, would implement the policies of the past and continue to be able to provide that service without giving individuals on that list a false sense that they were going to receive a unit in the future, based on what we see. You know, it is tougher — like anything, when you talk to someone, is it better to sit down with them and to say: Look, this is the likely

reality — the reality of the situation is that we would like to work with you in a different way. Maybe it is rent geared to income; maybe it is the Canadian housing benefit or rent — whatever it may be — maybe we can retrofit your place. That is a tough conversation to have with somebody, but saying: Don't worry; I changed everything. You are on the list, but you might be on the list for 15 or 20 years, because folks who are more vulnerable are going to continue to get units ahead — I don't think that is fair.

I have heard them — the Member for Porter Creek Centre has, we have heard in the House before, when it comes to policies: Are you focused on ensuring that victims of violence clients — when we have victims of violence in our housing units, they're always going to be in a position where, based on criteria and vulnerability, they are going to have opportunities to be housed first. There are going to be people with health concerns. There are going to be individuals with accessibility issues. I'm not saying that you have acquired a massive amount of assets; we're just saying that those assets are at a point where it would be significant, and you would be on the list for a long, long time, and what would be the chance of getting a unit?

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to these issues today. I appreciate the work by the Yukon Housing Corporation. I hope that public servants who are listening today know that we hear you when tough decisions go to our boards at the Crown corporations. We know that they may not be always the most popular policy decisions, but we know that you do your due diligence on that policy work. Even in the House today saying that this is a flawed architecture of policy — we know that the work has been done. We know that these are tough decisions. We know that, as a public service mixed in combination with the political work, we have to do bigger policy pieces on behalf of Yukoners. We know that more and more, at some point, it's just not appropriate. Again, thank you to the Yukon Housing Corporation.

The transcript, for anybody who is sharing with any seniors — I am looking forward to our meetings with Signpost Seniors in the week of the Association of Yukon Communities. I will continue to have dialogue with the Member for Kluane concerning the interest of Haines Junction. We will be looking for meetings in Dawson City, as well, and continue to work with our other smaller communities as we try to figure out the most effective ways to ensure that the great Yukoners who built this great territory get to spend their golden years in the communities that they helped to build.

Ms. Clarke: Salamat. I am happy to rise today to speak to this motion.

Yukon Party MLAs have heard from seniors and elders across the territory who are affected by this policy change last December. They are looking for answers about the policy change.

Many are saying there was little to no consultation before the policy was implemented and wondering why that happened.

Last month, my colleague the Member for Watson Lake asked the Premier about two of her constituents who are featured in a *Yukon News* article. Those constituents were

removed from the wait-list because their assets exceeded the asset cap after the policy change. When she asked the Premier to consult with seniors organizations and housing advocates to determine whether the \$100,000 cap is an appropriate level, he wouldn't commit to doing so. So, the Yukon Party is happy to see this motion called for debate today.

The first clause requests the government to start by pausing this policy change, which so significantly impacts Yukon seniors and elders, until they can properly consult. That ties into exactly what the Member for Watson Lake was requesting. It appears that this was a rushed process and yet another incomplete policy change from this government that didn't hear from Yukon seniors about the impacts.

Many of the seniors we have heard from want to tell the government how the policy change has affected them. We feel, if the government had properly consulted and heard from these seniors, that the policy change would not have been changed suddenly, and it would not be such a problem for elders and seniors. That's why the second point of this motion is also very important. The government and Premier should properly review the findings of the consultation and look at solutions to adjust the program.

We have already seen examples of loopholes and unfairness in the policy. A local economist wrote an article in the *Yukon News* last week that highlighted many of the significant flaws in the policy.

According to the *Yukonomist*, the policy notably punished seniors from the private sector for saving for their retirement, in contrast to the pensions of the public sector. No senior should be punished for planning for their retirement, and the Premier's new asset cap policy further wedges private sector Yukoners versus public sector Yukoners with a government pension. He knows that — quote: "... two people with the same economic income — the government pension beneficiary and the private-sector RRSP holder — are treated differently."

The *Yukonomist* also noted that the asset cap can easily be worked around. Hard assets that are owned — like houses, cabins, RVs, or second vehicles — can be transferred to children or relatives to hide from the cap calculation, and he knows cash assets can be hidden in luxury assets that wouldn't be available in the asset report. This really doesn't appear to be a fair situation, and the Liberals could have avoided it if they had properly consulted to hear from seniors.

The third point of the motion also requests that Yukon seniors who were on the wait-list in December can remain on the wait-list. That is very important, as it seems that many seniors were removed from the list. They should not be penalized for the Liberal government not properly consulting.

The Yukon Party believes that the government should do the right thing — follow the actions outlined in this motion. We would also note that the rollout was flawed. We heard from at least one resident who was sent a letter that indicated that they would be removed from Yukon Housing because they were now ineligible under the policy change.

Well, the Premier has admitted that it was sent, but it was a mistake. The impact that letter had on the senior should not be underestimated. It gave them a great deal of concern in the

middle of winter. It is just another example of the flaws in this policy rollout.

The Yukon Party supports the call for a pause in the policy change so that a proper consultation with seniors and elders on the policy change and review of the consultation findings can take place. I will be voting in favour of this motion.

Mr. Istchenko: Thank you for the opportunity to rise in the House to speak to the Member for Whitehorse Centre's Motion No. 720.

I just want to add another point that I think was missed. I am going to be supporting this motion today too. I think it's important that we actually go out and do consultation before decisions are made. If I had to speak in this House about the Liberal government's lack of consultation on many things, I probably would use my time up and more.

But I just wanted to highlight, when it comes to the asset cap and income level, that we talk about — my fellow colleague and the member who brought the motion forward — a lot of the issues that are with it, but one of the other issues that became apparent to me early — probably right after the policy was changed — was that when it comes to the policy and someone has a medical condition and is over the asset allotment, they just get no consideration given to their medical condition. Some people plan the future if someone has been diagnosed with something. They need to look at being in a facility or being somewhere for the next phase of care — maybe home care can't do it anymore and maybe he worked hard all of his life. He and his wife are good Yukoners and provided and helped to build the territory we are in today, but because of his hard work, he probably developed a condition from his hard work and now may need a little bit of help. But because of this asset cap, he can't move in there, so he is stuck looking at other options where there aren't options.

One thing that is never lost on me is — the previous government built a beautiful facility. I have listened to members opposite talk about it. I have been there to see people and I am so glad that we have that. One of the first people I ever talked to when I decided to run for politics said to me: You have got to take care of your seniors. How right they were and that's why we built that facility.

The Liberal government put in their platform that they would also look at communities. You can talk about my St. Elias Seniors who are a pretty active group in my community. If you were to go and consult with them, they could probably give you some pretty good ideas on what we could do with home care and what we could do with the asset cap. When they developed that seniors facility out there, they worked with the Premier of the day to get themselves a special deal. I don't know if you would call it a "deal", but it was something special to them and it was different from the rest of the Yukon. You can't say that the people from Watson Lake or the good people from Dawson City, Mayo, or Haines Junction are all the same. Maybe we are a little different. Maybe a housing policy needs to be a little bit flexible for the rural communities in rural Yukon.

I just wanted to add that point today. I just think it's really important that we do consult. I look forward, hopefully, to this motion passing so we can go out and do that, because our seniors are so important to us.

Ms. White: It's a pleasure today, actually, to rise and talk about this issue, because the issue of housing for seniors, for me, is near and dear and it has been since pretty much the day I was elected. It's interesting because when you talk to a senior and they tell you that there is no such thing as the golden years — because once you are over 65, you are forgotten about — it really gives you pause. I have spent quite a bit of time with seniors. I was really lucky that I had a close relationship with my grandparents, but they live in Edmonton. When I was elected, I really took advantage of the fact that there is a seniors complex in my riding and I spend a fair amount of time there.

The thing that I want to bring us back to is that the 37 seniors — the Premier said the number again. He said that there were 37 seniors who were removed from the wait-list due to the asset cap.

Well, the thing is that each of them — they are either individuals or couples — were there for different reasons. Some may have been there for issues of affordability, but some may have been there due to issues of accessibility. So, there is a really unique thing about the seniors buildings that have been built in the Yukon. It is one of the things that has been really important and it is actually one of the reasons why, since 2011, I told seniors that they should apply for seniors housing — because there is not a single senior in the territory who has the expectation that they will apply for that wait-list and that they will instantly get a place. There is not a single senior I know who has told me that they applied with the expectation that they would have a unit within a short amount of time. So, that number 37 represents people who probably have very diverse experiences and very diverse reasons for applying for seniors housing.

I am going to talk about one senior in particular who shared their story with us after learning about the asset cap. This senior actually lives in my riding and lives in a mobile home, and they have been there for almost 30 years. So, she owns the home, but she has paid pad rent for all of that time. On top of that, due to her medical condition, she pays an average of \$800 per month in fuel to heat her home because it needs to be kept at a certain temperature for her health — for reasons that are beyond her ability to change.

So, with her only income coming from her pension plan and the old age supplement, these costs are impossible, even though she owns the home. As she has aged, the situation has only become more unaffordable. Her home now needs major repairs and they cost more money than she could possibly pay for. So, this isn't a matter of choice — like, this is an impossible choice. It is not a decision she can make.

On top of this, this senior is dealing with multiple serious health issues and — no matter what — they will require her to live on a ground floor in a unit that is truly accessible. So, remember when I said that people would apply for social housing for different reasons and it wasn't always because of

the affordability? Often it is because, when you are a senior, it is for the accessibility. So, for her, Normandy Manor isn't a viable option. She loves to cook and she owns animals, and she, like many seniors, wants to maintain her independence. So, she applied for a Yukon Housing unit hoping that the support she needed would be available when she needed it. So, she was planning well into the future.

So, she was sitting on that wait-list for five years, and now with this new asset cap, all of those years of waiting could have been for no reason at all because this senior's aging home brings her over the new \$100,000 asset cap. Under this new policy, the home that she cannot afford is preventing her from finding affordable housing because eventually, with this new policy in place, she is going to lose out on ever accessing the kind of housing that she needs — both affordable and accessible.

So, I appreciate that the minister read the Auditor General's recommendation because I can read it into the record as well. We believe that the government took a simplistic approach to solving this issue. We believe that this quick fix fails to consider the people this policy affects and the impact it will have on seniors housing as a whole. Again, I am going to be clear. I am calling it "seniors housing" because, although I appreciate that it is social housing for seniors, lots of people apply for that housing because it is truly accessible, because it does have elevators, because it has — well, now, thankfully, more units are being built with more accessible bathrooms than not, but they are accessible. They are being designed for people to age in place.

So, the minister had so many different things to say about our reasons for bringing this forward and accused my colleague of poor research and poor policy-making and a series of things, but I disagree. I do disagree because we are talking about 37 people right now — maybe more. Let's say 37 examples because it's 37 — the number removed from that wait-list.

We heard about the couple in Watson Lake, but they only count for one of those. What this decision has done is that it hasn't taken in the reality of folks across the territory and the different reasons that they applied. I would have thought that the really capable people at Yukon Housing would have been able to have a conversation with each of those 37 cases to find out why they had applied and what it was that they were needing, because there are reasons behind each of those cases. So, was it an issue of affordability? Was it an issue of accessibility? Was it an issue of both?

So, the minister went on and he used some jurisdictions. He talked about Alberta, PEI, or British Columbia, and it is really interesting because I also think that if we are going to talk about the reasons why we would use other jurisdictions — and I am curious as to why the minister used those — I want to point out that right now the vacancy rate in Alberta is 3.8 percent.

That's a pretty healthy vacancy rate. That means that a person in the Province of Alberta probably has options when it comes to trying to find a place to live. It means that they can say that it needs to be accessible. There needs to be an elevator. Maybe it needs to be on the ground floor and it has to allow pets. But with a 3.8-percent vacancy rate, you can probably

have some room and some ability to make decisions. Even in PEI, which is a very small jurisdiction, there is a vacancy rate right now of 1.5 percent. Even with a vacancy rate of 1.5 percent, you can probably make some choices. You can probably still make some decisions, have a list of criteria, and there is the distinct possibility that you could run into that.

The minister used British Columbia because he talked about how they had a higher asset cap rate, but that is a jurisdiction that we, as the Yukon NDP, often compare to. Well, we actually use lots of comparisons at different times, but it is an NDP government, so I'll go with it. Well, the vacancy rate in British Columbia is 1.3 percent, which means that there are still some choices. This is an interesting one. I think that everyone in this Chamber knows that Yukon does not have a very high vacancy rate right now. A healthy vacancy rate allows for mobility and it allows for choices.

In case anyone wanted to know right now, the Yukon's vacancy rate is actually 0.6 percent. What that means is that there is very little choice here. You could go on Kijiji right now or on the Facebook rental page — you could go look right now and you will see that there is not a lot of choice. If you remove stairs as one of your barriers — if you say that you can't live in a place with stairs — and let's say it's a basement suite and you have to go down six stairs to get there, that one is out. Maybe we'll talk about the Boreal Commons, because there are accessible units there, and some of them are up a flight of stairs — so that's out.

Yukon's vacancy rate is 0.6 percent. I can tell you that I went across the country and I was curious what the vacancy rates were because I think they show where there is the ability to have choices and where there is not. In Nunavut, the vacancy rate is 0.7 percent, so they also have very little choice. Saskatchewan has a pretty healthy vacancy rate right now of 4.2 percent; Manitoba has 2.9 percent, and then it varies across the country. But I would like to point out that in the Yukon, there is not that ability to make those choices. There is not that ability to say that these are what your requirements are and this is what you need.

So, I think about those 37 — that number 37 and what that represents. To me, it represents people who have lived here, who have invested in the territory, who have put their energy into making us the place that we are. I think of the fact that if they are seniors and they have been here for a long time, they have paid a lot of taxes to be here. They have paid for the roads and the infrastructure that we use collectively. None of them will disagree with that. They will all tell you that doing all those things is all part of being a good citizen.

But when I tell you that a building of seniors tells me that there is no such thing as the golden years because after you are 65, you are forgotten — well, that should give us all pause. We can talk all we want in this Chamber about respecting seniors and elders, but if we don't really do it, then we are just talking about it.

What we are asking for in this motion is a pause. We are asking to have these 37 cases that were removed because of the asset cap grandfathered in, and we are asking for consultation with the groups that are affected — with seniors organizations,

with the St. Elias Seniors, with the Signpost Seniors, with Seniors Action Yukon, with the Golden Age Society, and with any other seniors organization in the territory. I don't disagree that social housing is important, but I also recognize that seniors are a demographic where it is not necessarily the affordability issue that they are applying for; they are applying for accessibility reasons.

Although I appreciate that now the government is subsidizing 26 units at Normandy Manor, that doesn't work for everybody. If you are a senior who is still independent and you still love to cook, you should still be able to cook. If you have pets and your pets are your family, you should still be able to live with that part of your family and you should be able to make those choices.

Again, I think — I actually know because I had a lot of dealings with the good folk at the Yukon Housing Corporation long before this Chamber's time. But my friends Earl and Louella lived in Yukon Housing. She was the first to die and he was the second to die. I was the executor of that estate. Yukon Housing was so kind and they were so caring and so aware of what was going on, and they were so patient because I was tasked with dealing with someone's life and their apartment. I was the one who was tasked with cleaning it out. I know that the folks at Yukon Housing Corporation are more than capable of sitting down with those 37 and having a conversation about why they had applied and what they were looking for.

But if I think about a senior who requires a place that is warm due to their health conditions and that they pay, on average, \$800 a month to heat their mobile home — I don't think that is sustainable and I also don't think it is fair. So, today what we are asking is just for the ability to push pause, to grandfather those 37 in, and then to have a conversation with the groups that represent seniors — have consultations, invite seniors to have a conversation.

I have to tell you that if you were to invite a group of seniors together, they would have so many ideas about how things can be done. I think that we have to take a look at and we have to figure out: Are those 37 on that wait-list — is it a combination of affordability and accessibility, or sometimes is it just accessibility or just affordability? — and then take a look at that.

So, that is what we are doing today. We are asking the government to push pause, to grandfather in those 37 on that list, and to work with seniors organizations to figure out a way forward. I am on the Public Accounts. When the Auditor General came back with those housing recommendations, I was part of the group that went through that report and I was part of the group that developed the questions. It's interesting — I can go through the public hearing when the Housing Corporation appeared as a witness — and we can talk about that a bit if that is the choice or if that is the decision.

We can look at the answers of the officials who came in and said that they updated the policy in December 2022 to include seniors in that asset cap. They committed that they are working on the new policy and that it won't apply to seniors who are currently in housing. But what about those who were caught on the outside?

It was really interesting to hear the minister talk about how seniors shouldn't be allowed to go on vacation. They are going to leave those apartments and those units for months at a time. Well, I will remind the minister that you actually have to ask permission to leave your housing unit for a period of time. You actually have to get permission, and sometimes it is denied because I have definitely worked on those appeals before.

So, there are two different forms that you have to fill out. One is for an absence of less than 30 days, and one is for an absence of more than 30 days. So, it's important to note that you can't just leave your unit; you have to ask the Housing Corporation for permission.

But if we're saying that we think that seniors shouldn't be allowed to leave the territory and we don't think that they should be able to go on vacation or visit family, it feels a little bit weird for us to make those kinds of decisions.

There are lots of measures in place already, but what we're asking for right now is that a decision that was made in December 2022 be reconsidered and that it be reconsidered by the people whom it affects the most. Again, it's not 189 seniors right now who would be taken off the list because of that asset cap. It's not hundreds of seniors who have been removed. It's 37 cases. It's 37 individuals or couples who had the rug pulled out from underneath them. I can tell you that, for me, it feels similar to but different from when Yukon Housing Corporation put in their non-smoking policy. It started in January 2012, but when people had been living there and were prepared to age out in Yukon Housing and had no idea that this was coming — they had been smoking for 40 years and it was the one thing that gave them pleasure — that was really hard on people.

I will say this first. I am a non-smoker and I spent a lot of time advocating that people who smoked and were living in units should be grandfathered into those very specific units. If they chose to move, the new rules would apply, but we would let them age out in the place that they had called home, because when you're watching someone in their mid-80s who has been smoking for 40 years try to quit under the fear of eviction, it's really awful. This isn't quite the same, but it feels the same, which is that the rug was pulled out from underneath people.

Today is an opportunity to push pause. It's an opportunity to go back to these 37 to have conversations about what their needs are and if they can be met in a different way. Saying that the pioneer utility grant is going to answer someone's affordability issues — I don't think that's accurate — or the seniors income supplement — I don't think that's accurate, either. I mean, it could be pieces, but it's not necessarily going to be enough.

I am hopeful. I look forward to hearing from my colleagues from the Liberal caucus, but really what we are doing is asking for a pause, for grandfathering, and then for consultation and conversations to happen with the people who are most affected by this decision. Again, I think it's an issue of fairness. I think about the senior who lives in one of my mobile home parks. What do I hope for her?

I think this really is about people. It's not about pointing fingers and calling each other bad; it's just asking for that

careful pause and that ability to take a look at this and figure out how to move forward.

If, after consultation, that is the decision, then so be it, but right now the problem is that the folks most affected haven't been consulted.

I look forward to a vote. I look forward to more speeches.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion today. I appreciate that individuals will bring forward points they think are important and I also appreciate that they will note one or two particular things that are said, but the truth is that all complex problems need a web of solutions, frankly, that are purposely entangled to support and complement one another. There is no one answer to these kinds of problems and the kind that we are discussing today.

One of the members opposite just mentioned that the pioneer utility grant isn't an answer. I don't think anyone here is saying that the pioneer utility grant is an answer to housing issues of concern to seniors. It is one part of a puzzle. It is one piece of a puzzle. All of the things that I will be speaking about today — which are supports for seniors, our government's support for Yukon seniors by evidence of things that have been supported going forward and things that we will continue to enhance — are each just one piece of the puzzle.

The motion is about the impact of a particular decision of the Yukon Housing Corporation on Yukon seniors, and so the theme of my remarks will be, in fact, about a web of programs and important things for seniors that I would like to speak about.

I will start with the audit. This is an important piece of the work. It is driving important priorities of the work of not only Health and Social Services with respect to housing but the Housing Corporation. You heard that earlier from the minister. The audit focused on emergency shelters, transitional housing, supportive housing, and social housing available in the territory between April 2015 and November 2021 — some six and a half years — quite an extensive study.

Of course, seniors were impacted by the concepts and by the audit that was done to support seniors. The OAG report wasn't necessarily focused on seniors but, of course, they were encompassed in the work that was done. It offered an overview of the state of housing for vulnerable Yukoners and identified progress that was made since 2015 to provide housing for those most in need. It acknowledged the work of government and work that government had undertaken with community partners to better understand housing needs in the territory and to increase housing options for vulnerable Yukoners. This is important work. This is work that guides the responses to the recommendations of the Auditor General's report — must guide the work going forward. If we were to be ignoring the recommendations of the Auditor General in this stage of government, in this part of serving Yukoners, we would do so at our peril. There were nine recommendations to better address housing needs in the territory and to improve Yukoners' access to adequate and affordable housing. They were all accepted by the Yukon government, and work with our partners has been

underway to address the housing needs of Yukoners throughout the territory, but we know that there is more to do.

The asset cap policy was just one of the decisions that was taken in response to the Auditor General's report. You have heard from the minister responsible — from the Premier — about those decisions and how they were taken by the Housing Corporation. The work of the board and the individuals at the Housing Corporation should be commended.

These are not easy decisions, and they are decisions that are taken with great care. I definitely take offence, on their behalf, to some of the comments that have been made today — that this was a quick decision or the decision was made without proper understanding or proper consideration of the implications of those decisions. That is completely unfair. That is not the way their work is done, that is not the way the work of Yukon public servants, in fact, is done, and it is certainly not the way that work is led by our government.

Through the strong community partnerships that were recognized in the Auditor General's report, there was a comment about how our government is directly supporting vulnerable Yukoners to meet their housing needs. It included reference to such things as the 46-unit Cornerstone community housing development, which is in collaboration with Opportunities Yukon, which provides supportive housing in Whitehorse. It also referenced an agreement with the Da Daghay Development Corporation to provide 50 units of housing at the River Bend development to Yukoners on the Yukon Housing Corporation's social housing wait-list. It also referenced a new 10-unit Housing First residence under development in Watson Lake and the territory's second Housing First residence — the community partnerships. Another one would be the new 47-unit community housing development at 4th Avenue and Jeckell in Whitehorse — one of the ones that the Premier made reference to about mixed use. Normandy Manor — we have heard in the details about how it is a supported housing development for seniors in Whitehorse and, of course, perhaps consideration must be added to the Council of Yukon First Nations' new Indigenous women's shelter in Whitehorse.

The OAG report provided clear guidance on how to improve coordination and service delivery so that we can better meet the needs of all Yukoners — it, again, to be clear, focused on vulnerable Yukoners, some of whom are seniors. A memorandum of understanding was, shortly after the release of the OAG report, developed between Health and Social Services and the Yukon Housing Corporation to more clearly define the roles and the responsibilities, including increased collaboration and work to improve the coordination of work. The memorandum of understanding was also focused on, and still is, ensuring that there is an opportunity to share existing information and system data to better meet the housing needs of Yukoners.

We cannot provide housing to Yukoners — vulnerable, otherwise, seniors, otherwise — without understanding their needs. I think that's much of what we heard with respect to the last speaker on this motion. It has to be related to Yukoners' true experiences. That work, and the data sharing and the data

collection, will complement the ongoing work to implement the *Putting People First* recommendations and the Yukon Housing Corporation's new community housing framework to increase people-centred service delivery. This is something that I have been accused in this Legislative Assembly of just saying.

The people-centred approach that was my responsibility — the student-centred approach and children-centred approach — was my responsibility when I was responsible for working with the Department of Education. It has always been my responsibility and honour with respect to the work done by the Department of Justice and now with respect to the work done by the Department of Health and Social Services. It is a guiding principle. It is the guiding principle. We are committed to working in collaboration with our partners to improve access to safe, adequate, and affordable — in this case — housing; in other cases, it's education; in other cases, it's health care.

I guess I will be accused on occasion of that being the politically correct thing to say. I didn't come here to have the responsibilities that I currently do to have anything to do with politics or to say the right thing. I came because the work is important. I came because serving Yukoners is important. The work that I do and the work that I have the honour to do with the departments that I've been working with is my honour and privilege to do, but I do not waver from the fact that Yukoners must be at the centre of the benefit of that work. We are spending Yukoners' money every day, and it must be spent to their benefit. That's the people-centred work that I'm so proud to lead with respect to *Putting People First* and with the concept of understanding that all services are entwined.

We have also been accused of the concept of a one-government approach being some sort of slick thing to say. It is not when you're sitting in these chairs. If you're not doing that work with the other seven, eight, or 10 people or others who are sitting in other chairs on this side of the House, then you are not doing a good job. You cannot possibly do this in isolation; you absolutely must do it as a one-government approach, because absolutely everything is intertwined, and it must be intertwined so that Yukoners get the best possible service that is available to them when we spend their money.

We introduced the *Aging in Place Action Plan* in 2020, focused on improving the lives of elders and seniors in the territory. The vision of our aging-in-place plan is to ensure that Yukoners can access the supports that they need to live safe, independent, and comfortable lives in their own home or community for as long as possible, regardless of their age, income, or ability. This is still the driving goal of the *Aging in Place Action Plan*. It includes work with individuals and with their loved ones to offer person-centred care and to find appropriate solutions to remain in their own homes and communities.

There is considerable alignment between the recommendations of aging in place and *Putting People First*. I don't think that is magic. I don't think that it was a mistake. I think that these are the priorities of Yukoners, and then they are bound to show themselves in — no matter the recommendations, no matter the reports being brought forward,

and no matter the studies, because they are the true priorities of Yukoners.

Together, those two reports — *Aging in Place Action Plan* and *Putting People First* — represent a path forward to promote, protect, and enhance the well-being of Yukoners. We continue to work collaboratively with partners, including First Nation governments, municipal and federal governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and community groups to implement aging in place and to achieve our common goals.

I will speak again in a few minutes about the seniors — impact of that and our opportunities to pay attention, to refocus after COVID-19 — although I am very careful not to say that COVID is over, but at this stage of COVID — an opportunity for us to get together again and to focus on working with seniors groups on the implementation of the *Aging in Place Action Plan*.

It was, of course, based on extensive public engagement with more than 1,200 people from across the territory. The first aging-in-place annual report was publicly released back in March 2022, and a new one is under development. I look forward to seeing that as well.

I am going to turn for a moment to the motion specifically. I think that it's truly unfortunate, but the motion accuses government of making a policy change without considering the consequences; yet the motion does exactly the same thing or asks us to do exactly the same thing here today, particularly part (3), because it suggests that all seniors who were already on the Yukon Housing Corporation wait-list when the exemption ended should remain on that list and continue to be exempt. I think the reference by the Leader of the Third Party recently was "grandfather in". This would mean, of course, that this part of the motion does not consider the impact of that suggestion on everyone else who would be on the list.

It makes the assumption, I think, that if you had the good fortune or good management or foresight to get yourselves on the list at Yukon Housing Corporation, no matter the assets that they may hold, you would get to stay on that list, and you would continue to be exempt no matter what future policy decisions would be made. I hope that's not likely what was intended by the motion, but yet that is what it says. It says that it would also mean that places on the list would be held by those who may not be vulnerable or who do not qualify otherwise for Yukon Housing. It makes the kind of blanket statement and blanket decision that the motion, in itself, is asking us to undo. I am puzzled and concerned by that.

As I said earlier, there have been some assumptions by some speakers today that the work was done quickly or without understanding the impacts of it, and I find that to be insulting to those who worked hard to serve Yukoners in a professional way to develop policy — the assumption that they didn't consider the implications, I think, is false. They did. I think that they do understand, and they are mindful that their responsibilities when they're spending Yukon taxpayers' money to serve Yukoners — that they must do so.

Policies require boundaries and limitations. Without such boundaries, the member opposite — the mover of this motion

— would say those were too rigid, but without such limitations and boundaries, policies are not understandable. Good policy has to be knowable, it has to be understandable, and it has to be clear. People need to be able to read a policy or a program eligibility or rules and understand if it is applicable to them or how it might apply to them.

I think maybe this is what the minister was talking about, but misunderstanding or not understanding the call for flexibility in the middle ground, how we would manage to ascertain who could get certain services — uncertainty does not make good policy.

These are tough decisions, and the wording of the motion truly does not permit us — for all the reasons I have said — to support it.

I think you have heard from the Premier a commitment to look into individual cases. I think that is exactly how this should be handled. I hear some of the members of the Third Party speaking about how that would be a good idea, that this would be supported by them, but that's not what this motion says. Let's be clear: If that's what they were asking for, that's not what the motion says.

I had the opportunity this morning to meet with the ministers responsible for seniors in Canada. I can assure everyone in this Legislature — and, more importantly, Yukoners — that no one across the country is ignoring the impact of inflation or of COVID-19 or of fixed incomes on Canadian seniors. It is simply top priority for the group that met today and for the discussions that will continue among that group.

I can also indicate that some of the conversation we had was about what inflationary measures have been put in place for seniors. In the Yukon, there are things like home care, hearing services, pharmacare, and long-term care availability. It is all public sector supported. There are dental care programs, rental subsidy programs, and new senior housing options. I guess I have come full circle back to the fact that the complex problems all need a series of solutions, and these are the kinds of solutions that are available.

I will also be meeting with seniors groups next week here in Whitehorse. I look forward to our renewed enthusiasm together for the aging-in-place strategy and the work that will be done together to move forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Like the members opposite, I know the individuals who have been touched by Yukon Housing's recently implemented community housing asset cap. I have a great deal of respect for them and fond memories of a public event I participated in with them many years ago in Watson Lake. I don't feel comfortable naming them today in the House, but it's important to acknowledge that I understand that they are affected by the policy decisions we have made. I empathize with them.

This is a small territory, and the decisions we take have a real and often very personal effect on folks. We face that every day. They are often not easy decisions. They are often necessary decisions. Being in government, as the Premier has

spoken about this afternoon, requires making tough, multi-faceted decisions — well-researched and justifiable decisions that balance the needs of an individual or a few individuals against a greater good, against the needs of a greater mass of people.

Today, as much as I empathize with some individuals affected by Yukon Housing's asset cap, I'm comfortable keeping it in place. Here I take a detour again from the New Democratic Party. At its core, this motion is about making housing more accessible for Yukoners but not just any Yukoners — specifically seniors. Our government supports helping seniors. The Minister of Health and Social Services just outlined a number of the initiatives that we have to do just that.

We want our seniors — those who have served our communities and our society for a good many years — to have a good quality of life, and that's something we can broadly agree on with our colleagues on the far side of the House. It's something that we have worked on tremendously hard for more than six years to improve and achieve. As the Health and Social Services minister said this afternoon, there needs to be a web of solutions presented to Yukoners. We have been working on bolstering support programs for Yukoners for years.

Mr. Speaker, we believe in making housing more accessible for Yukoners — more available. However, I do have real concerns about the Third Party's approach to this issue, specifically carving out housing opportunities for all seniors. We believe in creating housing opportunities for seniors who are in need — real, demonstrable need.

This motion, as it is written, seems to address not just Yukon seniors but wealthier seniors — indeed, seniors with an existing home, trailers, other assets — as we have heard this afternoon. That's right; this motion considers awarding seniors with significant tangible assets scarce, affordable housing — Yukoners with more than \$100,000 in assets. This motion would possibly put those folks ahead of other Yukoners who are barely scraping by — possibly put them ahead of single mothers, possibly put them ahead of Yukoners with significant medical conditions and expenses. Heck, they might wind up depriving someone on minimum wage trying to move away from a violent partner. This, at its root, is what this motion would put in play — correct?

We are considering accommodating people with some accumulated wealth — \$100,000 in assets or more — people who don't want to part with the asset to put a roof over their head. Instead, they want to keep the wealth and keep their spot in line for a scarce Yukon Housing unit, possibly putting them ahead of other Yukoners who are barely scraping by — right? That is what we are talking about this afternoon — correct?

All right — so, 31 days into the session and the New Democratic Party is proposing a profound change to Yukon Housing's rules as they pertain to seniors through this motion — a mere four months after the new rule came into effect — a rule asked for by the Auditor General of Canada following one of their audits. Have I got this right? I have a question for the members opposite: What research have they done on this subject beyond talking to the senior they referenced in their

opening remarks? Have they spoken to the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition or to Kaushee's?

As my good colleague the Premier laid out well in his remarks, providing housing for Yukoners is involved, nuanced — you might say hard, which is to say that there's a lot to consider when you operate in the housing field.

I asked my question about who the opposition has spoken to this afternoon because I rarely see any significant effort or nuanced consideration from my allies across the way. I give them credit for boiling issues down to the individual; I give them credit for keeping it simple, but time and again, we see this iteration of the New Democratic caucus proposing with no consultation or consideration of cost or of an idea's wider effect in the community. They are too often talking about off-the-cuff solutions that, when implemented, cause unintended harm to folks — folks we are also desperately trying to help.

Okay. That's a lot of words. Let me summarize. The motion proposed by the Member for Whitehorse Centre is seriously flawed. I will not be supporting it this afternoon. Yukoners young and old need access to more housing. We are a fast-growing community, one of the fastest growing communities in the country, and there is good reason for this. We have incredible job opportunities and wages, a strong economy, and we live within easy reach of a majestic environment with all the riches such a treasure brings.

Our society has a nation-leading suite of social programs. This is a great place to live and people across the country are recognizing this. As noted, we are one of the fastest growing communities in the country, and because of that, everyone needs housing — young, old, low income, medium income, high income. Everyone needs housing and everyone wants it to be affordable. The target moves depending on who you are speaking to — it's a spectrum.

Affordable, suitable housing is a challenge for many in our communities. It is, however, most pressing for vulnerable and low-income folks because they're vulnerable and because they have far fewer resources to put to housing. They don't have \$100,000 worth of assets. Some of them have nothing. Finding affordable, suitable housing is being addressed through a coordinated action across government.

I am working on it. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources is working on it. The Minister of Highways and Public Works is working on it. The Minister of Health and Social Services is working on it. The Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation is working on it. We want to help seniors — absolutely — and we want to help low-income families and individuals and people with medical needs, people with mobility needs, victims of violence, and, of course, those who are homeless and most vulnerable.

So, let me get this right. The Yukon New Democratic Party believes that if you have more than \$100,000 in assets, something you own or things you own, the government should provide your housing. The state should step in first. The state should support you before you have done everything you can as an individual. Is that what I'm hearing this afternoon?

The work of the Yukon Housing Corporation is ever-evolving and adapting to fit the needs of the Yukon's maturing

and progressive social fabric. Since 2019, Yukon Housing Corporation has been transforming its approach to a community housing model, one that treats all subsidized housing as a shared community asset, moving away from an antique social housing model. A community housing asset cap policy is essential to this approach. As I noted earlier, it has been in place for four months. The goal is to improve access to the rent-geared-to-income program for those in greatest need — those in greatest need, Mr. Speaker. We know that if everyone is a priority, there is no priority.

In December, the Yukon Housing Corporation board directed that all wait-listed applicants must have assets under \$100,000 to be eligible for scarce community housing. This was something that the Auditor General's office recommended. The goal of this is to restore fairness to a scarce resource: community housing stock. It was to make sure that those who need it can get it. It was to increase access. The goal is improving access for the most vulnerable in society. It aligns Yukon with other Canadian jurisdictions through a means-tested program.

My colleague has noted that there are concerns about how the asset cap affects seniors. We have heard those this afternoon. The Premier also noted that the Yukon Housing Corporation was subsidizing seniors who didn't need it. Almost half — 42 percent — of the corporation's units were assigned to seniors, many of whom may have been able to afford housing elsewhere. They were taking up valuable spots that could have been used by people who were more in need. Not long ago, there was no cap and a whopping 73 percent of Yukon seniors qualified for subsidized housing — 73 percent.

As the Premier noted, Yukon seniors have among the highest median incomes in the country. So, following the Auditor General of Canada's recommendations, we put a cap in place. This was recommended by the Auditor General of Canada. It follows a procedure set in place across the country and used by most jurisdictions, because we know that if everyone is a priority, there is no priority.

Now the New Democrat Party wants it removed or suspended, which could easily hurt those who need it most. That is what we are talking about this afternoon. Have I got that right? The auditor wanted to ensure that those who need it have access to housing. Who is in need? Who will benefit from an asset cap?

First, I stress that such a measure is not new. They are common in this country and at less than \$100,000 — ours is more lavish than most places. As the Premier noted, Alberta seniors with more than \$25,000 in assets are not eligible for government social housing. Prince Edward Island — a couple with assets above \$50,000 get no points toward their housing application. We are aligned with BC, which also has a generous \$100,000 threshold. The cap ensures that rent-geared-to-income units go to the folks who need it — who are most in need. Age is not a factor in the equation. If it was predicated on age, the policy would be discriminatory under our human rights legislation.

As the Premier noted, in 2011, the corporation eliminated the asset cap, and the number of eligible seniors on the wait-list

skyrocketed. Again, we know that when everyone is a priority, there is no priority. Four months ago, that policy changed and 37 seniors have been affected. Their average asset value is almost \$270,000. A dozen had more than \$300,000 in assets and some had more than \$500,000 in assets.

So, civil servants were placed in the troubling position of denying folks with extreme vulnerabilities a place to live, knowing that folks with hundreds of thousands of dollars in assets were housed instead. Today we are talking about suspending that cap and starting that all over again. That is what we are talking about today — right? This is not to say that we are not aware of the difficulties that some seniors are facing.

As I said earlier and as others have said this afternoon, we are pushing to develop lots and new programs and partnerships to provide alternatives for a wide spectrum of economic groups.

As the Premier has noted, our government supports all seniors through a coordinated aging-in-place plan. Subsidized community housing is simply one piece of this complex puzzle — a point that has been underscored by the Minister of Health and Social Services. Seniors who no longer qualify for the rent-geared-to-income program can avail themselves of other supports. The Yukon seniors income supplement, the pioneer utility grant, and the home heating subsidy are examples. Seniors with mobility challenges can apply for accessibility grants to fix their homes.

Today, we are talking about suspending the asset cap. The Leader of the Third Party said that it's just about 37 people. Forget for a moment that these seniors have resources that other less fortunate Yukoners do not. There is, as the member noted, a tight housing market here in the Yukon — a situation we are working very hard to fix from a variety of angles.

We can either house the seniors who have financial resources or house those who have fewer financial resources, or we can put the seniors on a list that they will never benefit from because, as the Premier noted, the wait-list will stretch into years and years and years. We can have the impression of doing something, but, in essence, we are not really doing anything.

Affordable housing is vital to all Yukoners, including seniors, but it is also important to other broad swaths of Yukon society. My priority is to ensure that those who need housing have access to it. Suspending the asset cap will make that more difficult. Hurting folks, I believe, should be helped, so I cannot support this motion this afternoon.

Last, I was surprised by the remarks from the MLA for Porter Creek Centre this afternoon which often seemed to veer into backhanded criticism of the civil service. I want to challenge the member opposite on the swipes at the civil service. Like my colleague the Health and Social Services minister, I take offence to the assertions that decisions made by the civil service were quick or ill-considered or without understanding the implications. I will repeat: That is not how they work.

As I have said earlier, some of these civil servants have been housing people — or trying to house people, knowing that there are people with huge resources —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

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

Mr. Cathers: I believe that the minister is in contravention of Standing Order 19(g). He is ascribing motives to the Member for Porter Creek Centre which she clearly did not have. I would suggest that he may also be in contravention of Standing Order 19(i) in using abusing or insulting language in a context likely to cause disorder. My colleague was clearly criticizing the political leadership, not the civil servants.

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

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 19(g) says “imputes false or unavowed motives”. I think what the Member for Whitehorse West was saying was just talking about the words that he heard being spoken in this Assembly. Second of all, with respect to Standing Order 19(i) — “uses abusive or insulting language” — I think all I heard was that there were concerns about the words that were being spoken and that they would reflect on the public servants.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: I am not certain there is a point of order, but I will review Hansard and get back to this House, if required.

Please continue.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like my colleague, I take offence to the assertions that the decisions made by the civil service were quick or ill-considered or without understanding the implications. I will repeat that this is not how they work. Our civil servants are hard-working, professional, and well-informed, and they —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

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

Mr. Cathers: It seems to me that the Member for Whitehorse West is just getting up and repeating remarks that you indicated you were going to review to see if they were in contravention of either Standing Order 19(g) or Standing Order 19(i), and I would suggest that he is not respecting the direction that you just provided.

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

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I heard you say that you would go and consider this and get back to us. I heard my colleague say that he's concerned with the remarks with respect to how they reflect on public servants. Mr. Speaker, if you — I will not suggest what you should judge, but we are listening to what you say and are happy to take your direction.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: There is no point of order at this time, but tempers are getting kind of high here. Please civilize your comments.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: That is not how they work, Mr. Speaker. Our civil servants are hard-working, professional, and well-informed. They are also dedicated to helping Yukoners in the best way they can. They do an incredible job serving Yukoners, and I thank them for the job that they do every day.

That concludes my remarks.

Hon. Mr. Silver: It is a privilege to rise today and to add comments to the debate, basically, on care for our elders, for our most vulnerable housing. I think I bring a lot of perspective to the table, being in the Legislative Assembly since 2011. I can put on a few different hats for today's debate, whether it be in my opposition days, my days as Premier, as a minister responsible for different roles, or as an MLA for a rural jurisdiction.

I think I want to start by talking about — you know, I believe wholeheartedly that every single member of this Legislative Assembly cares very deeply about our care for our seniors. We do disagree from time to time on the methodologies or policies, but at the same time, I think everybody today has proven to be very sincere in their approach and also in a great dialogue, the parameters of which have quite a truncated time frame. What I mean by that is — you know, it is very interesting to watch how our team works from the minute we get the notification from the members opposite about what motion we are going to debate. You can imagine, as we all have our individual roles and we are busy on our platform and our commitments and our budgets — those types of things — and then it is, you know, after Question Period on a Tuesday — we know that our team upstairs has started researching what we were just told is going to be up for debate that the opposition is ready for. It's very fascinating to watch.

There isn't necessarily a lot of time for us, as ministers, in that time frame to caucus as individuals, so what you hear is a lot of work that is brought to us by departments on the topic. I am very proud of the work that we, as a territorial government, have done to create a more whole-of-government approach when it comes to everything from budgeting to policy-making, et cetera. So, it's very, very interesting to watch as the ministers, in their different approaches, come together and talk to the public in this open and transparent manner about the concerns that they and their departments will bring to bear on particular topics.

This is a hard motion as well, I believe, for an opposition party to bring forward. The reason I say that is, based on the type of motion that is brought forward, opposition doesn't have the breadth of national or local opportunities to do what ministers do on a particular topic. We have the ability to work with departments and do jurisdictional scans. We have the ability to work with our colleagues across the nation in federal-provincial-territorial meetings. I have had the honour of having national debates on health care with Premiers from across the nation and the Prime Minister and their team in Ottawa. We have the ability to have a justice analysis. We have the ability to hear the expert opinion of each department but also the Management Board Secretariat.

We can take a look at best practices. We can take a look at forecasts for finance. That's where I am today, as the Minister of Finance. We also have, in that, an understanding of long-term planning, estimates, capital, O&M, extenuating pressures, and we understand, as everyone in the Legislative Assembly understands, that we can't, as a government, do everything. We do have to make decisions. As the Premier said today, we do have to make very tough decisions that are not necessarily politically expedient or flavourful sometimes.

So, I do also agree with the Leader of the Third Party that this is an issue of fairness, and in Yukon, we do better than most jurisdictions in our ability to be more than fair. I will give you an example. I was just talking with the Minister of Health and Social Services and just getting some round numbers, so don't quote me on specific numbers down to the dollar value, but very close. Let's look at continuing care costs, for example.

The cost to the government, through the Department of Health and Social Services, for one day of continuing care is over \$500 a day, but yet the cost — we subsidize that, and the cost that is passed on to Yukoners is \$40 a day. So, cost to government — which is taxpayers' money, right? — is a lot more than what we then turn around and subsidize. We could go through a whole list of the things that we do have the ability to subsidize by living in this great territory. We could talk about the federal transfer; we could talk about our ability to get flexibility through infrastructure dollars; we could talk about all of those things, but it is just a matter of fact.

We have the ability, here in the Yukon, more so than in a lot of other jurisdictions, to provide programs, policies, and direction that is nationally leading, all the while knowing that financing is not a faucet of infinite fiscal means. There need to be levels, there need to be rates, and there need to be policies and sometimes there does need to be thresholds. At every threshold, there is going to be somebody just past that threshold, and that is a tough conversation.

What I learned through the pandemic days was that no method is going to be perfect, but if you use a system that makes sense — a scientific method, a method that does a lot of coordinated, statistical analysis — that is probably the best way that you could come up with a lot of these policies. Add on top of that, when you have an Office of the Auditor General's report that is asking for a specific thing — trust me, as the Minister of Finance, I have seen a few of those asks that I wasn't necessarily happy with. Retirement of assets comes to mind right now, but at the same time, we can't not look at these reports and these actions.

I think that inside that is this conversation that we are having today. It is a very important question, but again, it is about where we have to draw specific lines and how we do that. It is not like we just arbitrarily pick something.

I mention specifically the continuing care costs because this was a conversation that I was in opposition land on when the former Minister of Health and Social Services at that time — who is no longer in the Legislative Assembly — brought up a concern that was a hard thing to say — and I agreed with that person at that time — which is that you set policies in the Yukon, compared to other jurisdictions, without doing

jurisdictional scans, and what happens if your policies are so attractive that — and it's the conversation about maybe a policy that would be created so that other people would retire after working their whole life somewhere else and come up to the Yukon, and that was a concern to the Yukon Party at the time.

I think that's a legitimate concern. That's a hard thing to say politically, because where do you draw that line? Where do you say that your grandparents aren't allowed up but another's grandparents are? That was tough, but at the same time, I agree with it. That's where we, as legislators, need to put our political hats aside and talk about priorities that make sense for making room for the greatest number of Yukoners in the most vulnerable of situations.

I don't think, in general, that we disagree with that. I'll push back a little bit on something that the Member for Kluane said about the extreme importance that consultation has to have when it comes to our seniors. Mr. Speaker, the 300-bed facility that the Yukon Party was talking about at that time — nobody even in government land heard about it until it was talked about in the Legislative Assembly: We are going to build this facility in Whitehorse.

There wasn't any consultation with our elders, especially not with our elders in rural Yukon. I said at that time — and I stand by it — that if we built a facility for all of our seniors — because that 300 number was based upon an analysis not just for Whitehorse and surrounding area; it was for the whole of Yukon. If we built a facility where our elders — can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, the elders of your community, the elders in my community, the elders in everybody's communities being asked or being told that the option is that you go to Whitehorse?

Now, going into Whitehorse as an elder — well, that just wouldn't work for Yukon. They are such an extremely important piece of the communities.

And I apologize in advance, Mr. Speaker, for bringing up your name inside of debate. I didn't mean to do that; I meant all the members in the Legislative Assembly.

So, again, 300 was the number for all of Yukon; 150 made sense for Whitehorse, and we were always in favour of the beautiful facility that we have here with 150 because that made sense for the demographic here. I said it before that we would be apologizing in a decade later or two decades later for a government policy — an institution that brought all of our elders out of our communities.

When we first started in government, it was about aging in place. That is not one policy; it's a plethora of different efforts. Not all communities are the same. We have to make sure that we identify the needs in every community when we move in that direction.

I just wanted to mention that, only because it was mentioned by the member opposite. I do agree that consultation is extremely important, and I believe, as well, that the Yukon Liberal Party has done a lot of consultation — a lot more consultation than was done in the past.

I am going to move specifically out of my opposition days and out of my leadership days and into my responsibility for Finance and back to my original statements about the truncated time frames that we have to debate these extremely important

topics. I am very proud to hear the Premier say that this conversation isn't over just because of this motion and the commitments he made to our seniors in today's debate and in his time as an MLA and as Premier. Specifically to how I prepared for today's debate — I go to my department. My job — every single request for money comes through the Management Board Secretariat. So, at Finance, we take a look at items. We ask very similar questions. Whether it is a agreement bilateral in nature or a successor legislation conversation or five-year capital plan conversation, we have very strict parameters that we have to work inside of in order to take a look at what is fair, because this is about being fair.

Again, the NDP does not have the luxury that I have of that analysis. These are good people. This is a fantastic team. To hear some of the concerns in other departments — because the ministers do the same thing — that's where I then utilize the resources that I have by being able to talk to some extremely smart Yukoners, dedicated public servants, and try to approach this in such a small amount of time as we would a Management Board submission. That's difficult to do because sometimes these analyses take a long time. Spit-balling with departments and talking with ministers in the small amount of time that we do have — it does bring up some questions. I will kind of go over that a bit.

We are talking about the \$100,000 threshold.

We did hear from the NDP that \$1 million is too much, but I'm piecing together that \$100,000 is not enough, so where is that line? Where exactly would that line be drawn? Because it all comes down to, at some point: Should we be subsidizing housing and assisting with payments on shelter for folks who can afford their own means? It's a complicated conversation. Where do you set that threshold?

Well, we decided, when doing the \$100,000, to take a look at British Columbia, because that is one of the more lucrative and higher thresholds of this conversation. I know that the Leader of the NDP talked about how they have more options because they have more accommodations. Okay, so what would that number be? Would it be one percent? Would it be two percent? Again, where are we drawing that line? Because there will be winners and losers drawn on those lines. It's hard in opposition to draw those lines. I am saying that because that is an analysis piece, and that's an extremely important part of implementing the recommendations of the Auditor General of Canada.

The Yukon Housing Corporation faces extreme pressures. I look back at news articles from back in the last five years of the Yukon Party's administration. There was a lot of maybe even denying that there was a housing crisis then, but there was, and what were the solutions at that point? There have been housing issues right across Canada, obviously, when looking at what other jurisdictions are looking at to accommodate pressures on its housing stock.

The Yukon Housing Corporation, I think, does a fantastic job of doing as much as they possibly can in the triage of a whole bunch of different pressures all at once. A booming economy would be an added pressure, let alone being able to facilitate different types of housing pressures in different

communities, so taking a look at how the system used to be used where you could be grandfathered in.

I was grandfathered in as a teacher in my community with rent that I could absolutely afford, and I shouldn't have been in that situation, in my opinion, in my specific situation when I was given housing in my first year in Dawson. I thought that was — well, at one point, I basically said: No, I need to grow roots in this community, and I can afford my own place. So, I got my own place. I was very thankful for that rental ability at that time, but there were issues in that community with the needs we saw back then. There were people who were running our tourism sector and living in tents along the river and on the other side of the river in Dawson. That came to an end, tragically, but at the same time, it wore hard on me that I was sitting there in Yukon housing as a government employee making a salary where I could afford to be using my own means for my own house. Anyway, I digress.

The Yukon Housing Corporation faces extreme pressure on its housing stock. With all of its units fully in use, under maintenance, or in transition, the corporation can't readily increase its number of available units in the short term. Should the asset cap be removed to increase the waiting list and further increase the pressure on that limited housing? How does that help with the groups who are in there now? How would that change if we are adding people to that cap, where I am sure a lot of the analysis is done with the need, first and foremost, and we are not even able to hit that cap as we speak now because of the pressures?

So, these are some of the questions we are looking at from a financial perspective as well — the changes that were implemented on the recommendations of the Auditor General of Canada to ensure that all applicants to the rent-geared-to-income program are treated equally. I mean, that is what this is all about. This is what the report is about. Should the Yukon Housing Corporation ignore this recommendation or not consider a senior's ability to pay for housing as a part of the application program? Like, is that what we are asking, that it shouldn't even be considered? Or again, where would that line be drawn if we are seeing other jurisdictions where that line is drawn at the \$30,000 level or the \$50,000 level? We went to the BC level because that was one of the — if not the highest, it was one of the highest rates.

Some of the other questions asked as well are — again, similar themes, but how should Yukon Housing Corporation ensure that it is allocating a limited number of housing units to those with the greatest need without removing applicants — who have assets to pay for shelter — from consideration for a subsidized housing unit? The basis of all of these questions is, again, if Finance was a never-ending gobstopper of money, well, then we wouldn't have to make these thresholds; we wouldn't have to make these considerations, but we do — we absolutely do because it is the pertinent thing to do, and it is the fiscally responsible thing to do.

I do really appreciate the care and conversation that we are having, as colleagues in the House, about our most important demographic, our seniors, as I fast approach that threshold myself, but at the same time, Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the

analysis and approach that we are taking here when it comes to an issue of fairness and with responding to the Office of the Auditor General's reports.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, incredibly important motion. Well, the whole topic of supporting our seniors or elders with housing — incredibly important — and how we do that, very important.

My riding of Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes is one of the oldest — from a demographic perspective — ridings in the territory. Often, when you go to the Bureau of Statistics and you look up the demographics of Tagish, it will list off that it is one of the — well, I think it is listed as the oldest, but I happen to know that Mount Lorne and Marsh Lake also have very similar demographics — in fact, possibly older. It is always tricky to know, because Mount Lorne and Marsh Lake aren't always pulled out from the statistics all the time, and so you have to sort of watch for when they get separated out or not.

What happens is that leads to a lot of conversation about how we support seniors and elders with my constituents. Many of them have moved to beautiful Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes to try to age in place. Just recently, I was at the Mount Lorne local advisory council meeting, and they were writing a letter to the Minister of Health and Social Services, and then — I think that was at the last local advisory council meeting, and then the minister wrote back, and I saw it just yesterday, I think. There was a lot of discussion in that response about how we would try to support seniors and those who are aging to be able to stay in their communities as long as possible. It was a conversation about home care, about how people come in and out of Whitehorse, about services.

The folks who I know, and probably this is true across all of our communities — is that there is a real sense of community. In my communities, the seniors volunteer at the pancake breakfasts or at the sign-raising ceremonies, and neighbours look out for neighbours, and there is a way in which people want to be there.

One of the things that the Member for Klondike was talking about, which I will touch on at some point today, is the whole notion of consultation around aging in place. While we were preparing to debate the motion today, I went back and looked up not only the aging-in-place strategy, with its whole suite of approaches, but also the "what we heard" document. I wanted to see how many Yukoners we had talked to. I certainly attended several of the engagement sessions. They were packed. Those were pre-COVID days; they were really packed.

We would have a whole table set up here for the francophone community so that they could engage in French. It was really dynamic. I was impressed by those seniors and their thoughts around how they could provide advice to government about this important issue of aging in place. In the "what we heard", 1,200 Yukoners were part of that engagement. It was a big thing.

Let's just talk for a second about where the Yukon is heading. I then downloaded the demographics of the Yukon for last year to try to see how it is changing over time. You can see that the baby boom bulge is moving. Over the next 20 years, I

think that the seniors population in the Yukon is going to more than double, so that is a lot. There are a lot of folks whom we are going to need to think about. I only want to sing the praises of the folks whom we are talking about today. I think of these people as helping to shape the path of this territory, and I think that they have done a tremendous job in navigating where the Yukon should go and I appreciate all of their hard work and dedication, as Yukoners, in shaping the territory.

I happen to be at the very tail end of the baby boom, so I am in that bulge. If you look at the demographics for the Yukon, it's the second largest group that is coming through. The 30 to 40 group is still larger right now here in the Yukon, but the second largest group is in the sort of 60 and up group, heading toward that time when they will look to downsize, shape their lives, making their last decisions about where they wish to be and how they wish to age.

I am also going to use, as one of my stories, my mother-in-law, who is the lovely Freda. She's in her mid-80s now. She used to be a proud mobile-homeowner maybe 15 or 20 years ago. At some point, we suggested that she move into a place that we have downtown. She lives downtown, and when we have sat down and talked with her about what she hopes for, she says to us that she hopes to stay in that home. My mother-in-law is a person of very modest means. She was widowed 45 years ago. That's a long time that she has lived as a single person, and she lives very modestly. She still goes on trips now and then, but I would say that this is all part of who she is, and that's great. She doesn't need to turn to Yukon Housing, thankfully — or knock on wood, is how I would say it. She doesn't have that need because we are able to help her out with the place.

So, we have more Yukoners who are coming and are getting older here in the territory. I hope all of us appreciate those Yukoners, and we want to support them as much as possible.

One of the things that I noticed about the debate — and I have been listening, as I hear from members opposite and our own side — is we are talking about the wait-list and how it is conducted, but we are not talking about whether or not there is more support for seniors, whether there is, for example, more Yukon housing for seniors. One of the things I have heard us talk about is that it is important that we identify the resources from Yukon Housing based on need. There have been really great arguments put forward today that need isn't just about affordability. It is about affordability, but it is also about accessibility. It is also about things like medical conditions, which I heard being discussed. The Premier talked about victims of violence. So, there can be many reasons why people would have need, and one of them is affordability.

The next thing that we should be thinking about — because the motion is talking about the threshold and the criteria and whether we drop it. No one said that should mean that people who are on the wait-list should automatically get a place, because it should be based on need. At least that is what I have heard us say, and I hope that is what we are saying.

The Member for Takhini-Kopper King said something like that seniors don't have expectation that they would get a place

in a short amount of time, but it's also possible that, if there are people who go on the wait-list who have more means, don't have medical conditions, don't have accessibility issues, are not victimized in some other way — so they're not in the highest need of our seniors — that they could possibly be staying on the wait-list indefinitely, in fact.

That's part of the thing I am concerned about. It is how the motion is worded — and it worries me — is that, as those folks are on the wait-list, they go there because it is their — you know, I am sure that everybody is thinking about their future and wanting to plan and make sure that they are doing the right things — I trust most Yukoners that way — and they put themselves forward, but they may have more means. Then, there will be other Yukoners who maybe have higher acuity or higher needs, so they will continue to move to the front. I don't think that the list is: Oh, you have been on there for a long time; therefore, you should be accommodated. Because there are some people, like me, for example — I feel I will be okay. Like my mother-in-law, I hope that she will be fine, and she will be supported. So, she should not displace Yukoners — seniors — who have higher needs.

Then, I worry if what we have is a system that basically doesn't let Yukoners know where they stand. In other words, suppose we were today to just say that everybody is back on the list. What that does is that, if there are some of those people within the 37 who don't have an issue around accessibility, around medical conditions or victims of violence or other criteria — so they don't have other reasons that they would have high need and they also happen to have a lot of resources there, then is it fair to say to everyone: That's okay; you're on the list — ? Well, not if you're not going to be up front with people about whether they have that ability to receive those units or not.

So, it changes, because I think the premise of the motion or at least how I hear it being talked about is that — I think the language used by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King was that “the rug got pulled out”. But I am more worried about keeping the wool over people's eyes. If what we do is say: No problem; we will put you on the list — let's say that's what happens, but then we continue to identify, based on need, rather than based on just: You have been sitting on the list for a long time. I hope that is what we all agree on, but then is it right to keep people on the list? So, there is a place where there is a threshold — where it is probably not right to say: Yes, just go ahead; we have you on the list; you're good. That won't help for planning, either.

These are difficult questions, to be sure. I have heard in part of the debate today that there comes a time when there are so many resources for some folks that, really, they don't belong on the list. Well, if the difference here is whether it should be \$100,000 or \$150,000 or \$120,000 or whatever that number is, that's okay; let's have that conversation. But what the motion suggests is that we should pull it back again. I think that, given that the Auditor General pointed out that we should have means tests and that we should look for ways in which we're going to differentiate so that we can discern need around affordability, it's important that we be up front with Yukoners.

I also think that the questions that were raised — there has been a news article or an opinion piece that was referenced several times that pointed out some issues, for example, around pensions and public servants who may have pensions. And I heard the Premier say that he agrees with that and that he would work to see that redressed, that there can and should be a way in which those issues are made more fair. So, the Premier has said, and I agree, that we should look for ways to resolve those challenges, but that's not what the motion says. The motion says: No, let's go back. It also says: Let's make sure to consult.

Well, just a couple of points. There are a couple of ways in which consultation has been ongoing. We heard from 1,200 Yukoners — seniors, really — about what they thought was important under the aging-in-place strategy. That was a very large engagement with seniors. I don't recall — I was on city council when I first started hearing about Whistle Bend Place going in. No one from the Yukon government came to talk to us about that; it was just announced. That would have been the Yukon Party at that time. Even yesterday, when we had a motion in front of us talking about an engagement that had 6,500 Yukoners responding, that wasn't enough for the Yukon Party. They said: No, we're not going to vote for that because it wasn't enough Yukoners telling us what they thought — amazingly, for me.

All right, I think that, as we talk about all of these issues, this is about being respectful. If we are going to prioritize the resources of, I think, very valuable and precious resources of Yukon Housing, where it is going to go based on need, then I think that there should be a threshold at some place that says: Hey, you are probably not going to make it on the affordability front. Are there other issues that may put your acuity higher from a needs perspective? I have given a list of several, and I don't think that is an exhaustive list, but if there were other reasons, then we should use those other reasons. It doesn't mean that you can't consider those other reasons through other channels and other ways in which the Housing Corporation looks at each of those individuals. If the 37 folks who are there now — if the threshold were close, then maybe it could be changed, but if there were other reasons, they should be captured through that.

So, I still fundamentally believe that the Auditor General has suggested that we need to have a way to do this type of testing. I think that it is important, if there are suggestions about other ways — I have heard some of them today; that's fine — let's have that conversation. That is not what the motion is doing; the motion is trying to go back. My sense is that, if we hadn't acted, then the criticism would be that we are not listening to the Auditor General, that we are not doing what we are supposed to. In this case, once we do it, then the issue is: Oh, you shouldn't have done it; you should have slowed down and taken more time. I think that we want to hear from Yukoners, in particular, seniors. Again, I want to thank all seniors for building this territory.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak on Motion No. 720, brought by the Member for Whitehorse Centre. I would like to take this

opportunity to highlight some of the amazing initiatives that this government has implemented in order to address housing issues in the territory.

Access to housing — particularly for vulnerable persons — is a challenge across the country. The Yukon Housing Corporation and the Department of Health and Social Services continue to work to address housing needs. We take very seriously the recommendations made by the Office of the Auditor General to improve housing outcomes for vulnerable Yukoners, which is why, in December 2022, we released the OAG work plan that outlines how the Yukon government, in partnership with housing providers across the continuum, can enhance efforts to help vulnerable Yukoners find safe and affordable housing.

Many of the actions are already ongoing. As the Yukon government moves forward with implementing the work plan, there will be more engagement opportunities which will refine the policies and programs. The work plan consists of 36 actions, including liaising with Yukon First Nation governments, municipalities, community groups, universities, and the federal government to share information and data on housing in the Yukon; to conduct community assessments of all Yukon communities with an established reporting cycle and publish an annual summary, including recommendations to inform decision-making and resource allocations; and to develop monitoring and evaluation frameworks for housing-related programs.

Working alongside our partners, we have several housing initiatives that have been completed or are underway to support vulnerable Yukoners, including three triplexes in the communities of Mayo, Watson Lake, and Whitehorse; 47 new Yukon Housing Corporation units at 401 Jeckell; and Normandy Living, the new 84-unit seniors supportive housing development in Whitehorse, including 10 from Yukon Housing Corporation's wait-list.

The three housing initiatives underway include the next phase of the existing River Bend housing development in Whistle Bend, which will provide 98 new affordable units, with 75 units available for the Yukon Housing Corporation to house wait-listed Yukoners; the development of a Watson Lake Housing First residence; and the Council of Yukon First Nations new Indigenous women's shelter in Whitehorse.

The Yukon Housing Corporation and the Department of Health and Social Services are collaborating on the development of seniors supportive housing as a way to meet a significant and growing gap in the housing continuum for seniors. The intent for seniors supportive housing projects is to help prevent premature entry into long-term care by introducing more independent housing options that incorporate support.

We heard from the Minister of Finance that the difference in the actual cost for long-term care at Whistle Bend Place is estimated to be an actual cost to government of approximately \$500 per day, but the cost that is assessed to Yukoners is \$40 per day. There's certainly a significant gap there.

The Yukon Housing Corporation also has 10 affordable housing units at Normandy Living for low-income seniors who require supports to live independently. Seniors supportive

housing demonstrates our government's commitment to aging in place and enhancing the quality of life for seniors. It also optimizes the public value by directing government funding to Yukoners based on their needs rather than spending almost five times the necessary funding through premature entry into long-term care. Although the ratio that was provided in debate on the motion today is more like a 12.5 factor, it is a significant number and certainly supports the proposition for aging in place. I know that the Minister of Health and Social Services has certainly supported that concept.

The Government of Yukon remains committed to implementing the 56 recommendations of the *Aging in Place Action Plan* and improving the lives of seniors and elders in the territory. The vision of our *Aging in Place Action Plan* is to ensure that Yukoners can access the supports they need to live safe, independent, and comfortable lives in their own home or community for as long as possible, regardless of age, income, or ability level.

This includes working with individuals and their loved ones to offer person-centred care and to find appropriate solutions to remain in their own homes and communities. There is considerable alignment between the recommendations in the *Aging in Place Action Plan* and the *Putting People First* report. Together, they represent a path forward to promote, protect, and enhance the well-being of Yukoners.

We continue to work collaboratively with partners including First Nation governments, municipal and federal governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and community groups to implement aging in place in order to achieve our common goals. Released in September 2020, the *Aging in Place Action Plan* is based on extensive public engagement with more than 1,200 people from across the territory. The first *Aging in Place Annual Report* was publicly released on March 28, 2022. The 2022 *Aging in Place Annual Report* is under development and will be released in 2023.

The responsibility to implement the actions is shared across seven Government of Yukon departments and agencies. The status of the 56 recommended actions so far is: 51 actions — 91 percent are operational, underway, or in planning or developmental stage; two actions have not been started; and three actions have changed course since the plan was released.

Twelve actions are complete as of January 2023, including: integrated intergenerational programming with preschool and school-aged children in long-term care homes; connecting seniors with technology literacy; training in partnership with Yukon Learn; finalizing a new agreement to recruit seniors for a tutoring program offered by Learning Disabilities Yukon; implementing a virtual exercise program available to seniors enrolled in the chronic conditions support program; as well as establishing an aging in place seniors advisory committee; maintaining high-quality infection control practices in long-term care homes; opening Wind River Hospice at Whistle Bend Place; implementing the Shine a Light on Dementia program to provide education and training to support caregivers, available in both English and French; developing a rural end-of-life care program which offers direct funding to Yukoners in rural

communities who have a progressive, life-limiting illness and are at the end of life; engaging Yukoners in a review of the travel for medical treatment program; completing a service evaluation in order to ensure that seniors services and adult protection services are effective and accessible; expanding the Handy Bus service in Whitehorse to offer seven days per week of service and funding for the operational costs of a second bus anticipated to be operational in July 2023; implementing best practices for ongoing vaccination schedules for seniors and elders such as publicly funding Shingrix for all Yukoners 65 to 79 years old; offering Fluzone high-dose vaccines to eligible long-term residents; and ensuring that long-term care residents were among the first Yukoners eligible for COVID-19 boosters.

With respect to this motion, when the seniors asset cap was implemented in December 2022, 37 applicants were removed from the Yukon Housing Corporation's wait-list, including four from communities outside of Whitehorse. This change did not impact Yukon Housing Corporation's costs for providing housing for seniors but ensured that a limited number of housing units were being allocated to those with the greatest need. The change does not apply to existing tenants, only to those who are applying for rent-geared-to-income — also known as "RGI" — housing units.

The implementation of the asset cap for seniors of \$100,000 responded to recommendation 28 of the 2022 report of the Auditor General of Canada on Yukon housing. The Auditor General found that, by not applying the asset cap that is in place for non-seniors, the Yukon Housing Corporation was providing subsidized housing to seniors who may have been able to afford other types of housing. Yukon Housing Corporation currently has 893 units available to rent, which includes 350 for seniors.

Yukon Housing Corporation is facing pressure on its housing stock, with all of its housing units fully in use, under maintenance, or in transition. As of April 20, 2023, Yukon Housing Corporation's wait-list includes 113 seniors. Without the asset cap, there would be greater pressure on Yukon Housing Corporation's wait-list and its ability to provide housing units to those with the greatest needs. Although asset caps for seniors vary across the country, Yukon Housing Corporation's asset cap is in line with many other jurisdictions. My colleagues have provided a survey across Canada indicating that some jurisdictions have less generous asset caps, as some are \$25,000 and some are \$50,000. In the Yukon, we chose to align ourselves with British Columbia, which has also adopted the higher and more generous \$100,000 threshold.

Mr. Speaker, in 2011, the corporation eliminated the asset cap, and the number of eligible seniors on the wait-list increased significantly, crowding out the corporation's ability to fairly and effectively provide housing access to those with high housing needs. The average asset value reported by this group of seniors was just over \$267,000. More than 12 seniors in that affected group reported assets worth more than \$300,000 and some reported assets over \$500,000. If you are a Yukon senior who no longer qualifies for the rent-geared-to-income —

the RGI — program because you have assets over \$100,000, there are other avenues of supports available.

Mr. Speaker, the Yukon seniors income supplement and the pioneer utility grant home heating subsidy are available to provide financial assistance to low-income seniors, and senior homeowners with mobility challenges who meet the conditions of the accessibility grant program may apply for up to \$30,000 to retrofit their home.

Our government continues to make unprecedented investments as we work collaboratively with partners across the territory to address the housing needs of all Yukoners. This year's budget includes more than \$40 million to stimulate housing development and to help make housing more affordable for renters and owners. \$22.4 million from the northern carve-out of the national housing co-investment fund will support projects in rural communities, including homes in Dawson City, Teslin, and Watson Lake. This year's budget also includes \$26 million for land development projects to address the strong demand for residential lots.

We are working closely with Yukon communities and the First Nation governments on a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial lots in Watson Lake, Carmacks, Teslin, Dawson City, Faro, Haines Junction, and Mayo. We are pleased to continue funding the successful housing initiatives fund that supports First Nation governments, First Nation development corporations, developers, contractors, community organizations, and individual Yukoners to build more affordable housing projects in Yukon communities.

We launched this innovative program in 2017. To date, 361 new housing units have been built, including 220 new affordable homes for Yukoners. More than 150 additional units are currently under construction.

This highlights just some of the good work that we are doing to address the growing housing needs in our territory. The Government of Yukon will continue to make investments across the housing spectrum and work collaboratively with partners throughout the territory in order to make housing more affordable and attainable for all Yukoners.

We have also increased support for low-income Yukoners, including seniors. We have also included almost \$10 million of inflation-relief measures, including an extension of the inflation rebate top-ups to social assistance and the Yukon seniors income supplement as well as an increase to the Yukon child benefit.

There are other highlights in the Office of the Auditor General's report, which offers an overview of the state of housing for vulnerable Yukoners and identifies progress made since 2015 to provide housing to those most in need. It acknowledges the work that our government has undertaken with community partners to better understand housing needs in the territory and to increase housing options for vulnerable Yukoners.

This work includes the 2017 housing needs review; the adoption of the Safe at Home community-based action plan to end and prevent homelessness in Whitehorse by the Yukon government and the community housing partners in 2017; the implementation of a Housing First philosophy to reduce

barriers and to increase access to housing for the most vulnerable Yukoners; the opening of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Jëje Zho, which provides emergency shelter to men living in and around Dawson City; the establishment of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, a low-barrier, harm-reduction-focused shelter providing services, shelter, beds, and 20 permanent Housing First units; the Housing First residence in Whitehorse, which provides 16 units of low-barrier permanent housing, with 24/7 on-site services provided by Connective and the Council of Yukon First Nations; and the addition of three units at Max's Place to provide residential care to individuals with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and concurrent substance use.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this motion. I would just concur with the comments made by my colleagues that these are reasonable limitations, and we do not support this motion.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am happy to rise today to speak to Motion No. 720, brought forward by the MLA for Whitehorse Centre. The motion speaks to — urging Government of Yukon to make housing more accessible for seniors by a number of points that the member has made. I think that this is an important topic — one that I have been very passionate about in terms of my role in government. I am certainly very supportive, and have been supportive, of the report that was brought forward — or the action plan that we brought forward in 2020, Yukon's *Aging in Place Action Plan*. This was an important plan for me. I certainly navigated a lot of really rough waters with my own parents in terms of their journey and path through — helping them to age in place and to navigate all of the different systems. Sometimes, it worked well and sometimes it didn't.

We made this a priority area — our government was committed to the goal of positive aging where older people age well and are healthy, connected, independent, and respected. At the heart of the plan that we put out — the Yukon's *Aging in Place Action Plan* — is about people and adding life to years, not just years to life. People age in different ways, and that has certainly been the experience of my parents and my grandparents and now going through that with — and helping other family members navigate the waters as they assist our other family members in aging and, you know, really working to keep them independent as long as possible and to respect, really, what they contributed to our territory.

I know my dad was a road builder, and he, you know, helped connect us and did this for a lot of years of his life. Seniors across the spectrum — elders and seniors — helped to build the territory that we love so much. So, this plan was very important to me, and I definitely refer to it when I work with constituents or family members or people from rural areas.

I was listening to the story of the — that the MLA for Whitehorse Centre brought forward. I spent a lot of time working in the Watson Lake area. I know the community very, very well and have a lot of strong ties to the community. So, I very much take to heart the story that was brought forward. You know, when I look into, of course, the *Aging in Place Action Plan*, there is a pillar that is committed to independence around

housing, and you know — I know my other colleagues have gone through some of the areas that we have achieved so far and other areas that we are still working toward — access to affordable and suitable housing, especially for vulnerable persons, is a universal challenge and something we are addressing in Yukon through coordinated action across government.

We are also leveraging the strengths of the community and private sector partners to deliver innovative and diverse solutions where they are needed everywhere throughout the housing continuum. It was certainly a major part of our platform in 2021, and it remains a high priority for us.

This collective effort targets support for seniors, low-income families and individuals, those with high medical and mobility needs, victims of violence, and those experiencing vulnerabilities related to homelessness. The work of the Yukon Housing Corporation is ever-evolving and adapted to fit the needs of Yukon's maturing and progressive social fabric. Since 2019, the Yukon Housing Corporation has been working to transform its approach to housing from an outdated social housing model to a community housing model that treats all subsidized housing as a shared community asset.

One important progression related to this new approach is the implementation of the community housing asset cap policy. This week is the four-month mark since the adoption of the new policy, which has been designed to ensure access to the rent-geared-to-income program for those in greatest need.

This past December, at the direction of the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors and the recommendations of the Office of the Auditor General of Canada, the corporation implemented the requirement that all wait-listed applicants must have assets under \$100,000 to be eligible. I certainly listened very carefully to the hearing that took place around that Auditor General's report. I listened to the entire hearing, the testimony of officials from both the Yukon Housing Corporation and the Department of Health and Social Services. While the policy has affected the eligibility criteria for seniors on the wait-list for community housing, the move to implement a consistent asset cap is all about restoring fairness and equity to the management of the territory's limited community housing stock.

Going back to my opening comments about —

Speaker: Order, please.

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

Debate on Motion No. 720 accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

The following sessional papers were filed April 26, 2023:

35-1-99

Report on Subsistence, Travel & Accommodations of Members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly 2022-2023 (Speaker Harper)

35-1-100

Department of Education 2022 Annual Report (McLean)

The following document was filed April 26, 2023:

35-1-153

Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon Annual Report 2022-2023 (Streicker)