



# Yukon Legislative Assembly

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Number 34

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35<sup>th</sup> Legislature

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## HANSARD

Thursday, November 18, 2021 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

# YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

## 2021 Fall 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** — Emily Tredger, MLA, Whitehorse Centre

### CABINET MINISTERS

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

### 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
Emily Tredger	Third Party House Leader Whitehorse Centre
Annie Blake	Vuntut Gwitchin

### LEGISLATIVE STAFF

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

\*Government House Leader: Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee to November 4, 2021; Hon. John Streicker from November 5, 2021

**Yukon Legislative Assembly  
Whitehorse, Yukon  
Thursday, November 18, 2021 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

*Prayers*

**Speaker's statement — in recognition of National Child Day**

**Speaker:** I would like to introduce Annette King, Child and Youth Advocate, and Chantai Minet, youth advisor.

I am now going to make some remarks. November 20 is National Child Day, a day that we recognize to show Canada's commitment to uphold children's rights. Thirty years ago, Canada ratified the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, UNCRC, making a historic commitment to the world's children to uphold children's rights, both globally and at home.

Children have rights to be protected from harm, to develop to their full potential, and to be an active participant in their own lives. National Child Day provides an opportunity to celebrate the power of youth's voice and the actions of those who work to promote the realization of children's rights.

Throughout the Yukon, young people are stepping up and taking the lead on issues that directly impact them, whether it is reconciliation, environmental issues, education, mental health, social justice, arts, sports, and more. The government recently tabled a report prepared by the Yukon Youth Panel on Climate Change, in which the Yukon First Nations Climate Action Fellowship was also presented.

Young people have shown an incredible resilience and ability to adapt in the midst of an unprecedented year dealing with COVID restrictions and interruptions to their social and educational lives. We could, and should, all look at them as an example.

Today, I would like to bring to your attention an initiative called "Communities Building Youth Futures", or CBYF. CBYF is a collective of young people and youth-serving organizations working toward developing a territory-wide Yukon youth strategy to support our young people on the issues that matter most to them.

CBYF is led by a team of youth interns who are guiding action teams around four main priorities: youth voice; mental health and wellness; individualized learning; and career inclusion. The first year's interns were Vanessa Oliverio, Samreen Ahmad, Zarah Sydney, Yebin Park, Isaiah Jekesta, and Kamryn Williamson and supported by CBYF manager Robin Mennell.

The interns published a research report highlighting the issues most important to Yukon youth. Earlier this year, interns from CBYF worked with the Child Youth and Advocate office to provide presentations to our former Speaker, the Member for Riverdale North, Yukon deputy ministers, and Yukon government policy analysts about implementing child rights impact assessments in policy development.

This year's interns are Zeta Gallan, Gwen Radzimirska, Ayesha Ahmad, Jennifer Tuton, Samreen Ahmad, supported by project manager Maxime Crawford-Holland. CBYF has provided support to the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate office in conducting a review of school attendance in the Yukon, producing a youth storytelling book highlighting children's rights, and a youth-led engagement in anticipating a review of the Yukon *Child and Youth Advocate Act*.

Youth advisors have developed a child-friendly version of the act and reviewed a plan to present to the Members' Services Board. Past and present members of this working group are Abeer Ahmad, Ashley Cummings, Victoria Holmes, Samreen Ahmad, Yebin Park, and Chantai Minet. These examples, among many more, remind us of the power of youth engagement. Young people want to be meaningfully involved when it comes to decisions that affect them.

Today, we urge all Yukoners to look at how to enhance the implementation of children's rights in policies and practice. This last year has shown us that they are already speaking up loudly and boldly. It's our turn to listen.

*Applause*

**DAILY ROUTINE**

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

Introduction of visitors.

**INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS**

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I would like to ask the Legislative Assembly to put out a warm welcome to some individuals who are here today for our geoscience tribute. With us today are Brianna Warner, new executive director for the Yukon Chamber of Mines — it's great to have you here today; Mr. Mike Burke, a stalwart within the mining sector in many different leadership roles. I also believe Randy Lewis is here with us today; Anne Lewis is with us today; and I think — I couldn't tell from the mask. I was going to send a note to your brother. Welcome today.

**Ms. White:** Today I invite my colleagues to welcome some visitors in the back row. It seems fitting, as we talk about National Child Day, that Eleanor Maunder is here for her very first attendance, prior to one, so it's exciting to have her. She is joined today by her mother, Shelby, and her aunt, Kristy Bader, so thank you so much for joining us today.

**Mr. Dixon:** I will help the Minister of Economic Development out on the last name that he missed. It's my sister, Bonnie Dixon, who has also joined us.

**Speaker:** Tributes.

**TRIBUTES**

**In recognition of Yukon Geoscience Forum**

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government and the New Democratic Party to pay tribute to the 49<sup>th</sup> annual Yukon Geoscience Forum that was

scheduled to take place here in Whitehorse from Saturday, November 20 to Tuesday, November 23. This year's event was cancelled in light of the recent increase in COVID-19 cases; however, I want to recognize the efforts of the Yukon Chamber of Mines and all of the organizers.

The event showcases the best of Yukon's mining industry and the Government of Yukon's commitment to mineral exploration and mine development. Participating in and contributing to the Geoscience Forum is just one way that we can demonstrate our support for the mineral sector.

The Geoscience Forum is an opportunity for geologists, prospectors, miners, and government representatives to connect on matters of interest to the mineral industry. The forum provides a venue for the industry to share information on its activities with Yukon First Nations and Yukoners. Each year, corporate presentations highlight new mineral discoveries as well as the many contributions that the mining sector makes to the Yukon, from employment opportunities to investment in social programs and skills training for youth. The forum's trade show enables delegates to meet with the business community and mining service sector.

Preliminary results of the Yukon's mineral exploration program, which supported 52 early-stage hard rock and placer exploration projects, were going to be presented at the forum, and the mining industry continues to provide substantial benefits to our territory. Mining and exploration support our economy with employment opportunities to Yukoners in our rural communities. The work of the chamber has helped to maximize those benefits.

The Yukon Chamber of Mines has been an active force in our territory since 1943. While much has changed in the mining industry since then, the chamber has remained the central organization that unites industry partners and voices their common interests. Their work to advance responsible mineral development for the benefit of all Yukoners deserves recognition.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Yukon Chamber of Mines for the tremendous work that they do in organizing the forum. I want to put a congratulations out to the new president of the Yukon Chamber of Mines, Lorelee Johnstone, who has been a great leader in the sector. I want to thank all of the partners involved for making this difficult decision to protect the health and safety of Yukoners, which the sector has done from the start of this pandemic. While this event won't be going forward this year, I look forward to the Geoscience Forum returning in 2022 for their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

*Applause*

**Mr. Istchenko:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize the Yukon mining industry and the incredible contributions that the industry makes to our territory. The Geoscience Forum and tradeshow has been a major event for industry in years past.

It has allowed governments, miners, geologists, and others involved in mining the opportunity to network and showcase their work to key industry players from throughout the territory and beyond. With all due respect to our friends in the Northwest

Territories, I would definitely say that the Geoscience Forum and trade show is the premier mining geology conference in Canada's north and one of the best in the country.

There are so many fun and exciting things to do at geoscience for all ages. This year, while the difficult decision had to be made to cancel geoscience in light of the recent territorial outbreak and subsequent restrictions, I am happy to be able to stand in recognition of those who make valuable contributions to the Yukon's economy in so many ways.

Mining brings more than just money to our territory. Mining and exploration provide training, opportunities for Yukoners, jobs, partnerships, education opportunities, and so much more. Immense contributions and support come from industry partners to benefit our communities, our charities, and our organizations.

So, a huge thank you to the Yukon Chamber of Mines and their contractors for their efforts in organizing this year's event. In spite of the disappointing news, we will be looking forward to coming together again in 2022 to celebrate the many successes of our mining industry.

Mr. Speaker, there is gold in them thar hills.

*Applause*

#### **In recognition of Make a Will Month**

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to recognize Make a Will Month, highlighted every November in the Yukon Territory. Make a Will Month is intended to raise awareness of the importance of having a will in place and to encourage all Yukoners to consider creating a legally valid will.

A will is an expression of your wishes for after you have passed away. It is used to communicate who you want to care for your children, how your assets and property should be distributed, and any specific instructions on funeral arrangements or perhaps a celebration of life, as just some of the details. Having a will creates certainty for family and friends during a very difficult time. It can alleviate stress and provide clarity on how to manage your estate. It can ensure that family and friends have comfort in knowing that they were able to fulfill your wishes.

If you die without a will, you will have died — what is known as — “intestate”. Dying intestate means that the government must use territorial laws to decide how to distribute your estate to surviving relatives and must appoint an executor. While it may be challenging to sit and think about what you would write in your will, it is crucial to do so in order for proper instructions to be left for managing your estate and your financial affairs, as well as for parental and legal responsibilities for your children.

According to a poll conducted by Angus Reid Institute in 2018, 51 percent of Canadians do not have a will in place, and a further 15 percent noted that the will they did have was out of date. Some of the reasons for not having a will included that they thought they were too young to worry about it, they didn't have enough assets, it was too expensive to prepare a will, they did not want to think about death, and it was too time-consuming to do so.

As a society, we span several generations, we lead complex lives, we raise families, we own properties, and we work for businesses and own businesses. Throughout November, it is important to remind Yukoners about Make a Will Month and to help them do so. None of us know what the future has in store for us. We should all plan on how we want to take care of our family and our friends by having a will.

Yukoners can visit yukon.ca for more information and for resources on wills and estates. You can also visit the Yukon Public Legal Education Association website, which hosts a wealth of information for Yukoners. It is located at yplea.com.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that this tribute today encourages lots of Yukoners to sort out their affairs through a will and make sure that their family and friends know what their wishes are.

*Applause*

**Mr. Cathers:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Official Opposition to recognize November as Make a Will Month in the Yukon. Make a Will Month began in 2015 to raise awareness of the value and importance of a will to provide certainty and assurance after your passing. Particularly important for people to know are the difficulties that family members may face in dealing with the estate and wishes of a person who has passed without a will in place.

A will is, of course, a written document that sets out how you would like your assets dealt with or distributed and addresses such matters as guardianship of children and preferences for burial or cremation service arrangements, and it can also address what should be done with any debts and liabilities that you may have. Often parents may not have thought about legally defining their wishes in terms of guardianship for their children. It is important and there is no time like the present to start planning out how you would like matters dealt with. There are resources available to help you get started on a will, and you can contact the public guardian and trustee with questions around wills and estates.

Thank you to all who are taking the time to assist Yukoners in getting organized to create wills this month. I would also like to thank and acknowledge those people who were involved in starting wills month in 2015.

*Applause*

**Ms. Tredger:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate Make a Will Month.

Until recently, I, like many people, thought that I didn't really need a will. I thought that the default was that my assets would just go to my next of kin. Unfortunately, as my colleagues have mentioned, it isn't that simple. Without a will, the process is longer and more complicated, with confusion at every step. In my mind, the primary reason to write a will is to make things as easy as possible for your loved ones in a difficult time.

I know that there are many Yukoners who are struggling to keep their head above water, and writing a will is the last thing on their mind — I get that. But, if you do have a little time and

a little mental space that you can set aside to making a will, it is worth it.

That said, it is not actually the easiest thing to do. I did search the Yukon government website this morning and found some information about wills but no instructions or support on how to write one. I found a document from the Yukon Public Legal Education Association, which is a great resource, but it was last updated almost 20 years ago, in 2003.

This is a question of equality. People should be able to get support to write a will, even if they can't afford a lawyer. They shouldn't be punished with a more convoluted process, just because of their financial situation. I urge the government to make writing a will an easy, supported process to encourage as many Yukoners as possible to complete their will.

The time after losing someone is a hard, sad time. Having a will can take away some of the burden of legalities and let people spend their energy on grieving and healing. This month is a good reminder to the Yukon government and to all Yukoners that they have a role to play in making that a reality.

*Applause*

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

## **TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS**

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** I have for tabling a letter from the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, better known by its acronym, CPAWS, in support of the proposed better building program.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I have for tabling, pursuant to section 23(2) of the *Housing Corporation Act*, the Yukon Housing Corporation 2020-21 annual report.

**Speaker:** Are there any reports of committees? Petitions.

## **PETITIONS**

### **Petition No. 7 — received**

**Clerk:** Mr. Speaker and honourable members of the Assembly: I have had the honour to review a petition, being Petition No. 7 of the First Session of the 35<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly, as presented by the Leader of the Third Party on November 17, 2021.

The petition presented by the Leader of the Third Party meets the requirements as to form of the Standing Orders of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

**Speaker:** Accordingly, I declare Petition No. 7 is deemed to be read and received. Pursuant to Standing Order 67, the Executive Council shall provide a response to a petition which has been read and received within eight sitting days of this presentation. Therefore, the Executive Council response to Petition No. 7 shall be provided on or before December 1, 2021.

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 chair of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges to call a meeting of that committee before 12:00 p.m. on Tuesday, November 23, 2021.

**Mr. Kent:** I rise to give notice of the following motion: THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to change the minimum age for proof of vaccination to access designated settings from 12 years old to 12 years plus four months in order to:

(1) align with Transport Canada rules for boarding domestic flights and trains in Canada; and

(2) allow 12-year-olds waiting to get fully vaccinated to continue to access all designated settings, including participating in organized sports, playing music or singing, dance recitals, or accessing restaurants.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to create a territorially appointed chief firearms officer to replace the current position that is appointed by the Government of Canada.

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

THAT this House urges the Minister of Community Services to explain why he reneged on the commitment he made publicly to call the *Act to Amend the Assessment and Taxation Act and the Municipal Act (2021)* for second reading today.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government House Leader to call the *Act to Amend the Assessment and Taxation Act and the Municipal Act (2021)* for second reading on Monday, November 22, 2021.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to release details on the algorithm that determines who is eligible for a rapid COVID-19 test.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to meet with the Yukon Medical Association to address their concerns regarding the implementation of the Meditech Expanse program.

**Speaker:** Is there a statement by a minister?

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Prenatal nutrition program

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I am pleased to rise in the House today to inform Yukoners that our Liberal government has met our platform commitment to match federal funding for Canada

prenatal nutrition program operating in the Yukon. The Yukon has eight Canada prenatal nutrition programs, which collectively receive \$677,000 per year in financial support from the Government of Canada. Our Yukon government will now be matching those funds going forward.

The Canada prenatal nutrition program provides much-needed support to expectant Yukoners. The programs operate in Carcross, Dawson City, Teslin, and Watson Lake, and four programs operate in Whitehorse. These programs provide prenatal and postnatal support, which includes free prenatal vitamins, information on nutrition during and after pregnancy, and breastfeeding support. Programs also offer peer support for new and expectant people.

Each program is customized by organizers to meet the needs of clients they serve. For instance, Les EssentiElles provide support in French for our francophone population, and the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre offers a traditional parenting program. The Teen Parent Centre, which also runs a program, has customized its support to meet the needs of their younger clientele.

Ensuring that pregnant people and developing babies receive proper nutrition is very important for the health of both the pregnant person and the baby. It also helps to provide babies with a good foundation for a strong and healthy life. Above and beyond the practicalities of proper nutrition, providing peer support and assistance is very important for helping expectant people and new parents to get through what can be a very emotional and challenging time. Having someone to ask questions, get reassurance from, and help to navigate being a new parent is a lifeline for many new parents.

I would also like to announce additional funding that our government has provided to the Council of Yukon First Nations. For the next two fiscal years, we will be providing CYFN with \$262,000 each year. This funding will be used to research and identify Yukon First Nation prenatal and infant support needs in communities, enabling First Nations to develop culturally relevant prenatal and infant programming and to assist in identifying the needs of high-risk expectant people. The funding will also be used to fill a position to assist the Yukon First Nation prenatal and infant supports.

We are excited to offer this funding to support both expectant Yukoners and infants. Supporting new and expectant parents sets the foundation for strong, healthy families and communities.

**Mr. Cathers:** This is a promise that the Liberals made in their 2016 election platform and then did nothing about for years. Then, in the budget speech this spring, they announced the funding. In their 2021 platform, they flew the “mission accomplished” banner for this commitment and claimed that it was already done.

It’s disappointing that the Deputy Premier is focused on re-announcing old news instead of doing her job and focusing on fixing major problems in her portfolio. Over one-fifth of Yukoners — 2,472 people — are on the wait-list for a family doctor. Some are desperate, yet she has been unable to point to a single real action that she has taken to encourage more family

doctors to move to the Yukon. When asked what physician incentive and support programs that we put in place were still actually there and what the current levels are, she couldn't tell us. As an example of the neglect, the medical education bursary for Yukon students has been cut to half of what it was when I announced it 15 years ago.

The Liberals got rid of the physician recruitment position, and she still won't commit to reinstating it as a first step. Clearly, fixing the serious family doctor shortage isn't a priority for the Deputy Premier. Meanwhile, desperate Yukoners are contacting reporters about the family doctor crisis. One person said: "I am going to die sooner, because right now ... the model of the medical care is, 'don't come see to us until you're really, really sick' ... That quite literally means this health care system is shortening my life."

Another was quoted saying: "I feel very betrayed. I feel betrayed by a system that I have supported all my life."

While thousands of Yukoners without a doctor are forced to go to the emergency room, we learned from Yukon Hospital Corporation witnesses this week that the government left them short millions of dollars that they need again. They told us that their budget for this year is \$98 million, not including COVID costs. The government is giving them millions less. The minister is also failing Yukon women who need OB/GYN services. There were two OB/GYN doctors providing service, but currently one is on leave, meaning the entire Yukon is currently served by only a single OB/GYN specialist.

In response to questions from my colleague, the Member for Porter Creek Centre, about this, the Deputy Premier talked about regulating midwifery, suggesting that this was somehow a solution to long wait times for women needing to access the OB/GYN program and the lack of doctors. We support midwifery, but a midwife can't provide some of the critical services, such as C-sections, that an OB/GYN provides.

Speaking of midwifery, congratulations to the Liberals on banning unregulated midwifery and failing to deliver on their commitment to hire midwives months ago. Yukon women who wanted access to midwifery this year were left without the service and, for the first time in decades, the Yukon doesn't have a single practising midwife. The Liberals have refused the request to provide a funding structure that would allow midwives in private practice to continue to offer services.

Mr. Speaker, we would like to see the minister focus on these important areas instead of on old promises from 2016 that they are just getting around to now.

**Ms. Blake:** The health of a mother and their child starts well before birth. Every mother and unborn child should have access to the best care, the right support, and good nutrition. It is great to see that more funding will be provided to programs in Carcross, Dawson, Teslin, Watson Lake, and Whitehorse. Prenatal nutrition programs across the Yukon have been working extremely hard. They have had to adapt to the pandemic and rising costs to ensure health and well-being for all of their clients, but there are still so many hurdles.

I only have to look at my own community where groceries are available through the co-op but are increasingly expensive.

For a pregnant person living in Beaver Creek, getting groceries involves a long round trip to Whitehorse with the added cost of gas and sometimes overnight accommodations.

There are good programs in Whitehorse, and I acknowledge and thank the staff at the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre. These programs are where conversations unfold, healthy meals are shared, and community is built. Healthy diets and supports should not end with the birth of a child but, because of COVID, many have. Unfortunately, many programs — both prenatal and postnatal — have been cancelled or impacted by COVID. This has left new and expecting parents feeling isolated. Important services like infant immunization have been cancelled or delayed as nurses and other health care workers have had to work elsewhere in response to each new wave of COVID in the territory. All of these services are essential, pandemic or not.

By offering supports upstream, we are setting parents and young Yukoners up for success. It is our responsibility to do as much as we can for mother and baby during and after birth in every Yukon community.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** First of all, I would like to say that it is fitting that we are here on National Child Day, and I am very happy that there is a youngster in our gallery. I am disappointed that the remarks of the Official Opposition ignored the importance of prenatal care for Yukon families, new parents, and infants.

What is important for Yukoners to know, and what they deserve to know, is that our government is committed to supporting Yukoners throughout their lives, starting with birth. We know that a healthy pregnancy is a path to a healthy birth. The Canada prenatal nutrition program helps to provide that pathway for pregnant Yukoners, new mothers, and their babies during the early stages of parenthood and life.

Since being elected in 2016, our government has been working to ensure that expectant parents can access prenatal services in their communities. Today's announcement is long overdue. Canada prenatal nutrition programs in the Yukon have not received an increase in funding in almost 20 years. During their 14 years in governance, the Yukon Party was asked repeatedly by providers to boost funding for prenatal and infant supports, and they refused to do so. That is why our government is stepping up now to ensure that new parents and infants get the support that they need in what are arguably the foundational years of anyone's life.

I am very proud to say that, going forward, we will match the federal funding on an ongoing basis to support the eight Canada prenatal nutrition programs in the Yukon, but in addition, we are also stepping up to provide the Council of Yukon First Nations with funding to provide First Nations with prenatal and infant supports in their communities in a way that is culturally relevant and meaningful to them.

Ensuring that First Nation parents and infants can get parental and infant supports in a way that embraces their cultural values is truly incredibly important. Our government will continue to support parents and newborns in ensuring that they get the support they need in a way that they need it most.

By focusing on better health outcomes and client services for Yukoners, we will be able to reduce the inequities in our health system that often fall on the shoulders of those for whom the support is needed most.

Today's announcement is a good first step in doing that for Yukon parents and newborns. I hope that we all know how important good prenatal care is to children's ultimate development, and our goal is to provide Yukon families with that kind of support.

### Speaker's ruling

**Speaker:** Before proceeding to Question Period today, the Chair would like to deliver a ruling regarding a point of order that was raised during Question Period on November 17, 2021 by the Government House Leader.

In the course of asking his first question, the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin stated: "So, the Minister of Education has been consistently called out by stakeholders this fall for sharing inaccurate information with Yukoners. Whether this is deliberate or just a case of the minister not being aware of what her department is doing, we will leave her to explain."

This statement uses a roundabout way to say that the minister is deliberately misleading the House, and is out of order. Members cannot do indirectly that which they cannot do directly. This is not the first time such a construction has been ruled out of order. For example, members can refer to the Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole's ruling on pages 1038 to 1039 of the Hansard for March 12, 2020. I would ask the members to refrain from using this form in the future.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

This then brings us to Question Period.

### QUESTION PERIOD

#### Question re: Physician recruitment and retention

**Mr. Cathers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under this Liberal Minister of Health and Social Services, the health care system in the Yukon has gotten significantly worse. On August 23 this year, the minister wrote us, indicating that the wait-list for a family doctor was a massive 2,000 people. This morning, CBC reported the wait-list for a doctor has skyrocketed to nearly 2,500 people. That's nearly 500 more people waiting for a doctor that it has grown in less than three months under this minister's watch. This is a health care crisis.

Will the Minister of Health and Social Services recognize that the Liberal government's actions to date have been completely inadequate at addressing this issue and that her inaction on getting more family doctors is directly contributing to this health care crisis?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, again, I see — the members opposite think that they are being somewhat clever. I actually won't agree with that. I won't agree that there has been Liberal inaction, I don't believe that there has been government inaction, and frankly, I know that is not in fact the case. I have answered this question before, and I'm very happy to answer it again with respect to the important work of making sure that Yukoners have primary health care.

The *Putting People First* report found that, as I've said before, approximately 21 percent of Yukoners do not have access to primary care providers — the member opposite has spoken previously about that being one in five. That is not the math. It's actually one in 20, or approximately two percent of Yukoners. Is that an okay number? Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker, and we are working hard to make sure that primary care physicians and other health care professionals — remembering that, in some places in the territory, we have nurse practitioners and other health care professionals who can provide service for Yukoners.

I have spoken recently with the president of the Canadian Medical Association, our very own Dr. Katharine Smart. We had an excellent conversation about two days ago, and this was one of the topics on our agenda, and I will continue, hopefully, with the answer.

**Mr. Cathers:** The minister herself has admitted that 21 percent of Yukoners don't have a family doctor. That's over one-fifth. We have seen the doctor shortage skyrocket under this Health and Social Services minister, and she seems to think that it's not a big deal.

In the last two and a half months, the wait-list to get a family doctor has increased by nearly 500 people. This means that more Yukoners are having to go to the emergency room for primary health care needs. This fall, the number of people going to the ER for non-emergency care has nearly doubled. This is negatively impacting the health of Yukoners.

One Yukoner told CBC this morning — and I quote: "I am going to die sooner, because right now ... the model of the medical care is, 'don't come to see us until you're really, really sick'..." This is a staggering indictment of the Liberals' mismanagement of our health care system and neglect to the importance of family doctors.

Can the Minister of Health and Social Services tell us a single thing that she has done since taking this job that has alleviated the doctor shortage?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Again, I'm very pleased to be able to speak to Yukoners about this important issue. The staggering neglect of doctor shortages began long before our government took this role on, but, yet again, we will work hard to resolve it.

The people-centred approach of *Putting People First* — and the independent report with respect to the review of the health care system here in the territory — has provided a road map — 76 recommendations — and a road map to proceed with significantly shifting the way in which primary medical care has been provided throughout the years — not only here, but across Canada.

Let's note that the doctor shortage is a national problem. I have spoken recently with Dr. Katharine Smart, the president of the Canadian Medical Association, and this was actually the very first item on our agenda, because it is a national shortage, and our work together, going forward, we hope — we will work with the Canadian Medical Association, with the Yukon Medical Association, and ultimately with individuals and places where doctors are educated so that we might be able to work together to provide a response to what is a significant national shortage of medical professionals.



**Mr. Cathers:** The Liberals have had five years in office, and the family doctor shortage is getting worse under this minister's watch. The Liberals have directly contributed to the health care crisis and doctor shortage. They cut the doctor recruitment program. They got rid of the doctor recruitment website, and the medical education bursary for Yukon students is just half of what it was 15 years ago. What are the results of these Liberal decisions? The wait-list for a family doctor has skyrocketed to about 2,500 people. It has gotten so bad that one Yukoner was quoted on CBC this morning stating that, because of this doctor shortage, they will have to leave the Yukon. They went on to say: "I have received some long-term service awards, and I would like to give them back to..." — the Premier — "... and his crew and say, 'thank you for nothing.'"

So, I will ask again: Can the Liberals point to a single thing that they have done that has reduced the wait-list for doctors or encouraged family doctors to move to the Yukon?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Unfortunately, in the short period of time here, I don't have — I can list many opportunities that have been provided by this government to address this medical shortage: the "find a doctor" program, the bilingual health centre, expansion of midwifery, et cetera.

But let me speak for a moment about our government's commitment to supporting individuals who are pursuing health-related education to receive financial support. We are pleased to offer financial supports through the medical education bursary, the nursing education bursary, and the health profession education bursary programs; \$89,000 is available for 16 new health-related education bursary recipients each year through the Department of Health and Social Services. If you listened to the member opposite, you would think that this was a program that had disappeared and was not available. While recipients of these bursaries are not required to deliver services in the Yukon following the completion of their education, we do anticipate that these recipients do return to deliver services to Yukoners. These three education bursary programs represent just one part of our overall funding to support health care recruitment and retention.

#### **Question re: COVID-19 rapid testing**

**Mr. Dixon:** Over the last two weeks, the Liberal government's policy on rapid testing has changed dramatically. Last week, the Minister of Health and Social Services told the Legislature — and I quote: "The acting chief medical officer of health is not currently recommending the use of rapid tests at schools." Then, this week, the same minister said — and I quote: "We do, in fact, have rapid testing" — and that it is being used in the schools.

So, my question is simple: Why does the government's message on rapid testing keep changing?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Unfortunately, I think that it is the opposition that is sometimes stirring confusion with respect to these issues, and I am happy to rise to be able to speak to the issues of rapid testing, which are incredibly important to Yukoners. Science is the best guide when dealing with this pandemic, and we continue to follow the recommendations of our public health experts.

Our strong leadership has guided us through this pandemic and will keep doing so. Our focus as a government remains on protecting the health and safety of Yukoners. We understand the concerns of parents and concerns around cases in our schools. What we have heard recently from the acting chief medical officer of health is that, while there are a large number of cases in children under the age of 12, they have not been spreading through schools. We have heard from many constituents about this issue and have shared their concerns with the acting chief medical officer of health. We continue to work with our public health officials to adjust our response as necessary.

Rapid testing is available when there is an outbreak in a location. In addition, we have heard this week that rapid testing is recommended if teachers want to have that option going forward.

**Mr. Dixon:** Quite frankly, it seems that the Liberals are changing their position so frequently — it seems that the "science" they are following is political science.

Parents in schools have been pushing the government on this, and it appears to be working, because their tune has changed. Last week, the new Government House Leader told the Legislature that, when it comes to rapid testing — and I quote — that "... could overwhelm the rest of testing system, which you want to keep available to support those Yukoners who are symptomatic — so there are risks." But then this week, the Premier said that there is — and I quote: "... rapid testing available to all Yukoners."

So, Mr. Speaker, can the Premier tell us whether or not what he said was true? Is rapid testing indeed available to all Yukoners, and how do Yukoners go about accessing these rapid tests that he said are available to all of us?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** With all due respect to members opposite as they take quotes here and there and put them together, we need constant information to be crystal clear in the Legislative Assembly. Our comments about rapid testing being available — yes, they are available, and the science behind that is: When there are outbreaks, there is rapid testing.

**Mr. Dixon:** It appears that the Premier completely ignored my question.

The Liberals are completely mismanaging the communications on this, as their message has been changing daily. I will refer to a *Whitehorse Star* article yesterday about the Liberal government's flip-flop on rapid testing. The YTA president said that he spoke to the Government House Leader on Monday and that he gave him a flat "No" on the issue of testing for teachers. Then, the very next day, the Minister of Health and Social Services said that rapid testing is available to any teacher who shows up at the testing centre with symptoms.

In response, the president of the YTA said — and I quote: "None of that has been presented to us..." Whether it's opposition parties, parents, or teachers, Yukoners are realizing that this government is spinning out of control and are starting to wonder what else the government is going to flip-flop on.

So, will the government tell Yukoners clearly: What exactly is the policy when it comes to rapid testing, and will that policy change again next week?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I did talk with the Yukon Teachers' Association president. I had a great conversation with him on Monday. I did talk with the *Whitehorse Star* yesterday. The conversation that we had was with unions and around whether we could use rapid testing and personal protective equipment instead of vaccines — so as a prophylaxis — and the answer to that is no. I tabled those recommendations from the chief medical officer of health here in the Legislature yesterday, so — no, where it's about a replacement for vaccines; yes, where it's about an outbreak.

I believe that the chief medical officer of health has been pretty consistent with that language when she talks to the media and on the weekly updates.

So, if there's an outbreak, yes, we then do bring in rapid testing. We have done it in our communities over the last year and a half; we have done it where there are outbreaks. Rapid testing is here; we'll continue to use it where it's indicated by the chief medical officer of health.

#### **Question re: COVID-19 vaccine and safety measures**

**Ms. Tredger:** There is a major gap in the vaccine mandate. While parents soon will be able to drop their children off at school and feel confident in the knowledge that everyone working in that building will be vaccinated, parents of children in daycares, day homes, and private programs do not have the same certainty.

Mr. Speaker, daycare-aged children are just as vulnerable to COVID as every other child. There have been multiple closures of childcare facilities in the last month, and yet none of these workers will have to be vaccinated under the vaccine mandate. Why are children attending daycare not being given the same protections as children in schools?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I'm happy to stand and reply to the question on the floor today regarding our childcare centres. The health and safety of children and families is always our first priority, as I've said many times during this Sitting. Licensed childcare centres continue to provide valued high-quality service for our community, especially essential workers during this challenging time, and I thank them for their work over the last 20 months in a very challenging time.

The chief medical officer of health has provided clear guidance for Yukon licensed childcare centres, school-age programs, and family day homes for COVID-19.

The director of the Early Learning and Child Care unit made the chief medical officer of health's recommended guidelines compulsory, and this was communicated to licensed operators at the end of August. If a COVID-19 case is connected to a childcare centre, operators will receive information and instruction directly from Yukon Communicable Disease Control. YCDC will contact families and staff directly regarding matters connecting — if there is a positive test. We will be working to clarify how the mandatory vaccination policy may apply to licensed day-home settings, and we'll share more information as it comes.

**Ms. Tredger:** Mr. Speaker, there are new cases every day and widespread community transmission, and the end is

nowhere in sight. Right now, Yukon parents are being forced to choose between the risk of their children getting COVID-19 or staying home from work long term. We need to protect every child in the Yukon, including the ones who are too young to go to school. It is a simple decision but, from the minister's answer, I am not even clear on whether daycare workers are required to be vaccinated or not.

Will the minister include all early years professionals in the vaccine mandate?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Mr. Speaker, again, we will continue working to clarify how mandatory vaccine policy may apply to licensed daycare settings, and we will share more information as it's available with operators. The department definitely coordinates its COVID-19 response through an education emergency response team, which is in place to oversee the implementation of health and safety guidelines and our education recovery plan and as needed to deal with positive cases in schools and daycares. A member of this team has been embedded in the Department of Health and Social Services and will continue to work closely with their officials and the chief medical officer of health to move forward with appropriate responses. We continue to provide ongoing support to the licensed childcare providers for enhanced cleaning and to assist in meeting all pandemic public health guidelines and requirements.

We greatly appreciate, of course, the efforts that have been taken by all involved. It is an important and essential service to Yukon families. Again, we will continue working to clarify mandatory vaccination policies as they may apply to licensed daycares and other settings such as this.

**Ms. Tredger:** We have heard from daycare workers and parents who are under the impression that the vaccine mandate does not apply to daycare staff. Now it sounds like that might not be true, but there is not clarity on that yet. We are a week and one-half away from November 30, and it sounds like there could be entire organizations that fall under a vaccine mandate and don't even know it. This is a mess.

Why is the minister not communicating to daycares now about their vaccine requirements?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Mr. Speaker, as I started out with in this reply, we continue to work with the chief medical officer of health. They have provided clear guidelines to day homes. The director of the Early Learning and Child Care unit has made all of that available and compulsory and this was communicated to the licensed operators earlier this year.

I have been clear about where we're at with this in terms of — if those recommendations come, they will be communicated with the licensed daycare settings, and that information — as it becomes available, we will communicate that to them. As it stands, there are current guidelines that are in place, and those are clear right now.

One of the things I would like to just point out is that yesterday in the Legislative Assembly we had a great opportunity to debate mandatory vaccination, and the members opposite voted to not have that debate, and so —

**Some Hon. Members :** (Inaudible)

**Speaker:** Order, please, the member has the floor.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I see the rumbling across the way, and thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for speaking to that, because we did have a great opportunity yesterday to have a very thorough discussion, and all members opposite us voted not to have that.

**Speaker:** Order, please.

**Question re: Land development**

**Mr. Hassard:** We have talked about the doctor shortage that the Liberals' mismanagement has contributed to; now let's talk about the housing shortage they are also contributing to.

On May 18, the Minister of Community Services said — and I quote: "... we have work underway on phase 6 of Whistle Bend for completion this summer. It will create some 171 lots for a planned release later this fall."

Mr. Speaker, it's November 18 now, there is snow on the ground, and the Liberals haven't lived up to the commitment to release those 171 lots. We asked about the Liberal mismanagement of this earlier this week and the minister confirmed it's now going to only be approximately 100 lots, and he couldn't even give a clear timeline for when they are coming out.

Can the minister tell us why the Liberals have cut back the number of lots they are releasing this year?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to discuss all of the work that this government is doing on housing across the territory.

The member opposite has opened this door and I am more than happy to step through it, because this government has created more lots in the last four years than the previous government did in several years more than that. We have done all that we can to make sure that we have enough housing lots for the people of the territory, for the growing economy that we are seeing throughout this.

I might remind the members opposite that this economy is perhaps the only one that saw the greatest growth throughout the pandemic than any other economy in the country. That is putting pressure on our housing stock, and we are dealing with it as we can.

In 2020-21, 262 Whistle Bend lots and five country residential lots were released and sold in one lottery — one lottery, Mr. Speaker. There were 779 applications received for 147 single-family lots. There were 91 townhouse lots, 11 multi-family lots, and eight commercial lots released. I challenge the members opposite to come up with stats like that. I am happy to talk about this going forward.

**Mr. Hassard:** Mr. Speaker, I think maybe the minister should have said he "stepped in it", rather than "through it".

We have established that the Liberals promised in the spring that 171 lots would be released this fall. We have established that not only are they late getting these lots out, they won't even be releasing them.

Let's move on to some more broken promises by the Liberals on land development.

Again, on May 18, the minister said, "The phase 7 construction tender just closed. It will supply another 90 residential lots targeted for the release in the fall of 2022."

The only problem is that he terminated that tender and now the release of those lots is going to be late as well. So, can the minister explain why he terminated this tender and how long those 90 lots will be delayed for?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Mr. Speaker, so much invective — so much invective. I really do enjoy talking with my colleague opposite. We weren't able to talk in the spring session because he had been benched, but this afternoon I am happy to have him back in the roster and able to talk to him now that he has been brought out of Coventry.

Construction is wrapping up for this building season and the lots have been completed. Let me repeat that, Mr. Speaker: Construction is wrapping up for this season and lots have been completed. This will allow for the preparation for the release by lottery later this year of 97 Whistle Bend lots, 70 phase 6A lots consisting of 38 single-family and 32 townhouse lots, and 27 commercial lots on Keno Way. We will also be releasing four single-family lots in Logan, just down the street from my house, three lots in Mayo, and three in downtown Dawson City. Whistle Bend phases 7 and 8 and lift station tenders are targeted for release in the fall and winter of 2021-22 and phase 9 in the early summer of 2022. Phase 6B: 101 lots; phases 7A and 8: 80 to 100 lots are targeted for release in 2022, followed by phase 9 in 2023.

Mr. Speaker, this government is working hard on the housing front. I know that my colleague, the minister for housing, has lots to say on this matter as well. We are working very, very hard across this territory to create lots for Yukoners because the economy is so strong that we have lots of people coming.

**Speaker:** Order, please.

**Mr. Hassard:** Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the minister is looking for humour in this because it is not funny for Yukon citizens. Under the Liberal watch, the price of a house has skyrocketed by almost \$90,000 in one year and the Liberals' mismanagement of getting lots out in a timely fashion is directly contributing to the housing affordability crisis, as they are not keeping up with demand.

The Liberals are late getting phase 6 in Whistle Bend out and they are late in getting phase 7 out. Now, let's move on to phase 8 and phase 9. In the spring, the minister said — and I quote: "We are anticipating tendering phases 8 and 9 this year, as well as a lift station."

Can the minister tell us where the tenders for phases 8 and phase 9 are? Why are they late and why has he been unable to live up to a single commitment that he has made since becoming minister with respect to land development?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Mr. Speaker, what I would like to share with the House today, as we look at housing and lot development, is that it is a multi-pronged approach. First of all, of course, you have seen record lot development over the last number of years — record investment in lot development. We are also in a position right now, between Boreal Commons — our partnership extension with Da Daghay — Normandy cornerstone — the largest investment in Yukon history in affordable housing, which is also underway.

The other commitment that we have made, and it was discussed and debated in the previous mandate, is that we would be working with the private sector on land development — not just the way of doing things that we have seen for decades, where the government was overseeing all the lot development, but actually putting land into the hands of the private sector.

I know that, over the next number of months, we will be rolling out a number of those projects, and I think that this will be extremely substantial. That is, again, going to be added onto the work that we're doing on lot development.

The first thing that comes to mind is that we are trying to catch up when it comes to social housing and affordable housing. When there is a big cash investment from the federal government, you want to seize that, and that is what we are trying to do now. We are trying to make sure that the private sector has good opportunities, and we don't want to cancel things.

Previously, all of the projects that were here in the Yukon were cancelled. That had us trying to catch up, and that is what we are doing.

#### **Question re: Teacher staffing**

**Mr. Kent:** So, Liberal mismanagement has led to doctor shortages, housing shortages, and now it's also leading to teacher shortages. Yukon teachers began ringing the alarm bell about the significant teacher shortage back in the summer. They told the government that teacher absenteeism was going to be a big issue this school year due to the isolation requirements of COVID. We have seen this play out exactly as they said, with the predictable results of teacher shortages and burnout.

Can the Minister of Education tell us of any concrete steps that the Liberals have taken to actually address this growing crisis in our schools?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I am happy to stand and speak about our schools and the educators within them. Effective teachers are one of the most important factors in student success at school, and we work hard to attract and retain the best educators. I want to thank all of the administrators, educators, and staff who are working so hard for the benefit of our students and all Yukoners. I have had an opportunity to meet with many of the school councils this fall and have more to come, for sure. I have heard the issues raised directly. I know that our administration is working very hard with each and every school to mitigate the challenges that they have.

I am inspired by some of the innovation that I have seen at our schools in terms of — even through a pandemic, they are incredibly resilient and innovative and working hard toward the well-being and the education of our young people, which is just inspiring. I will continue to build on my answer as I go forward.

**Mr. Kent:** So, the minister spoke about mitigations and innovation, but she didn't identify any concrete steps that they have taken to actually address this growing crisis in our schools, which is the question that I asked.

Yesterday, the CBC reported that pay for teachers on call was among the lowest in the country. As we have heard, the demand for teachers on call has skyrocketed as more and more

teachers are forced to isolate due to COVID exposures. We have heard from the minister that technical problems in the government's TOC system have caused some faults, but surely it would be hard to convince people to become teachers on call if we pay among the lowest rates in the country.

What have the Liberals done to address the shortage of teachers on call?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Definitely, teachers on call are a very big part of our response to the challenges that we have been facing with COVID-19. This is the third school year impacted by COVID-19, and we acknowledge the stress of the pandemic and the fatigue that many are feeling. We acknowledge that increased staff absenteeism due to COVID-19 and the requirements to stay home when sick or in care of children while self-isolating is an additional challenge that has caused increased pressures on school staffing.

Our administration works closely with each and every school. We have a touch-base every single morning. Any schools that have notifications for COVID-19 are checked in on and ensured that they have the resources to be able to proceed with the day's activities.

Teachers on call are very valued. They are playing a key role in supporting our schools through short-term absenteeism and by providing coverage through the pandemic. Right now, we have 201 registered teachers on call. Again, I will continue building on my answer in the next question.

**Mr. Kent:** With due respect to the minister, rather than continuing to build on these briefing notes, we're looking for specific actions with respect to the teacher shortages and the substitute teacher shortages that the Yukon faces.

One clear solution to reducing the amount of time that teachers need to spend isolating is to allow rapid testing for teachers. As you know, the Liberals have completely bungled the communications around rapid testing. After refusing to allow rapid testing for weeks, they haphazardly announced at a school council meeting that teachers would, indeed, be given eligibility for rapid testing at the COVID testing centre in Whitehorse, but unfortunately, they forgot to tell the teachers.

When he learned of this from the media, the president of the Yukon Teachers' Association expressed shock. So, a very simple question for the minister: Why didn't she think to let teachers know that they were eligible for rapid testing?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I am happy to stand and speak to this question. I want to be clear that there are very clear processes that are in place in schools. We have followed the guidance of the chief medical officer since day one, actually for the last 20 months, and that hasn't changed this year. We have taken the guidance — we've recently made adjustments to the guidelines in schools, and each and every school does have an operational plan.

When there is a — I've already talked today about how we work with Health and Social Services and that we have staff embedded in the emergency response team on behalf of Education to communicate — if there are confirmed cases of COVID-19 in schools, we follow the guidance of the chief medical officer of health, and Yukon Communicable Disease is the primary communication on these types of cases. When there

is an outbreak in a school, rapid testing is a method that has been used for the past 20 months — all the way through. Whether there is an outbreak in a community or in a school, it is absolutely the method that we have used.

So, I get that the opposition is wanting to spin a narrative around miscommunication. I don't accept that. Yukoners deserve accurate information.

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

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

*Motion agreed to*

*Speaker leaves the Chair*

## COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

**Chair (Ms. Blake):** Order, please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 202, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2021-22*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

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

*Recess*

**Deputy Chair (Ms. Tredger):** Order, please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

### Bill No. 202: *Second Appropriation Act 2021-22* — continued

**Deputy Chair:** The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 202, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2021-22*.

Is there any further general debate?

#### Department of Education — *continued*

**Mr. Kent:** I thank the minister for the debate that we're about to engage in here this afternoon. I also welcome her officials to the House again today. We just had a brief time at the end of the day yesterday. I did give a bit of a general overview of some of the topics that I wanted to touch on here today.

The first question that I want to ask the minister is — we are less than two weeks away from the vaccine mandate for YG employees, including teachers and those working in our schools. I'm wondering if the minister can give us an update on how many teachers or educators are anticipated to be placed on

leave without pay on December 1 as a result of the incoming vaccine mandate.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I am happy to stand and speak to this question around mandatory vaccination of adults in schools. This is, of course, a matter that has been spoken about a great deal over the past several weeks and maybe even months.

We have a duty to lead by example and do our part to keep each other safe from the spread of COVID-19. Yukon government employees will be able to verify — this is one of processes that I wanted to just lay out here — their vaccination status via an online system that has started. This is a new process that, for the Yukon government as an employer — this information will be used to assess the potential impacts on individual schools in weeks ahead. From the reports that we have to date, with all staff in Government of Yukon overall — we have gone live with this now, and over 50 percent of all staff — not just looking at the Department of Education — have attested their vaccine status.

So, we will know more — employees have the opportunity until November 30 to get their first vaccine and to attest within this online service that is now available and live. So, if folks are just hearing about it now, as we are in the Legislative Assembly, I encourage you to do your registration.

This requirement will also be applied, of course, to any adults who volunteer or perform work in schools. We are working with school communities to identify issues and are putting in place contingency plans, should we find ourselves with vacancies in schools — so, the availability of our teachers on call and potential actions to address the situation.

**Mr. Kent:** I believe that it was the Minister of Highways and Public Works who mentioned, either earlier this week or last week, this attestation period. The Minister of Education has now said that 50 percent of all employees across government have indicated if they are vaccinated or unvaccinated as of, I am assuming, today. Perhaps that's a real-time number.

Of those 50 percent, can the minister give us an idea of how many of those individuals have indicated that they are vaccinated and how many have indicated that they are unvaccinated?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** This new system just went live on Monday, so we are really anticipating more reports coming. The information that I received today is that around 50 percent of overall staff within Government of Yukon did their attestation.

When you go into that system, you are asked when your first or second vaccine was taken. We will have more information to come, and we will be producing reports that will be specific to the Yukon Teachers' Association and those who are associated with schools who may not be part of the YTA.

**Mr. Kent:** So, the minister said that there will be more information to come and that reports will be made available. Respectfully, we are less than two weeks away from December 1, when, my understanding is — with respect to education — teachers and educators in the schools will be placed on leave without pay, and there will have to be some measures put in place to find replacements or deal with that situation.

If the minister can maybe give us an indication on when we can expect to see those reports so that we have a better idea of how many teachers and paraprofessionals in the schools are affected by this vaccine mandate — we have talked quite a bit about staff shortages, and I will get into some more detail on that in a moment. But again, this is a pressing issue. It's less than two weeks away, as I've said, and Yukoners will be quite curious to know how many people will be affected.

So, when can we get those reports that the minister just spoke of?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I am giving the information that I have right now, that is in front of me today, and my commitment then will be to follow up. I am happy to bring information forward, either through a legislative return, as the information becomes available, or directly to the Official Opposition Education critic, as that information becomes available to us.

The second part of that was that I really wanted to emphasize, as well, that employees do have — and I want to say this, and I will probably say it a number of times — that employees have the choice right up until November 30 to get their first vaccination and register that with the Government of Yukon.

In terms of the teachers on call, I know that we had some debate around that today in Question Period, and we have had this discussion ongoing. Teachers on call are a very valued part of our education system. They are playing a key role in supporting schools — they have been through the routine short-term absences, as well as providing coverage through the pandemic. All school exposure notices are posted on yukon.ca, of course, so that folks know where we have pressures and to ensure that TOCs are also informed of current COVID-19 cases connected to schools that they may be working in.

We are working with teachers on call to address health and safety concerns and to identify options to ensure that teachers on call are available to support schools through staffing challenges. We did work out some glitches earlier in the year, in terms of just some of the technical difficulties that we were having, in terms of the robo-calling of teachers on call, which was put in place to alleviate some of the burden on administration. We found, through our discussions with the schools assistant deputy minister, but also through our discussions — our meetings — with school councils, that this was an issue that was arising, and we are working every day to address it.

I think that assistant deputy minister Sikkes said it very well, that when he is entering into a school to work with them, the first question asked is: How is your teacher-on-call situation? Things are improving in our schools, and that's what — as of November 15, we have 201 registered teachers on call in Yukon. There are 155 in Whitehorse, 46 are in the communities, with an additional 31 applications pending. That breakdown of those 31 are 23 more in Whitehorse and eight in the communities.

We continue to plan and look at all scenarios around — to be able to be ready to deploy teachers on call post-November 30, if needed in our schools, either in rural or urban

settings. We are looking at all of the plans and adjusting them, as we go forward. As we receive more information from the Public Service Commission, we will be able to better determine what those needs are, but we are preparing.

**Mr. Kent:** I am sure that, in our capacity as MLAs in all three parties in this House, we have started to hear some stories from Yukon government employees or teachers who have decided not to get vaccinated and will be going on leave without pay. There are some extremely difficult discussions that I am sure we have all had with our constituents.

I know my colleague, the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin, brought up earlier this Sitting, with respect to Ross River, the fact that they will be losing a number of important individuals in the community, including the individual who provides substitute teacher service. We heard from a rural school this morning that they have six individuals working in the school who it's anticipated will not be vaccinated on December 1, so these individuals will be going on leave without pay as well.

Obviously, this is an incredible concern. Normally, when you're losing this number of individuals — however many, when we end up getting that number back from the minister when she has that information — it's going to be an extremely concerning situation, given the fact that we have talked about teacher-on-call shortages — and staff shortages as well — throughout the system.

I have just a quick question, I guess, on staff shortages as they exist right now: Does the minister have the information with her and can she tell us how many schools don't have a full-time principal right now, and how many teachers throughout the entire system are we missing? Again, I've just heard some stories with respect to the Ross River School about the principal and teachers — those positions are vacant. That's what I'm asking the minister for: How many vacancies are there in the system, including principals, at schools?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Thanks again for the question. We have made progress, for sure, on the recruitment of principals. We had vacancies at F.H. Collins, Kluane, and Old Crow. The principal position at F.H. Collins was filled, and we're very happy with that, and we currently have letters of offer out on Kluane and Old Crow. We anticipate those positions to be filled very soon with that process being at that stage.

In terms of vacancies, current postings — as of November 15 — include 15 teacher postings, with four in Whitehorse and 11 rural. As we fill positions in different places, that is where it is fluctuating a little bit and going up and down, because there are teachers moving around in the system. We have seven EA positions — four in Whitehorse and three rural — and four Yukon First Nation language postings — two Whitehorse, two rural.

We have been working to manage this, and this not something that is unique to the Yukon. This has been a nationwide issue around the recruitment and retention of teachers during a global pandemic. This has been a pressure across the country. I know that my deputy minister, Nicole Morgan, has been working with colleagues from across the country around understanding this place that we find ourselves in. It's very unusual for us to have this many vacancies and to

have difficulty filling teaching positions. Oftentimes, rural teaching positions are a little bit more difficult to fill, but to have these types of vacancies in Whitehorse is quite unusual. We're working, of course, on strategies and working in a whole-government approach to recruitment of staff in different areas, such as in health and education where we have these pressures. There is a lot more to come on this, and I will be happy to bring it forward when we are there — the larger government strategy around recruitment and retention of staff. I have certainly heard the issues that have been raised at the school council level, as I have had discussions throughout the territory, both urban and in the rural communities.

I know that we will have to have different plans in place after November 30. That is something that our department is working on.

Again, several different scenario approaches — and we know that we will have to work in a different way with the rural communities, and we are preparing for that. That is why the Public Service Commission is working with Government of Yukon staff now to get the attestations in place so that we can have a better idea — and then breaking that information out to the school situation so we will have a better idea of what to expect. If we are seeing that we're not seeing attestations from rural community schools, then we will be indicating that there may be some pressure there. If we're not getting them before November 30, that will be how we plan.

I think that I have touched on all of the points that you have raised in that question, and I will continue to build on that if we need to keep on this particular topic.

**Mr. Kent:** I was jotting some stuff down as the minister was speaking, and I think she mentioned that there are 15 teacher vacancies — four in Whitehorse and 11 in rural Yukon, if I caught that correctly — but she also mentioned some of the paraprofessional support positions such as educational assistants.

I don't need her to repeat that because I can check the Blues, but I'm wondering if she is able to provide us with a breakdown of which communities these vacancies are in or which schools these vacancies are in — not necessarily the Whitehorse ones. I'm more concerned about the rural ones because, as the minister said, it's often more difficult to find teachers on call or people to fill those positions — obviously, with the numbers that we see here. If the minister is able to provide us with a breakdown by school or community, that would be helpful.

I did want to just quickly touch on the teacher-on-call issues. The minister mentioned that she has been attending a number of school council meetings, and I think that's great. It is important to get out and listen to the concerns of the school community first-hand. The Leader of the Official Opposition — the Member for Copperbelt North — and I attended the October council meeting for Selkirk Street school. There was a document presented there that raised concerns, not only for the individuals in attendance, but also for us, as MLAs.

What was presented by the school council was a snapshot of August and September and the number of teachers who were absent and then the number of replacements that they were able

to get. When we looked through the seven or so actual school days in August — so, on August 23, there were seven teachers absent from the school, and they were able to get six replacements; on August 24, it was 10 and six; on August 25, it was six absent and five replacements; on August 26, there were eight teachers absent, but they were only able to get three replacements; on August 27, there were seven absent and only three replacements; on August 30, there were seven absences and four replacements; and then on August 31, there were nine absent and five replacements. I won't go through the entire month of September, but this pattern continues. There were only two days when all the positions that were absent got filled. On September 13, there were five regular teachers absent and they were able to cover off with subs; and again, on September 21, there were five absent and they were able to cover off all five with subs. There were a couple of days here when there were seven missing staff, essentially. On September 10, 11 teachers were absent, but they could only get four replacements, so there were seven positions that weren't covered that day. Then, on September 17, it was 12 and five — so, another seven. Those were the two peak numbers throughout this reporting period.

I am curious if the minister can tell us what — I guess my question as the critic, as an MLA, and as a parent — not for a student in this school, but a student in another Whitehorse-area school — would be: What does the department do, or what provisions are in place for those positions that cannot be covered? Again, there were only two days in this 26-day reporting period when the number of absent teachers was fully covered by substitutes. So, I am curious what happens to those classes that aren't covered during those days.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I'll start with — you had asked first around the breakdown of the vacancies in communities, by rural communities — there are the 25 postings — so this is both teaching and the other — all three of the categories: teachers, EAs, and language teachers. Right now, we have 10 vacancies in Whitehorse that are in the postings: three in Old Crow, one in Pelly, one in Carcross, two in Mayo, three in Ross River, two in Dawson, two in Carmacks, and one in Teslin. That's the breakdown there. We know it's very, very challenging for schools.

I haven't had a chance to meet with the Selkirk school council yet. I think we may have that booked now for an upcoming meeting. I do want to note that I know that the situation is improving at many of the schools, in terms of the use of teachers on call, but outside of teachers on call, schools do have a couple of other options that help them to manage, should they have vacancies or what you have described with this particular school, many vacancies over a number of days and a few days without those challenges, but they include temporarily adjusting staff teaching assignments and adjustments to student learning groups.

I talked about this a bit, but in terms of our management of COVID-19 situations and pressures in school, we collect information from schools each morning and have that touchpoint meeting to look at where help is needed, make changes, and identify the challenges on an every-morning basis.

Then we work with that school to ensure that they have the supports and resources that they need. This has included deploying central staff when needed. This has happened on two occasions, one with the Elijah Smith school and one other time with the Whitehorse Elementary School. They were for one day each in each of those incidents.

In terms of teachers on call, again, we are working with them to identify what some of the reluctance has been around when they are being called out and identifying why we are not getting the responses. So, again, this has improved substantially around some of the administrative and technical glitches, but we have also identified a couple of areas of concern with the teachers on call. We are now providing training on the operational plans that are in place in the schools that they would be deployed to and information on COVID-19 in schools and how that is managed. So, those are two things that are happening now. We're working to mitigate the issues as they come up. It's a constant focus of the department to ensure that schools have the supports that they need and that, when we need to deploy, we can deploy other folks to assist where needed. As we move into post-November 30, this will be as well a very big part of the planning for the day-to-day operations of the schools. Thankfully, we have very skilled folks and great relationships with each school to ensure that they are communicating. It is a big part of my outreach to each and every school council to build that relationship and open that line of communication with them so that there is comfort when there is a need to reach out directly and to not wait until things are unmanageable.

**Mr. Kent:** Those numbers that I gave the minister — that snapshot from Selkirk Elementary School mentioning where on only two of the 26 instructional days in August and September did they get all of their teacher absences covered by teachers on call — the minister did mention that those stats are getting better. One of the things — I believe it was the superintendent who mentioned it — at the Selkirk meeting was that there was going to be some sort of new principal reporting requirements, whether it was just something they could do on their smartphone or at their desk on what I believe to be exactly this — how many teachers were absent that day and how many teachers were covered. Perhaps the minister can shed a little bit of light on that, if that technology has been implemented. Then, since she mentioned that the situation was getting better, does she have some statistics that she can share with us — maybe not specific to Selkirk or any individual school but all — on how many days there was not 100-percent coverage or whatever stats the minister has?

Then, I have just one other quick question with respect to staff deployment from the Department of Education. We have talked about that this Sitting. I'm curious how many certified teachers are available from the Department of Education to go out. The minister did mention that there has been staff deployed on two occasions — once, I think she said, to Elijah Smith and the second time to Whitehorse Elementary School — but is any of this staff deployment from the main department able to assist people in rural Yukon who are having challenges?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** In terms of the electronic reporting tool that was discussed — which the member has raised — around a new tool to assist principals in helping us to get the information in a timely manner, it has been in place for one month now. I can return with a report on some statistics around the information that is being gathered from that and from other sources.

Just following up from the previous question, in terms of — the Department of Education has, I think, 12 certified teaching staff within central. Again, yes, we have deployed in Whitehorse — a little bit more difficult to deploy to rural communities, but we are prepared to work toward that, if we need that.

I just have another piece of information that has come to me here, as we were doing this debate around Selkirk. As an example, today, in the check-in, I think that they had two vacancies, and it was offered to them to deploy central, if needed. As an example, today they said, "No, we have the coverage that we need."

In terms of rural communities, some of our other options are to deploy teachers on call. We are prepared to do that; we have done that. Generally, if it is a more rural community, they are deployed for a week at a time, and we are covering travel and expenses around that. Again, we continue to work with our school communities, and we are keeping our hand on the pulse of what is happening and where the pressures are, and we are putting in place contingency plans, as they are needed, which we will also do post-November 30, when there may be other pressures in schools.

**Mr. Kent:** I forgot to ask a question of the minister the last time with respect to the postings in our schools. She went through a list of the communities, and I thank her for that. She mentioned there are 25. Could she just confirm that there are no postings for either school in Watson Lake — Johnson Elementary or the high school there? That would be great. As I said, she went through them, and I think I caught them all. I just wanted her to confirm that Watson Lake was at full capacity for teachers and doesn't have any current vacancies down there.

I appreciate the responses around the deployment of staff from the Department of Education. I will look forward to getting some of the data from the principal reporting tool that the minister mentioned.

I apologize to the minister, but I just want to jump back quickly to the vaccine mandate piece and when we start to get a sense regarding teachers and other educators who will be placed on leave without pay on December 1. As I mentioned, we have been hearing from a number of employees across the Yukon government with their concerns on this. I have been forwarding them to the minister, if we receive permission to do so from the individuals.

Obviously, this is a very difficult time of year for something like this to happen — when you are placed on leave without pay. I'm just curious — would it be the Department of Education, or would this be done through the Public Service Commission or somewhere else, where there would be additional mental health supports for those employees who require it as we move into the holiday season and they find



themselves without a paycheque because they have chosen not to get vaccinated?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I'll go to the first part of the question around the vacancies in rural communities. The communities that currently do not have any vacancies are Faro, Kluane Lake, Beaver Creek, Haines Junction, and Watson Lake.

In terms of mental health, yes, of course, we know that this is going to cause stress and further pressure on folks who choose not to take this step, but, again, the health, safety, and well-being of all staff and students is always our first priority, which is why we have taken this decision to mandate vaccination — and, of course, always wanting to support employee well-being. It is a critical part of our work toward creating and engaging an inclusive workplace, but I know that this is going to cause a lot of stress and it is certainly something that we have talked about as a Cabinet.

I can point to a few things before I get to the crux of what will be available, but this is, again, the third year that schools are impacted by COVID-19, and now we have taken this decision to move toward mandatory vaccination. Our school staff have already been experiencing pandemic fatigue, including increased anxiety and stress in schools. We talked a lot about this in the session around different behaviours and issues that are happening in various schools in the Yukon. The *Learning during COVID-19 survey* conducted at the end of the 2020-21 school year highlighted that staff respondents noted negative impacts on mental health and wellness. We offer all employees and their families a range of confidential, expert health and well-being services through the employee and family assistance program and through their extended health benefits as employees of the Yukon government. This will remain something that they will have access to, as long as they are within the employment of Government of Yukon. The employee and family assistance program provides counselling and critical incident services as well as nutritional, financial, and well-being services to get support to deal with life-challenging situations, and I would include this in all of these categories.

When school staff are dealing with critical events, we work oftentimes with LifeSpeak to help deploy counselling resources for support and debriefing for staff. So, again, these are services under the extended health care benefits that employees will have access to, as long as they remain as Government of Yukon employees.

I will come back with a bit more information around the time frame for employees who go off work as of November 30 and then those who may go off work as of January 30, because there may be some different scenarios that play out here, but if they are continuing to be on extended health care benefits, they will have access to these programs.

**Mr. Kent:** So, will the teachers placed on leave without pay still be entitled to the extended health care benefit program that the minister talked about?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Yes, for the period that they are entitled to those benefits. Again, there may be some different

scenarios, and we'll come back with more specific dates if that is the wish of the member opposite.

**Mr. Kent:** As I mentioned, we are all, I'm sure, getting calls from constituents who will be affected by this, and the time of year — obviously, the Christmas season is a difficult time for some individuals and some families, in spite of what might be happening to some of them here who may be placed on leave without pay. The minister did mention that mental health supports will be available for these employees, but is there any talk about supplementing the mental health assets — or the individuals who offer those services — during this time because, not only is it Christmas, which, as I have mentioned, is a difficult time for many people who are challenged with mental health issues, but it will be compounded by the fact that some, including single mothers whom I've heard from and families, will be under this additional stress of not having a paycheque at the Christmas period.

I mentioned earlier on to the minister that we have heard from one rural school that is anticipating that as many as six individuals from that school will be affected and will be placed on leave without pay on December 1. I'm curious what plans the minister has in place — or in cooperation with the Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission — and what they are both anticipating as far as mental health needs and staff needs in not only the Whitehorse area but also in our rural communities.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I know that the pandemic has been difficult for everyone — some more so than others. I have already talked a little bit about the surveys that we have done — the learning through COVID surveys — and ensuring that we are checking in with all of our students, our staff, and our partners and continuing to learn about what is happening for folks. As we navigate through COVID-19, what we know is that mental health has been a huge issue, not only for students and families, but also for our staff.

Our primary focus, and what we are committed to, is ensuring that students are successful at school and that the health and safety of students, families, and staff is number one. It has to be number one. So, that is why we have taken the decision that we have around mandatory vaccination. I know that this is going to cause stress for those who choose not to be vaccinated, and if there are no medical or religious reasons for not getting vaccinated, then it becomes a personal choice. It is a personal choice, of course.

Is that going to cause some hardship for folks? Yes, I think it will. Folks can choose to be vaccinated before November 30, and we talked a little bit about that today — around doing the attestation, using the online tool that is now available and has been live since Monday.

In terms of the information that the member opposite is looking for — in terms of additional supports — I have given the information that I have today around the benefits that will continue to apply to those employees, should they choose to leave their position and go on leave without pay.

I would ask, of course, for the member bring some of these further questions to the Minister responsible for the Public

Service Commission when the minister is here in the House in Committee of the Whole.

**Mr. Kent:** Respectfully, that won't be until the spring that the Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission will appear in Committee, so the timing is difficult, but we will reach out to the minister by letter or written question or some other means to try to get an answer for those constituents as soon as possible, who will be facing some difficult times here as the holiday season approaches.

I just have one question on the attestation piece. The minister mentioned that 50 percent of government employees had filled out that attestation. I am just curious when the window for them to provide that closes. Is it right up until November 30, or is there a date ahead of time, so that individual departments can start to plan for vacancies throughout their system?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** My apology about the Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission. I will seek the answers and bring them back to the House through the Public Service Commission and the minister responsible in a timely manner.

In terms of the other aspect of the question around the attestation, it will close on November 30, so folks have an opportunity to do the attestation up until November 30. That's when it will close, and we will then have the information that we need to proceed forward.

**Mr. Kent:** November 30 — to me, that seems fairly late to be able to turn around and deploy staff where needed, not only for Education, of course, but highways and health care. I believe the officials from the Hospital Corporation mentioned earlier this week that 14 individuals — I think that was the number; seven full-time and seven part-time — they anticipated being affected there.

I mean, that is the plan that is in place, so it is a bit difficult to get a sense for how, in such a short time frame, they will be able to turn around, especially with teachers in schools or EAs or other paraprofessionals or custodians, to make sure that those ones are covered off as we move through there to get those final numbers, but again, that is the choice of the government to move on that. So, we will look to see how that plan rolls out, as we get a little bit closer here in the next week and a half to two weeks.

Just to change gears here a little bit now: I wanted to ask about the situation with Hidden Valley Elementary School. I know that there has been a review commissioned by the government with a Vancouver lawyer, Ms. Amanda Rogers, and I can't find the contract for her on the contract registry. At the briefing with officials, we were made aware that perhaps Justice was the lead department on managing that contract, but I can't find anywhere on the contract registry where that contract is.

So, can the minister either direct us to where that contract might be or identify which department is in charge of that contract — the Amanda Rogers contract — for the review of the situation out at Hidden Valley?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I just want to go back to the attestation first and clarify a couple of things in terms of the fact

that it does close on November 30 for folks to register for the first dose, and then we will be working toward the second dose by January 30. We will be receiving reports on a daily — or every second day — basis to see where we are sitting with that. In terms of a rural school that may find themselves with a number of vacancies, we will definitely be working toward ensuring that we have contingency plans. As I have said, those are already underway, in terms of different scenarios that may or may not happen, and we will get more information as we go forward.

In terms of the contract, the contract is held by Justice, and the resources will come from Education, of course. That is a standard practice. I will commit to returning with information around the registry. I don't have that information with me right now.

**Mr. Kent:** Does the minister have the value of the contract with Ms. Rogers, at this point?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** As I have committed to returning with information around the registry of the contract, I will also return with the value of the contract.

**Mr. Kent:** I wanted to jump over to the situation at Jack Hulland Elementary School. It was my understanding that the acting principal who came from Elijah Smith Elementary School was to be in place until November 12. Has that individual now returned to his duties at Elijah Smith, or is he still at Jack Hulland as of now, given the fact that the original information we had was that he would be there until November 12?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** The situation at Jack Hulland — we have had a chance to talk about it quite often during Question Period, so I am happy to be able to speak about it in Committee of the Whole, in terms of where we're at with the school and some of the challenges that they certainly have faced — always focused on the health, safety, and well-being of staff in all schools and ensuring that we have a supportive, psychologically safe and engaging and inclusive workplace; it is very critical for all employees' well-being.

We know that there have been challenges at Jack Hulland school. I have spoken about that and have had the opportunity to sit with at least half of the staff, which happened on October 21. Some of the staff met with me, and I was able to listen and hear them directly and have them express their concerns about what was happening in the school. We further had a written confidential report back to them, outlining what was discussed that day.

The department has replied to those initial written responses and concerns that staff raised at that meeting. I'm going back in a little bit of history, because I think it's important to kind of build to where we are. Last Friday, all staff were offered an opportunity to have a confidential conversation over these next two weeks with a third-party contractor to share further concerns. Also, on November 12, Jack Hulland staff were able to use their professional development day to complete The Working Mind training to support creating and maintaining a psychologically healthy and safe workplace.

Additional opportunities to hear from all staff are planned. The next steps to address the workplace concerns will be confirmed from this information gathering.

Again, the Government of Yukon certainly offers a variety of supports for staff to address workplace challenges, such as resources through health, safety, and well-being to assess, protect, and promote psychological safety in our workplace. Our employee and family assistance program is available for staff on an individual level. Of course, the Respectful Workplace Office is another avenue for staff who are experiencing conflict in the workplace. It's a place where they can receive support and guidance.

Jack Hulland staff — in terms of the date of November 12, that was the period where our principal of the school — the leave went to November 12 and has now been extended. So, the Department of Education has arranged, as you have indicated in your question, for an experienced school administrator, Jeff Cressman, principal of Elijah Smith, to be at Jack Hulland to provide the additional support for the school administration team while the principal is on leave. So, at this point, we are determining the length of that placement for Jeff Cressman.

**Mr. Kent:** I am sure the minister can appreciate that these decisions for one school obviously affect another school — in this case, the decision to move the principal from Elijah Smith to Jack Hulland has created some concerns that we are starting to hear about now from members of the Elijah Smith school community. I am curious, when the decision was made to reassign — on a temporary and now an extended basis — the principal from Elijah Smith to Jack Hulland, was there discussion held with anybody from the school council, as representatives of the parents in that school community? I am curious if any of those discussions were held with respect to the principal moving from Elijah Smith to Jack Hulland on an interim basis.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I just want to be clear that the principal has not been moved, that Jeff Cressman remains the principal at Elijah Smith school and is the principal right now at Jack Hulland, as well, on a temporary basis. These are the things that take time; this is what takes the time — that we need to work with the school councils and the Yukon Teachers' Association, which we are doing, ensuring that the questions and concerns of both school councils are taken into consideration, as decisions are being made. But, just to be clear, the principal, Jeff Cressman, remains the principal of Elijah Smith.

**Mr. Kent:** That begs the question — obviously, there have been some challenges that have been raised with respect to Jack Hulland Elementary School, and it is at — looking at the enrolment numbers — it is at or near capacity. Elijah Smith is also a very busy and crowded school with, I am sure, a number of unique needs as well. So, the principal is splitting time — is that what the minister is saying? This principal is splitting time between — he is maintaining his job as principal at Elijah Smith, while also being acting principal at Jack Hulland. Is that the case?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** The vice-principal at Elijah Smith is the acting principal right now — comes behind the principal,

who is acting in two capacities right now. This is allowable under the *Education Act* — I'll just be clear about that. If this becomes a longer term situation, where Jeff Cressman remains the principal over two schools, then additional supports for both schools will be put in place. Again, this is allowable under the *Education Act*, and we are still working out some details and working with the school councils and the Yukon Teachers' Association.

**Mr. Kent:** I just want to be clear on this. So, the substantive position for the individual is as principal of Elijah Smith; there is someone acting in his place there now — I'm assuming, on a full-time basis — and he has relocated to Jack Hulland school as an interim principal, and he is on a full-time basis there, or — and again, I'm also curious with respect to my previous question: What sort of discussions or consultation took place with the Elijah Smith Elementary School community, as represented by the school council on this, because as I mentioned, there are some from that school community who started to reach out to us with concerns about this as well.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Jeff Cressman, right now, is splitting his time between the two schools. At Elijah Smith, we have an acting principal and an acting vice-principal right now, and at Jack Hulland, there are two vice-principals. So, if this scenario continues and becomes longer term throughout the year, then additional supports will be put at both schools.

In terms of the Elijah Smith school council, I have not met with them directly, but I know that department staff have been working closely with them and working on any concerns that they may have — as we are, and have been doing quite regularly, with Jack Hulland school council — looking at the well-being of both schools and ensuring that the proper support is put in place, but again, this is allowable under our *Education Act*, and we are following that, and this scenario is built upon that.

**Mr. Kent:** Just to be clear, I wasn't inferring that there was anything untoward with respect to the *Education Act*. We are just trying to get a sense for some of the angst and some of the concerns that we are hearing from both school communities with respect to the situation with the senior leadership at both schools.

I will review what the minister said in Hansard, or the Blues, tomorrow, and then if I have any additional questions, I can get back to her with them.

I know that, obviously, this has been the topic of some school council meetings — the concerns around bullying, violence, and vandalism at the school. The minister and her senior staff from the department met with staff — I think it was in late October.

The more recent school council meeting was cancelled, and I thought there was supposed to be a meeting scheduled for this week of the broader school community. I do understand that, on Tuesday, there was a Zoom meeting put together by parents to discuss their concerns, but I am not sure how those concerns will be communicated to the department.

Is the minister aware of the outcome of that meeting or the discussions of that meeting? I know my colleague, the Member

for Porter Creek North, has been a regular attendee at school council meetings and also attended that meeting where concerns were raised the other night. I am just curious how those individuals are to get their concerns to the minister. Should it be through the school council, or can they provide them directly? I am wondering if the minister can share any outcomes of that staff meeting that are not confidential in nature, of course.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** There are a couple of different pieces in there, so I will just sort through them. I'll start with the voluntary meeting that was held on October 21 at Jack Hulland school, where the deputy minister and I, the assistant deputy minister of schools, and the superintendent attended. We met with approximately half of the staff. The Organizational Development branch facilitated this meeting, and a confidential report was provided to participants.

The deputy minister provided a follow-up response on November 5 to all school staff, and so there was a confidential report that was produced, and then there was a further follow-up — I think there were eight questions posed to us, and we committed to getting back to them. I can provide the answers to those eight questions. That part was not confidential, but the discussion within the meeting was.

I'll go into a few other things before I get to the parents' meeting. Additional opportunities and next steps were opportunities for one-on-one conversations, to be coordinated through a private contractor, who will deliver a report to central administration. Information collected in individual interviews with the private contractor will be anonymous, and they'll be analyzed so that they are not able to identify who it is, but to identify themes and impacts in the workplace.

Also, in terms of other steps, the Health, Safety and Wellbeing branch continues to support the schools and Student Support Services to develop a plan to address the factors of psychological health and safety, and this will be done through Guarding Minds at Work — a survey and online resource that helps employees assess, protect, and promote psychological health and safety in their workplaces. PSC and Education — human resources — coordinated the provision of the Guarding Minds workshop to the staff on November 12, their PD day. It was well-received, for sure.

Then there is a commitment to continually report back to staff on work and next steps — so, really working hard to bring things to a place — as I have stated lots of times — a workplace that is healthy, safe, and takes into consideration the well-being of all, including our students and the families.

I am aware, of course, of the parents' meetings that have been going on that are being facilitated by a parent. There have been two that I am aware of, which were done in a virtual format. We received today recommendations to the department from parents, and we will be following up on those and continuing to work with our school community and parents to, again, go back to that first statement about ensuring that our schools are healthy, safe, and that the well-being of our children is at the centre.

**Chair (Ms. Blake):** Do members wish to take a brief recess?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

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

*Recess*

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 202, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2021-22*.

Is there any further general debate?

**Mr. Kent:** I thank the minister for those responses before the break. I have some more questions with respect to Jack Hulland, but I think I will take the opportunity to review what was said here today and then come back to the minister before the end of the Sitting, hopefully, if Education gets recalled. I will address those questions at that time.

I do want to jump back to just one question about one topic we were talking about before the break, and that is the contract with Amanda Rogers for the review of what happened at Hidden Valley Elementary School. I think the minister said that the contract is funded by Education but being held by Justice, and that is standard procedure. Can she explain just the standard procedure? Is that something to do with the fact that Ms. Rogers is a legal counsel? Is that why it is at Justice?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** In terms of the contract for Amanda Rogers, again, I tabled those terms of reference early in the Sitting. I just want to be clear that this is an independent review. I have already committed to a couple of things around the contract, in terms of the registry of the contract and the value — I will commit to. Any other information related to this question today in Committee of the Whole, I will return.

**Mr. Kent:** I appreciate that from the minister. The question that I had was around the statement that she made, and she can perhaps go back in the Blues, as well, just to take a look at it and get a sense for why it's standard contract for that contract to be held by Justice, even though it's funded by Education — I think that would be helpful for us to know.

I want to move on to a few other topics. The first one may or may not be within the minister's purview here, but the minister will perhaps recall that, from earlier today, in Orders of the Day, I tabled a motion with respect to proof of vaccine for 12-year-olds. What I've been hearing from a number of parents — especially for me, it's parents with young 12-year-olds who are involved in organized sports — is that, with the restrictions and the proof of vaccine requirements, at this point, they're required — to have that proof of vaccine for a 12-year-old is difficult, because they are just becoming eligible for the vaccine.

So, what I had mentioned in my motion is that Transport Canada has a rule in place that if you're 12 years of age plus four months — so, that gives them the time to get their first shot, wait the recommended eight weeks, I believe it is now, get their second shot and then wait a couple more weeks, but meanwhile, they can still participate in the sports or in the other things I identified today from the Yukon government website with respect to dancing, or singing, or other activities. And of

course, what the parents have said to me is this is important for their mental health and important for them to continue, especially, as I have mentioned, the ones I have been dealing with, with respect to organized sports.

Would the minister be able to take that request forward? Would she take it to her Cabinet colleagues, or do I ask these parents, or do we direct it to the chief medical officer of health to take a look at adopting what Transport Canada has for the minimum age, which is 12 years plus four months, instead of the 12-year-old age that the Yukon government has in place right now for proof of vaccine?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I definitely can bring this discussion forward to my Cabinet colleagues, and then further, the ministers responsible for these various areas can bring it to the chief medical officer of health and have the information come back.

**Mr. Kent:** I appreciate that from the minister. I know that it is important to a number of families, so that their children can be able to continue to participate from when they turn 12 to when they are fully vaccinated, which could be as much as two, two and a half, or three months later, if they are able to get an appointment right away.

I wanted to move on to a few other issues. Perhaps the first one that I will touch upon is with respect to the First Nation school board. Obviously, the end of October was the timing for school councils to pass a motion to put the idea of them dissolving and joining a First Nation school board to a referendum of the broader school community. I attended a meeting put on by the Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees, where there were presentations by the assistant deputy minister of — it used to be public education, and I think it is schools now, is what you refer to it as, as well as the head — the executive director — of the First Nation Education Directorate and CYFN legal counsel. The three of them presented on the First Nation school board to a number of school councillors, and it was open to the public.

I do have a few questions with respect to that. I do understand that, I think it is, five schools have passed a motion to put it to a referendum. That includes Watson Lake — the school council is joint for the elementary school and the high school there. It is my understanding, as well, that two communities are going the way of a petition.

Can the minister just confirm those numbers for me? Is that where we ended up, after the end of October, with those five school councils going out to a referendum, and is she aware of the two communities that are working on petitions at this point?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Thank you for the question around the First Nation school council. We, of course, always want to ensure that schools meet the needs of Yukon First Nation students and offer all students opportunities to learn about Yukon First Nation history, culture, and languages. We have been working with the Chiefs Committee on Education regarding options for establishing a Yukon First Nation school board under the *Education Act*. We believe that this framework agreement and the establishment of a Yukon First Nation school board is an additional option to enable Yukon First

Nations to meaningfully shape their children's education and improve their educational outcomes.

I will go a little bit into the process and get to the question that is on the floor right now about the petition.

The process to establish a school board can start in two ways: by school council resolution, which we do have five; I confirmed that. That includes the two Watson Lake schools, so really, it is six schools, but the Watson Lake referendum would be in one.

The other way is by petition of 20 percent of the electors in an attendance area, submitted to me before December 13. So, they have until December 13, if a community decides to go by way of petition. Again, as of October 31, five school councils have passed resolutions to trigger a referendum of the electors within their attendance area — parents, guardians, or any current students in the school.

As of November 7 — I don't have the information as of today, but I will check just to make sure — the department is aware of two school communities — Dawson City and Mayo — that have asked for petition packages. Again, they have until December 13 to fulfill that 20 percent. I can't comment, and I don't have information about where that sits with these communities. At this point, they have asked for petition packages. I cannot confirm, either way, where that will end by December 13, but that is the deadline.

Then there is a 90-day window to conduct a referendum. Elections Yukon has agreed to coordinate and hold the referendums.

Just going back to the petition, all of that is being coordinated through the Chief Electoral Officer. The Department of Education has offered to support school communities that have triggered a referendum in whatever community-based way individual communities prefer, including information and resources grounded in the *Education Act*. That's something we are now communicating with all our school communities around this, and have been all the way through, but we are continuing to have that dialogue and share that information.

I think that, up to this point, answers the questions that are posed on the floor today.

**Mr. Kent:** I thank the minister for that response.

The two communities are looking to get the signatures of 20 percent of their electors by December 13 via petition, which would then be presented to the minister, and I'm assuming it would trigger a referendum at that point. Is that the process, as I understand it? So, the petition is to trigger a referendum, rather than having the school council pass a motion to trigger the referendum? I will leave it at that, because that is just a quick clarification that I would need to ask a few more questions about.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Yes, the petition avenue is another way, under the *Education Act*, that allows for a petition of 20 percent of the electors, resident in an attendance area, who may request to me to establish a school board in substitution of a school council. As I have indicated, the timeline right now is December 13 to receive any such petition. Right now, we know of two schools that have requested packages. Upon receipt of

that, there would be a process of verification of the validity of that petition, so there would have to be due diligence, which would be undertaken by the Chief Electoral Officer and then the Department of Education. Right now, where we are at is the Department of Education will communicate the clear process for all of the process within the referendum within the next couple of weeks, because we already know that we have five referendums coming.

That is work that will be done by, again, the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. The Chief Electoral Officer will be leading that and will take that — if we receive any petitions, there will be a process of verification beyond that to ensure that it is all up to standard and that the residents and those within that catchment area are verified, and that will be the work of the Chief Electoral Officer to do that work if we receive a petition.

**Mr. Kent:** I was a bit confused with the process around petitions. I thought that a petition of 20 percent would then lead to a referendum, but it sounds like — if 20 percent of the eligible electors sign that petition, then it is to the minister and the minister will make a determination on whether they go straight to the school board. I just wanted to be clear on that. Am I correct? So, there is no referendum from the petition; the petition is final.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Yes, there will be a referendum if it is verified. The signatories included in that petition package then go through a process of verification, and they will have to meet a certain threshold. The number will be specific to that catchment area for the 20 percent. All of that is then verified by the Chief Electoral Officer, and if that is all verified and up to the standard that has been set, which is very clear, it will then go to a referendum. That is what we have agreed to.

**Mr. Kent:** Thanks for the clarification. That was an important point that I was looking for clarity on.

So, given that the petition would have to be submitted to the minister by December 13 and then subject to verification by the Chief Electoral Officer, I guess we're a month and a half or maybe a couple of months past where the five school councils that passed their motions would have been to start communicating with their school communities. When would the vote be held if Dawson City and Mayo get the required number of electors to sign the petition? When would the vote be held for them? Is it a different date than it is for the other five school councils, including the joint council in Watson Lake?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** There will not be two referendum dates. The goal is the five that we have now, and we carefully worked out the timeline with the Chief Electoral Officer to make sure that this was doable and that we were able to accomplish both.

So, the deadline of December 13 for further petitions to be received gives enough time to verify and then to have the referendum at the same time as those that are by resolution. We are not going to have multiple processes happening; they will all happen at the same time, but they must be held before January 31. That is the deadline, based on the first ones that were received, but according to the act, I have 90 days to hold a referendum. The goal is to not have multiple processes — to

make this as clear to folks as possible so that the information, once a petition — I mean, we may not receive any petitions, or we may receive two. That information is going to be consistent so that the communication used with the first five will then be able to be used with the other two, if that happens. If it doesn't, then we have the five set, and that work is underway now for that planning.

**Mr. Kent:** So, when we were at that AYSCBC information session, the Chief Electoral Officer was also there. I mean, the elections that I am most familiar with are the territorial elections where there is a voter list established that is reflective of the riding that you are running in, and you get a sense for who is eligible to vote.

But the Chief Electoral Officer said that, for school councils or school catchment areas, there is no voters list established. I guess the question that I had — and I am sure that the minister had, and I'm curious if she has asked the Chief Electoral Officer this — is: Without a voters list, how do you determine what the 20 percent is? If you don't know how many eligible voters are in the catchment area or the school community — how many are eligible to vote — how would you determine what that 20-percent threshold is? I'm curious if the minister has talked to the Chief Electoral Officer about that and, if so, if she could share what the response is to determine that 20 percent without an actual voters list to see what the total number of eligible voters is.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I am going to start by talking a little bit about the attendance areas. The attendance areas support the governance and operation of schools and support the school council election process overall. The Government of Yukon has completed a review of Whitehorse school attendance areas, and school councils have been informed of this. Part of that work included looking at all of our attendance areas, so a considerable amount of work has been done on this. It helps to inform this process.

Elections Yukon is using the territorial voters list and worked with the Yukon Bureau of Statistics on methodology. All of my discussions with the Chief Electoral Officer have been in writing, to date, but a tremendous amount of work has gone into this at the department level and with the Chiefs Committee on Education around the process that we are going into. The Chief Electoral Officer is willing and, I think, has offered technical briefings to all parties. I am just confirming that the invitation went out to all of the parties. Again, this is new territory. We do have one school board in the Yukon, which is the francophone school board. Again, this is all found within our *Education Act*. I know that this is new for folks, so I think that this is definitely an opportunity for us to understand what will be happening over the next several months with our Chief Electoral Officer.

We can talk a little bit more about the attendance areas if the member opposite wishes to do that. A lot of work has gone into it in recent times to ensure that we have a clear understanding of what our catchment areas are.

**Mr. Kent:** Thank you, and I appreciate that from the minister. We will follow up with Chief Electoral Officer and perhaps schedule a briefing so that we can communicate to

those individuals who are asking us about the process and how to determine that 20-percent threshold.

One of the other things that I did want to ask the minister about with respect to this process is how members of each affected school community or attendance area or catchment area can gather information. When we were at that AYSCBC meeting, of course, the representative from the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate mentioned that they would be advocating in support of schools and of people voting in support of joining the First Nation school board, and we certainly recognize that as their role, and it should be their role, but I'm curious what the role is of the Department of Education with respect to giving unbiased or neutral information to voters in these school communities about what this entails, what it means for them as far as representation on the First Nation school board.

Some of the questions we are hearing is whether or not all members are eligible to vote for members of the First Nation school board when those elections are held. So, there is a variety of questions that are coming up and that we're getting from members of the school community, but I'm just curious what role the department will be taking in providing some sort of neutral information and answering questions and if there are — when my colleague, the Member for Watson Lake, was asking the minister about this in Question Period, she asked if there are information sessions planned. I think the minister said that there are, but I'm just curious how many there will be when we are bumping up against the Christmas season and the holiday season, which will be difficult for people to organize meetings.

There are obviously the temporary, or new, restrictions that are in place with respect to meeting size, so there could be virtual information sessions as well. I'm just curious where we send people who have questions and are looking for a neutral response, or a neutral answer, and what the role of the department will be in that.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** A big part of this will be communication, going forward. The Department of Education has offered to support school communities and our partners in First Nations who have triggered a referendum in whatever community-based way individual communities prefer, including information sessions and resources grounded in the *Education Act*.

We are working on that now. There will also be Q&As on the Yukon government website under Education that folks can access, if they want to read what the common questions are and get information there. In terms of information sessions, I support neutral facilitation of information sessions that will focus on providing information to the folks within the catchment areas, plus staff and others who may be impacted. The department will also offer Zoom sessions for the public so people can have access in this time of COVID reality that we are in.

Definitely, communication will be key in ensuring that people have the information and that they are properly registered to vote and have all that information, as well, which will be included in the Q&A. It will be included in information

sessions so that it is clear how people can vote and answer any questions they may have about the application of a school board in their catchment area.

**Mr. Kent:** That seems like a good jumping-off point for me to turn the floor over to my colleague, the Leader of the New Democrats, the Member for Takhini-Kopper King.

I thank the minister and the officials for their time here today, and I will cede the floor to my colleague who, I am sure, has a few questions as well.

**Ms. White:** I also thank my colleague for asking so many questions, which I am sure I will have to read through Hansard after to make sure that I didn't miss anything.

One of the conversations I have been having in the last number of years around education is actually about the Yukon grants and how they work — or don't work, in some cases — for different people. As I have said many times in this House, I am a tradesperson, so it meant I took an intensive program where I was able to access \$500 of my Yukon grant that I only ever accessed one time. I paid almost \$10,000 for my course, and I was very employable at the end. So, I did that before I got elected.

I think that education has changed. Education isn't just about post-secondary, it is not just about university or college, and it's not just about academics. Education looks different, whether it is the environmental monitoring certificate from Yukon University or their Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining. There are lots of different educational paths a person can take that will lead to employment.

One of the challenges that I brought forward in this House previously is that, in order to qualify for the Yukon grant, it is very much directed toward academics, but not all of us are academics. It doesn't mean that where we choose to invest our time and our energy doesn't lead to fulfilling careers and opportunities.

So, I just wanted to give that as the beginning and ask the minister: Where are we at, in looking at Yukon grants and educational funding?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the question. I think that it is definitely an important topic.

Yes, education is changing, and I, too, have a young person — one of my sons has gone through trades training and didn't have all the access that my son who is now training to be a lawyer is getting, in terms of that Yukon grant funding.

If a student or adult learner does not qualify for the Yukon grant, which is connected to the Canada student loans program, which is where that criteria comes from, there is also available to them a student training allowance and Canada student loans and grants. They may be eligible for funding support under post-secondary labour market funding, and that is where most of our flexibility is. So, I think that part of — the bigger part of — the question here is helping folks and directing them into the right program, because there are programs that we have under our labour market transfer agreement that can provide flexibility.

There are three programs, and we have redesigned these programs. I am not sure if the member opposite has had a

chance to look at them, but I actually brought the pamphlets with me today to show, because I had hoped this one would come up, but there are three programs: Building UP, which is focused on support for organizations under workforce; then there is the Staffing UP, which is support for employers; then there is Working UP, which is the support for individuals.

These have been redesigned to be more flexible and to provide the support that individuals need. Really, where we are going with the revisioning and the work that we are doing around making very strategic fundamental changes to our education system — it leads into this, because it is more opportunity for experiential learning, working with our business community, ensuring that great opportunities are provided for young people who want to go into the trades, and that the academic stream doesn't fit for everyone; it really doesn't, and we know that.

I think that some of the reports that we have at hand, like the Child and Youth Advocate's report on attendance, points to that as well. Kids need to be interested in what they are doing, and the way that they are being taught — so, experiential learning and finding their path in our education system and not every student — like I have said, I have two sons who are on very different tracks, but our system needs to support that.

I think some of the changes that we have made with the labour market programs are lining up with that, so we're really happy. Is there more work to be done? Yes, absolutely. We are committed to doing that work to provide as many opportunities as possible for our young people and other adult learners.

**Ms. White:** I thank the minister for that. Just to follow up on some of that, what is the value, for example, for a school year that you can access with the Yukon grant, compared to those labour market programs that you referenced? What I am looking for is equity, because, again, programs are different. The program that I took was different from others. Knowing that someone can train to be a pilot, for example, in British Columbia and it can cost \$80,000, but they are guaranteed to have a job at the end and they don't necessarily have access to the same amount of funding. What is the value of the Yukon grant for a school year, and what do those other programs look like that she has mentioned?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I definitely want to provide this information. I don't have all of it in front of me today, but I will come back with a return on this question with more detail. There are a lot of things that factor into this — when you were looking at Yukon grant versus labour market and the Working UP program and other programs that may be available to individuals who are seeking to go through a trade.

There are factors, like whether they are going to Yukon University and would qualify for travel — for instance, if they are in Whitehorse or if they're in a rural community. There are differences in tuition costs, as well, and those pieces factor in.

I will definitely commit to bringing back a return and to detail a little bit more on that, in terms of what are some examples — so, not just providing basic information but giving a few examples, or scenarios, that will look at what the differences are.

**Ms. White:** I thank the minister for that, and I do look forward to that.

One of the reasons to go along this line again is that we acknowledge that education is changing and the face of education is changing. Along with that are families. One of the challenges that was recently brought to my attention had to do with eligibility, and it had to do with family makeup. If you are an 18-year-old and your parent chooses to leave the territory — and you stay because you are working in the territory, you live in the territory, you have your Yukon driver's licence, you have your Yukon health care card — and you apply for an Outside university, and if you get accepted, you apply for the Yukon grant, but then you are denied because your parent lives in a different jurisdiction. The reason that this is an issue is that families look different. Not everybody stays at home when they are 18. We know that, in some cases, many young people leave far before that. So, one of the challenges with the eligibility is based on where your parent lives, because if your parent has left the jurisdiction, but you went to school here, you graduated school here, you continue to live here, it's your primary residence — and so, if the minister can just talk a little bit about eligibility and then if there is an appeal process and what that appeal process looks like.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** The Government of Yukon's student financial assistance program supports many students attending post-secondary education institutions in Yukon and beyond. The *Student Financial Assistance Act* and regulations outline the criteria for Yukon grant funding, which is available for students attending eligible, full-time, post-secondary programs. The criteria for post-secondary student eligibility for student financial assistance are established in legislation. The eligibility criteria for the Yukon grant are set out in the *Student Financial Assistance Act* and regulations. Eligible criteria for the student training allowance are set out in the *Occupational Training Act* and regulations.

There is a board that administers this and can take appeals if any issues arise. The director of training programs — there was a time when that position directly advised the board. That is no longer the case. That position is now at arm's length from the board, and the board receives the information independently and is able to then make decisions around appeals that come to it.

**Ms. White:** Thanks to the minister for that. I was just trying to find the act online, which at times is more challenging than I would like.

Currently, how many apprentices are registered in the Yukon?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Thank you for the question. Of course, I really appreciate the work and what apprentices contribute to our communities — everything within our communities. We just had a chance to do a tribute not long ago and really emphasize how important apprentices are and how broad it is. There are some who look at this in sort of a narrower view. There is a lot of work being done to showcase what can be accomplished through apprenticeship programs.



As of this month, Yukon has 415 registered apprentices, including 111 First Nation people, and there are 44 who identify as women in the apprenticeship programs.

**Ms. White:** I thank the minister for that. That is a stellar number.

One of the questions that I have asked over time — and I don't expect the Minister of Education to know, but I guess that I am signalling all ministers that I am curious to have the answer — is: How many apprentices does the Yukon government hire? One of the challenges is that the way in which an apprentice learns is actually on the job, and it is kind of challenging. It is not that you have an extra fully skilled person on the site; you have someone who requires a little extra support and a little extra direction, and it is really valuable.

I have to say that the first time I got the answer — from between 2011 and 2016 — I was shocked. I think the answer was four. But then I was more shocked after 2016 when the answer was still four. I say this because the Yukon government has a real responsibility to take part in that, which is training Yukon apprentices to be qualified journeypersons, because without journeypersons, without trades, things kind of fall apart. They really do, for so many reasons. Every day, you go in and out of a room or a car or you turn on a light, and there is always a tradesperson behind that. I think that it is really important. So, I will just put that out there. I would like to know how many apprentices are currently on Yukon government staff because I think that that is a really important number.

I appreciated at the beginning when the minister gave us the number of vacancies, but one school that is near and dear to my heart is, of course, the northernmost school in the territory, and that is up in Old Crow. The reason why I want to bring forward the Old Crow school is — for one thing, if folks haven't had a chance to visit — if you ever get a chance and you are in Old Crow, please go and visit the school. It is beautiful and is an example of a school that was very thoughtfully built. There is lots of light and there is lots of space; there is lots of space to gather inside, and it is really important because, as you can imagine, in the wintertime, Old Crow is cold.

When we talk about vacancies in communities, can the minister let me know how many vacancies there are in the teaching staff in Old Crow right now?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** It is a really important question and I know that we only have a few moments left in the day, but I am very well aware of the issues around vacancies in Old Crow. One of the things about Old Crow, though, is that currently there are 31 students in kindergarten to grade 12. This is lower than what was projected. I think that we had projected that there would be 50 students enrolled, and we presently have 31.

We initially allocated for eight teaching positions for the school year. Again, we currently have 31 students in attendance. Currently, we are recruiting for two teaching positions for the grades 10 to 12 math and science teacher and the principal who is also a learning assistant teacher. We do have a letter of offer out for that position right now. I know that we are running short on time, so I apologize for not being able to go a little bit further on this. I'm sure that we will have more

time during Committee of the Whole to have more discussion, but I would be happy to bring back a bit more information and do a legislative return just because of the time of day.

Madam Chair, given the time, I move that you report progress.

**Chair:** It has been moved by the Member for Mountainview that the Chair report progress.

*Motion agreed to*

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

**Chair:** It has been moved by the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

*Motion agreed to*

*Speaker resumes the Chair*

**Speaker:** I will now call the House to order.

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

#### **Chair's report**

**Ms. Blake:** Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 202, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2021-22*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Speaker:** I declare the report carried.

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

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

*Motion agreed to*

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

*The House adjourned at 5:28 p.m.*

#### **The following sessional paper was tabled November 18, 2021:**

35-1-30

*Yukon Housing Corporation Annual Report — For the year ended March 31, 2021* (Pillai)

#### **The following document was filed November 18, 2021:**

35-1-27

Better Buildings Program, letter re (dated October 18, 2021) from Chris Rider, Executive Director, CPAWS Yukon, to Hon. Richard Mostyn, Minister of Community Services (Mostyn)